

# MATRIZes

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## DOSSIER:

*New Perspectives in  
Communication Theories*

Pierre Lévy

José Luiz Aidar Prado

François Jost

Marialva Carlos Barbosa

Celso Frederico

## INTERVIEW:

Néstor García Canelini





## Editorial

**T**ERMS SUCH AS big data, datafication, algorithms, metadata, platformization, artificial intelligence, among others, have been gaining strength in communication research in recent years, highlighting the relevance of processes involving digital media and technologies. Terminological issues in a field of study are, as Livingstone (2009) reminds us, related to social and technological changes that transform communication practices – which now involve machines and computer programs – and require attention to new issues that the terms mobilized seek to distinguish and clarify.

The ubiquity of digital technologies means that they affect practically all social dimensions: democracy, culture, identity, inequality, and power relations. In this sense, the multi or transdisciplinary contributions of research in our field can be identified, as well as the epistemological and theoretical research related to communication technologies.

The contribution of the philosopher Pierre Lévy, which opens the **Dossier** of this issue, lies in this second aspect, but with obvious implications for the first – particularly to avoid determinism or technicism. It is certainly significant to note that among the author's current concerns is the practical development of theoretical ideas he launched decades ago, such as the notion of collective intelligence. Thus, in the essay **IEML: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Artificial Intelligence**, Lévy first presents a general discussion about limitations of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and then describes a computable and univocal model of human language, represented by the Information Economy Metalanguage (IEML). For the author, this creation may open new paths for AI by creating a synergy between the democratization of data control and the enhancement of collective intelligence.

The next article is **Event as Singularity**, by José Luiz Aidar Prado, who, resorting to Alain Badiou's work, seeks to deepen the event theory. As the author

observes, in the field of communication in Brazil, the event subject has been associated with the analysis of communicational processes by several theories. In the article in question, the author opted to examine the theory of the event from the French semiotics, with the conclusion that this allows us to advance towards questions such as the communicational processes engendered in the post-event.

In the third article of the **Dossier**, François Jost, in **Portrait of the Interactive Spectator as Musician**, reflects on a very current theme: the nature of certain interactive works, such as the analyzed *Bandersnatch* – a component work of the Netflix series *Black Mirror* –, in which the author notes a deep similarity with contemporary music. This occurs in view of the fact that the proposed narrative paths are composed of digressions and random passages executed or not according to the orders of a superior authority, which gives complex contours to the figure of the spectator of this type of work.

The two articles that conclude the **Dossier** are by Brazilian authors, Marialva Carlos Barbosa and Celso Frederico. The former, in the article **Communication Circuits of the Brazilian Press in the 19th Century: Perspectives About the New Moment**, presents part of a wider research that seeks to elaborate new interpretations about the history of the press in the 19th century. In the work in question this is done based on a detailed analysis of the newspapers *O Diário do Rio de Janeiro* and *O Universal* from Minas Gerais, concerned with demonstrating the communication circuits of the Brazilian press during the Empire, showing flows, counterflows, and dialogues between the periodicals. In the second work, **Ideology and Culture: Notes for a Research**, the author presents a study on the relationship between ideology and culture in three theoretical strands that start from Marxism, highlighting the diverse and conflicting interpretations on the relationship between these dimensions in the authors studied – among others, Althusser, Macherey, Adorno, Jameson, Gramsci, and Raymond Williams.

The **Interview** of this issue, with Néstor García Canclini, was conducted by Ana Carolina Damboriarena Escosteguy and João Vicente Ribas, who invited the Argentine anthropologist to discuss, among other subjects, about the research on “The Institutionality of Culture in the Current Context of Sociocultural Changes”, conducted by him under the Cátedra Olavo Setubal de Arte, Cultura e Ciência (Olavo Setubal Chair of Art, Culture and Science) at the Universidade de São Paulo from 2020 to 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The section **Agenda** begins with the article **Reality and Limits of Empirical Research on Public Communication**, by Maria Helena Weber and Carlos Locatelli, in which the authors seek to offer a theoretical and methodological contribution to research in public communication, highlighting the complexity involved in its objects of study, related to communication conflicts in democracy.

The second work of the section, **African and Latin American Cultural Studies: Global-South Perspectives**, by Nilda Jacks, Guilherme Libardi, and Isaias Fuel, discusses the so-called internationalization of cultural studies from two versions – Latin American and African –, describing the political conjuncture in which they are developed, their institutional context, and their main characteristics. The following article, **Melodrama, Excess, and Media Narratives: A Systematization Based on the *Intellectual Kinship* Approach**, by Anderson Lopes da Silva, presents a theoretical discussion of ontologies related to excess and melodrama in media narratives, which the author seeks to discuss through different categories of analysis.

The final three articles of the **Agenda** section are more empirical studies, with qualified analyses of certain contexts and situations. Thus, Rafael Grohmann, in **Worker-Owned Platforms: Cooperatives and Collectives of Platform Riders**, aims to analyze the emergence of platforms owned by delivery workers in the context of work platformization by discussing six cases from three countries (Spain, France, and Brazil), concluding with the importance of social media for communication and work organization and the emergence of cooperation between initiatives. Next, the article **Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil**, by Nina Santos and Lucas Reis, seeks to understand the dynamics of visibility of the anti-racism mobilization on Twitter and in the Brazilian online media in 2020. Finally, Pedro Vinicius Asterito Laperla and Felipe Davson Pereira da Silva presents in **Between Moralities and Visualities: Cinema and Religion During Primeira República**, a historiographical study, under the indicative paradigm, about the consumption of sacred films during Holy Week in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Recife in the first decades of the 20th Century.

This issue of **MATRIZES** ends with Francisco Rüdiger's review of Muniz Sodré's book *A Sociedade Incivil*, entitled **Barbarism and Mediatization according to Muniz Sodré: Is Neoliberalism to Blame?**. As the title suggests, Rüdiger highlights the originality of the author's approach and critically analyzes the view of neoliberalism as an explanatory stereotype.

Before closing this **Editorial**, we register that from the next issue on, the executive editors of **MATRIZES** will be the professors and researchers at the Universidade de São Paulo, Luciano Guimarães and Wagner Souza e Silva, replacing Richard Romancini, to whom we express our deep gratitude for his dedication to the journal since 2014. Professor Maria Clotilde Perez Rodrigues, coordinator of PPGCOM-USP, also joins the **Editorial Committee** in this issue.

In concluding, we wish, as always, that everyone enjoys this new issue of **MATRIZES**. 

# E

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# DOSIÊ

*Novas Perspectivas em Teorias da Comunicação*



# IEML: Rumo a uma Mudança de Paradigma na Inteligência Artificial<sup>a</sup>

## *IEML: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Artificial Intelligence*

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### RESUMO

O objetivo deste ensaio é apresentar uma visão geral das limitações da Inteligência Artificial (IA) contemporânea e propor uma abordagem para superá-las com uma metalinguagem semântica computável. Proponho que a IA adote um modelo computável e univocal da linguagem humana, a MetaLinguagem da Economia da Informação, um código semântico de minha própria invenção que tem o poder expressivo de uma linguagem natural e a sintaxe de uma linguagem regular. Isso pode abrir novos caminhos para a IA criar uma sinergia entre a democratização do controle de dados e o aprimoramento da inteligência coletiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Inteligência Artificial, código semântico, inteligência coletiva, MetaLinguagem da Economia da Informação

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### ABSTRACT

The goal of this essay is to present an overview of the limitations of contemporary AI (artificial intelligence) and to propose an approach to overcome them with a computable semantic metalanguage. I propose that AI adopts a computable and univocal model of the human language, the Information Economy Metalanguage (IEML), a semantic code of my own invention. IEML has the expressive power of a natural language and the syntax of a regular language. This can open new avenues for Artificial Intelligence to create a synergy between the democratization of data control and the enhancement of collective intelligence.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, semantic code, collective intelligence, Information Economy Metalanguage

VAMOS PRIMEIRO EXAMINAR como o termo *inteligência artificial* (IA) é usado na sociedade em geral, por exemplo, no jornalismo e na publicidade. A observação histórica mostra a tendência de classificar as aplicações *avançadas* em inteligência artificial nas épocas em que emergem pela primeira vez; no entanto, anos depois, essas mesmas aplicações são frequentemente atribuídas à computação cotidiana. Por exemplo, o reconhecimento de caracteres visuais, originalmente conhecido como sendo IA, agora é considerado comum e muitas vezes é integrado em programas de software sem alarde. Uma máquina capaz de jogar xadrez foi celebrada como uma conquista técnica na década de 1970, mas hoje é possível baixar facilmente um programa de xadrez gratuito no smartphone sem nenhum toque de espanto. Além disso, a depender da IA estar na moda (como hoje) ou desacreditada (como nos anos 1990 e 2000), as estratégias de marketing enfatizarão o termo IA ou o substituirão por outros. Por exemplo, os *sistemas especializados* da década de 1980 tornam-se as inócuas *regras de negócios* nos anos 2000. É assim que técnicas ou conceitos idênticos mudam de nome, conforme a moda, tornando a percepção de seu âmbito e evolução particularmente opaca

Vamos agora deixar o vocabulário do jornalismo ou do marketing para investigar a disciplina acadêmica. Desde a década de 1950, o ramo específico da ciência da computação que se preocupa com a modelagem e simulação de inteligência humana é chamado de Inteligência Artificial.

A modelagem computacional da inteligência humana é um objetivo científico digno, que teve, e continuará a ter, consideráveis benefícios teóricos e práticos. No entanto, a maioria dos pesquisadores da área não acredita que máquinas inteligentes *autônomas* serão construídas em breve, a despeito das previsões iniciais e entusiasmadas sobre a capacidade da IA declaradas nos primeiros anos, contrariadas, mais tarde, pelos fatos. Grande parte da pesquisa nesse campo – e a maioria de suas aplicações práticas – visa aumentar a *cognição humana* em vez de reproduzi-la mecanicamente. Isso contrasta com o programa de pesquisa focado na construção de uma Inteligência Artificial geral autônoma.

Defendi a ideia de Inteligência Artificial a serviço da inteligência coletiva e do desenvolvimento humano no livro *La Sphère Sémantique* (Lévy, 2011). Vamos continuar essa linha de pensamento neste ensaio.

Do ponto de vista técnico, a IA é dividida em dois ramos principais: estatístico e simbólico. Um algoritmo estatístico de IA *aprende* com os dados fornecidos. Simula, portanto, (imperfeitamente, como veremos na sequência) a dimensão *indutiva* do raciocínio humano. Em contraste, a IA simbólica não aprende com os dados, mas depende da formalização lógica de um domínio do conhecimento como projetado pelos engenheiros. Em princípio, comparada com a IA estatística, exige,

portanto, uma maior quantidade de trabalho intelectual humano. Um algoritmo simbólico de IA aplica as regras que recebeu aos dados fornecidos. Assim, simula mais da dimensão *dedutiva* do raciocínio humano. Revisarei sucessivamente esses dois ramos principais da IA, com um foco especial em destacar suas limitações.

## IA E SUAS LIMITAÇÕES

### IA Neural

O ramo *estatístico* da IA envolve o treinamento de algoritmos a partir de acumulações massivas de dados para permitir o reconhecimento visual, de áudio, linguístico e de outras formas de informação. Isso se chama *aprendizado de máquina*. Quando falamos de IA em 2022, geralmente designamos esse tipo de programa de pesquisa técnica e científica. Como observamos, a IA estatística utiliza o trabalho humano com moderação em comparação com a IA simbólica. Em vez de ter que escrever um programa de reconhecimento de padrões, basta fornecer um conjunto de dados de treinamento para o algoritmo de aprendizagem de máquina. Se, por exemplo, a IA estatística receber milhões de imagens de patos com rótulos especificando que a imagem representa um pato, ela aprende a reconhecer um pato e, após a conclusão de seu treinamento, será capaz de afixar o rótulo *pato* em uma imagem não categorizada dessa ave. Ninguém explicou à máquina *como* reconhecer um pato: basta apenas dar exemplos. A tradução automática funciona com o mesmo princípio: uma IA estatística recebe milhões de textos na linguagem A, acompanhados de sua tradução para a linguagem B. Treinado com esses exemplos, o sistema aprende a traduzir um texto da linguagem A para a linguagem B. É assim que algoritmos de tradução automática como DeepL ou Google Translate funcionam. Para dar um exemplo de outro campo, a IA estatística usada para dirigir *veículos autônomos* também funciona *combinando dois conjuntos de dados*: as imagens da estrada são combinadas com *ações* como aceleração, frenagem, giro etc. Em suma, a IA estatística estabelece uma conexão (*mapeamento*) entre um conjunto de dados e um conjunto de rótulos (no caso de reconhecimento de padrões) ou entre dois conjuntos de dados (no caso da tradução ou dos veículos autônomos). A IA estatística, portanto, destaca-se na categorização, reconhecimento de padrões e correspondência entre dados perceptivos e motores.

Em sua versão mais avançada, a IA estatística é baseada em modelos de *rede neural* que simulam aproximadamente a maneira como o cérebro aprende. Esses modelos são chamados de *aprendizagem profunda* porque são baseados

na sobreposição de *múltiplas camadas* de neurônios formais. As redes neurais são o subcampo mais complexo e avançado da IA estatística. Esse tipo neural de inteligência artificial existe desde a origem da ciência da computação, como ilustrado pela pesquisa de McCulloch nas décadas de 1940 e 1950, Frank Rosenblatt e Marvin Minsky nos anos 1950, e von Foerster nas décadas de 1960 e 1970. Trabalhos significativos nessa área também foram feitos na década de 1980, especialmente envolvendo David Rumelhart e Geoffrey Hinton, mas toda essa pesquisa teve pouco sucesso prático até a década de 2010.

Além de certos refinamentos científicos dos modelos, dois fatores independentes dos avanços teóricos explicam o uso crescente de redes neurais: a disponibilidade de enormes quantidades de dados e o aumento do poder computacional. A partir da segunda década do século XXI, as organizações estão engajadas na transformação digital, e uma parcela crescente da população mundial está usando a web. Tudo isso gera fluxos de dados gigantescos. As informações produzidas, portanto, são processadas por grandes plataformas digitais em *data centers* (a *nuvem*) que concentram um poder computacional sem precedentes. No início do século XXI, as redes neurais foram implementadas por processadores originalmente projetados para a computação gráfica, mas, hoje em dia, os *data centers* de propriedade das grandes empresas de tecnologia já usam processadores especificamente projetados para aprendizado neural. Assim, modelos teóricos interessantes, mas impraticáveis, do século XX, tornaram-se subitamente bastante relevantes no século XXI, a ponto de apoiar uma nova indústria.

### **Diminuindo os Retornos**

No entanto, após o turbilhão de avanços no aprendizado de máquina baseado em redes neurais na década de 2010, o progresso parece ter parado nos últimos anos. De fato, para obter agora um desempenho mesmo marginalmente aprimorado, o tamanho dos conjuntos de dados e o poder computacional usado para treinar modelos devem ser multiplicados por várias ordens de magnitude. Já chegamos à era do *decréscimo dos retornos cognitivos* da IA neural; portanto, chegou a hora de questionar as limitações desse conjunto de técnicas e vislumbrar seriamente uma mudança de paradigma.

Os principais problemas repousam na qualidade dos dados de treinamento, na falta de modelagem causal, na natureza inexplicável de alguns dos resultados, na ausência de generalização, no significado supostamente inescrutável dos dados e, finalmente, nas dificuldades em acumular e integrar o conhecimento.

### **Qualidade dos Dados de Treinamento**

Um engenheiro do Google é citado como se dissesse, brincando: “Toda vez que despedimos um linguista, nosso desempenho de tradução automática melhora”. Mas, embora a IA estatística seja conhecida por ter pouca necessidade de trabalho humano, os riscos de viés e erro apontados por usuários cada vez mais preocupados estão impulsionando a necessidade de uma melhor seleção de dados de treinamento, incluindo uma rotulagem mais cuidadosa. No entanto, isso requer tempo e experiência humana, precisamente os fatores que se espera eliminar.

### **Ausência de uma Hipótese Causal Explícita**

Todos os cursos de estatística começam com um alerta sobre a confusão entre correlação e causalidade. Uma correlação entre A e B não prova que A é a causa de B. Pode ser uma coincidência, ou B pode ser a causa de A, ou mesmo um fator C não considerado pela coleta de dados é a verdadeira causa de A e B, sem mencionar todas as complexas relações sistêmicas imagináveis envolvendo A e B. No entanto, o aprendizado de máquina é baseado na correspondência de conjuntos de dados por meio de correlações. A noção de causalidade é estranha à IA estatística, como acontece com muitas técnicas usadas para analisar coletas massivas de dados, embora as suposições causais estejam muitas vezes implícitas na escolha dos conjuntos de dados e sua categorização. Em resumo, a IA neural/estatística contemporânea não é capaz de distinguir causa e efeito. Até agora, ao usar a IA para auxiliar na tomada de decisões e, de modo mais geral, para orientação em domínios práticos, modelos causais explícitos são indispensáveis, pois, para que as ações sejam eficazes, elas devem intervir *nas causas*.

Em uma abordagem científica integral, as medições estatísticas e as hipóteses causais trabalham em controle uníssono e recíproco. Mas considerar apenas correlações estatísticas criaria um perigoso ponto cego cognitivo. Já a prática generalizada de manter as teorias causais implícitas impede relativizá-las, compará-las com outras teorias, generalizá-las, compartilhá-las, criticá-las e melhorá-las.

### **Resultados Inexplicáveis**

O funcionamento das redes neurais é opaco. Milhões de operações transformam gradualmente a força das conexões dos conjuntos neurais que são feitos de centenas de camadas.

Uma vez que os resultados dessas operações não podem ser explicados ou justificados conceitualmente de uma forma que os seres humanos possam

entender, é difícil confiar nesses modelos. Essa falta de explicação torna-se preocupante quando as máquinas tomam decisões financeiras, legais, médicas ou conduzem veículos de forma autônoma, sem mencionar aplicações militares. Para superar esse obstáculo, e paralelamente ao desenvolvimento de uma inteligência artificial mais ética, cada vez mais pesquisadores estão explorando o novo campo de pesquisa da *IA explicativa*.

### **A Falta de Generalização**

À primeira vista, a IA estatística apresenta-se como uma forma de raciocínio indutivo, ou seja, como uma capacidade de inferir regras gerais de uma infinidade de casos. No entanto, os sistemas contemporâneos de aprendizagem de máquina não conseguem generalizar além dos limites dos dados de treinamento que lhes foram fornecidos. Nós – humanos – não só somos capazes de generalizar a partir de alguns exemplos, enquanto é preciso milhões de casos para treinar máquinas, mas podemos abstrair e conceituar o que aprendemos, enquanto o aprendizado de máquina não consegue extrapolar, muito menos, conceituar. A IA estatística permanece no nível de aprendizagem puramente reflexa, sua generalização é estritamente circunscrita aos exemplos fornecidos com os quais é alimentada.

### **Significado Inacessível**

Enquanto o desempenho na tradução e na escrita automáticas (como ilustrado pelo programa GPT3) está avançando, as máquinas ainda não entendem o *significado* dos textos que traduzem ou escrevem. Suas redes neurais se assemelham ao cérebro de um papagaio mecânico, capaz apenas de imitar o desempenho linguístico sem entender nada do conteúdo dos textos que está traduzindo. Em poucas palavras, a Inteligência Artificial contemporânea pode aprender a traduzir textos, mas é incapaz de aprender qualquer coisa com essas traduções.

### **O Problema da Acumulação e da Integração do Conhecimento em IA Estatística**

Desprovida de conceitos, a IA estatística tem dificuldade em *acumular* conhecimento. Por isso, a *integração* do conhecimento de diversas áreas da expertise parece fora de alcance. Essa situação não favorece a troca de conhecimento entre máquinas. Portanto, muitas vezes é necessário começar do zero para cada novo projeto. No entanto, devemos apontar a existência de modelos de processamento de linguagem natural, como o BERT, que são pré-treinados

em dados gerais e têm então a possibilidade de se especializar. Uma forma de capitalização é possível, de maneira limitada. Mas continua impossível integrar todo o conhecimento objetivo acumulado ao longo dos séculos pela humanidade em um sistema neuromimético.

## IA SIMBÓLICA E SEUS LIMITES

Durante os últimos setenta anos, o ramo *simbólico* da IA tem correspondido sucessivamente ao que é conhecido como: redes semânticas, sistemas baseados em regras, bases de conhecimento, sistemas especializados, web semântica e, mais recentemente, gráficos de conhecimento. Desde suas origens, nos anos 1940-50, boa parte da ciência da computação de fato pertence à IA simbólica.

A IA simbólica codifica explicitamente o conhecimento humano na forma de redes de relações entre categorias e regras lógicas que permitem o raciocínio automático. Seus resultados são, portanto, mais facilmente explicados do que os da IA estatística.

A IA simbólica funciona bem nos micromundos fechados de jogos ou laboratórios, mas rapidamente se torna sobrecarregada em ambientes abertos que não seguem um número limitado de regras rígidas. A maioria dos programas simbólicos de IA usados em ambientes de trabalho do mundo real resolvem problemas apenas em um domínio bastante restrito, no diagnóstico médico, na resolução de problemas de máquina, conselhos de investimento etc. Um *sistema especializado*, na verdade, funciona como um meio para o encapsulamento e distribuição de determinado know-how que pode ser utilizado onde for necessário. A habilidade prática então se torna disponível mesmo na ausência de conhecimento humano.

No final da década de 1980, após uma série de promessas muito otimistas seguidas de decepções, começou o que tem sido chamado de *inverno* da inteligência artificial (combinando todas as tendências). No entanto, os mesmos processos continuam a ser aplicados para resolver os mesmos tipos de problemas indiscriminadamente, só abandonamos o programa de pesquisa geral no qual esses métodos foram incorporados. Assim, no início do século XXI, as regras comerciais do software corporativo e as ontologias da *Web Semântica* sucederam os sistemas especializados da década de 1980. Apesar das mudanças de nome, é fácil reconhecer nessas novas especialidades os antigos processos de IA simbólica.

No início dos anos 2000, a Web Semântica tem como objetivo explorar todas as informações disponíveis na Web. Para tornar os dados legíveis pelos computadores, diferentes domínios de conhecimento ou prática são organizados em modelos coerentes. Essas são as *ontologias*, que só podem reproduzir a

compartimentação lógica das décadas anteriores, mesmo que os computadores estejam agora muito mais interligados.

Infelizmente, encontramos na IA simbólica as mesmas dificuldades na integração e acúmulo de conhecimento que na IA estatística. Essa compartimentação está em oposição ao projeto original da Inteligência Artificial como disciplina científica, que quer modelar a inteligência humana em geral, e que normalmente tende a uma acumulação e integração de conhecimentos que podem ser mobilizados pelas máquinas.

Apesar da compartimentação de seus modelos, a IA simbólica é, no entanto, ligeiramente melhor do que a IA estatística em termos de acumulação e troca de dados. Um número crescente de empresas, começando pelas Big Tech, estão organizando suas bases de dados usando um gráfico de conhecimento que está constantemente sendo melhorado e aumentado.

Além disso, o Wikidata oferece um bom exemplo de um gráfico de conhecimento aberto, por meio do qual as informações que vão gradualmente se acumulando podem ser lidas tão bem pelas máquinas quanto pelos humanos. No entanto, cada um desses gráficos de conhecimento é organizado de acordo com os propósitos – sempre particulares – de seus autores e não pode ser facilmente reutilizado para outros fins. Nem a IA estatística nem a IA simbólica possuem as propriedades da recombinação maleável que devemos esperar justamente dos módulos de uma Inteligência Artificial a serviço da inteligência coletiva.

### **A IA Simbólica é uma Consumidora Voraz do Trabalho Intelectual Humano**

Houve muitas tentativas de conter todo o conhecimento humano em uma única ontologia para permitir uma melhor interoperabilidade, mas então a vibração, complexidade, evolução e múltiplas perspectivas do conhecimento humano são apagadas. Em um nível prático, ontologias universais – ou mesmo aquelas que afirmam formalizar todas as categorias, relações e regras lógicas de um vasto domínio – rapidamente se tornam enormes, complicadas e difíceis de entender e manter para o ser humano que deve lidar com elas. Um dos principais gargalos da IA simbólica é a quantidade e a alta qualidade do trabalho humano necessários para modelar um domínio do conhecimento, ainda que bastante circunscrito. De fato, é necessário não só ler a literatura, mas também entrevistar e ouvir longamente vários especialistas do domínio a ser modelado. Adquirido pela experiência, o conhecimento desses especialistas é mais frequentemente expresso por meio de histórias, exemplos e descrições de situações típicas. É então necessário transformar o conhecimento empírico e oral em um modelo lógico coerente cujas regras devem ser executáveis por um computador. Eventualmente, o raciocínio dos

especialistas será automatizado, mas o trabalho de *engenharia do conhecimento* a partir do qual a modelagem prossegue não pode ser.

## POSIÇÃO PROBLEMÁTICA: QUAL É O PRINCIPAL OBSTÁCULO PARA (MAIS) DESENVOLVIMENTO DA IA?

### **Rumo a uma Inteligência Artificial Neuro-Simbólica**

Agora é hora de dar um passo atrás. Os dois ramos da IA – neural e simbólico – existem desde meados do século XX e correspondem a dois estilos cognitivos igualmente presentes em humanos. Por um lado, temos o reconhecimento de padrões, que corresponde aos módulos sensório-motores reflexos, sejam eles aprendidos ou de origem genética. Por outro lado, temos o conhecimento conceitual explícito e reflexivo, muitas vezes organizado em modelos causais e que podem ser objeto de raciocínio.

Uma vez que esses dois estilos cognitivos trabalham juntos na cognição humana, não há razão teórica para não tentar fazê-los cooperar em sistemas de Inteligência Artificial. Os benefícios são óbvios e cada um dos dois subsistemas pode sanar problemas encontrados pelo outro. Em uma IA mista, o componente simbólico supera as dificuldades de conceituação, generalização, modelagem causal e transparência do componente neural. Simetricamente, o componente neural traz as capacidades de reconhecimento de padrões e aprendizado a partir de exemplos que estão faltando na IA simbólica.

Importantes pesquisadores de IA, bem como muitos observadores reconhecidos da disciplina, estão gravitando na direção de uma IA híbrida. Por exemplo, Dieter Ernst (2021) defendeu recentemente uma “integração entre redes neurais, que se destacam na classificação perceptiva e sistemas simbólicos, que por sua vez se destacam na abstração e inferência” (“AI Research and Governance Are at a Crossroads”, para. 4).

Seguindo os passos de Gary Marcus, os pesquisadores da IA Luis Lamb e Arthur d’Avila Garcez publicaram recentemente um artigo em favor de uma IA neuro-simbólica na qual representações adquiridas por meios neurais seriam interpretadas e processadas por meios simbólicos. Parece que encontramos uma solução para o problema de interrupção no desenvolvimento da IA: seria benéfico acoplar, de modo inteligente, os ramos simbólico e estatístico, em vez de mantê-los separados como dois programas de pesquisa concorrentes. Além disso, não vemos as empresas de Big Tech, que destacam o aprendizado de máquina e a IA neural em seus esforços de relações públicas, desenvolvendo internamente, de

forma discreta, gráficos de conhecimento para organizar sua memória digital e dar sentido aos resultados de suas redes neurais? Mas antes de declararmos a questão resolvida, vamos pensar um pouco mais sobre os dados do problema.

### **Cognição Animal e Cognição Humana**

Para cada um dos dois ramos da IA, listamos os obstáculos que impedem uma Inteligência Artificial menos fragmentada, mais útil e mais transparente. No entanto, encontramos a mesma desvantagem de ambos os lados: a compartimentação lógica e as dificuldades de acumulação e integração. Combinar o neural e o simbólico não nos ajudará a superar esse obstáculo, já que nenhum deles pode fazê-lo. No entanto, as sociedades humanas reais podem transformar percepções tácitas e habilidades experienciais em conhecimento compartilhável. Por meio de um amplo diálogo, um especialista em uma área acabará por se fazer entender por um especialista em outro campo e pode até mesmo lhe ensinar algo. Como esse tipo de desempenho cognitivo pode ser reproduzido em sociedades de máquinas? Qual fator desempenha o papel integrativo da linguagem natural nos sistemas de Inteligência Artificial?

Muitas pessoas pensam que, como o cérebro é o recipiente orgânico da inteligência, modelos neurais são a chave para sua simulação. Mas de que tipo de inteligência estamos falando? Não vamos esquecer que todos os animais têm um cérebro, e não é a inteligência do mosquito ou da baleia que a IA quer simular, mas a do ser humano. E se somos *mais inteligentes* do que outros animais (pelo menos do nosso ponto de vista) não é por causa do tamanho do nosso cérebro. Os elefantes têm cérebros maiores que humanos em termos absolutos, e a proporção do tamanho do cérebro para o tamanho do corpo é maior em camundongos do que em humanos. É principalmente nossa capacidade linguística, predominantemente processada nas áreas de Broca e Wernicke do cérebro (exclusivas da espécie humana), que distingue nossa inteligência da de outros vertebrados superiores. No entanto, esses módulos de processamento de linguagem não são funcionalmente separados do resto do cérebro; ao contrário, informam todos os nossos processos cognitivos, incluindo nossas habilidades técnicas e sociais. Nossas percepções, ações, emoções e comunicações são linguisticamente codificadas, e nossa memória é em grande parte organizada por um sistema de semântica coordenada fornecido pela linguagem.

Tudo bem, pode-se dizer. Simular habilidades de processamento simbólico humano, incluindo a faculdade linguística, não é precisamente o que a IA simbólica deve fazer? Mas então por que a IA está compartimentalizada em ontologias distintas, ainda que lutando para garantir a interoperabilidade semântica de seus

sistemas, e tem muita dificuldade em acumular e intercambiar conhecimento? Simplesmente porque, apesar de seu nome de *simbólica*, a IA ainda não tem um modelo computável de linguagem. Desde o trabalho de Chomsky, sabemos como calcular a dimensão sintática das línguas, mas sua dimensão semântica permanece fora do alcance da ciência da computação. Para entender essa situação, é necessário recordar alguns elementos da semântica.

### **Semântica em Linguística**

Do ponto de vista do estudo científico da linguagem, a semântica de uma palavra ou uma frase pode ser dividida em duas partes que são combinadas na prática, embora conceitualmente distintas: semântica linguística e semântica referencial. A semântica linguística lida com a relação entre palavras, enquanto a referencial está preocupada com a relação entre palavras e coisas.

#### ***Semântica Linguística (Palavra-Palavra)***

Um símbolo linguístico (palavra ou frase) geralmente tem dois aspectos: o *significante*, que é uma imagem visual ou acústica, e o *significado*, que é um conceito ou uma categoria geral. Por exemplo, o significante *árvore* tem o seguinte significado: “uma planta amadeirada de tamanho variável, cujo tronco cultiva galhos a partir de uma altura específica”. Dado que a relação entre significante e significado é estabelecida por uma língua, o significado de uma palavra ou de uma frase é definido como *um nó de relações com outros significados*. Em um dicionário clássico, cada palavra está situada em relação a outras palavras associadas (o tesouro), e seu significado é explicado por frases (a definição) que usam outras palavras que são explicadas por outras frases, e assim por diante, de forma circular. A *semântica linguística* é fundamental para um dicionário clássico. Verbos e substantivos comuns (por exemplo, *árvore*, *animal*, *órgão*, *comer*) representam categorias conectadas por uma densa rede de *relações semânticas* como: “faz parte”, “é um tipo de”, “pertence ao mesmo contexto que”, “é a causa de”, “é anterior a” etc. Pensamos e nos comunicamos da maneira humana porque nossas memórias coletivas e pessoais estão organizadas em categorias gerais conectadas por relações semânticas.

#### ***Semântica Referencial (Palavra-Coisa)***

Em contraste com a semântica linguística, a *semântica referencial* faz a ponte entre um *símbolo linguístico* (significante e significado) e um *referencial* (uma instância real). Quando digo que “carvalhos são árvores”, estou especificando o significado convencional da palavra *carvalho* colocando-a em uma

relação espécie-a-gênero com a palavra *árvore*; portanto, estou estritamente colocando a semântica linguística em ação. Mas se eu disser que “aquela árvore no quintal é um carvalho”, então eu estou apontando para uma situação real, e minha proposta é verdadeira ou falsa. Essa segunda declaração, obviamente, coloca a semântica linguística em ação, uma vez que primeiro devo saber o significado das palavras e da gramática para entendê-la. Mas, além da dimensão linguística, a semântica referencial também está envolvida, uma vez que a declaração se refere a um objeto específico em uma situação concreta. Algumas palavras, como substantivos próprios, não têm significado; este refere-se diretamente a um referente. Por exemplo, o significante *Alexandre, o Grande* refere-se a uma figura histórica e o significante *Tóquio*, a uma cidade. Em contraste com um dicionário clássico que define conceitos ou categorias, um dicionário enciclopédico contém descrições de *indivíduos* reais ou fictícios com nomes próprios como divindades, heróis de romances, figuras e eventos históricos, objetos geográficos, monumentos, obras da mente etc. Sua principal função é listar e descrever objetos externos ao sistema de uma língua. Por isso, registra a semântica referencial.

*Nota bene:* Uma *categoria* é uma classe de indivíduos, uma abstração. Pode haver categorias de entidades, processos, qualidades, quantidades, relações etc. As palavras *categoria* e *conceito* são tratadas aqui como sinônimos.

### Semântica em IA

Na ciência da computação, as referências reais, ou indivíduos (as realidades de que falamos) tornam-se os *dados*, enquanto as categorias gerais se tornam os cabeçalhos, campos ou *metadados* usados para classificar e recuperar dados. Por exemplo, no banco de dados de uma empresa, *nome do funcionário*, *endereço* e *salário* são categorias ou metadados, enquanto *Tremblay, 33 Boulevard René Lévesque* e *65 K\$/ano* são dados. Nesse domínio técnico, a semântica referencial corresponde à relação entre dados e metadados e a semântica linguística, à relação entre metadados ou categorias organizadoras, geralmente representadas por palavras ou expressões linguísticas curtas.

Tendo em vista que o objetivo da ciência da computação é aumentar a inteligência humana, uma de suas tarefas deve nos ajudar a entender a inundação de dados digitais e extrair o máximo de conhecimento utilizável possível deles. Para isso, devemos categorizar corretamente os dados – isto é, implementar a semântica da palavra-coisas –, e organizar as categorias de acordo com relações relevantes que nos permitem extrair todo o conhecimento acionável dos dados – o que corresponde à semântica palavra-palavra.

Ao discutir o tema da semântica na ciência da computação, devemos lembrar que os computadores não enxergam espontaneamente uma palavra ou uma frase como um conceito em uma certa relação com outros conceitos em uma língua, mas apenas como uma sequência de letras, ou *sequência de caracteres*. Portanto, as relações entre categorias que parecem óbvias para os seres humanos e que fazem parte da semântica linguística devem ser adicionadas – principalmente à mão – a um banco de dados se um programa deve levá-las em conta.

Vamos agora examinar até que ponto a IA simbólica modela a semântica. Se considerarmos as ontologias da Web Semântica (o padrão em IA simbólica), descobrimos que o significado das palavras não depende da circularidade autoexplicativa da linguagem (como em um dicionário clássico), mas que as palavras apontam para Identificadores de Recursos Uniformes (Uniform Resource Identifiers – URI) na forma da *semântica referencial* (como em um dicionário enciclopédico).

Em vez de confiar em conceitos (ou categorias) que já são dados em uma língua e que aparecem desde o início como nós de relações com outros conceitos, a estrutura da Web Semântica se baseia em conceitos que são definidos separadamente uns dos outros por meio de identificadores únicos. A circulação de sentido em uma rede de significados é descontada em favor de uma relação direta entre significante e referente, como se todas as palavras fossem substantivos próprios. Na ausência de uma semântica linguística baseada em uma gramática e dicionário comuns, as ontologias permanecem assim compartimentalizadas. *Em resumo, a IA simbólica contemporânea não tem acesso ao pleno poder cognitivo e comunicativo da linguagem porque não tem uma linguagem, apenas uma semântica referencial rígida.*

Então, por que a IA não usa línguas naturais – com sua semântica linguística inerente – para representar o conhecimento? A resposta é bem conhecida: as línguas naturais são ambíguas. Uma palavra pode ter vários significados, um significado pode ser expresso por diversas palavras, frases têm múltiplas interpretações possíveis, gramática é elástica etc. Uma vez que os computadores não são seres imbuídos de um bom senso nato, como nós, eles são incapazes de desambiguar corretamente declarações em linguagem natural. Para seus falantes humanos, uma linguagem natural fornece um dicionário, que é uma rede de categorias gerais predefinidas mutuamente explicativas. Essa rede semântica comum permite a descrição e comunicação de múltiplas situações concretas, bem como diferentes domínios do conhecimento. No entanto, devido a suas irregularidades, a IA não pode usar linguagens naturais para se comunicar ou ensinar às máquinas diretamente. É por isso que a IA permanece fragmentada hoje em microdomínios de práticas e conhecimentos, cada um com sua própria semântica particular.

# D

## IEML: Rumo a uma Mudança de Paradigma na Inteligência Artificial

A automação da semântica linguística poderia abrir novos horizontes de comunicação e raciocínio para a Inteligência Artificial. Para lidar com a semântica linguística, a IA precisa de uma linguagem padronizada e univocal, um código especialmente projetado para uso de máquinas e que os humanos poderiam facilmente entender e manipular. Essa linguagem finalmente permitiria que os modelos se conectassem e o conhecimento se acumulasse. Em suma, *o principal obstáculo para o desenvolvimento da IA é a falta de uma linguagem computável comum*. Este é precisamente o problema resolvido pela Metalinguagem da Economia da Informação (Information Economy Metalanguage – IEML), uma metalinguagem que pode expressar significado, como línguas naturais, e cuja semântica é inequívoca e computável, como uma linguagem matemática. O uso do IEML tornará a IA menos onerosa em termos de trabalho humano, mais apta a lidar com significado e causalidade e, o mais importante, capaz de acumular e trocar conhecimentos.

Sem linguagem, não teríamos acesso a questionamento, diálogo ou narrativa. A linguagem é simultaneamente um meio de inteligência pessoal – é difícil pensar sem diálogo interno – e de inteligência coletiva. Grande parte do conhecimento da sociedade foi acumulado e repassado de forma linguística. Dado o papel do discurso na inteligência humana, é surpreendente que esperamos alcançar a inteligência artificial geral sem um modelo computável de linguagem e sua semântica. A boa notícia é que finalmente temos um.

### IEML: UMA SOLUÇÃO BASEADA EM UM CÓDIGO SEMÂNTICO

#### **A Metalinguagem da Economia da Informação**

Muitos avanços na ciência da computação vêm da invenção de um sistema de codificação relevante que torna o objeto codificado (número, imagem, som etc.) facilmente computável por uma máquina. Por exemplo, codificação binária para números e codificação de pixels ou vetores para imagens. Por isso, temos trabalhado no design de um código que torna a semântica linguística computável. Essa linguagem artificial, IEML, tem uma gramática regular e um dicionário compacto de três mil palavras. Categorias mais complexas podem ser construídas combinando palavras em frases de acordo com um pequeno conjunto de regras gramaticais. Essas categorias complexas, por sua vez, podem ser usadas para definir outras, e assim por diante, recursivamente. Resumindo, qualquer tipo de categoria pode ser construído a partir de um pequeno conjunto de palavras.

**Em um nível linguístico**, a IEML tem a mesma capacidade expressiva que uma língua natural, e pode ser traduzida em qualquer outra língua. É também uma linguagem univocal: cada palavra do dicionário tem *apenas um significado* (ao contrário das línguas naturais) e um conceito tem apenas uma expressão, tornando sua semântica linguística computável. É importante notar que a IEML não é uma ontologia universal, mas é de fato uma *linguagem* que pode expressar qualquer ontologia ou classificação.

**Em um nível matemático**, IEML é uma linguagem regular no sentido estabelecido por Chomsky: é uma álgebra. É, portanto, favorável a todos os tipos de processamento automático e transformações.

**Em um nível de ciência da computação**, como veremos em mais detalhes a seguir, essa metalinguagem fornece uma linguagem de programação especializada para o design de gráficos de conhecimento e modelos de dados.

### O Editor IEML

A IEML é definida por sua gramática e dicionário de três mil palavras, que podem ser encontrados no site [intlekt.io](http://intlekt.io). Essa metalinguagem vem equipada com uma *ferramenta digital* para facilitar sua escrita, leitura e uso: o editor IEML.

O editor IEML é usado para produzir e explorar *modelos de dados*. Essa noção de *modelo* abrange redes semânticas, sistemas de metadados semânticos, ontologias, gráficos de conhecimento e sistemas de rotulagem para categorizar dados de treinamento. O editor contém uma linguagem de programação para automatizar a criação de nós (categorias) e links (relações semânticas entre categorias). Esta linguagem de programação é *declarativa*, o que significa que não pede ao usuário para organizar um fluxo de instruções condicionais, mas apenas para descrever os resultados desejados.

(1) Com o editor IEML, o modelador humano pode elaborar as *categorias* que servirão como recipientes (ou caixas de memória) para diferentes tipos de dados. Como dito acima, se algumas categorias não podem ser encontradas no dicionário IEML de três mil *palavras*, o modelador pode criar mais delas, combinando palavras para fazer frases, trazendo grande refinamento à categorização.

(2) A partir das categorias, o modelador então programa as *relações semânticas* (*faz parte, é uma causa* etc.) que conectarão os dados categorizados. A ligação entre nós é automatizada com base nas funções gramaticais das categorias. As propriedades matemáticas das relações (reflexividade, simetria, transitividade) são então especificadas.

(3) Uma vez categorizados os dados, o programa tece automaticamente uma rede de relações semânticas, dando aos dados, ao fim, ainda mais significado. A mineração de dados, a exploração hipertextual e a visualização de relacionamentos por tabelas e gráficos permitirão que os usuários finais explorem o conteúdo modelado.

### **Vantagens**

Várias características fundamentais distinguem o editor IEML das ferramentas contemporâneas de modelagem de dados: categorias e relacionamentos são programáveis e os modelos resultantes são interoperáveis e transparentes.

#### ***Categorias e relacionamentos são programáveis***

A estrutura regular do IEML permite que categorias sejam geradas e as relações sejam tecidas *funcional ou automaticamente*, em vez de serem criadas uma a uma. Essa propriedade economiza tempo considerável para o modelador. O tempo economizado pela automação da criação de categorias e relacionamentos mais do que compensa o tempo gasto na codificação de categorias no IEML, especialmente porque, uma vez criadas, novas categorias e relacionamentos podem ser trocados entre os usuários.

#### ***Os modelos são interoperáveis***

Todos os modelos são baseados no mesmo dicionário de três mil palavras e estabelecem regras gramaticais. Os modelos são, portanto, *interoperáveis*, o que significa que eles podem facilmente se fundir ou intercambiar categorias e submodelos. Cada modelo ainda é personalizado para um contexto específico, mas os modelos agora podem se comparar, interconectar e integrar.

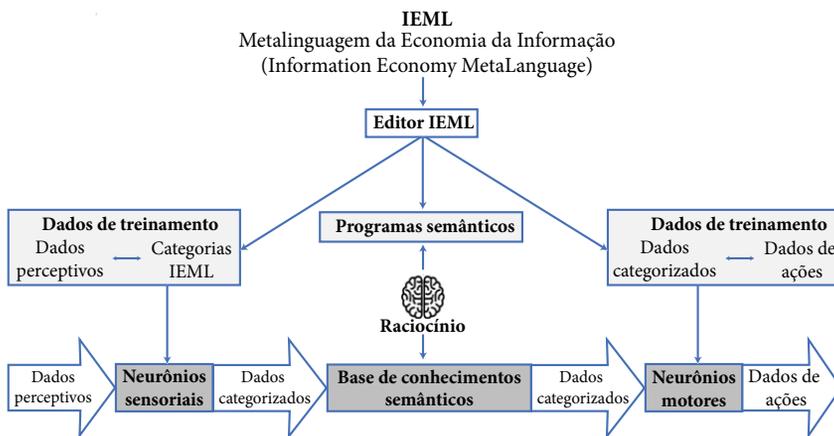
#### ***Os modelos são transparentes***

Embora codificados no IEML, os modelos escritos com o editor IEML são *legíveis em linguagem natural*. Uma vez que as categorias e as relações são rotuladas com palavras ou com frases mais elaboradas em linguagens naturais (e sem ambiguidade semântica), os modelos são *mais claros* tanto para os modeladores quanto para os usuários finais, alinhando-se, portanto, aos *princípios contemporâneos de ética e transparência*.

O usuário não precisa ser um cientista da computação ou estar familiarizado com a linguagem IEML para aprender a usá-la com sucesso; a curva de aprendizado é curta. Apenas a gramática (simples e regular) precisa ser dominada. O editor do IEML poderia ser utilizado nas escolas e, portanto, abrindo caminho para uma democratização da alfabetização em dados.

### A Arquitetura Neuro-Semântica da IEML

**Figura 1**  
Uma arquitetura neuro-semântica para a IA



Vamos agora propor uma arquitetura (Figura 1) de sistema de IA baseada na IEML, claramente um exemplo particular de uma arquitetura neuro-simbólica, apesar de ser chamada de *neuro-semântica* para enfatizar que resolve o problema da *computação semântica* e da *interoperabilidade semântica* entre sistemas.

#### Neurônios sensório-motores

Devemos distinguir vários tipos de dados de treinamento (texto, imagem, som etc.), dos quais resultam vários tipos de redes neurais. As redes neurais sensoriais que foram treinadas por meio de exemplos de dados categorizados na IEML inserirão informações no sistema. Os dados categorizados pelos neurônios sensoriais são transmitidos para a base de conhecimentos semânticos. Se forem detectadas inconsistências, erros ou vieses, os dados de treinamento ou sua conceituação devem, obviamente, ser revistos. Assim, o sistema deve incluir um ciclo de diálogo entre os registradores de dados que treinam as redes neurais e os engenheiros que gerenciam a base de conhecimento.

Na saída, as redes neurais motoras transformam os dados categorizados em dados que controlam ações, como escrita de texto, síntese de imagens, saída de voz, instruções enviadas a quem responderá aos estímulos (robôs) etc. Esses neurônios motores são treinados com exemplos que correspondem aos dados categorizados da IEML com os dados motores. Novamente, os

dados de treinamento e as redes neurais devem ser diferenciados de acordo com seus tipos.

### **Memória e Processamento Semântico**

A base de conhecimento é organizada por uma rede semântica; portanto, é preferencialmente apoiada por um *banco de dados gráfico*. Em termos de interface, essa base de conhecimento é apresentada como uma enciclopédia hipertextual. Também permite a programação de simulações e vários painéis de controle para monitoramento e inteligência.

O editor IEML mencionado na seção anterior também pode ser usado para tarefas que não sejam modelagem. Com efeito, permite operações variadas de leitura-escrita condicionadas pela presença de conteúdos semânticos localizados em determinadas funções gramaticais. Quando são codificados na IEML, os conceitos se tornam variáveis de uma álgebra, o que obviamente não é o caso quando são expressos em linguagem natural. Portanto, *transformações semânticas* podem ser programadas e computadas. Esta programação semântica abre o caminho não apenas para o *raciocínio lógico* clássico, ao qual os motores simbólicos de inferência da IA nos acostumaram há décadas, mas também a outras formas de raciocínio automático. Uma vez que na IEML a semântica é uma imagem funcional da sintaxe, torna-se possível automatizar *raciocínio analógico* como *A é para B o que C é para D*. Outras operações semânticas também podem ser programadas, tais como: seleção e pesquisa; substituição, inserção ou exclusão; extração de sub-redes semânticas relevantes; sumarização ou expansão; inversão, alusão, atenuação ou amplificação; extração ou projeção de estruturas narrativas etc.

### **Várias Aplicações**

Algumas aplicações da nossa arquitetura de IA neuro-semântica IEML são evidentes: integração de dados; suporte de decisão com base em modelos causais; gestão do conhecimento; compreensão e síntese do texto; geração *controlada* de texto (ao contrário dos sistemas do tipo GPT3, nos quais a criação de texto não é controlada); chatbots e robótica. Agora comentaremos brevemente dois exemplos de aplicações: compreensão de texto e geração controlada de texto.

Em relação à *geração de texto controlado*, vamos imaginar dados de telemetria, informações contábeis, exames médicos, resultados de testes de conhecimento etc. como entrada (input). Como saída (output) podemos programar textos narrativos em linguagem natural sintetizando o conteúdo dos fluxos de dados de entrada: diagnósticos médicos, relatórios escolares, conselhos etc.

Sobre a *compreensão de texto*, vamos primeiro assumir a categorização automática do conteúdo de um documento inserido no sistema. Em uma segunda etapa, o modelo semântico extraído do texto é escrito na memória do sistema e integrado ao conhecimento que o sistema já adquiriu. Em suma, sistemas de Inteligência Artificial poderiam acumular conhecimento a partir da leitura automática de documentos. Supondo que a IEML seja adotada, os sistemas de Inteligência Artificial se tornariam capazes não apenas de acumular conhecimento, mas de integrá-lo em modelos coerentes e intercambiá-lo. Essa é obviamente uma perspectiva de longo prazo que exigirá esforços coordenados.

### CONCLUSÃO: UM FUTURO HUMANÍSTICO PARA A IA

Mesmo que a arquitetura neuro-semântica proposta acima não contorne todos os obstáculos no caminho da Inteligência Artificial geral, ela favorecerá a IA na criação de aplicações capazes de processar o *significado* de textos ou situações. Ela também nos permite vislumbrar um mercado de dados rotulados em IEML que estimularia o já em expansão desenvolvimento do aprendizado de máquina. Também apoiaria uma memória pública colaborativa que seria particularmente útil nas áreas de pesquisa científica, educação e saúde.

Hoje, a multiplicidade de linguagens, sistemas de classificação, pontos de vista disciplinares e contextos práticos compartimenta nossa memória digital. No entanto, a comunicação de modelos, a comparação crítica dos pontos de vista e o acúmulo de conhecimento são essenciais para a cognição simbólica humana, uma cognição indissolivelmente pessoal e coletiva. A inteligência artificial só será capaz de aumentar de forma sustentável a cognição humana se for interoperável, cumulativa, integrável, intercambiável e distribuída. Isso significa que não faremos progressos significativos na Inteligência Artificial sem fazermos esforços simultâneos por uma inteligência coletiva capaz de autorreflexão e de se coordenar em uma memória global. A adoção de uma linguagem computável que funciona como um sistema universal de coordenadas semânticas – uma linguagem fácil de ler e escrever – abriria novos caminhos para a inteligência coletiva humana, incluindo uma interação multimídia imersiva no mundo das ideias. Nesse sentido, a comunidade de usuários da IEML pode ser o início de uma nova era de inteligência coletiva.

A IA contemporânea, a maioria estatística, tende a criar situações em que os dados pensam no lugar dos humanos, sem saber. Em contrapartida, ao adotar a IEML, propomos desenvolver uma IA que ajude os seres humanos a assumir o controle intelectual dos dados, a fim de extrair significado compartilhável, de forma sustentável. A IEML nos permite repensar o propósito e o funcionamento da IA de um ponto de vista humanista, um ponto de vista

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para o qual o significado, a memória e a consciência pessoal devem ser tratados com a maior seriedade.

### NOTAS E REFERÊNCIAS COMENTADAS

#### **Sobre as Origens da IA**

O termo *Inteligência Artificial* foi usado pela primeira vez em 1956 em uma conferência na Dartmouth College, em Hanover, New Hampshire. Os participantes da conferência incluíram o cientista da computação e pesquisador cognitivo Marvin Minsky (Turing Award 1969) e o inventor da linguagem de programação LISP, John McCarthy (Turing Award 1971).

#### **Sobre o crescimento cognitivo**

O *crescimento cognitivo* (em vez de *imitação* da inteligência humana) foi o foco principal de muitos pioneiros da ciência da computação e da Web. Ver, por exemplo:

- Bush, V. (1945, julho). As we may think. *Atlantic Monthly*.
- Licklider, J. (1960). Man-computer symbiosis. *IRE Transactions on Human Factors in Electronics, 1*, 4-11.
- Engelbart, D. (1962). *Augmenting human intellect* [Relatório técnico]. Stanford Research Institute.
- Berners-Lee, T. (1999). *Weaving the Web*. Harper.

#### **Sobre a História da IA Neural**

Muitas pessoas reconhecem Geoffrey Hinton, Yann Le Cun e Yoshua Benjio como os fundadores da IA neural contemporânea. Mas a IA neural começou já na década de 1940. Uma breve bibliografia é fornecida a seguir.

- O primeiro artigo teórico sobre a IA neural foi publicado em 1943: McCulloch, W. S., & Pitts, W. (1943). A logical calculus of ideas immanent in nervous activity. *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics, 5*, 115-133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02478259>
- Warren McCulloch publicou vários artigos sobre esse tema que foram reunidos em: McCulloch, W. S. (1965). *Embodiments of mind*. MIT Press. Escrevi um artigo sobre seu trabalho: Lévy, P. (1986). L'Œuvre de Warren McCulloch. *Cahiers du CREA, 7*, 211-255.

- Frank Rosenblatt é o inventor do *Perceptron*, que pode ser considerado o primeiro sistema de aprendizagem de máquina baseado em uma rede neuromímica. Ver: Rosenblatt, F. (1962). *Principles of neurodynamics: Perceptrons and the theory of brain mechanisms*. Spartan Books.

- A tese de doutorado de Marvin Minsky, de 1954, foi intitulada *Theory of Neural-Analog Reinforcement Systems and Its Application to the Brain-Model Problem*. Minsky criticaria o *Perceptron* de Frank Rosenblatt em seu livro *Perceptrons* (MIT Press, 1969), escrito com Seymour Papert, e mais tarde continuaria o programa de pesquisa simbólico em IA. Também de Minsky, *The Society of Mind* (Simon and Schuster, 1986) resume bem sua abordagem da cognição humana como emergindo da interação de múltiplos módulos cognitivos com funções variadas.

- Heinz von Foerster foi secretário das Conferências Macy (1941-1960) sobre cibernética e teoria da informação. Foi diretor do Laboratório de Informática Biológica da University of Illinois (1958-1975). Seus principais artigos foram coletados em *Observing Systems: Selected Papers of Heinz von Foerster* (Intersystems Publications, 1981). Estudei de perto a pesquisa feita neste laboratório. Ver: Lévy, P. (1986). *Analyse de contenu des travaux du Biological Computer Laboratory (BCL)*. *Cahiers du CREA*, 8, 155-191.

- Nos anos 1980, vamos notar a publicação do livro de referência de: McClelland, J. L., Rumelhart, D. E., & PDP Research Group. (1986). *Parallel Distributed Processing: Explorations in the Microstructure of Cognition*. 2 vols. MIT Press.

- Desse mesmo ano, ver o importante artigo: Rumelhart, D. E., Hinton, G. E., Williams, R. J. (1986). Learning representations by back-propagating errors. *Nature*, 323(6088), 533-536. <https://doi.org/10.1038/323533a0>

- Hinton foi mais tarde reconhecido por seu trabalho pioneiro com um Prêmio Turing junto com Yann LeCun e Joshua Benjio em 2018. Um de seus artigos mais citados é: LeCun, Y., Bengio, Y., & Hinton, G. (2015). Deep learning. *Nature*, 521, 436-444. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature14539>

### **A Crítica da IA Estatística**

Em relação à crítica da IA estatística, este texto retoma alguns dos argumentos apresentados por pesquisadores como Judea Pearl, Gary Marcus e Stephen Wolfram.

- Judea Pearl recebeu o Prêmio Turing em 2011 por seu trabalho sobre a modelagem da causalidade em IA. Ver: Pearl, J., & Mackenzie, D. (2019). *The book of why: The new science of cause and effect*. Basic Books.

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- Gary Marcus escreveu em 2018 um artigo seminal: “Deep learning, a critical appraisal” (<https://arxiv.org/pdf/1801.00631.pdf?u>). Ver também: Marcus, G., & Davis, E. (2019). *Rebooting AI: Building artificial intelligence we can trust*. Vintage.

- Stephen Wolfram é o autor do software Mathematica e o cérebro por trás do mecanismo de busca Wolfram Alpha. Ver sua entrevista de 2016 para a Edge.org ([https://www.edge.org/conversation/stephen\\_wolfram-ai-the-future-of-civilization](https://www.edge.org/conversation/stephen_wolfram-ai-the-future-of-civilization)).

- Além do trabalho de Judea Pearl sobre a importância da *modelagem causal* em IA, vamos lembrar as teses do filósofo Karl Popper sobre os limites do raciocínio indutivo e das estatísticas. Ver, em particular: Popper, K. (1972). *Objective knowledge: An evolutionary approach*. Clarendon Press.

### **Sobre a IA Neural Contemporânea**

- Sobre o modelo de processamento de linguagem natural mais utilizado atualmente, chamado *BERT*, ver: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BERT\\_\(language\\_model\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BERT_(language_model)).

- O recente relatório do Center for Research on Foundation Models (CRFM) do Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), *On the Opportunities and Risks of Foundation Models*, começa com a frase: “A IA está passando por uma mudança de paradigma com o surgimento de modelos (por exemplo, BERT, DALL-E, GPT-3) que são treinados em dados amplos em escala e são adaptáveis a uma vasta gama de tarefas derivadas” (<https://arxiv.org/abs/2108.07258>).

- Sobre a Open IA Aberta, ver: <https://openai.com/blog/gpt-3-apps/> e <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/08/22/1007539/gpt3-openai-language-generator-artificial-intelligence-ai-opinion/>.

### **Sobre IA Simbólica Contemporânea**

- Integrar o conhecimento existente nos sistemas de IA é um dos principais objetivos da *Wolfram Language* de Stephen Wolfram. Ver <https://www.wolfram.com/language/principles/>.

- Sobre a Web Semântica, ver <https://www.w3.org/standards/semanticweb/#> e [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic\\_Web](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_Web).

- Sobre Wikidata ver: [https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata:Main\\_Page](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Wikidata:Main_Page).

- A respeito do projeto Cyc de Douglas Lenat, ver: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyc>.

### **Sobre a Perspectiva Neuro-Simbólica**

- Ernst, D. (2020). AI research and governance are at a crossroads. *CIGI Online*.  
<https://www.cigionline.org/articles/ai-research-and-governance-are-crossroads/>

- Garcez, A. A., & Lamb, L. C. (2020). Neurosymbolic AI: The 3rd Wave.  
<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2012.05876.pdf>

- Sobre a fusão neuro-simbólica, ver também o recente relatório da Universidade de Stanford *100 Year Study on AI*, que identifica a hipótese neuro-simbólica como uma das chaves para o avanço da disciplina (<https://ai100.stanford.edu/>).

### **Sobre interoperabilidade semântica**

- Todos os editores de metadados semânticos afirmam ser interoperáveis, mas geralmente é uma interoperabilidade de *formatos de arquivo*, sendo estes últimos efetivamente assegurados pelos padrões da Web Semântica (XML, RDF, OWL etc.). Mas neste texto estou falando da interoperabilidade dos próprios *modelos semânticos* (de *arquiteturas de conceitos*: categorias e suas relações). É importante distinguir a interoperabilidade *semântica* da interoperabilidade do formato. Os modelos escritos na IEML podem ser exportados em formatos de metadados semânticos padrão, como RDF, JSON-LD ou Graph QL. Sobre a noção de interoperabilidade semântica, ver: <https://intlekt.io/2021/04/05/outline-of-a-business-model-for-a-change-in-civilization/>.

### **Sobre Chomsky e Sintaxe**

Um dos primeiros pesquisadores a ter realizado uma matematização da linguagem é Noam Chomsky. Ver: Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. Mouton e Chomsky, N., & Schützenberger, M.-P. (1963). The algebraic theory of context-free languages. In P. Braffort & D. Hirschberg (Eds.), *Computer Programming and Formal Languages* (pp. 118-161). Para uma abordagem mais filosófica, ver: Chomsky, N. (2000). *New horizons in the study of language and mind*. Cambridge UP. Para entender como a IEML continua várias tendências da pesquisa linguística do século XX, ver: Lévy, P. (2021). The linguistic roots of IEML. *Intlekt*. <https://intlekt.io/the-linguistic-roots-of-ieml/>

### **Sobre Substantivos Próprios**

Adoto aqui a posição de Saul Kripke, que é seguida pela maioria dos filósofos e gramáticos. Ver: Kripke, S. (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. Blackwell.

Ver minha recente entrada no blog sobre esse assunto: Lévy, P. (2021). Proper nouns in IEML. *Intlekt*. <https://intlekt.io/proper-names-in-ieml/>

### Pierre Lévy sobre a IEML

- Lévy, P. (2009). Toward a self-referential collective intelligence: Some philosophical background of the IEML research program. In N. T. Nguyen, R. Kowalczyk & C. Shyi-Ming (Eds.), *Computational collective intelligence, semantic web, social networks and multiagent systems. First International Conference, ICCCI, Wroclaw, Poland, Oct. 2009, Proceedings* (pp. 22-35). Springer.

- Lévy, P. (2010, 2 de janeiro). The IEML research program: From social computing to reflexive collective intelligence. *Information sciences, special issue on collective intelligence*, 180(1), 71-94.

- As considerações filosóficas e científicas que me levaram à invenção do IEML foram amplamente descritas em: Lévy, P. (2011). *La sphere semantique. Computation, cognition, économie de l'information*. Hermes-Lavoisier. A tradução para o inglês: Lévy, P. (2011). *The semantic sphere. Computation, cognition and information economy*. Wiley. Esse livro contém uma extensa bibliografia.

- Os princípios gerais do IEML são resumidos em: <https://intlekt.io/ieml/>.

- Sobre a gramática IEML, ver: <https://intlekt.io/ieml-grammar/>.

- Sobre o dicionário IEML, ver: <https://intlekt.io/ieml-dictionary/>.

### Outras referências relevantes de Pierre Lévy

- Lévy, P. (1994). *L'intelligence collective, pour une anthropologie du cyberspace*. La Découverte. Edição inglesa: Lévy, P. (1997). *Collective intelligence* (R. Bonono, Trans.). Perseus Books.

- Lévy, P. (1991). Les systèmes à base de connaissance comme médias de transmission de l'expertise. *Intellectica*, 12, 187-219.

- Analisei em detalhes o trabalho de engenharia do conhecimento em vários casos em meu livro: Lévy, P. (1992). *De la programmation considérée comme un des beaux-arts*. La Découverte. ■

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# Event as singularity<sup>a</sup>

## *Acontecimento como singularidade*

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### ABSTRACT

This article starts from the concept of event brought by Greimas, which gave rise to two trends: Landowski's sociosemiotics, which debates the interaction and meaning regimes without privileging the event, and tensive semiotics, by Zilberberg and Fontanille, which operates with the concept of events based on tensivity. We will examine the theses presented against the use of the concept and deepen the theory of events using the theory of Alain Badiou. This allows us to think about such transformations brought about by the event considering the role of the body, the subject, truth, and antagonism from interaction and tension regimes and how new communicational processes can be engendered in the post-event.

**Keywords:** Event, antagonism, interaction regimes

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### RESUMO

Este artigo parte do conceito de acontecimento de Greimas, que originou duas tendências: a da sociosemiótica de Landowski, que debate os regimes de interação e sentido sem privilegiar o acontecimento, e a da semiótica tensiva de Zilberberg e Fontanille, que opera com o conceito de acontecimento a partir da tensividade. Examinaremos as teses apresentadas contra o uso do conceito e aprofundaremos a teoria do acontecimento recorrendo à teoria de Alain Badiou. Isso permite pensarmos tais transformações trazidas pelo acontecimento considerando o papel do corpo, do sujeito, da verdade e do antagonismo, a partir dos regimes de interação e da tensividade, e como podem ser engendrados novos processos comunicacionais no pós-acontecimento.

**Palavras-chave:** Acontecimento, antagonismo, regimes de interação

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<sup>1</sup>This path would lead us to debate pragmatist theories, such as Vera França's, supported by Querê's theories, and to question Marcondes Filho's theory, answering questions such as: is the event the moment of emergence of communication and what happens if the post-event is no longer communication? Or can we talk about communication disputes after the moment of the event, through interaction regimes? Although we do not go into such issues in this text due to lack of sufficient space, they will indirectly appear in the debate with Landowski's semiotics. The debate with journalism theories through the event would also deserve an entire article, as there are four volumes of the book *Jornalismo e Acontecimento*, organized by several authors, including Eduardo Meditsch, Daisi Vogel, Bruno Leal, Beatriz Marocco, and Marcia Benetti.

<sup>2</sup>Giacoa (2013) translates *Ereignis* as appropriating event but the translation of Heidegger's book uses appropriative event (Heidegger, 2013). Giacoa says: "The sign of this happening is not the chronological time of clocks and calendars but a time which Heidegger calls the *Timeness of Being*. It is in it that Being gives itself and shows itself on the horizon of history, its truth prevails as an appropriating event" (p. 92). Thus, *Ereignis* designates "an advent that marks a time in history, gives it an essential property and a meaning for the way entities, in their totality, exist in the world. The appropriating event gives meaning to an era of the world thought of as a destination, an unveiling of the essence of beings in their truth" (p. 93).

We will not develop such a conception in the present text but we are interested in marking its difference with the semiotic conception.

<sup>3</sup>About this theme, see Demuru (2019) and Fontanille (2019).

IN THE FIELD of communication, the theme of the event has allowed the examination of processes from numerous theories, such as Vera França's pragmatism at GRIS (França & Oliveira, 2012), Ciro Marcondes Filho's (2010) new theory of communication, and others related to cinema, to journalism with numerous authors, such as Vogel et al. (2013), to name just a few<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the present text is not to depart from this state of the art, although that would be an extremely fruitful path; the aim here is to examine the theory of the event as we thematize the discursive regimes of interaction in French semiotics.

For this, before entering this debate, we will recall the sources of the theory of the event and how this theme historically emerged within French semiotics. The theme of the event is dear to French thought. Deleuze approached it in *Logic of Sense* in 1969. Badiou published *Being and Event* in 1985. Heidegger's hermeneutics approaches it from the meditation of the *Ereignis*, between us translated as *appropriative event*<sup>2</sup>.

Our intention is not to connect all these meanings of event but to focus our attention on the internal debate of Greimasian semiotics. Greimas arrived late on this subject. In this text, I will follow the confrontation that takes place in Greimasian semiotics in relation to the interpretation of the concept of event, introduced by Greimas in 1987 in the book *De l'Imperfection* (2002). With this, it will be possible to extract the differences between two conceptions of event that derived from this book by Greimas. We will see how these differences will be important to situate the category of interaction, which is fundamental for discussing the political dimensions of communication and sociability. Finally, we will propose a conception of event closer to Alain Badiou's theory but crossed by discussion with works by Landowski and Fontanille.

The old semiotic models of narrativity<sup>3</sup> do not allow us to understand the current communicational processes that permeate society in all its magnitude and have given way to research on forms of life, body and meaning, event and discourse, and interaction and affection regimes. This did not happen only due to an internal process of the theory but mainly due to processes of cultural transformation. On the one hand, the economic production of sign-value penetrates the construction of all types of capital, from the financial to the capital of the self, based on the performance and enjoyment criteria of neoliberalism and biopolitics (Dardot & Laval, 2016). On the other hand, the transition from the culture of production to the culture of consumption of communicational capitalism (Dean, 2005; Fontenille, 2017; Prado & Prates, 2017) gave rise to changes in the circulation of texts at all levels and practices, causing the old analyses of texts as closed in themselves

(there is no salvation outside the text, semioticians used to say) gave way to analyses of objects under construction, affected by the ups and downs of the meanings in social fields; it was also necessary to face the fact that communications began to appeal not only to the intelligible, but increasingly to the sensitive of bodies. It is also necessary to emphasize that, in addition to these two spheres, there is the fact that traditional truth regimes have been under political attack, for example, against the models which characterize our activity in the social sciences<sup>4</sup>.

What is an object under construction? Paolo Demuru (2019) says: “everything that is part of the field of pertinence necessary for its constitution as an object of meaning” (p. 82). This goes for texts and practices. Demuru does not start from Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that *we are doomed to meaning* nor of the change proposed by Landowski: *we are condemned to construct meaning*. The proposal becomes: “we are not condemned either to meaning, nor to building meaning, but rather to rebuild meaning” (p. 83). But is *condemnation* a good figure for this current situation of the hypermedia society in which the senses circulate vertiginously based on summons<sup>5</sup>? *Condemnation* recalls the movement of Sisyphus, who was punished by the gods to incessantly carry a stone to the top of the mountain but the stone rolls downhill and he has to start the climb again. Are we, like Sisyphus, condemned to ceaselessly carry the stone of meaning? Or is there another way of asking about the incessant *task* of marking the world that produces meanings? When studying the messages circulating on the networks, we must necessarily face this reconstruction of meaning but not as a condemnation.

<sup>4</sup>I think here on the attacks by the Brazilian extreme right from 2018-19 onward against authorized voices, mainly from journalism, science, justice, and the university.

<sup>5</sup>About this, see Prado (2013) and Carlón (2020).

## AESTHESIA AND EVENT

*De l’Imperfection* (1987/2002) is the last book by Greimas, without considering the ones he co-authored. In this book, he takes a turn in his semiotic theory, which had been centered on narrativity. He begins his analysis with Michel Tournier’s (1967/2014) 1967 book, *Friday or the Limbs of the Pacific*, in which the protagonist (Robinson) ordered his life “according to the rhythm of the drops of water that fell one by one of an improvised clepsydra (water clock)” (Greimas, 1987/2002, p. 23) but suddenly found himself “awakened by the unusual silence that revealed to him the noise of the last drop falling into the copper basin” (Greimas, 1987/2002, p. 23). “He then found that the next drop, ‘resolutely refusing to fall,’ even ‘outlined a reversal of the course of time’” (Greimas, 1987/2002, p. 23). A wonder involved him with this suspension of time. It is an *aesthetic* event, an exceptional

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*aesthetic* apprehension, which shakes Robinson to the point where his body falters and he has to lean against a threshold. Greimas (1987/2002) says: “The apprehension itself is conceived as a particular relationship established, in the actantial framework, between a subject and an object of value” (p. 25). It is not a *natural* relation:

its primary condition is the stop in time, figuratively marked by the silence that abruptly follows everyday time, represented as a rhythmic noise. This silence corresponds to a sudden stop of all movement in space, an immobilization of the world-object, of the world of things that hitherto did not cease “inclining . . . towards its use – and its usury” . . . The suspension of time and the petrification of space are marked twice by the word “suddenly” [*soudain*], which underlines an unpredictable punctuality, which creates a discontinuity in the discourse and a rupture in the represented life. (Greimas, 1987/2002, pp. 25-26)

The subject had been following a habit, a disposition, attached to certain self-identities linked to discourses until a sudden event allows him to see something different about himself and the world. There is a rupture: a gap appears, a change in the regime of expectations and dispositions, *something* of the order of the sensitive of the body, not just of the intelligible, of the idea.

Greimas performs several analyses of aesthetic events of this type in the book, which we will not detail. What interests us is Landowski’s reading of the directions taken by semiotics after this book by Greimas. For Landowski (2017), after this book, it was possible to overcome the sensible-intelligible dualism:

Just as the sensible not only “feels” (by definition) but also has, or rather makes sense, inversely what “understands” – the intelligible, the sense itself – in itself embodies the sensible. This means that the meaning, in a way, would already be present in what the senses allow us to feel or perceive. (p. 105)

According to Fontanille (2019), this book by Greimas inaugurated the possibility of

writing semiotics in another way, not at a distance, after objectification and through the screen of metalanguage, but in a way in immersion in the object of analysis, an immersion that allows rediscovering the sensitive experience from which an interpretation is possible. (p. 157)

Beividas (2016) also addresses this shift in semiotics:

The text was replaced first by the subject of the enunciative praxis, subject in action, subject in situation, and then by an ascension movement towards the source, by the body itself as the first instance of the pre-conditions of emergence of perception and, therefore, of the sense, as a place of necessary mediation in the passage “from states of affairs” to “states of the soul” in a significant world. In short, it is the (definitive?) entry of a body of flesh in the *corpus* of discourse (or in its replacement?). (para. 5)

In our reading, the novelty of *De l'Imperfection* (1987/2002) is a kind of late post-structuralization of Greimasian semiotics, a change of focus, which had been placed in a fixed structure, and shifts to the event, which has the consequence of softening the structures (the semiotic square), which Jameson (1975) had called the “prison-house of language.” The abstract enunciator becomes incarnated, in this new phase of theory, in a perceptual body, which demands that semioticians start to experiment phenomenological approaches, without which it would be difficult to try to overcome the sensitive-intelligible dualism.

## INTERACTION REGIMES

Landowski (2017) builds his interpretation of *De l'Imperfection* (1987/2002) through the theory of interaction regimes and criticizes the other strand, which he calls “catastrophist”, in which the appearance of the aesthetic would have the *status* of an “accidental event” (p. 106). Let us see how he synthesizes this current:

it all starts with the appearance of an actant-subject characterized by the state of “need” in which he finds himself. It is anchored in the “daily routines” and, without him noticing it clearly, it lacks something that he would hardly know how to define, but which, in opposition to the “prosaic” aspect of what he is experiencing, can only be conceived as something “dazzling.” Only some unexpected event would be capable of making him suddenly apprehend, “under the guise of things,” another, more authentic sense: a sense that would give him access to “another” world, in which, finally, he would be able to recognize himself. Once the state of “waiting for the unexpected” is installed in the hero’s soul in this way, the event, the so-called accident itself, can occur. It is this irruption that will constitute the nucleus of the following sequence, that is, of the decisive scene. (p. 107)

After this emergence, this allegedly mistaken theoretical current (by Fontanille and Zilberberg) would consider that the event would fade and

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begin what Landowski (2017) calls “a retrogradation” to a state similar to the first, “either because the subject cannot withstand the force of the occurred,” or because “the glow has vanished by itself” (p. 107). It would return the subject to an everyday life that is more de-semanticized than the initial one. Let us see: “the only thing that the hero of this adventure will ultimately gain will be nostalgia or the ‘aftertaste’ of the sensitive presence of meaning, glimpsed only for an instant” (p. 107). For Landowski, this model lacks explanatory value, as it does not bring to understanding the modes of articulation between the three states and the corresponding forms of apprehension of meaning, and, as a consequence, reinforces the dualism that it intends to overcome. According to him, this vision – which he calls accidental – seems romantic, but in fact it is “unionistic:” “on the one hand, the days of work and routine, the everyday; on the other hand, rare ‘out of the ordinary’ moments: the so-called escapes, moments of bliss that, breaking the continuity of the prosaic, would encourage the worker to face another week...” (p. 108).

Then he asks: “What meaning should we assign, in this context, to the vocabulary felt?” (Landowski, 2017, p. 109). Is the meaning “which ‘reveals’ in ecstasy the same as that which is presupposed when talking about its ‘wear,’ and that which allows itself to be captured thanks to the ‘shudder’ produced by contact with certain sensitive qualities of the world?” (Landowski, 2017, p. 109). He goes on to say:

In the same way that the subject defines itself as an empty place in which two states totally alien to each other are manifested each in its turn, the notion of meaning also presents itself devoid of fixed content since, as we have observed, it refers alternately to two ways of meaning that have nothing in common. (Landowski, 2017, p. 109)

For Landowski (2017), the event is understood as an instantaneous happening in which there is a rupture of a state linked to

a purely “denotative” signification regime in relation to a “flattened” life, which would explain why, paradoxically, in Greimas’ terms, the meaning is considered de-semanticized – while the alternative regime, the one in which it makes possible the advent of an “other” meaning, it is described as full of “dazzling” content, the apprehension of which would allow one to glimpse, in addition to the appear, the very being of things. (Landowski, 2017, p. 110)

For him, this is a “decidedly flattened,” “substantially catastrophic,” “formally catastrophic” conception, “not only of life, but also of poetry and of aesthetics

itself” (Landowski, 2017, p. 110). He claims not to fall into the dualism pointed out in this reading (the theory of the event in the way of Zilberberg, 2011) and seeks to think of meaning in a *constructivist* way, emphasizing intentionality (opposing the randomness of the accident) and progressiveness (opposing the punctuality of the event). In this Landowskian reading, meaning will no longer be sought only in the punctual moment of ecstasy, of intensity, but in “everyday behavior” (Landowski, 2017, p. 111). The subject is no longer waiting for the unexpected but starts to “actively exercise a practice aimed at approaching this objective” (Landowski, 2017, p. 111). It is committed to an aesthetic action, in terms of what is lived, choosing its actions in order to build an object of value. This sought-after aesthetic value is no longer something *providentially* given to the subject, but a construction to be carried out, to be constructed. He appeals to the second part of *De l’Imperfection* (1987/2002), in which Greimas proposes something “more motivating, another adventure, less spectacular than that of someone who realizes – or loses – in the *esthesia* understood as an ecstatic experience, but also less conventional” (Landowski, 2017, p. 113). This would be, according to Landowski (2017), “a path out of all sentimentality and away from any transcendence, a positive path that points to the methodical construction of the aesthetic sense” (p. 113). In this way, *De l’Imperfection* (1987/2002) would bring us the development of “an intelligence of the sensitive” (p. 116). He says:

more concretely, we are witnessing a work of edification, or even semiotic education: a kind of self-learning that aims at a better mastery of the latent competence that each one has to feel the presence of the other (in any of its possible ways) while apprehending what makes sense in this way. (Landowski, 2017, p. 116)

## INTERACTIONS

In Landowski (2017), interaction is always linked to meaning, based on four types of regimes: programming, manipulation, accident, and adjustment. The previous narrative semiotics thematized the junction regime, in which intersubjective relations are mediated by objects of value, “with which one must enter into conjunction or disjunction” (p. 116). Both logics

are inscribed in an existential constellation that Landowski defines as the constellation of *prudence*, that is, in a universe where the risk of unexpected, new, and unusual meanings arising (from interactional processes) is circumscribed and can be relatively controlled (risk minimum in the case of programming and limited in the case of manipulation). (Demuru, 2019, p. 85)

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In that first phase of semiotics, two types of interaction were differentiated: that based on programmed actions, in which regularity is exercised, and that based on strategic manipulation, in which there is a relationship between subjects who try to reach an agreement about something in the world, in which intentionality dominates (cf. Landowski, 2014, p. 19). Landowski (2014) introduces two other regimes based on the logic of union: that of adjustment, based on the sensibility of interactants, and that of accident, linked to chance. Let us see how he characterizes each of these regimes. The programming regime is based on *making being*:

an electronic device, for example, has a “program,” an animal has its instincts . . . so many other thematic roles that not only semantically delimit particular spheres of action, but which, in certain contexts, will allow us to anticipate even in the smallest details the behaviors of actors (human or not) who are invested in them. . . . From the factory or the laboratory to the kitchen, it is in this way by programming operations that consist in taking advantage of behavioral regularities – in other words, virtual programs – characteristic of objects taken as raw material, that we build new objects every day of all kinds, starting with modest soups. (Landowski, 2014, pp. 22-23)

However, when two subjects have to negotiate the meanings of a given situation, when one has to make the other do what he wants, then the regime is one of manipulation. The certainties of the programming regime give rise to relative uncertainty: “From recording interactions based on one or another of the *principles of regularity* – causal or social – that all programming presupposes, we now move to another regime, of a manipulative (or strategic) type, based on a principle of intentionality” (Landowski, 2014, p. 25). It is the territory of *doing things*: an agent can tempt the interlocutor, promise reward, argue, flatter, provoke, etc. “Whatever it is, the manipulator always proposes to the other one form or another of exchange – economic bargaining or blackmail on honor, or at least on self-love” (Landowski, 2014, p. 27). To achieve his ends, he can be tempting, overbearing, threatening, flattering, seductive or provocative. Both are subjects but their thematic roles are, as Landowski (2014) says, “specialized functions, whose characteristic consists in not communicating directly with each other” (p. 28). We are still in a strategy regime but no longer in the program order, involving a type of communication in which there are movements from one party or another to direct the behavior and action of the other. There is still no adjustment, communicative action based on understanding and considering the movements of the other understood as an intentional otherness. Landowski explains:

Suppose that, caught at fault on the road, I find no arguments to objectively justify my conduct. What kind of persuasion strategy to adopt in a situation like this so that the angry policeman . . . turns a blind eye? Try to seduce him? Too risky. Trying to threaten him? Flatter him? . . . As we can see, every strategic choice essentially expresses the way the manipulator builds the competence (volitional, deontic, cognitive, epistemic, etc.) of the other and the way he locates the sensible points, flaws or critical zones, susceptible, in their eyes, to make their interlocutor manipulated. (pp. 29-30)

If, in the programming regime, subjects are limited to “following to the letter the routes and narrative programs pre-established by some enunciator-recipient” (Demuru, 2019, p. 84), be it leader, teacher, priest, auditor, government or coach, in the manipulation regime we see “a sender who seeks to lead an interlocutor to want or to do something and act according to his plans” (Demuru, 2019, p. 85). If this interlocutor accepts the proposed contract, he/she must engage “as a subject, in a certain narrative program, then acquiring modal-type competences (being able to do, knowing how to do)” (Demuru, 2019, p. 85).

Let us now consider the two other regimes that characterize the logic of *union*: adjustment and accident. In these cases, interaction and meaning no longer depend on the mediation of objects of value but “are built through direct contact, contagion, body to body and sensible co-presence – immediate between one subject and another, either this other a human subject in flesh and blood, an object, a space etc.” (Demuru, 2019, p. 85). Here we have the constellation of *adventure*, no longer of *prudence*. The accident regime presents a high level of risk, being characterized as nonsense, in which “chance breaks out in its purest form, as in the case of earthquakes and other natural disasters, leaving us stunned and astonished” (Demuru, 2019, p. 85). But a subject can accept this risk, “electing it as the north of their daily lives and interactions, as in the case of those who practice extreme sports in contemporary cities” (Demuru, 2019, p. 85).

In the adjustment regime, there are greater perspectives for creating meaning in the interaction itself, according to Landowski (2014):

An interaction is of a programmatic order when, to reach its ends, it is sufficient for the actor to rely on certain preexisting, stable and knowable determinations of the behavior of the other. Now, in interactions that depend on adjustment, the actor with whom one interacts is characterized . . . by the fact that its behavior obeys its own dynamic, but this dynamic . . . is not reducible, as in the previous case,

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the pre-established and objective laws. It is, on the contrary, in the interaction itself, depending on what each of the participants finds and, more precisely, feels in the way their partner or opponent acts, that the principles of interaction gradually emerge. (p. 48)

In this case, actors are not limited to a thematic role but have an open action to which the other adjusts as the interaction takes place. Demuru (2019) differentiates two types of adjustment. In the first one, which he calls *interaction between equals*, “interacting subjects build, from their aesthetic competences, by feeling each other, a relationship that can lead to mutual realization” (p. 86). The example here is that of a dance: “one can dance following pre-established steps (programming), or seeking to impose a style on the partner” (manipulation); or one can dance “adjusting oneself sensitively to the partner, seeking to be realized not independently of the other but only ‘through the realization of the other dancer’” (p. 86). Demuru speaks of a second type of adjustment, understood as a subject’s response to attempts to program and manipulate his existence:

In this case, we are no longer facing an interaction between equals, but between subjects situated in different positions of power. Here, there is resistance, through progressive adjustments, from one subject to another subject who intends and tends to dominate him (another subject in flesh and blood, a city, a situation, but also a government or a period of political and democratic crisis like the one we are experiencing today in Brazil). It is a style of conduct – and of life – that Landowski compares to Sun Tzu’s art of war, to the Russian general Kutuzov’s inertia before the Napoleonic army, and to the Afghan guerrilla that destabilized the US armada, in other words, to a military practice, which consists in “letting, as far as possible, the other follow his own propensity in order to take advantage of it, precisely adjusting to his or her movements.” (p. 86)

In Landowski, these four regimes shift: we can go from a programming regime, based on regularity, seeking security against risk, to a regime of adjustment, based on sensitivity and aesthetic competence, more insecure, whose regime of meaning is to make to feel, and finally to a regime of accident, based on randomness, with pure risk, and with a regime of meaning of folly. Another possible path is to move from the accident regime to manipulation, based on modal competence and intentionality, with a meaning regime with limited risk, and finally to programming.

**TENSIVITY**

The other current of semiotics that opened from *De l'Imperfection* (1987/2002) is tensive semiotics, which is the path called “catastrophist” by Landowski. I will appeal to a text by Fontanille (2019) in which he synthesizes this theory – we have already dealt with this in previous texts (Prado, 2015, 2017). Fontanille’s first step in this text is to locate it already in *Structural Semantics* (1973) by Greimas a reduced way of dealing with affections. There, perception was the non-linguistic place in which the apprehension of meaning took place. Fontanille (2019) says:

Greimas does not speak of affect, but the phenomenological anchoring of his taking a position, under the authority of Merleau-Ponty, implies that the significant discontinuities are the product of our perceptive activity, that is, of the way we experience the “world of sensible qualities.” In principle, this experience is indivisible: the apprehension of discontinuities is, therefore, inseparable from the affection it arouses. One could even consider that affection is really this apprehension. (p. 139)

According to Fontanille, in *De l'Imperfection* (2002), Greimas changes the term: instead of perception, he speaks of *esthesia*. In the *Semiotics of Passions* (1993), which Greimas signed with Fontanille, “the analysis of passions, which implies proprioception and thymia, and, therefore, the role of the body in semiosis and its enunciation, exerts a critical pressure on the principle of methodological objectification” (Greimas & Fontanille, 1993, p. 137). In this work, tensivity becomes a correlate of *phoric dimension*<sup>6</sup>:

the meeting of the two allows, then, to advance the concept of *tensive-phoric* space, in which the pre-conditions of meaning would be defined and where the minimal *feeling* would be located. If since *Structural Semantics*, perception is the non-linguistic place where discontinuities of meaning are apprehended, feeling will be from the *Semiotics of the Passions*, the non-linguistic (or pre-semiotic) place where these discontinuities are initially experienced as *tensions of meaning*. (Greimas & Fontanille, 1993, p. 138)

If in the old narrative semiotics, the enunciator was disembodied, tensive semiotics addresses the perceptions of a subject who is bodily in the center of the field of presence. We do not start from the discontinuities of the text but from the tensions of meaning, which cross this sensible body in the pre-semiotic perceptual space. Tensivity has two components: intensity and extensivity. The first concerns

<sup>6</sup> According to Pistori (2010), the phoric dimension expresses the ways in which a being reacts to his environment; euphoria is the positive reaction, dysphoria, the negative.

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strength, energy, affection. “The other is extension: quantity, unfolding, space and time, cognition” (Fontanille, 2019, p. 145). Tensions emerge with varying intensity, smaller or greater, and spread over the extensiveness of the field of presence, reaching other subjects.

If Zilberberg started from the assumption that intensity governed extensivity, Fontanille (2019) asks: “in the name of which the sensible and the affect depend only on the intensity?” (p. 147). Fontanille resorts to J. F. Bordron, to affirm that, in perception, there is an apprehension of something that “can be either a set of discontinuous parts-entities or a set of force-flows to be regulated, or, more often, both at the same time” (p. 148). From then on, Fontanille proposes that intensive forces should not be placed first, on detriment of extensive ones, but that varied compositions of the two modes of sensible apprehension of the underlying ontologies should be considered. Fontanille says:

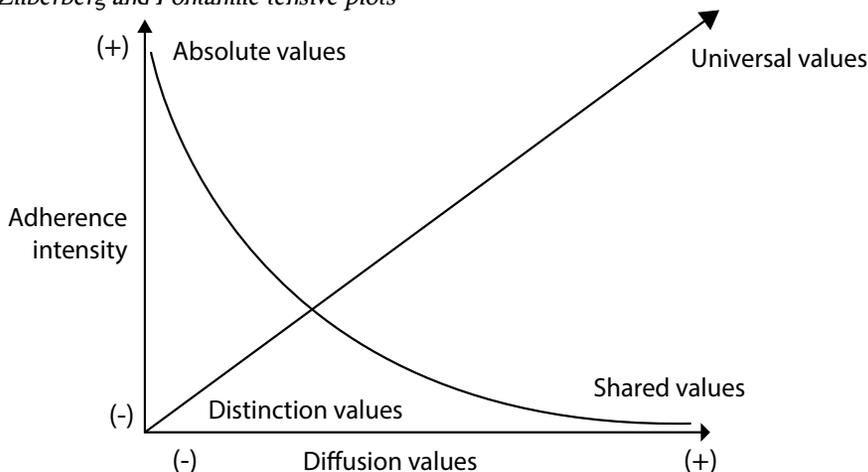
It would be possible to imagine a future semiotics that . . . would make no previous ontological choice, but which would instead be interested in the establishment of multiple and complex ontologies, created in cohabitation, by competition or collusion between the two modes of structuring and of composition: that of discontinuous quantities and mereological compositions; and that of continuous, energetic and flowing quantities? (p. 149)

Put more simply: on one hand we have texts and practices that can be read, as Landowski says, as inscription surfaces covered with signs to decipher, meanings to understand (the discontinuous quantities of semiotics), and, on the other hand, sensible qualities that reach our body not as signs to be deciphered but as what we feel, affecting us tensively, with more or less force. For Fontanille (2019), we should not make the ontological choice between one direction and the other:

the articulation between these two ways of apprehending meaning, and with some others that, no doubt, will yet be discovered, is one of the main tasks of a semiotics that wishes to be really “general.” And, looking for these articulations, whether they are oppositions or tensions, triages or mixtures, we would arrive, as Landowski does, patiently constructing their regimes of meaning, at a properly structural vision of the modes of existence that shape the different types of *worlds* in which *semiosis* is produced. (p. 150)

Fontanille arrives at a proposal summarized in the following tensive diagram:

**Figure 1**  
*Zilberberg and Fontanille tense plots*



Note. From “As vias (e as vozes) do afeto”, de J. Fontanille, *Galáxia*, (Special 2), p. 150. (<https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-25532019545632>). Licence Creative Commons 4.0

According to Fontanille (2019), semiotic structuring modes start from the modes of sensitive apprehension: “the semiotic construction does not choose between two apprehension modes (the perception of intensive forces or the perception of extensive discontinuities), it succeeds them, collects the results, and gives them shape” (p. 148). Zilberberg had made the choice for intensity as conductor, where living is affection and intensity, with regard to the perception of meaning, but Fontanille does not follow this ontological choice, preferring to speak of establishing “multiple and complex ontologies created by cohabitation, by the competition or collusion between the two modes of structuring and composition: that of discontinuous quantities and mereological compositions; and that of continuous, energetic, and flowing quantities” (p. 149). Zilberberg’s option for the descending chart favors maximum intensity for absolute values, at the price of weak extension; on the contrary, in the case of universe values, we have maximum extent and weak intensity. But Fontanille thinks of semiotic situations that would not be included in this chart, such as low intensity values and restricted diffusion or universal values with high collective adherence. Fontanille says:

the model thus reduced does not foresee, therefore, no place for fragile and individual adhesions, let us say “marginal,” nor for massive and intense adhesions. For example, there would be no place in this model for the *Indignados* movement in Spain or for the large demonstrations that took place in France after the terrorist attacks. (p. 150)

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In the previous figure we have two possibilities of relation between absolute and universal values. In the descending curve, absolutes are, for example, those related to situations in which a social group builds belonging to the group excluding those who do not share these values; sharing values, on the other hand, operate through the inclusion of those who were initially not included in the group. At first, absolute values dominate; to the extent that there is adherence to the values of sharing, there is a spread across the field of presence, intensity drops and the diffusion of sharing increases. In the ascending curve, we have the other situations mentioned by Fontanille (2019), excluded from the Zilberberg model. This proposal also allows for individual and fragile, massive and intense adhesions (given in the ascending line), which had no place in the Zilberberg model (in which there was only the descending curve). This results in two types of universal values: “on the one hand, universal values, with strong and massive adherence, and, on the other hand, simple sharing values, widely spread but weakly assumed” (p. 151). In this diagram, the affective intensity of a force can be reiterated, that is, amplified by extensiveness, duration, and repetition (number of occurrences). “Duration and frequency are even here indications of the potency and depth of affection” (p. 151).

### EVENT IN BADIOU

The question that we will discuss next, based on Alain Badiou’s theory of the event, is: should Landowski’s thesis that the event implies a return to the de-semanticized routine be maintained? Our thesis is that the semiotic education proposed by Landowski is not enough to build a democratic world. Societies are crossed by antagonisms that make real changes difficult, such as those involved in confronting prejudice, in the domain of patriarchy, in feminicide, in militia activities, in the growth of neo-fascisms, in overcoming the permanence of the effects of the colonial world, in the consequences of slavery etc. Routine can mean, for a large part of the population, the continuation of police persecution, growing poverty, unemployment, persistence of prejudice, etc. How to think about the logic of change? Changing interaction regimes alone is insufficient to alter these logics that govern the southern worlds<sup>7</sup>. So, let us discuss the types of changes to consider. For this, let us start by defining world, change, singularity, and transcendental of a world. *World* for Badiou has a precise sense, of a field of visibility in which the appearances of beings there take place, according to a so-called transcendental logic, that is, an order, a regime of visibility that constitutes the structure of this world. Says Badiou (2008):

The transcendental that will be dealt with in this book is well prior to any subjective constitution, since it is an immanent fact of situations, whatever they may be. It is . . . what imposes on all situated multiplicity the constriction of a logic, which is also the law of its appearing, or the rule by which the “there” of being-there makes the multiple arise as essentially linked. The fact that everyone has a singular transcendental organization here supposes that, since thought alone cannot explain its manifestation, it is necessary that certain immanent operations make the intelligibility of this manifestation possible. Transcendental is the name of these operations. (p. 123)

Badiou (2008) thinks of the world as the sum of its modifications. Modification is not change (p. 400). Being, as being, is pure multiplicity and therefore immobile. For Badiou, being is not one. It only becomes one from the activities of presentation and representation, when the elements are organized in sets, these being considered one. On the other hand, the appearance of a being in a world is not linked to real change. For Badiou, real change is one “that imposes an effective discontinuity in the world in which it occurs” (p. 397). There are several types of change. One of them is the singularity, which designates “an entity whose thought cannot be reduced to that of its mundane context” (p. 397). What does that mean? That a real change understood as a singularity cannot take place based on the coordinates of what is there, the data, the *status quo*. In Badiou “a singularity is what a thought begins with. But if this beginning is a mere consequence of the logical laws of a world, it only appears in its place and nothing starts” (p. 397).

The appearance of an entity in the world is the same, says Badiou (2008), “that its modifications in this world, without requiring any discontinuity and, ultimately, no singularity for the development of these modifications” (p. 398). Each world has its logical identity, which Badiou calls the transcendental indexing of a multiplicity. Badiou gives an example:

If we identify a demonstration in the Republic Square as “world”, we think of the coming of the crowd, from its initial meeting to its slow dispersion along the lines of police cars. The intensity of objects and relationships are measured according to a singular temporal transcendental, which aims in these appearing multiplicities such as “the standing firm from beginning to end of a group of anarchists,” or “the organizing role of the railway workers union,” or “the growing isolation of the Kurdish communists” and so on. In other words, the object absorbs, as elements of the multiplicity that it is, the modifications that include it in the

<sup>7</sup>Here we are adopting Boaventura Sousa Santos’ (2007) idea that there is a division between the theories of the social sciences of the North and the South: “Our first problem for those who live in the South is that the theories are out of place: they do not really fit our social realities. It has always been necessary for us to ask how the theory fits our reality” (p. 19). See also Sousa Santos and Meneses (2010).

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time of the world, through which it “changes” only insofar as this “change” is its appearing-in-a-world. (p. 399)

It is the modifications themselves that place an object in the world as a multiplicity. If a world is nothing more than the set of its modifications, the variations are read from the transcendental that sustains this world: “these variations are nothing other than the immanent movement of appearing as the transcendental prescribes its possible intensities and its breadth” (Badiou, 2008, p. 399). From there, we can define the modification more precisely in order to arrive at the concept of event later on.

We will call “modification” the appearing ruled by the intensive variations that a transcendental authorizes in the world of which it is the transcendental. Modification is not change. Or is it nothing more than its transcendental absorption, the part of becoming that is constitutive of all being-there. . . . A change, if it is a singularity and not a simple consequence – a modification – cannot happen either according to the mathematical order that founds the thought of the multiple, nor according to the transcendental regulation that rules the coherence of appearing. Certainly there is nothing more than the being-there of multiples. But it is possible that the multiple-being, support of objects, rises “in person” to the surface of objectivity. It is possible that there is a mixture of being multiple and appearing. For this, it is enough that a multiple aspires to appear referred to itself, its own transcendental indexation. In short, it is enough for a multiple to play, in a world in which it appears, a double role. On the one hand, it is objectified by the transcendental indexation of its elements. On the other hand, it aims at, figuring among its own elements and being captured, thus, in the transcendental indexation of which it supports being. The mundane objectification makes this multiple the synthesis between the objectifying (multiple support and referential of a phenomenon) and the objectified (belonging to the phenomenon). We call such a paradoxical entity a site. (Badiou, 2008, p. 400)

The change, which is more than mere modification, is neither being nor appearing. This exceptional entity appears there, which is the *site*, which sustains the change. But for this to sustain real and strong changes, the site must have a high degree of appearance, otherwise the changes induced by it would be limited or non-existent. There are, therefore, two requirements to arrive from a simple change to the event, which is a much more intense change: the ontological (self-ownership of this place) and the logic (intensity of existence and extension of the consequences)<sup>8</sup>. The site is a multiple that supports its own apparition:

<sup>8</sup>Note here the similarity with tensive semiotics, which attributes to a semiotic quantity at this tensive level the valences of intensity and extensivity.

“a site is a being that happens to exist by itself” (Badiou, 2008, p. 403), even if in a precarious way. The site, by appearing in this way, transgresses the laws of being, “it is the instant revelation of the emptiness that inhabits the multiplicities, through the transitory nullification that operates from the distance between being and being-there” (Badiou, 2008, p. 409). The site appears and disappears quickly, or, as Badiou (2008) says, “the site is an ontological figure of the instant” (p. 409) and is capable of producing event effects beyond a simple change. If we want to speak of duration, we have to consider these effects, not the fleeting site that allowed their intensive emergence; the site is the instantaneous emergence of the paradoxical multiple (self-belonging) and its logic concerns “the distribution of intensities around this vanished point that is the site” (p. 411). But not every site has event power, only those with maximum existence value. Says Badiou:

Only an integral power to exist differentiates a site from the simple network of modifications in which the law of the world persists. A site that does not exist maximally is just a fact. Although ontologically identifiable, it is not, in appearing, logically singular. We call modification the simple becoming of a world, seen from the point of an object in that world. Internal to established transcendental correlations, the modification does not name any site. We call singularity a site whose intensity of existence is maximum. Here we have three distinct degrees of change: modification, ontologically neutral and transcendently regular; the fact, ontologically supernumerary, but existentially (and, at the limit, logically) weak; the singularity, ontologically supernumerary and of maximum apparition – existence – value. (p. 413)

Badiou (2008) gives the example of the Paris Commune, which was repressed by the forces of Versailles, constituted by “propaganda that systematically de-singularizes the Commune, to present it as a monstrous set of facts that must enter (by force) into the normal order of modification” (p. 413). In this sense, regulating a singularity is bringing it to the order of the facts, lowering the intensity of its emergence, treating its consequences as if they were appropriable under the transcendental measure of modifications. An event is a strong singularity, in relation to the intense appearing.

The event, instantaneous or procedural, in this theory is not necessarily of the order of catastrophe, nor does it inevitably take bodies backward, once again subjected to the discourses that constituted them or that constituted an oppressive or disconcerting sociability. Nor is it any accident, as we have seen. The event can open up the possibility of a new micropolitics, of a new love, in which new subjects invest in the direction of the forces of change, characterizing a process

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<sup>9</sup>Truth, for Badiou (2008) is “a set that is supposed to be finished from all the productions of a faithfully subjectified body. . . . Ontologically this set results from a generic procedure. Logically, it develops a present in the world, by sustaining a series of points” (p. 650). The concepts of body, fidelity, generic procedure, world, present, and point also have very precise meanings in this logic of worlds, or logic of appearing.

of truth, as defined by Badiou<sup>9</sup>. For this, it is not enough that the event has emerged, it is necessary that there is a strong singularity, which provides a new appearance, and for this, subjects have to emerge supporting the process of truth that they glimpsed in the emerging intensity of this event. Thus, the event in Badiou is not a catastrophe, but a strong singularity that has the consequence of leading subjects to a maximum existence, which did not exist before the event. It disorganizes the present and introduces a process, if there are subjects faithful to it, towards a new truth to be built. This can happen in art, love, science and politics (not in religion, because there one starts from the idea that there is One).

In Badiou (2008) one must see how a truth subverts the logic of a world, by transforming the rules that regulate, generate the way in which things appear – the way in which different elements of a world appear as less or more intense and visible. A new truth appears in a world causing the old norms of appearance to become inconsistent. For Badiou, fidelity to the event is required to enable a representation of this inconsistency to be the basis for a new configuration of a world. This can lead to a new logic of apparition, to the appearance of what previously had zero degree of existence and visibility.

Here we speak, therefore, of a logic of appearing in which things can appear with less or more intensity, in gradients, from less to more, as in tensive semiotics, which also works with the concept of event (Prado, 2013, 2015, 2017; Zilberberg, 2011). But what differentiates fact, singularity and event is the degree of change in the *status quo* of the situation, in the intensity of the novelty. We are not talking here about small events, linked to the tastes of each one, to the pleasures and anxieties of consumption, but to changes in the transcendental structure of a world, with regard to what appears in it or does not have a degree of existence. Events, like truths, are exceptional occurrences in Badiou; they constitute the beginning of a process that allows for a complete reassessment of the transcendental evaluations that govern the way things appear in a world. This is not just an accident or just contingency. It triggers a process through which what used to appear as nothing starts to appear as something, as something more or as everything, tensively.

It is also worth examining the logic of event in Massumi (2020), for whom it is not enough to reform, in the way of social engineering, the coordinates of the world. If we think, for example, of a future of capitalism in which the surplus value of life is not reduced to the economic surplus value, it is impossible not to give importance to intense changes. To think about post-capitalism under these conditions, it is necessary to imagine ethical ways of revaluing value. Affection is thought of in this perspective as a set of factors external to the market but which leave marks on market dynamics, that is, as an immanent

outside of the market. What drives the economic system is the potential to derive, from an amount of money in the present, a greater amount in the future. This potential is qualitative and moves the economic system, and for that it needs to activate the immanent force: Surplus-value is the “continuous potential of deriving in the future an excess over a present quantity. This and not equitable exchange or the fair value for money is the engine of the economy” (p. 41). Capitalism captures the future of vitality, the qualitatively-in-process of life, its potential. That’s why Massumi considers it an ontopower, which transforms the vital activity into an economy.

How to make an alter-economic alternative? Quality of life in this sense can only be thought of as an event. “To claim it means to double back the non-chronological time of capital in the event of the qualitative in-process in life” (p. 57). There needs to be a real change in the systems of sayability, visibility, interaction etc., or, in Massumi’s case, in valuation, so as not to reduce more-life value to more economic-value.

## POST-EVENT AND INTERACTION

Landowski’s understanding of the event is different from Badiou’s, as we have seen. For Badiou, an event is something that can become a renovator of worlds, changing the logic of appearance, the visibility regimes; only *a posteriori* can an event be recognized if subjects capable of language and action have emerged and would have invested their bodies and their discourses in sustaining this process, giving rise to a world in which the new logics of apparition alters the *status quo*; such subjects sustain this process in the face of reactive or obscure subjects, who would have risen before the event, considering it perhaps catastrophic and demanding a return to the previous world and, in the case of the obscure subject, returning to a mythical world, more conservative than the previous situation, sought by reactives.

In a first reading, there is an opposition between the views of Badiou and Landowski, who does not accept the concept of event. If, however, we consider that the post-event implies the spreading of the evental intensity extensively throughout the field of presence, it would be the case to consider, with Landowski, that the meanings of the event are present in the immediate of the sensible, that is, it is discursivized as semiosis and as a sensible practice of the world, penetrating everyday communications: “it arises from bodies in interaction and co-construction and, more precisely, from the capacity of these bodies to transmit meaning effects by *contagion* (inter-corporal)” (Fontanille, 2019, p. 154). It is, as we have seen, the regime of

union: “the configuration of *union* presupposes, in the sensible experience, a global and, in principle, bodily interaction. Union implies, as a mode of semiosis, the contagion of meaning, and it adopts, as a form of the process . . . the adjustment between actants” (Fontanille, 2019, p. 154). In the post-event, in daily communications, discursive political disputes occur, involving not only ideas, but the experimenting of bodies, the feeling, which brings into play the faithful, reactive and obscure subjects facing each other around the consequences of the event, in terms of the changes in the world caused by it.

At this point, we need to operate with the type 2 adjustment Demuru speaks about, as such struggles involve antagonisms, as in the cases of recognition struggles (Honneth, 2011), which require confronting the colonial-capitalistic unconscious (expression by Rolnik, 2018). Such adjustments crave for conceptual detailing, as they would be involved in the oscillation between a logic of difference and a logic of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 2015), which unites different subject positions to face power blocks<sup>10</sup>. In this type of political-discursive disputes, it is necessary to face the real from antagonism and negativity; in the daily life of these struggles, bodies adjust themselves so as to collectively sustain the processes and regimes of truth linked to the event. However, it is essential to link this equivalence and logic of adjustment to the issue of antagonism, outlined but not further developed in the aforementioned text by Demuru (2019).

From the point of view of theory, it is necessary to consider how this meeting of actant-bodies takes place in the daily post-event process. Fontanille touches on this point, talking especially about the regime of adjustment, which marks the bodies<sup>11</sup>:

In this process of co-construction of actants, bodies receive marks from each other, which allow us to inscribe the process in time and in the aspect (punctual, duration, iterative etc.) of the interactions. In the long run, they contribute to the establishment in both of them of lasting dispositions and *habitus*, brought about by the sensible body. In short, in the adjustment processes, it is necessary to compose the regulation of flows and forces with the structuring of the parts into wholes. (p. 154)

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Landowski (2019), however, does not consider the possible continuity between the event and the post-event moments. It sounds strange to speak of *continuity* as they are totally different intensive stages of affect, as we have seen. Continuity is here thought of as fidelity to the meanings of rupture arising

<sup>10</sup>About this, see also Prado (2016a, 2016b, 2019).

<sup>11</sup>Fontanille (2017) develops the process of these markings on the body in the book *Body and Meaning*, which we will deal with in another text.

from the event. For Landowski “an experience, one that has an aesthetic value, is defined as the mere negation of the other, that is, tautologically, as the opposite of a previous anesthesia” (p. 154). More simply, for Landowski there is an incongruity between the two states: that of the event and the subsequent one, insofar as there is a punctuality at the moment of the event, which denies the durative continuity. And then there is a step back. In Badiou, the emergence of events entails a transformation of the world, something that requires a process of sustaining the truth that is announced at the event. Let us see the case of love, for example, in Badiou’s speech:

I distinguish three main conceptions of love. First, the romantic conception, focused on the ecstasy of the encounter. Then, . . . the commercial or legal conception . . . , according to which love would be a contract. A contract between two free individuals declaring that they love each other, but paying attention to the equality of the relationship, to the system of reciprocal benefits, etc. There is, furthermore, a skeptical conception that considers love an illusion. What I try to say in my own philosophy is that love is not reduced to any of them, it is a construction of truth, . . . on a very specific aspect, namely: what is the world, examined, practiced and experienced from difference rather than identity? (Badiou & Truong, 2013, p. 20)

The evental emergence of love is not romantic ecstasy but the encounter in difference: it is about living the experience of love through the prism of difference. Love is not exhausted at this moment of the encounter. It initiates a process that has to be sustained by the fidelity of the subject (the Two) who emerged and decided to pursue this process. The subject of the process is not each one of the two involved, but this Two of the difference. In another book, Badiou (2018) explains better what this encounter is in the Two of love, in the Two of difference:

The thesis I will maintain here is that love makes the difference as such. . . . It tells the truth of the other in the element of the same. That is, in its temporal labyrinth, the loving work: the irreducibility of difference is shared in the same – the same Two – by which there is, indefinitely, and in myself, the other. (p. 611)

This idea of love as a substitute is explained by Lacan’s thesis that there is no sexual relationship, the proportion, the fit between the sexes:

the sexual does not unite, it separates. A person being naked, glued to the other, is an image, an imaginary representation. The reality is that jouissance takes us far,

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far away from the other. Reality is narcissistic, the bond is imaginary. . . . If there is no sexual relationship in sexuality, it is love that makes up for the lack of sexual relationship. What he says is that there is no sexual relationship and that love is what appears in place of this non-relationship. . . . In love, the subject goes beyond himself, beyond narcissism. In sex, he is ultimately in relationship with himself, with the mediation of the other. (Badiou & Truong, 2013, p. 18)

Therefore, the event does not imply a return to the de-semanticized routine, it does not constitute a flattened vision, a return to a retrogradation situation. It is not a pure accident of intensity, an accident, that once this magical moment has passed, everything goes back to the way it was. It is necessary to think about the post-event treatment from a theory of interaction regimes and a theory of tensivities (which connects with psychoanalysis through the drive), in order to imagine, to fable how the consequences of the event can be sustained, in terms of strong world change, in which new communication processes can be sustained<sup>12</sup>. As post-event communications materialize in the new post-event world, with its tensivities, intensity is distributed throughout the field of presence and the consequences of the event begin to be discursivized. ■

<sup>12</sup>Unlike *Ciro Marcondes Filho* (2010), I argue that when the emergency event takes place, communication is extinguished and bodies are taken by an extreme kind of sensitiveness. To state that "communication is extinguished" is to claim that the event makes the world's rules fall apart and create a state of rupture. Unfortunately, this article lacks the space for us to detail this statement; it deserves another full article.

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# Retrato do Espectador Interativo como Músico<sup>a</sup>

## *Portrait of the Interactive Spectator as Musician*

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### RESUMO

Com apoio em Goodman e Genette, o autor desenvolve dois conceitos centrais previamente cunhados pelo primeiro – autografia e alografia – para ajudar a responder se a oposição entre filme e TV está relacionada com diferenças na qualidade artística, um debate exacerbado pelo ingresso da Netflix em festivais de cinema. Usando também uma comparação com partituras musicais, o artigo indaga se o espectador do trabalho interativo pode ser chamado de operador, executante, ator ou intérprete.

**Palavras-chave:** Ficção-científica, Netflix, música contemporânea

### ABSTRACT

With the help of Goodman and Genette, the author develops two major concepts previously coined by the former – autography and allography – to help answer the question as to whether the opposition between film and TV series is related to differences in artistic quality, a debate exacerbated by Netflix's candidacy at film festivals. Also using a comparison with music partitions, the article wonders whether the viewer of the interactive work may be called an operator, performer, player, or interpreter.

**Keywords:** Science-fiction, Netflix, contemporary music

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**P**ODE PARECER SURPREENDENTE que, para definir o cinema na era digital, vários pesquisadores procurem analogias heurísticas com *The Early Cinema* (Gaudreault & Marion, 2013; Grusin, 2016; Hansen, 1995). À primeira vista, o que essas fitas oscilantes em que os personagens parecem fantasmas têm em comum com as imagens e projeções digitais sem a menor aspereza, sem rasuras quando as bobinas começam a girar e sem a crepitação da trilha sonora, coisas a que nos acostumamos ao longo das décadas? Nada ou quase nada. Grusin (2016) aponta que não é no nível estético que devemos associar o início e o que alguns veem como um fim, mas na descrição do processo histórico que os afetou. Comentando o argumento de Myriam Hansen (1995), segundo o qual “o primeiro cinema remediava o formato de entretenimento comercial da época como os vaudevilles e espetáculos itinerantes” (pp. 38-39), ele afirma que “podemos ver um contínuo perceptivo semelhante, no cinema digital de hoje, às interações entre o filme exibido no cinema e sua múltipla remediação em DVD, videogames, trailers, sites da web etc.” (p. 70).

É inegável que o início do cinema está ligado a vários gêneros de entretenimento, da mesma forma que o pós-cinema. Dizer que os dois são semelhantes é, no entanto, outra questão. A semelhança não se aplica a eles, mas ao método que os aborda. Ao mesmo tempo que utiliza um entendimento muito mais frouxo de *remediação* do que o do livro coescrito com Bolter<sup>1</sup>, Grusin (2016) simplesmente observa que o que outros chamam de *intermedialidade* é o indispensável solo de criação de um novo meio emergente. A televisão foi vista inicialmente como uma extensão do cinema e do rádio e, assim como *The Early Cinema*, estendeu o entretenimento popular na época: o cabaré, os espetáculos de music hall e até o circo. Entretanto, devemos ver analogias com o pós-cinema? Acredito que não. Por outro lado, o *terminus a quo* não é desinteressante se o compararmos com o *terminus ad quem* representado pelo pós-cinema, não como se faria com dois estados, mas com dois caminhos. Assim, a fim de seguir um caminho, retomo o início do cinema, que, simplificando, vai até pouco antes de a web 2.0 emergir. Seguindo os passos de Goodman (1968/1990) e depois Genette (1994) no debate sobre o estatuto das obras de arte, tenho mostrado como, de uma perspectiva diacrônica, essa condição, longe de ser completamente estática, evolui entre os dois polos que Goodman chama de autografia e alografia (Jost, 2000).

<sup>1</sup> Adotamos o termo [remediação] para expressar o modo pelo qual um meio é visto em nossa cultura como capaz de “transformar ou aperfeiçoar outro” (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 59).

## O RETORNO DO REPRIMIDO

Na virada dos séculos XIX e XX, o filme é caracterizado principalmente por seu aspecto performativo e por sua consequente autografia. Pode ou não ser acompanhado pelo comentário de um locutor, de um piano, de um aparelho

de efeitos sonoros ou de canções cantadas pelo público etc. Portanto, difere conforme o local e o dia, os espectadores não veem todos o mesmo objeto. Entretanto, ao longo dos anos e décadas, tudo foi feito para reduzir esta diversidade, confirmando a hipótese de Goodman de que “todas as artes eram originalmente autografadas, e gradual e desigualmente ‘emancipadas’, adotando, sempre que possível, sistemas de notação” (Genette, 1994, pp. 154-156).

Desde o início, o cinema adquiriu técnicas que, é possível dizer, reduziram constantemente o papel do autor autográfico, evidenciando um contínuo esforço para transformar o filme em partitura<sup>2</sup>. A introdução dos letreiros na tela na primeira década do século XX não criou a narrativa verbal – ela já era transmitida pela fala do locutor – mas fixou o texto, que doravante seria o mesmo para todos os espectadores, onde quer que vissem o filme. Da mesma forma, o cinema *falado* não introduz o som – que existia no chamado cinema *mudo*, por meio da música de acompanhamento, efeitos sonoros, ou mesmo certas tentativas de sincronizar a fala ao vivo –, ele apenas assegura a circulação da mesma partitura; a música cinematográfica faz parte deste movimento de homogeneização, pois, em vez de ser deixada à avaliação de um pianista na sala de cinema, é o resultado de uma escolha autoral que a torna intangível.

Assim, o cinema adquiriu técnicas que, é possível dizer, têm reduzido constantemente o papel do autor autografado (o do locutor, do realizador de efeitos sonoros, do acompanhante musical) através do desenvolvimento gradual de sistemas de notação cinematográfica. Nessa perspectiva, a tecnologia digital seria o resultado final desta redução alográfica: o trabalho, quase imaterial, pode circular independentemente do seu suporte. Em 2000, escrevi que essas características digitais certamente influenciariam as estruturas econômicas do cinema. Estamos nesse ponto agora. No entanto, em retrospecto, o que me parece mais importante neste processo contínuo de redução alográfica é que chegamos a um ponto em que o filme se tornou o mesmo para todos. Mesmo os arranhões que mencionei antes, que surgiam ao longo das exibições e que pioravam, diferenciando as cópias dos lançamentos daquelas exibidas em um pequeno cinema de província, desapareceram. O mesmo se aplica aos defeitos na calibração de cor ou outros aspectos materiais semelhantes. A projeção digital nivelou as diferenças – até o momento em que o espectador assumiu o controle. Como acabamos de ver, ao longo do século XX, as variações da obra estiveram do lado do autor ou da execução da obra. Com a tecnologia digital, o espectador pode modificar a obra, primeiro intervindo nos parâmetros audiovisuais (cores, contrastes, intensidade sonora etc.), depois influenciando o curso da narrativa. Essas ações praticamente constituem o que poderia ser chamado de retorno do reprimido, causado pela redução alográfica operada pela

<sup>2</sup> Este esforço é explicado por um crítico do início do século XX, que escreveu: “A cinematografia é uma forma de notação por imagem, como a aritmética e a álgebra são notações por figuras e letras” (Haugmard, 1913/1988, p. 83).

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história do cinema. É por isso que, neste texto, vou considerar que a essência do pós-cinema é a interação.

É também a posição de Grusin (2016), que, a partir do modelo de cinema de atrações conceitualizado por Gunning (1986), define o pós-cinema como um “cinema de interações”. Para Grusin, a interação é definida por sua relação “com outras mídias (principalmente) digitais” e por seu

senso estético, que nos coloca diante de um cinema de interações – a emergência de um estilo visual e de uma lógica narrativa que se relacionam com as mídias digitais como os DVD e os videogames, em vez da fotografia, do drama, ou da ficção. (Grusin, 2016, p. 73)

A oposição entre a mídia digital e a fotografia, o drama e a ficção, mistura critérios heterogêneos. O DVD é um meio que acomoda tanto filmes recentes quanto clássicos do cinema mudo. Como um sistema de reprodução da realidade, a fotografia, digital ou não, ainda tem um papel preponderante no cinema. A ficção, por outro lado, é um horizonte incontornável para qualquer obra de invenção. Quanto ao drama, é um gênero, entre outros, que não vemos ser evitado pelo cinema das interações. Mais convincente para mim é a definição de Greenaway (citado em Ferenczi, 2007), que diz: “O cinema agora deve se tornar uma arte interativa multimídia. . . . Somos forçados a enfrentar este novo meio que fará que *Guerra das Estrelas* pareça uma leitura à luz de velas no século XVI” (para. 2).

### PÓS-CINEMA OU PÓS-TELEVISÃO?

Em vez de definir o cinema das interações por meio de falsas oposições, parece-me muito mais proveitoso testar o conceito a partir da análise de uma obra que se apresenta como abertamente interativa: *Bandersnatch* (Brooker & Slade, 2018). A imprecisão de minha qualificação (uma obra) recoloca uma questão que já tinha levantado, ou seja, a definição de *pós-cinema*. O que é *Bandersnatch*, de fato? Como uma primeira aproximação, a seguinte definição mínima pode ser dada com confiança: um objeto ou produto audiovisual acessível em uma plataforma SVOD, Netflix. Essa formulação é suficiente para excluí-lo do âmbito do cinema por aqueles que consideram que esse é definido em primeiro lugar e exclusivamente por seu espaço de veiculação, conforme nota Bellour (2012):

A projeção de um filme em uma sala, no escuro, pelo tempo prescrito de uma sessão mais ou menos coletiva, tornou-se e continua sendo a condição de uma

experiência única de percepção e memória, definindo seu espectador e que qualquer outra situação de visualização se altera mais ou menos. E só isso vale a pena ser chamado de “cinema”. (Contracapa)

Qualquer outro evento filmico seria uma versão degradada. Voltarei a essa valorização implícita do dispositivo tradicional de projeção, mas antes vamos investigar mais a fundo a natureza desse objeto misterioso. A Wikipedia informa aos interessados que “*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* é um filme interativo de 2018 da série de ficção científica no formato de coletânea *Black Mirror*” (“*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*”, 2019, para. 1). Um filme e uma série ao mesmo tempo, *Bandersnatch* estaria assim a igual distância de dois universos muitas vezes concebidos como opostos, o cinema e a televisão. Pós-cinema ou pós-TV? Os críticos hesitam. Alguns insistem na filiação à série, ligando-o a *Black Mirror*, outros à experiência cinematográfica. A atribuição de prêmios confirma essa hesitação. Um episódio de *Black Mirror* foi agraciado com um prêmio da Academia Britânica de Cinema e Televisão, em 2014, como melhor *telefilme dramático* (*Best single drama*). Em 2019, *Bandersnatch* recebeu um prêmio Emmy na categoria de *Outstanding Television Movie*, o que, como gênero, o situa em algum lugar entre o cinema (*movie*) e a televisão; foi indicado para um Bafta Television Award na categoria *Drama*, que obviamente o coloca do lado da televisão; e em uma categoria muito mais difícil de se relacionar a um desses dois mundos, *Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media Within a Scripted Program*. Finalmente, *Bandersnatch* recebeu um Golden Trailer Awards como *Best Drama/Action Poster for a TV/Streaming Series*. Essa designação reflete uma última dificuldade: falar sobre séries de TV quando, hoje, embora formalmente próximas do que a televisão nos acostumou a ver, elas sejam com frequência produzidas por plataformas de streaming.

Essa discussão sobre a identidade genérica de um objeto audiovisual não é uma simples questão de ontologia. Não é tanto uma questão de encontrar uma resposta do que notar que esta também desencadeia um debate sobre o estatuto artístico desse objeto. A oposição de Spielberg (citado em Dezeraud, 2019) à presença dos filmes Netflix nos Oscars atesta isso: “A partir do momento que você se compromete com o formato televisivo, faz filmes de televisão. Se for um bom filme, você certamente merece um Emmy, mas não um Oscar” (para. 2). A ideia de que qualquer evento cinematográfico que não seja uma exibição de cinema é uma versão degradada leva a uma aporia que é perfeitamente exemplificada pelo caso de *Roma* (Cuarón, 2018). Como sabemos, em 2016, o Festival de Cannes selecionou duas produções da Netflix, *Okja* (Bong, 2017), do diretor sul-coreano Bong Joon-ho<sup>3</sup>, e *The Meyerowitz Stories* (Baumbach, 2017), do diretor

<sup>3</sup> Os nomes coreanos são escritos na sua forma tradicional: com o sobrenome primeiro.

estadunidense Noah Baumbach. Imediatamente houve um grande movimento de protestos de produtores e distribuidores, que criticaram o fato de que esses filmes não seriam lançados em cinemas.

Como a regulamentação francesa proíbe que um filme seja oferecido em um serviço como a Netflix antes de decorridos três anos de sua exibição nos cinemas, a plataforma recusa essa obrigação, pois privaria seus assinantes franceses dos filmes em questão. Em 2018, a questão surgiu novamente com *Roma* (Cuarón, 2018), que, pela mesma razão, foi excluído da seleção do Festival de Cinema de Cannes. Alguns meses depois, o filme recebeu o Leão de Ouro no Festival de Veneza, e depois o Oscar de melhor filme. Em resposta a Spielberg, a plataforma anunciou que seus filmes passariam a ser exibidos por alguns dias nos cinemas californianos antes de serem colocados em seu site. Qual é a situação de um filme como *Roma* nesse contexto? Cinema quando exibido em salas cinematográficas, não cinema quando está na plataforma e, no entanto, aclamado como o melhor *filme* do ano! Claramente, o critério do lançamento em salas tem menos a ver com uma tentativa de diferenciar as artes e a mídia do que com uma hierarquia axiológica – e com uma nostalgia cinéfila que separa toalhas e panos, nesse caso o cinema como arte e a televisão como mídia.

Determinar, portanto, se *Bandersnatch* é um filme ou uma série e se essa série é televisionada ou em streaming implica uma avaliação artística a priori. Basta ouvir o diretor do Festival de Cannes, Thierry Frémaux (citado em “Les Séries, C’est Industriel”, 2018), que proclama: “as séries são industriais, os filmes são poesia” (para. 1). Os defensores das séries concordam com seus críticos. Para estabelecer o status artístico das séries, procuram trabalhos que as elevem à categoria de TV de qualidade. Jane Feuer (2007), por exemplo, diz:

*Six Feet Under* é perfeitamente serializada, usa múltiplas tramas narrativas e um elenco de atores, mas também se identifica estilisticamente com o gênero não televisivo do cinema de arte europeu. Essa maior dependência do cinema é evidente nos créditos de abertura. (p. 150)

Essa referência ao cinema ao definir a obra como “HBO, não série de TV” (Feuer, 2007, p. 150) conduz inevitavelmente a comparações com os cineastas que são vistos não como meros *diretores*, mas como autores por direito próprio. Assim, a mesma Jane Feuer escreve que as sequências de sonhos em *Six Feet Under* (Ball et al., 2001-2005) evocam Fellini<sup>4</sup>.

Na realidade, essas duas abordagens, ao procurarem valorizar seu objeto – o cinema para uma, a televisão para a outra – perdem o que o aproxima de uma ou outra arte e o que não está no objeto em si, mas no olhar do espectador.

<sup>4</sup> Ver também: “*Six Feet Under* exala uma herança artística europeia” (Feuer, 2007, p. 145).

Pois, diante dessas séries associadas ao streaming, há duas atitudes possíveis: ou considerá-las uma continuação da televisão – a rigor, uma *pós-televisão* – ou considerá-las uma continuação do cinema, um *pós-cinema*. A primeira atitude consiste em jogar o jogo da serialidade ou, mais precisamente, da telenovela. Enquanto os canais pediam aos telespectadores que esperassem pelo próximo episódio por um período estabelecido pelo programador, o internauta pode espaçar a visualização de dois episódios por um tempo determinado por ele, permanecendo na lógica da transmissão em série, que é a da disponibilidade progressiva dos episódios, separados por um lapso de tempo.

A segunda atitude, que é a do *binge watcher*, consiste, ao contrário, em assistir ao maior número possível de episódios, ou mesmo uma temporada, em um tempo muito curto, para chegar ao fim. Os DVD e o advento de plataformas como a Netflix incentivaram essa prática. Alguns sites de canais adotaram a mesma estratégia para competir com eles. O resultado é uma espécie de longa-metragem que, por um lado, neutraliza a curiosidade inerente ao gênero telenovela e, por outro, quebra a comunidade temporal que une os atores e os espectadores desse formato, à medida que, de temporada em temporada, eles envelhecem ao mesmo tempo. Em última instância, é o usuário que escolhe se deseja fazer da série de streaming um objeto pós-cinemático ou um objeto pós-TV. E essa liberdade de uso chega perto de ser a característica definidora do *pós*.

Isso significa que “o espectador se tornou proativo [e que] assistir se tornou uma ação” (Gaudreault & Marion, 2013, p. 183)? E de que ação estamos falando? Para Gaudreault e Marion (2013), trata-se sobretudo de escolher o dispositivo para ver um filme, de decidir se o assiste todo de uma vez ou não, se o assiste em casa ou em outro lugar etc. Falar de ação me parece um pouco exagerado nesse caso, e sem tanta novidade. O espectador dos anos 1980 também podia escolher saciar sua sede por filmes indo ao cinema, à locadora de vídeos ou assistindo a um cassete, depois parando a fita com o controle remoto, ou até mesmo adormecendo no sofá enquanto ela era exibida. Os argumentos daqueles que falam do *spectator* me parecem mais decisivos. A partir de uma reflexão sobre a multimídia, em 1999, um grupo de acadêmicos interessados na *imagem representada* (*l'image actée*) propôs esse termo, que eles definiram da seguinte forma:

Ator do próprio espetáculo (em colaboração com o software instalado pelos designers), espectador dos efeitos das próprias ações: tal é a postura da pessoa que enfrenta esses dispositivos, atravessando constantemente a barreira semiótica que delimita o interior (a apresentação) e o exterior (o dispositivo que organiza o acesso). (Barboza & Weissberg, 2006, p. 17)

A interatividade é comparada aqui à posição do espectador em relação a uma estátua cuja aparência muda conforme ele se aproxima ou se afasta dela, mas sem alterar formalmente o trabalho. Outros nomes foram propostos, por exemplo, o *interator*, para o qual “tudo o que vai se desenrolar na tela depende agora das decisões, ações e iniciativas tomadas pelo sujeito que se relaciona com ela, o usuário do computador” (Machado, 2007, p. 142). Essas definições certamente têm mérito, mas a definição do espectador deixa a relação com o designer-programador ou o que deve ser chamado de autor na sombra, enquanto a primeira definição o relega a parênteses. E essa relação seria oposta à “ditadura da obra [que] me é imposta por capricho dos programadores [dos canais de televisão]” (Gaudreault & Marion, 2013, p. 192)? Isso é o que agora proponho esclarecer, com base na análise narratológica de *Bandersnatch* (Brooker & Slade, 2018).

#### “IT’S LIKE TV ONLINE. I CONTROL IT”

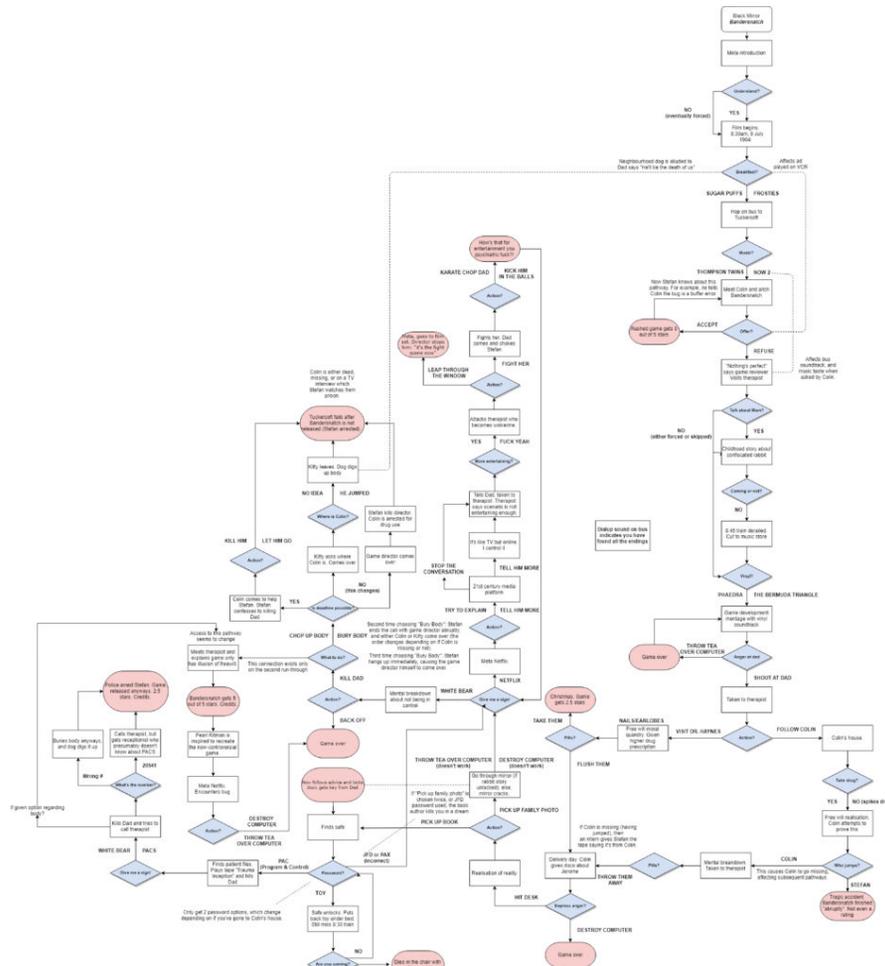
O filme (ou o episódio da série *Black Mirror*) propõe uma narrativa na qual o usuário (essa é a palavra mais neutra que posso encontrar no momento) terá de fazer escolhas. Mas que escolhas e que impacto elas têm sobre o desenrolar dessa história? Para responder a esta pergunta, revi o *filme* várias vezes, seguindo diferentes caminhos, enquanto utilizava o fluxograma de programação elaborado por um usuário da internet após assisti-lo (Figura 1). Tem alguns erros, mas é bastante útil. Também assisti no modo automático, ou seja, deixando a máquina escolher a direção da história para mim. Essa jornada, proveitosa para entender o funcionamento, durou 45 minutos (metade do tempo anunciado pela Netflix).

A história começa em 9 de julho de 1984. Um jovem, Stephan Butler, acorda. Grande dia: ele vai propor um projeto de jogo à Tuckersoft, uma empresa administrada por Mohan Thakur, na presença do especialista em design de jogos Colin Ritman. Duas sequências se seguem até chegar lá: o café da manhã com seu pai, uma viagem de ônibus. Duas escolhas foram oferecidas: a primeira dizia respeito à comida (Sugar puffs ou Frosties), a segunda, à música que ele escutaria em seu walkman durante o trajeto. Desde os primeiros cinco minutos, dois tipos muito diferentes de ação do usuário são assim destacados: escolher seu cereal é uma escolha puramente paradigmática que não envolve a narrativa de maneira alguma, enquanto o que Barthes (1966) chamou de função cardinal permanece a mesma<sup>5</sup>. A única coisa que muda é o que ele chamou de *catalisadores*, ou seja, aqueles detalhes que embelezam a narrativa, mas não mudam sua direção. Outro item a ser acrescentado ao mesmo esquema é a alternativa *morda suas unhas* ou *arranhe sua orelha* para expressar a

<sup>5</sup>“Para que uma função seja cardinal, basta que a ação a que ela se refere abra (ou mantenha, ou feche) uma alternativa consequente para a continuação da história, enfim, que inaugure ou conclua uma incerteza; se, num fragmento da narrativa, o telefone toca, é igualmente possível que se atenda ou não, o que não deixará de levar a história por duas vias diferentes. Em contrapartida, entre duas funções cardinais, é sempre possível dispor noções subsidiárias, que se aglomeram em torno de um núcleo ou outro, sem modificar-lhes a natureza alternativa: o espaço que separa ‘o telefone tocou’ de ‘Bond atendeu’ pode estar saturado por uma multidão de pequenos incidentes ou pequenas descrições: ‘Bond dirigiu-se para a mesa, pegou um receptor, colocou o cigarro no cinzeiro’ etc.” (Barthes, 1966, p. 9).

angústia de Stefan a sua psicanalista. Ou *enterrar o corpo* (de seu pai) ou *cortá-lo em pedaços*. Qualquer que seja a escolha, ela não altera a estrutura narrativa que o narrador-programador quer transmitir. Ainda mais redutora é a escolha em relação a *Mais ação: Yeah* ou *Fuck Yeah*. A escolha da música só tem uma consequência estética sem qualquer impacto sobre a estrutura narrativa. Não se pode negar, é claro, que a repercussão dessas decisões na imagem – vemos o pai dando o pacote pedido pelo filho, a fita de música determinada pelo usuário – provoca um sentimento de poder e satisfação temporária, até mesmo de liberdade.

**Figura 1**  
Fluxograma de programação de *Bandersnatch*



Nota. Reproduzido de “Almost 4 Hours After Release and I Think I Have Mapped *Bandersnatch*. Throw Tea Over Computer”, de u/alpine, 2019, *Reddit* (<https://bit.ly/3u2gu01>). Copyright 2019 do autor.

A primeira possível mudança de direção ocorre quando Stefan encontra Mohan Thakur e o desenvolvedor Colin Ritman. O chefe da Tuckersoft aceita seu projeto e lhe pergunta se quer trabalhar na empresa ou em casa. *Aceitar* ou *recusar*: cabe ao usuário da internet dizer. É agora uma escolha sintagmática, uma vez que influencia a evolução da história. Se ele aceita, acabamos com uma sequência de TV na qual um crítico do jogo lhe dá 0 em 5. Colin diz a Stefan: “Lamento, cara, *escolha ruim...*”. Para continuar essa busca para desenvolver o jogo *Bandersnatch*, temos que seguir Stefan, que diz “Vou tentar de novo”; e a história começa de novo, logo no início, com o despertador tocando até alcançarmos a sequência em Tuckersoft. De agora em diante, ele trabalhará em casa.

Como se vê, a escolha proposta por Thakur não é de forma alguma uma escolha. Para evitar que a narrativa pare, o usuário é obrigado a começar do zero e aceitar que Stefan trabalha em casa. A aparente liberdade de escolha é assim restringida pelo programa, que neutraliza o que Genette (1994) chamou de arbitrariedade da narrativa. A essa restrição acrescenta-se outra, a impossibilidade de voltar atrás se não for uma opção proposta pelo filme.

Para transmitir a estrutura narrativa necessária à compreensão da trama, o narrador-programador tem à sua disposição meios mais suaves, semelhantes aos exemplificados pelos teóricos do *empurrão*. Como sabemos, o empurrão consiste em fazer sugestões indiretas, sem forçar; influenciar motivações, incentivos e tomada de decisões sem dar ordens, sem comandar abertamente. É exatamente assim que a psicanalista de Stefan procede. O rapaz está em seu escritório após sua nomeação em Tuckersoft. Ele explica a ela que preferiu trabalhar em casa porque não quer ser constantemente controlado. Entretanto, ele também sente que seu pai o está vigiando. Diante de sua crescente ansiedade, ela sugere que ele fale de sua mãe, cujo aniversário de falecimento é nesse momento. Cabe ao usuário aceitar ou não. Se ele recusar, ela insiste com ele: “Você poderia aprender coisas... Vou lhe perguntar novamente: sim ou não?”. A curiosidade é o *empurrão* que impele o usuário a seguir e ver, caso tenha recusado inicialmente. Mais uma vez, o usuário é forçado a seguir o caminho proposto. Para o resto da história, essa passagem é essencial porque conta as circunstâncias em que mãe de Stefan morreu, pelas quais ele se sente responsável. No caso de uma recusa persistente, o flashback que desenvolvia os detalhes do acidente é ignorado e passamos para outra sequência.

A expressão *escolha ruim* que acabamos de encontrar indica, na verdade, que o usuário fez um desvio desnecessário. Assim, se ele se recusa a permitir que Stefan fale de sua mãe com sua psicanalista, ele é recolocado no caminho certo pelo programa, o que o obriga a falar sobre isso de qualquer maneira. Há então um flashback no qual vemos Stefan aos cinco anos de idade procurando

seu coelho de pelúcia, atrasando a saída da mãe de casa. Como resultado, após sair, ela embarcará em um trem que descarrilará. Para que essa estrutura cardinal funcione, quando se pergunta à criança “Você está vindo?”, o programa responde “Não”, sem a possibilidade de fazer o contrário. Da mesma forma, *derramar chá no computador* é uma escolha que leva a um beco sem saída, uma *escolha ruim* que o programa corrige, colocando o usuário de volta nos trilhos, forçando-o a voltar: dois televisores estão na tela e um deve escolher o outro termo da alternativa: *responda o pai gritando*. Esse método é usado várias vezes. A inversão pode ser ordenada por uma fonte extra-diegética graças às opções propostas ou às decisões tomadas, sem nenhum outro processo, internamente à diegese pelo personagem que decide *tentar de novo*<sup>6</sup>. A restrição final ocorre quando o usuário escolhe derramar o chá no computador e o personagem se recusa a fazê-lo (“Não!”) na sequência seguinte. Esse é um processo mais suave, pois deixa à sombra a autoridade do narrador-programador.

As escolhas do usuário não perturbam de forma alguma o sistema de esquemas plausíveis estabelecido pelo roteiro. A habilidade do programa é de fato distribuir os gatilhos narrativos no *núcleo comum* obrigatório das primeiras sequências (até a reunião com a empresa Tuckersoft). Desde as primeiras cenas, Stefan toma pílulas, o que antecipa seu caráter atormentado, que a psicanalista procura tratar aumentando sua medicação. Ele mostra a seu pai o livro *Bandersnatch* que veio de sua mãe, que entendemos estar morta (por quê? gostaríamos de saber). O autor desse livro decapitou sua esposa, um evento que se repete mais tarde. Quaisquer que sejam os caminhos percorridos, essas notas podem ser ampliadas depois.

Finalmente, é necessário insistir no sentido da arquitetura global que permanece, ilustrando as palavras do desenvolvedor Colin: “há uma mensagem em cada jogo”. Se há restrições para o usuário, elas não são nada em comparação com aquelas que pesam sob o caráter de Stefan, que teme acima de tudo ser vigiado e se sente cada vez mais controlado. No início, ele diz a sua psicanalista que preferiu trabalhar em casa para evitar o controle da empresa, que sente que seu pai está de olho nele, chegando ao ponto de dizer “eu perco o controle como se alguém estivesse fazendo minhas escolhas (escolhendo meus cereais, gritando com o papai, ouvindo música)”. Se a entrevista com a psiquiatra for seguida pela reunião com Colin, a paranoia se torna um pouco mais generalizada. O desenvolvedor explica a ele que “pagamos as pessoas para jogarem os nossos preferidos . . . eles nos drogam e filmam”, que Pac-Man, o jogo dos anos 1980, é um acrônimo que significa *Program and Control Man*. “Se você ouvir, você ouve os números”, conclui ele. A única maneira de continuar a história para além dos dois finais disponíveis ao usuário é uma sequência em que Stefan, enquanto olha para cima,

<sup>6</sup>Em uma entrevista ao *The Hollywood Reporter*, o diretor desse episódio especial convidou os telespectadores a serem “eles mesmos”. “Não pense que há uma maneira melhor, faça seu próprio caminho”, diz ele. “Caso contrário, você ficará paralisado pela ansiedade de ter que fazer escolhas. E não volte para trás: siga sempre em frente” (citado em “Après avoir Vu”, 2018, para. 4).

# D

grita: “Dê-me um sinal!”. A escolha é então entre o *branching pathway symbol* (símbolo de caminho bifurcado), herdado do livro sobre a vida de Davies, e o logotipo da Netflix. Como se pode esperar, a rota automática leva à opção Netflix. Quando esta última opção é selecionada, seja *Tell me more* ou *Try to explain* – outra falsa escolha – aprendemos que Netflix é uma plataforma de entretenimento do século XXI (lembro que a história é ambientada em 1984, que é uma referência explícita ao romance de Orwell), e que *it’s like TV online but I control it* (é como uma TV on-line, mas eu a controlo)<sup>7</sup>. Stefan reclama que está sendo controlado por “alguém do futuro. . . Tudo isso estaria acontecendo para entreter alguém”. A psicanalista aponta para Stefan que não há muita ação no jogo. O usuário é então solicitado a escolher entre *lutar contra ela* e *saltar pela janela*. Em um aceno final à ilusória liberdade do usuário, essa escolha não é uma escolha, pois se alguém decide tomar o segundo caminho, o diretor intervém no set e explica ao ator, que interpreta Stefan, Mike, que esse final não é o que está no roteiro, que lhe entrega como prova. Mas o ator tem dificuldade de aceitar isso porque se identifica com o personagem. Essa conclusão leva a um metalepse final, em que o personagem dá lugar ao ator e o ator assume o papel do personagem.

Vamos nos deter por um momento na complexa relação entre *mise en abyme* e *metalepsis*. O sentimento de Stefan de ser permanentemente controlado é um *mise en abyme* tanto do romance *Bandersnatch*, que, embora esteja ligado à literatura de *Choose Your Own Adventure*, afirma que somos controlados (um capítulo do livro sobre Davies é chamado de “Mind Control Conspiracy”). Mas é sobretudo um *mise en abyme* do próprio dispositivo, que se baseia numa comunicação entre o nível diegético da história de Stefan e a realidade do dispositivo lúdico, que constitui uma *metalepsis* entendida como a contaminação dos dois níveis. Enquanto o romance fornece exemplos de “um narrador extradiegético [que] entra de repente em uma relação direta com um de seus personagens diegéticos” (Cohn, 2005, p. 123), é mais raro que um personagem reclame de seu narrador (não consigo pensar em nenhum exemplo). No entanto, isto é basicamente o que acontece em *Bandersnatch*. Um ser fictício se sente controlado por um poder superior (que ele procura nas alturas levantando a cabeça), mas não consegue identificá-lo, apesar de o jogador do século XXI reconhecê-lo ao se sentir diretamente visado! Um jogador que é, ele próprio, controlado por um programador. É óbvio que se pensa na situação imaginada por Borges (1970) “de peças de xadrez que não sabem que são guiadas por um jogador, que não sabe que é guiado por um deus, um deus que não sabe que é guiado por outro deus” (pp. 192-193). Exceto que aqui o personagem tem a intuição. A intrusão do diretor no set e a conseqüente confusão entre o personagem e o ator é uma *metalepsis* mais

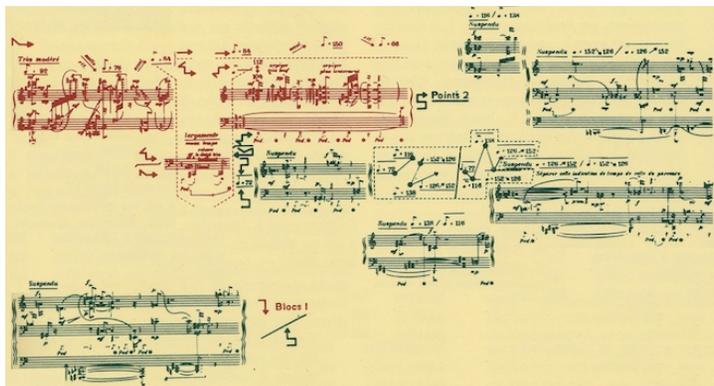
<sup>7</sup> Para explicar a Stefan o que é Netflix, a seguinte frase aparece na tela de seu computador: “Eu o observo na Netflix. Eu tomo decisões por você”.

comum, embora nesse caso seja decidida em vários níveis. À primeira vista, como acabo de dizer, há uma mudança repentina do personagem para o ator, cuja condição preocupa o diretor a ponto de chamar um médico. Na verdade, essa é uma ilusão adicional, como os créditos informam, já que Mike não é o nome do verdadeiro ator (Fionn Whitehead), mas uma nova máscara diegética.

Vamos recapitular as regras da narrativa de *Bandersnatch*: impossibilidade de voltar quando se quer, caminhos forçados, significado global proposto... As limitações são numerosas e as ações são limitadas pela decisão do programador, permitindo um pouco mais do que desenvolver o que é chamado de *programa narrativo*. O *espectator* e o *interator* são, de fato, atores cujas ações são amplamente controladas. É claro que precisamos fazer concessões para a liberdade desse novo usuário, que está a uma distância igual do espectador do cinema e do jogador de videogame. Digamos que ele esteja em liberdade condicional e que, faça o que fizer, execute um programa que define seu campo de ação. Como podemos caracterizá-lo se, em vez de enfatizar a liberdade, preferimos destacar a questão da restrição? Os proponentes do espectador, como vimos, esboçaram uma comparação provisória com o sujeito que circula em torno de uma estátua. Quanto a mim, prefiro me voltar para a música. Esses caminhos compostos de digressões, de passagens aleatórias executadas ou não de acordo com as ordens de uma autoridade superior, podem ser encontrados nela. Por exemplo, em peças de Pierre Boulez, nas quais determinados compassos da partitura podem ou não ser tocados. Veja-se o terceiro movimento de sua terceira sonata para piano (Figura 2).

**Figura 2.**

*Partitura de sonata de Pierre Boulez*



Nota. Reproduzido de “3 ème SONATE POUR PIANO. Formant: Constellation-Miroir”, de D. Jameux, s.d., *Education Musicale. Histoires des Arts* (<https://bit.ly/3tCtBue>). Copyright 1957 Pierre Boulez

Segundo o musicólogo Dominique Jameux (s.d.), é assim que devem ser lidos:

# D

## Retrato do Espectador Interativo como Músico

Esses fragmentos musicais aparecem na partitura – consistindo em nove folhas paginadas de a a i e medindo 39 x 60 cm – de acordo com seu papel estrutural. Três estão em verde e são chamados de *Pontos*, dois em vermelho são os *Blocos*. Pontos e blocos, ao contrário do que o nome sugere, são dispostos alternadamente, com os pontos aparecendo nos lugares ímpares numerados. Assim, os fragmentos escritos pelo compositor seguem um ao outro *de acordo com uma ordem deixada à escolha do intérprete* [ênfase adicionada], sabendo que esse último pode se dar ao luxo de saltar certos fragmentos. (para. 2)

Não é esse exatamente o caso do jogador-espectador em *Bandersnatch*? Ele também seguirá a partitura elaborada pelo programador, *de acordo com uma ordem* (Figura 1) que escolha. Podemos aplicar essa descrição a ele sem hesitar. Nas palavras do musicólogo:

As principais características desta forma aberta, na qual o artista recebe um texto que é fixo em cada detalhe, mas para o qual ele ou ela tem uma certa liberdade de arranjo, só podem ser resumidas em traços largos. . . .

O agente desta produção, que também é chamado de “intérprete” na música, não é um autor nem um intérprete, mas o “operador” de um projeto que tende ao anonimato. E Boulez conclui: “Se alguém tivesse que encontrar um motivo profundo para o trabalho que tentei descrever, seria a busca de tal ‘anonimato’”. (Jameux, s.d., paras. 7, 23)

Essa comparação nos permite voltar à nossa reflexão sobre a oposição entre as artes autográficas e alográficas. Se, como disse, a história do cinema mostrou que, até a era digital, inclusive, houve um esforço constante de redução alográfica, o cinema de interação tem um novo status, próximo ao da música contemporânea.

O trabalho do músico, escreve Goodman (1968/1990), é “liberado de sua dependência de um autor, um lugar, uma data ou um meio particular de produção” (p. 195). Tantas características que poderiam ser facilmente aplicadas ao pós-cinema. A partitura define sua obra, inclusive com rotas opcionais. A execução, nessa perspectiva, é uma exemplificação da partitura. O usuário de *Bandersnatch*, como o executor de uma peça de Boulez, escolhe um caminho que faz parte de um sistema de notação muito preciso. Assim como o ouvinte do terceiro movimento da terceira sonata para piano desconhece o que não é tocado, ele também desconhece o caminho que poderia ter tomado, até decidir recomeçar sua jornada.

Como resultado, se o espectador ou interator conjectura uma ação não especificada e que vai muito além do que seria levado a imaginar, como podemos nomear o que chamei até agora de *usuário*? Uma palavra composta com ator seria possível, mas no sentido de um ator que interpreta um texto escrito por outro, não de um ator de teatro. Tendo em vista a natureza incômoda do termo, prefiro descartá-lo. Operador, intérprete, jogador... E se simplesmente chamássemos este usuário de *intérprete*? Isso teria a vantagem tanto de se referir ao músico (*performer*), que estrutura uma parte da obra de acordo com suas escolhas, quanto de nos lembrar que qualquer espectador, independentemente da forma da narrativa audiovisual que se considere, é sempre um hermenêutico capaz de dar sentido mesmo às narrativas mais aparentemente não estruturadas.

Considerar o usuário de um filme do pós-cinema como um instrumentista que pode escolher seu caminho em uma partitura – tanto no sentido musical como no sentido, dado por Goodman (1968/1990), de um sistema de notação – é estender sua liberdade e traçar seus contornos. É a ambição deste texto: substituir os discursos eufóricos e aproximados sobre as transformações do usuário da narrativa por uma avaliação mais precisa e mais justa dessa atividade testada pela virtude heurística da análise. ▣

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# Communication Circuits of the Brazilian Press in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Perspectives About the New Moment

## *Circuitos Comunicacionais da Imprensa no Brasil do Século XIX: Olhares Sobre o Momento Inicial<sup>a</sup>*

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### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the first moments of the press in Brazil, pointing out two movements: the creation of the first daily newspaper of the country, *O Diário do Rio de Janeiro*; and the communicational circuits of the press from the Imperial capital to the inland provinces and the opposite, in the 1820s, revealing the communicational flows, counterflows and dialogues. To exemplify the forming communicational circuits, we use as object of observation the first year of circulation of the Minas Gerais newspaper *O Universal* (1825). We show the crystallizations about the story of the press that might be object of historiographic review when the perspective is on this historical universe.

**Keywords:** Newspapers, history, 19<sup>th</sup> century, *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, *O Universal*

### RESUMO

O artigo reflete sobre os momentos iniciais da imprensa no Brasil, abordando dois movimentos: o aparecimento do primeiro jornal diário do país, *O Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, e os circuitos comunicacionais da imprensa da capital do Império para as províncias do interior e destas para o Rio de Janeiro, na década de 1820, mostrando fluxos, contrafluxos e diálogos comunicacionais. Para exemplificar os circuitos comunicacionais em formação, tomamos como objeto de observação o primeiro ano de circulação do jornal mineiro *O Universal* (1825). Busca-se mostrar que cristalizações sobre a história da imprensa podem ser objetos de revisão historiográfica quando o olhar comunicacional se debruça sobre esse universo histórico.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornais, história, século XIX, *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, *O Universal*

<sup>a</sup> This article is part of a broader research, named História da Imprensa no Brasil do Século XIX: Uma Rede de Pesquisa, which makes new interpretations of the history of the press in the nineteenth century, with the collaboration of researchers from different regions of Brazil and the support from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

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ALTHOUGH IT IS a kind of consensus to recognize the expansion of newspapers from 1820 onwards as part of the movement of formation of public opinion that used periodicals to echo ideas about the political moment at the time, in the studies on the historical press of the period it is possible to frequently identify two editorial classifications regarding such publications: gazettes and newspapers. However, other types should be added, including daily newspapers, which, as we will see throughout the article, have specificities in relation both to gazettes and to newspapers.

The gazettes were those that turned a virulent opinion, an explicit political position, into the meaning of their publications, in addition to disseminating other national and foreign information (what today we call the news). On the other hand, the newspapers were those that had the mission of clarifying, with the objective of bringing light to readers, with subjects divided into scientific, literary, and artistic themes, among others, with a clear tendency to disseminate scientific knowledge. But there were still those that were primarily concerned with everyday issues, publishing notices and the most varied pieces of information, on demand from the readers themselves. This differentiated content was published, above all, in the daily newspapers, which began to circulate in the Court in 1821. Therefore, even at the beginning of the press in Brazil, it is possible to observe at least three models of regular dissemination of printed matter, and the most common were gazettes and newspapers<sup>1</sup>.

The informative and commercial press would only change with the debates on independence, a decisive factor also for the proliferation of periodicals, multiple pamphlets, leaflets and printed matter intended for propagation of political ideas. Gradually, the press moved away from the model of the old regime gazettes, and opinion newspapers proliferated, which would fight fiercely to win public opinion, obtaining supporters who identified with them and who became systematic readers of the same publication. However, the Court daily newspapers were inspired by the editorial organization and the symbolic value of the old gazettes, which remained as a journalism model.

In this article, we deal with the beginning of the boom in the printed word in Rio de Janeiro (Barbosa, 2013), moment at which there was formation of real communication networks in the city, from 1820 to 1829, and of the Court with the inland provinces, when literate circles interconnection took place (Morel & Barros, 2003, p. 47). Thus, we seek to reflect on the following processes: the initial circulation of daily newspapers in Rio de Janeiro, showing what differentiated them from other periodicals with a longer period of time between one issue and another; and the communication circuits formed between the Court periodicals – observed from the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*,

<sup>1</sup> Silva (2007), when studying the *Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro*, states that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, readers knew how to differentiate between a gazette and a newspaper: the gazette had the role of disseminating national and foreign news, while the newspaper should be more erudite, displaying the comprehensive knowledge of its editor. Morel (2009, p. 154) further clarifies that, at the beginning of printed production in Brazil, the concept of an “illustration press” would be predominant and related to the idea of enlightening propagation of sciences, arts of thought and human progress. Thus, alongside gazettes and daily newspapers, other types of periodicals were also published, with many pages, with texts that nowadays we would call the scientific popularization (*O Patriota*, which circulated between 1813-1814, is one example). There was also a desire, with this movement, to improve printing techniques.

first daily newspaper to circulate in the city –, and also between provincial newspapers and capital newspapers and vice versa, particularized from analysis of the first year of circulation of *O Universal* (1825), from Minas Gerais.

While in the Imperial capital the dominant pieces of news were from the city itself or from abroad (based on information sources that systematically included the republication of news from European newspapers), in provincial newspapers it was more frequent to republish news that had previously been reported in the Court. The flow of information, therefore, had a singularity: from abroad to the capital and from the capital to inland. It can also be seen that both provincial and Court newspapers brought references and long excerpts already published in the cities where they were originally printed. Therefore, there was an expressive dialogue between the Court press and the provinces, and vice versa. Although the flow of news was exponentially greater from the Imperial political center towards the provinces, there was also a flow of information from the provinces to the Imperial city's periodicals.

Looking at the beginning of the nineteenth century presupposes interpreting and imagining scenarios that bring many surprises. In relation to the publication of the first daily newspaper in the country, the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, we verified the daily creation of a web of meanings of the printed word, which reached an audience that also included those belonging to the *various classes* and that began to build a permanent dialogue with the newspaper<sup>2</sup>. Part of this process is described below, aiming at unveiling the modes of production and the administrative and editorial practices of the publication. We take the *Diário* as an example, not so much because it was the first daily newspaper to circulate in the country, but because it established a series of actions to get closer to its possible readers and which resulted in its immediate success, as we will see in the first part of the article.

## DIÁRIO: MANY VOICES IN THE URBAN SCENE

In the days before the publication of the first issue of *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, a box was left for anyone who wanted to place advertisements and pieces of news, in a very visible place in Manuel Joaquim da Silva Porto's bookstore, located on Rua da Quitanda, on the corner of Rua São Pedro, in the busiest spot of Rio de Janeiro.

The strategy preceded the publication of the first daily newspaper launched in Brazil. Unlike other publications already circulating in the city<sup>3</sup> and even in other provinces and all those that also appeared in 1821 – year that saw the beginning of what can be defined as the explosion of the printed word –, the *Diário* would be on the streets every day, and therefore needed material to fill

<sup>2</sup> Analyzing the list of subscribers to *Gazeta do Brasil* – a total of 693 –, classified by the editor himself in socio-professional categories, Morel and Barros (2003, pp. 41-44) show that 10% of the public was composed of a group qualified by the newspaper editor as from the “various classes”, which leads authors to divide the public of the periodicals into those who were targeted by them and those who actually existed. However, the reading public increased in the period 1820-1830.

<sup>3</sup> In 1821, the year in which the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* started being published, the following periodicals circulated in the city: *Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro* (1808-1822); *O Amigo do Rei e da Nação* (1821); *O Bem da Ordem* (1821); *O Conciliador do Reino Unido* (1821); *Despertador Brasileiro* (1821); *O Espelho* (1821-1823); *O Jornal de Anúncios* (1821); *A Malagueta* (1821-1822); *Reverbero Constitucional Fluminense* (1821-1822); and *Sabatina Familiar dos Amigos do Bem-Comum* (1821-1822). In 1822, the following appeared: *O Constitucional* (1822); *O Compilador Constitucional, Político e Literário Brasileiro* (1822); *Correio do Rio de Janeiro* (1822-1823); *O Regulador Brasileiro* (1822-1823); *O Papagaio* (1822); *Macaco Brasileiro* (1822); *A Verdade Constitucional* (1822), and *O Volantim* (1822) (Biblioteca Nacional, 1965).

its four pages from Sunday to Sunday, invariably. The box with contributions from readers would be collected at 4:00 pm, and the promise was that the following day these contributions would be inserted in the newspaper at 8:30 am, “as promptly as possible, and with all reasonable impartiality” (Diário do Rio de Janeiro, 1821, para. 3).

The “plan for the consolidation of a useful and curious DIARIO in this City” (Diário do Rio de Janeiro, 1821), which announced its publication on June 1, 1821, presented the planning for distributing subjects in its four pages. The first page would bring the “meteorological observations, made the day before at seven in the morning, at noon, and at five in the afternoon”. which corresponded to the “hours of sunrise, passage of the sun through the meridian, and sunset” and, then, at the time of the tides (“high and low tides in this Port”) (Diário do Rio de Janeiro, 1821, para. 2). Those pieces of information were considered “useful”. The second page would display the public’s writings: “Any and all private advertisements or news (convenient and lawful to be printed) including public entertainment and spectacles, which will take place on each of the days” (Diário do Rio de Janeiro, 1821, para. 4). Besides, in the case of the first issue, all people that wanted to “assist in this very useful work and make use of it” (Diário do Rio de Janeiro, 1821, para. 3), were asked to put their advertisements in the box at the bookstore from May 30<sup>th</sup>, in order for the purpose of collecting writings to be achieved. Nothing would be charged for that.

It is possible to observe some clues about the predominantly narrated sense of time in this letter of intents directed at possible readers. The hours of the day were fundamental to define not only the city’s light and shadow scenario, marked by day or night, but also the weather that could strike it. The tidal movements added one more piece of nature information, essential for regulating everyday life. Dawn, afternoon and dusk marked the flow of life, as well as the tidal movements, in a city where activities around the dynamics in the ports had multiple meanings: news, varied information, the economic world and political life, going to and coming from distant places.

In the plan, the promises regarding the precise time also stood out. In order for the newspaper to be published at 8:30 am, people should leave the writings in the box until 4:00 pm. From there, the production process began, throughout the night. After separating the writings by themes, it was necessary to choose the ones that would appear in the newspaper and their order. The next day, the information would appear divided into rubrics: *Mail*, *Private News*, *Published Works*, *Loss*, *Sales* and, finally, public entertainment and shows, usually information about performances at the *Real Teatro de São João*. The small headings that preceded the information varied from issue to issue.

When announcing the undertaking, typographer Zeferino Vito de Meireles<sup>4</sup>, *Diário* editor, highlighted in the first line of the plan that he was “convinced of the utility of a daily newspaper for the public” (*Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, 1821, para. 1).

The word “diário” in the title of the periodical appears from the first issue superimposed on the image of a winged angel playing a trumpet, in a clear allusion to the mythological figure of the Apocalypse, which announces the eruption of something deeply transformative and also summarizes what the metaphor of the diffusion of printed words means to the *Diário*: to announce widely (as the sound propagation) the arrival of the *public voice*, also referring to the Roman mythological allegory<sup>5</sup>. The ideas and information that would circulate were added to the transit of goods across the city. The everyday information placed in those pages by the readers had an exchange value and acquired a new meaning for the communicational expansion in other expression webs, represented by the periodicals.

Dividing the writings sent by the public into advertisements and private news shows that the difference between these two types of text was perceived not only by the editor, but also by the public. The advertisements were about sale of slaves, houses, farms, and several other products that owners would like to trade, in addition to lost and found of the most different natures, including, and highlighted, slave escapes. Private news, on the other hand, referred to information about arrival and departure of ships, arrival of correspondence or other varied pieces of information, and about which one realized the need to expand their reading circuit to the public space. In other words, while the advertisements were directly related to the pecuniary issue, the news amplified a particular fact for a larger group. Professionals who wanted to be known, works that were being printed, ships about to leave and that were receiving shipments, and establishments and their commercial practices were among the many subjects of private news, which were always enunciated by the verbal expressions “it becomes public knowledge” or “it is made known”<sup>6</sup>.

The clues from the nineteenth century show that the success of the *Diário* was immediate. A month after its first edition, each issue was edited with eight pages and, in July 5, the editor announced that the Royal Press was not able to regularly print more than a thousand copies. He informed that the *Diário* had reached more than 800 subscriptions and, in view of this fact, it was not possible either to increase the number of copies for new “subscribers” or to put the periodical to “be sold to the public”. Increasing the number of copies could lead the Royal Press to stop “sensibly its own service” (de Meirelles, 1821a, p. 31)<sup>7</sup>.

Limited space and the public’s demand for information to be inserted obliged the editor to inform in the next edition that he had failed to insert

<sup>4</sup> Portuguese born in Lisbon, he has worked at the Royal Press Typography since its foundation. According to Blake (1883-1902), the first position of the founder of the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* in the Royal Press was that of manual work in the workshop. Subsequently, he was a kind of controller of graphic works, including pointing out “spelling errors”, and finally Royal Press deputy administrator. Pires (2008), when recovering the *Diário* founder’s career, states that the numerous functions with which he was involved during his work in the Royal Press reveals characteristic traits of an intellectual profile, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, and he was an active producer of the culture-society relationship. When he died in 1822, a victim of an attack, he was replaced in the newspaper’s editorial board by the French-born typographer Antonio Maria Jourdan (Biblioteca Nacional, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> PHEME, she who initiates and further communication.

<sup>6</sup> Although not concerned with distinguishing the typology of the texts published in the periodical, Pires (2008, pp. 89-94) makes a detailed analysis of the themes included in the *Diário* from 1821 to 1825, showing that those related to slavery predominated, also revealing the emphasis given to the announcements of the Police Administration and Senate and the Government notices, as well as to public speeches of D. Pedro I soon after independence. There were also texts that demanded resolutions of the most diverse daily problems. The predominance of themes referring to slaves leads the author to qualify the newspaper as a “slave counter”: there were always many advertisements of fugitive slaves (usually under the rubric *Loss*); sales and purchases of slaves; slaves that were found; slave auctions; wet nurses offer, and slave rent.

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<sup>7</sup>For comparative purposes, we bring some data on the number of subscribers to other periodicals that circulated in the 1820s in the city of Rio de Janeiro: *Gazeta do Brasil*, in 1827, announced a total of 693 subscribers, while *Atalaia da Liberdade*, in the previous year, reported having 180 subscribers in its third issue (Morel & Barros, 2003, p. 35).

<sup>8</sup>Despite the announcement, the next and subsequent issues of the periodical continued to cost 40 réis, and the price of the subscription remained at 640 réis per month. We do not know the reasons why the increase did not take effect, but the transformations in production and administrative processes (“work simplification” and more points to deliver news and advertisements) may have been decisive for the daily price to be maintained.

“many of the aforementioned Advertisements and News” and that he would include them in order of arrival. To act with “impartiality”, he would, from that moment on, number the texts received, which would also make it easier to justify if the text was not published. In the same announcement, he also said that there would be increase both in the number of pages of the periodical and in the subscription price, which would go from 640 to 960 réis per month. Besides, the single copy of the *Diário* (public sale) would cost 60 réis instead of the previous 40 réis (de Meirelles, 1821b, p. 39)<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the initial difficulties, the *Diário* announced in the edition of July 9<sup>th</sup> that it had managed not only to publish more copies, but also to put more boxes at commercial establishments, even in regions far from the city’s heart, using pharmacies. Since the edition of June 4<sup>th</sup>, Zeferino had expressed his desire “to be able to divide the City into different Districts of reasonable length, where there would be the respective Boxes, and the indispensable servants for the prompt and regular service of the *Diário*” (de Meirelles, 1821c, p. 55). Now he was pleased to inform that the periodical would be offered for sale at seven new points and that there would be also boxes for advertisements and news to be delivered: all this in “pharmacies, in which a Box of the *Diário* is constantly exposed to the public, and the *Diário* is also sold” (de Meirelles, 1821c, p. 56). The wider periodical circulation was due to the “simplification of the work”, which would have allowed “printing a greater number of daily copies” (de Meirelles, 1821c, p. 56). From that date on, the *Diário* and its boxes for receiving advertisements and news could be found in two pharmacies on Rua da Quitanda, one on Rua dos Ferradores, one on Rua dos Barbonis, one in Largo das Laranjeiras, one in Cidade Nova, and one on Rua do Mata Porcos. Thus, the area where the newspaper circulated across the city was considerably expanded, both towards the north and the south.

Readers were also informed about the limits of the seven districts where the *Diário* circulated and the number of subscriptions in each of them was presented in detail: 398 in the first; 295 in the second; 152 in the third; 122 in the fourth; 13 in the fifth, which was out of downtown, since it comprised the area from Chafariz da Glória to Botafogo and Largo das Laranjeiras; 40 in the sixth, in the opposite direction, including Cidade Nova, Gamboa and Costão da Saúde, and, finally, four subscriptions in the seventh district, which comprised São Cristóvão, Engenho Novo, and Engenho Velho. Pharmacy owners received 5% monthly from all subscriptions in their districts and from the individual periodicals sold. Subscriptions totaled a thousand distributed copies (de Meirelles, 1821d). The editor’s strategy, which also explains the ever-increasing number of subscriptions, was to publish, with priority, advertisements and private news from subscribers.

Thus, with just over one-month circulation, the periodical reached the impressive mark of more than a thousand copies sold per day. In addition, the strategy adopted by Zeferino of scattering boxes to receive writings from the public indicates engagement in a lasting dialogue with readers, who became initially linked to the periodical because it provided a service that could only be offered by a means capable of making their demands public. The solution to the problem was often divulged by the newspaper itself as “advertisement resolution”.

The expansion of the private voice to the public space, making it known to a wide range of people, and the positive results of this action – readers complained intensely and their ads were not published – built the meanings of the public word in the city and, at the same time, made periodicals essential for their readers. The printed word value also expanded the territories of the speech beyond the immediate interlocutor. Public demand, their advertisements and news spread through the newspapers on the city’s streets far beyond what the eye could see. Therefore, multiple transits of the printed word were established. Through the printed word, it was possible to know the price of goods; find advertisements for the purchase and sale of various things, used or new; buy, sell or exchange slaves, and also learn about many other subjects related to local trade. The periodical allowed people to learn about publications printed in the city, arrival of ships to the ports, and some government official acts. It was a mosaic of information perceived as useful to the reading public’s daily life.

### BETWEEN THE VINTÉM AND THE BUTTER (AND THE “MULEQUES”)

Five years after its first issue, the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* was qualified as a *fashionable periodical* by other newspapers circulating in the city. The nicknames by which it was known, *Diário de Vintém*<sup>9</sup> or *Diário da Manteiga*<sup>10</sup> spread far beyond Rio de Janeiro. Qualified as a “friend of all people of this city”, “the newspaper of the rich and the poor”, “broker of all big and small businesses, of all daily transactions of life” (“Revista dos Diários desta Courte”, 1827, pp. 26-27), the *Diário* aroused passions, criticism and polemics. However, for some, the popular epithets revealed disrespect for the newspaper: “But is there anyone who does not get stunned by seeing the opposition that Mr. Minister of War begins to express to the advertisements in the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, which is called the *Diário de Vintém* or *da Manteiga* by some *with little decency* [emphasis added]?” (Um do Brasil, 1828, p. 1449).

Discussing the reasons for its popular names is not within the scope of this article. It doesn’t matter if “vintém” came from its cheap price and “butter” from the recurrent advertisement of the product in the periodical<sup>11</sup>. The point is that

<sup>9</sup>Old money used in Brazil.

<sup>10</sup>Butter

<sup>11</sup>On the construction of the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* in historiography as merely an advertisement newspaper and the criticism of this interpretation, as well as the fact that the denomination has been linked to the newspaper price, as cited by Sodré (2011), and the controversies surrounding the nomination, refer to: Pires (2008). As for *Diário da Manteiga* being related to the most frequent product in the current list of published goods, which is not a consensus, refer to: Marendino (2016). In our understanding, the name issue gives rise to a deeper reflection than know the true reasons for the denominations. The objective here is to understand the periodical as a vehicle for the diffusion of the Enlightenment in the tropics, which is a highly relevant perception.

<sup>12</sup>In 1830, in a text from a student of the Legal Course in Olinda, the newspaper was referred to as follows, in a periodical from Pernambuco: "It will only publish its minor advertisements (which give it a few "vinténs") arrivals and departures, buying and selling (except butter, because since they named it Diário da Manteiga the editor has never written butter in the Diário again)" (Freire, 1830, p. 718). *O Verdadeiro Liberal* describes it: "Diário de vintém – it is a periodical of appropriate literature, useful to the businessman, and to the literate, the military and the priest; it is the newspaper in vogue" ("Espírito dos Periódicos", 1826, p. 3).

<sup>13</sup>In the original: "Dès l'aube matinale, le *Diário do Vintém* et le *Jornal do Commercio* se disputent le dessous des portes, et se glissent sans bruit dans la demeure des commerçans que l'amour du gain éveille aux premiers rayons du jour. Le déjeuner n'est bon, il n'est vraiment complet, que lorsqu'on a savouré la lecture des articles variés et piquants du *Diário* des moleques, ou du *Vingtain*, dénominations qui caractérisent l'esprit, la substance et le prix du journal".

<sup>14</sup>*Muleques* were how the slave boys – aged between 7 and 18 years – were known. "Whoever lacks two Mozambique Nation *muleques* who are still poorly educated in the language of white people, go to the Parish of Irajá at the Luiz Manoel Farm, who, giving the signs, will receive them; these *muleques*, are the same ones that were announced in the Diário of Tuesday, January 15, 1822, and as the said *muleques* are free and there is no prison in the place, they may escape or die as one has been very sick, the risk is taken for nothing, and there are expenses" (Diário do Rio de Janeiro, 1822, pp. 51-52).

popular names, which indicate jocularly and, at the same time, the population proximity to the periodical, have spread fast. "Vintém" and "butter" weren't just a bunch of private advertisements and news. Its public significance went beyond this service to which many claimed to be in debt, even going so far as to consider the newspaper "the indispensable entertainment for morning tea" ("Revista dos Diários esta Corte", 1827, p. 27)<sup>12</sup>.

When referring to the habit of reading newspapers at the time, the French periodical *L'Echo de l'Amérique du Sud* characterizes the editorial singularity of the multiple newspapers produced in the city in the late 1820s and the sharing of existing readers. Reading that began at dawn, with the dispute between *Diário do Vintém* and *Jornal do Commercio*, when they were placed at the subscribers' doors.

At dawn, the *Diário do Vintém* and the *Jornal do Commercio* dispute the underside of the doors and slip silently towards the home of the merchants whose love of gain awakens in the first rays of the day. Breakfast will not be good, nor truly complete, if you do not enjoy reading the varied and spicy articles of the *Diário dos moleques* [emphasis added] or *do Vintém*, denominations that characterize the spirit, substance and price of the newspaper<sup>13</sup>. ("Lecture des Journaux", 1827, pp. 3-4)

This is the first time that the newspaper is referred to as "diário dos moleques". Was it an allusion to the paperboys<sup>14</sup>? Or just an insult used by Pierre Plancher, founder of *Spectador Brasileiro* and its successor, *Jornal do Commercio*, to refer to the periodical, as we will see later?

Next, *L'Echo de l'Amérique du Sud* characterizes the city's newspapers: *Aurora Fluminense*, "which from now on surely will choose an earlier time"; *Diário Fluminense*, "with its decrees, its various ordinances and its foreign news"; *Ástrea*, which "is the politicians' favorite reading at dinner"; and *Gazeta do Brasil*, which reaches its subscribers "at the usual time of tropical thunderstorms". At dusk, readers "amuse themselves with jokes and the spiritual epigrams of the *Espelho Diamantino*", "the prosecutor of the jury translated the joyful monkey into justice", and finally, the *Écho de l'Amérique du Sud* reaches the subscriber shortly after dinner, and "we'd like to think he won't leave it aside to take a nap"<sup>15</sup> ("Lecture des Journaux", 1827, p. 4).

More than the temporal marking of life by the delivery of periodicals with their characteristic times (morning, afternoon, and evening), the description shows the specificities of each publication and the recognition of the textual multiplicity offered to the public. Controversies between newspapers are also indicated in the text. After all, *Diário do Vintém* (or *da Manteiga*) and *Jornal do Commercio* disputed more than doorsteps since the time of the *Spectador Brasileiro*.

Because it is constant to all citizens the irrecoverable damage that the *Diário da Manteiga* usually causes in publishing the Lottery prizes, due to the many errors, serving only as annoyance and disorders and not being useful; it is therefore requested that the Board of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia instead of divulging them daily in the imposter *Diário*, publish a general printed list only at the end of the drawing, as usual in all Nations. (*O Spectador Brasileiro*, 1824, p. 4)

Thus, in addition to *Diário de Vintém* and *Diário da Manteiga*, *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* was also called the *Diário dos Muleques*, a name that has not been carried over from the past to the present. That was how its great rival, Pierre Plancher, founder and editor of *O Spectador Brasileiro* and, later, of *Jornal do Commercio*, referred to it.

It seems that the rivalry stemmed from the fact that the *Diário* published the public's advertisements and pieces of news for free, while *O Spectador* charged 40 réis per published line, as the *Diário* editor's response to the criticisms from the competing newspaper shows:

What Mr. Plancher resents is that everything is published here for free, and it can be published in his *Spectador* in clear characters, for the minimum of 40 réis for each line; but we started this task long before Mr. Plancher has made or has been obliged to make the decision about being our fellow citizen, and the people of this city, who encouraged us in it, and who are more judicious than Mr. French Brazilian, think it's better to make their advertisements for *free* using our bad characters, than put money in his beautiful page. (“*Observações do Redator*”, 1824, p. 92)

The letter from a reader who, under the pseudonym “Um Amigo da Verdade” [Friend of the Truth], expresses his disappointment at the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro* because it had published a piece of political news, also reveals the impolite way in which Plancher, a competitor of Zeferino Meireles and Antonio Jourdan, referred to the journal. “It was a shame I have read in the *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, or as the *great PP Spectador* [emphasis added] would say, *dos moleques* [emphasis added], (which despite everything is worth a thousand of its lying papers), a political piece of news that displeased me for two reasons” (Um Amigo da Verdade, 1825, p. 517). Subsequently, he explains the reasons for being disappointed over the fact that the periodical inserts politics into its narrative plots. “First, because I disliked seeing that excellent and very useful newspaper getting involved in politics”, and, secondly, “I was disgusted with the same news, not only it was very false, but also because it was evidently included in that newspaper so that *it would have a greater circulation among the population* [emphasis added]” (Um Amigo da Verdade, 1825, p. 517).

<sup>15</sup>In the original: “dorénavant elle choisira, san doute, une heure plus matinale”; “avec ses articles d’office, ses décrets, ses diverses *portarias* et ses nouvelles étrangères”; “lecture favorite des politiques à l’issue de leur diner”; “C’est à l’heure ordinaire des *trevoadas* du tropique”; “se divertissait naguère des plaisanteries et des épigrammes spirituelles de l’*Espelho Diamantino*”; “le promoteur du jury a traduit le joyeux *macaco* en justice” e “et nous aimons à penser qu’il ne les dispose pas à faire la sieste”.

What does this short excerpt allow us to conclude about two key questions for understanding the *Diário* as a public word in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1800s? First, that the denominations that remain in time refer to the way in which, in general, the “population”, or readers, referred to the periodical. The nicknames received by the *Diário* demonstrate its dissemination in society in an amplified way through and easier and current name, close to the majority’s real life: “vintém” and “butter” are emotional, affective names, metaphors that synthesize different perspectives. In turn, *Diário dos muleques* is a qualifier that was addressed to the editors of the publication, an insult (and that probably was not the only one) and did not designate the periodical.

The second point refers to the content of the publication, also expressed by the anonymous reader: editing private news and public advertisements transformed the periodical into something important for readers, and deviating from this path, by “getting into politics”, it meant ceasing to be a “very useful newspaper”. On the other hand, including in the newspaper the polemics, the verbal insults, the public position taking in the arena of debates that proliferated throughout the city was the certainty that they would reach the “population”. The *Diário* was, in fact, the “newspaper in vogue” in Rio de Janeiro in the 1820s.

The communication circuits, developed in the city itself, and which appear in the pages of the *Diário*, show the importance of the public’s constant dialogue with the newspaper for its survival (and immediate success), since it was through the readers that the pieces of information (news and advertisements) were inserted in the publication. Application of some administrative formulas, such as the need to subscribe to the newspaper to publish news and advertisements, was one of the reasons for the explosion of periodicals. But the success of the *Diário* cannot be attributed to this practical reason alone: publishing topics of daily interest to readers made it indispensable for their lives. This did not free it from polemics, in taking explicit positions, always around a printed word re-signified in multiple ways on the streets.

## COMMUNICATION CIRCUITS IN PRINTED-WEB DIALOGUES

From the point of view of the focus of this paper, as it has already been emphasized, we are also interested in analyzing the transits, circuits and communicational dialogues of the Court newspapers with provincial ones, seeking to unravel not only the ways in which they were constituted, but also the meanings they produced. For this, we deal specifically with the 1820s, focusing on the years 1825 and 1826. We examined, on the one hand, some newspapers that circulated in the Court (*Diário do Rio de Janeiro*, *O Spectador*

*Brasileiro*, *Diário Fluminense*, *Ástrea* e *O Verdadeiro Liberal*) and the explicit references they made to *O Universal* (1825-1842), the only periodical that circulated in the Province of Minas Gerais for most of the year 1825<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, we analyzed the editions of *O Universal* of 1825 to detect some of these movements of the news from the provinces towards the capital and vice versa.

In its first issue, *O Universal* editor explained its purpose and the need to write in order to “transmit the most interesting news, which comes to my attention” (*O Universal*, 1825a, p. 1):

As the *Companheiro do Conselho* is due to end soon, and the illustrious editors of the *Abelha* will not continue to publish their periodical for now, I found myself in need of writing to transmit the most interesting news, which comes to my attention. No other correspondence will be published in it, except those dealing with objects in general and not containing personalities, because my aim is public enlightenment and not to arouse hatred among citizens. I will always prefer the publication of Laws, Decrees and Ordinances, because although these objects do not please as much, as they should, their dissemination is of first necessity, and all citizens should seek such important knowledge. (*O Universal*, 1825a, p. 1)

In the opening excerpt of the first issue, which, although unsigned, was authored by Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos<sup>17</sup>, founder and editor of the periodical, it is clear that the public did not aspire to official public information that would be prioritized in the publication, qualified as essential. Therefore, there was the intention, even if it was only in the order of desire, not to stimulate polemics, since the purpose was “public enlightenment and not to arouse hatred among citizens” (*O Universal*, 1825a, p. 1).

Throughout the year, *O Universal* republished, countless times, the news that had previously appeared in the capital periodicals. In the second edition, in July 20, it published: “Ouro Preto, July 19<sup>th</sup>. Yesterday afternoon the *Correio do Rio de Janeiro* arrived, *very barren of news* [emphasis added]. From some Gazettes that *we read hastily* [emphasis added], we give the public the extract of what we found most interesting” (*O Universal*, 1825b, p. 6).

Then, there was a summary of some pieces of information collected from the Court periodicals: recognition of the independence of the Empire of Brazil; some information about the arrival in Rio de Janeiro, in July 5<sup>th</sup>, of the English ship carrying one of the Empire’s commissioners in London; arrival of troops in Montevideo, Uruguay; issuance of ministerial orders for elections for deputies and senators in the northern provinces; and the murder of the government minister of Lima, announced by “respectable letters from Santiago de Chile

<sup>16</sup>The first issue of *O Universal* is dated July 18, 1825. There, the reason for the appearance of the periodical is explained: to fill the gap left by the end of *Abelha* (1824-1825) and by the imminent end of the *Diário do Conselho do Governo da Província de Minas Gerais*, whose final edition, of just one page, circulated on November 14, 1825, informing the establishment of the General Council of the Province, in December 1<sup>st</sup>, which caused the organ to lose its function (“Sessão Extraordinária do Dia 14 de Novembro” 1825). *O Patriota* was created in 1825; however, it stopped circulating that same year. On the press in Minas Gerais in the period, refer to, among others: Moreira (2011) and Silva (2011).

<sup>17</sup>An important politician of the Empire, he began his political career in the Government Council of the Province of Minas Gerais, fighting the diamond concession, including the fierce campaign he made for *O Universal*, in 1825. He was a deputy in the first Legislative Chamber of the Empire (1826). He was also a senator and minister at several ministries in the Empire of Brazil (Piñeiro, 2014).

with reference to others from Lima” (*O Universal*, 1825b, p. 6). It concludes: “Nothing is said about the reasons that will serve as a pretext for committing this horrible action, and it is only said in the letters that the murderers were arrested” (*O Universal*, 1825b, p. 6). There are no references to the periodicals from which the information was taken, contrary to the subsequent issues.

In these editions, in addition to the transits that appear explicitly in the information reproduced, we also observe the complex circuit of information at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Ships that docked in Rio de Janeiro brought a lot of printed matter (including the European gazettes) and letters bearing the truth in postal bags, since they could be qualified as *respectable*. The content, with information that transfigured normality, presumed in abnormality – the murder of a minister from a neighboring country, for example –, then came to the attention of the editors of the capital newspapers. From then on, it was transformed into printed letters in newspapers, which were then transported to other locations and reached the hands of editors in those cities.

From one day to the next, fulfilling, therefore, the ideal of urgent information, present in the gesture of the editor of *O Universal*, he had to read “hastily” the capital’s gazettes. After this quick read, he had also summarized hastily what he found most interesting to his readers.

We see, therefore, the emergence of a time governed by the speed possible in journalistic production at the beginning of the nineteenth century: from one day to the next, it was necessary for editors from different cities to read the capital gazettes and compile excerpts from information they considered to be of interest to the public. In the editor’s opinion, there were few interesting pieces of news from those gazettes received by *O Universal*: after all, the mail that had arrived from Rio de Janeiro the day before was described as “very barren of news”.

Evidently, the temporality that made urgency a frequent reference was not just a result of being in a hurry to disclose facts that had already occurred, many times weeks or months ago. Speed seems to indicate a productive way of newspapers from that initial moment – showing a temporality typical of the news dimension – as well as the need to include a plurality of information. Hence the compilation of many gazettes, from many places, in a mosaic of a world that allowed people to see (or foresee) new temporal nexuses.

Dialogue with the reader, common in the early nineteenth century, was constant in the pages of *O Universal*. In these letters, whose authorship was obscured by the anonymity of pseudonyms, there were those that praised the editor’s choices and others that complained about the content of the publications. In them, we can still perceive the last stage of a complex communication circuit: the meeting with the public.

This circuit often began on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, when periodicals were loaded onto ships, arrived to Rio de Janeiro and were republished in the Court periodicals. Later, they were sent, via post service, to other cities, along difficult paths and impassable roads, full of quagmire and dangers that surrounded pedestrians, as those who carried letters between villages on foot were called, while couriers carried the mailing bags on the animals' back.

The mailing bags contained a large amount of correspondence – letters from all over the city and other printed matter intended for individuals – and carried the seal of the coat of arms of the Empire, remaining sealed until their destination. They were then delivered to the home of the person responsible for distributing the local mail, so that they could be collected there later by the recipients. In some urban centers, the size of the city, as was the case of Ouro Preto, made it impossible for residents to notice the arrival of the mailing bags. Fireworks were then used at the branch, announcing the arrival of the letters (Oliveira, 2010; Rodarte, 1999; Rosário, 1993).

The provinces that gave the Crown the greatest profit were those with the greatest number of mail routes, such as Minas Gerais. In the early years of the nineteenth century, there was strong interconnection between Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco, Bahia, and Minas Gerais (Rosário, 1993, p. 68). From Rio de Janeiro, mail departures to Minas took place every Tuesday at 18:00 in the summer and at 17:00 in the winter. Regarding the types of correspondence that arrived in the city, letters ranked first (52% of the total); second, newspapers and other printed matter (35% of the total); and, finally, official correspondence (13%) (Rodarte, 1999).

During 1825, *O Universal* published daily news from several Court periodicals, from which it transcribed long excerpts or made small extracts, and the Court periodicals also published news that were originally brought by the newspaper. There were, therefore, flows and counter-flows of information in a bidirectional way in these communicational circuits.

The greatest dialogue of *O Universal* occurred with Pierre Plancher's *O Spectador Brasileiro*. From it, *O Universal* transcribed letters, news from abroad, gazettes from localities in Latin America and imperial decrees that had originally been published in the Court periodicals. *O Universal* editor also announced to readers, with enthusiasm, the fact that *O Spectador* founder had offered him "his excellent periodical free of charge, from which I extract so many extracts for my periodical" (*O Universal*, 1825c, p. 134).

The launch of a new periodical in 1825, *O Patriota Mineiro*, which had a short duration, was greeted with enthusiasm, as it was politically aligned with Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos' positions. In turn, those in opposition were criticized. Thus, *O Patriota Mineiro* was given all the praise, and it was

recognized for “the relevant services it provides to our homeland. . . . The vast and profound knowledge of this classic writer, his impartiality, his courage and his unchanging eloquence have made him seek in this and in the neighboring provinces with a rare eagerness”. (“Patriota Mineiro”, 1825, p. 187). When, still in 1825, the newspaper stopped circulating, *O Universal* assumed in public the commitment to fight against opponents, because at that time there were no others:

<sup>18</sup>Paraopebano was the pseudonym of a man from Minas Gerais who criticized the positions of *O Universal* in letters sent to the *Diário Fluminense*. By the indication provided by the newspaper itself, he started, later, to sign as “Amigo da Verdade”.

Finally, the Paraopebano<sup>18</sup> resurrected as Amigo da Verdade; and his antagonists, with *Patriota Mineiro* as the most prominent, no longer exist. *O Universal* will make every effort to cut off the heads of this Hydra of Paraopeba! Come Mr. Amigo da Verdade; the battery is ready and I enter excited in the fight. (“Ouro Preto, 9 de Dezembro de 1825”, 1825, p. 252)

The effervescence of the works of *Typographia Patrícia*, which, in Ouro Preto, was responsible for transforming periodicals and other typographic products into printed matter, was reported in detail at the end of that year, producing a valuable summary of the growing printing activity in the city. Under the title “Typographic News”, it is stated that 1825 was the year in which the *Typographia* had worked the most and published “the highest [amount] of periodicals” (“Notícia Tipográfica”, 1825, p. 286). The list was composed of 82 issues of *Abelha do Itacolomy*; 12 issues of *Companheiro do Conselho*; 13 issues of *O Patriota Mineiro*, and 22 issues of *Diário do Conselho do Governo*. In addition to these periodicals, Comendador Gomide’s *Tratado de Educação Física* (Treaty of Physical Education) was also printed, and, finally, 72 issues of *O Universal*, “the only one that remains among so many writers” (“Notícia Tipográfica”, 1825, p. 287).

If *O Universal* made use of many periodicals to publish information from various parts of the country and the world, the newspaper also appeared, albeit in a smaller volume, in the pages of the Court newspapers. Letters from its editor asking for disclaimer, other correspondence and extensive extracts from the news were published, including everyday information, such as the consequences of the storm that hit Ouro Preto on December 22, 1825. The news, which was originally published in the edition of December 26<sup>th</sup> of *O Universal*, was transcribed literally 20 days later by *O Spectador*:

In the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the current month, a rare case took place in this city. The day dawned clear and pleasant, a little hot, but the heat was modified by a cold wind, and it was almost one o’clock when the weather began to change and the day darkened, and it seemed it was going to rain; a few minutes and it began to rain

heavily, accompanied by horrible and thunderous thunder, and it felt like waterfalls were falling from the sky; an impetuous wind drove the rain with such force that no roof in the whole city was unharmed; this horrible storm of water and wind lasted quarter of an hour and suddenly stones started to rain down, leaving the inhabitants dismayed and filled with terror. . this storm lasted almost two hours, the biggest that has been seen here, according to the oldest in the country. (“Ouro Preto, 26 de Dezembro”, 1826, p. 4)

Thus, transcribing information that had been “extracted from *O Universal*” or indicating at the end of the text the name of the periodical that had originally published it, we noted in the years 1825 and 1826, in the Court newspapers, the publication of seven extracts/references from *O Universal* in *O Spectador Brasileiro*, five in *Diário Fluminense*, four in *Ástrea*, one in *O Verdadeiro Liberal* and one in *Atalaia da Liberdade*, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Extracts from and references to *O Universal* in other periodicals

Newspaper	Date	Published news
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	08/31/1825	Plan for the extraction of diamonds in this and more Provinces of the Empire (“Plano para a Extração...”, 1825)
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	10/31/1825	Two words from the Paraopebano (“Duas Palavras ao Paraopebano”, 1825)
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	11/4/1825	Letter from the “Amigo do Presente” [ Friend of the Present] (O Amigo do Presente, 1825)
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	11/7/1825	Letter from Universal in response to Mr. Paraopebano (O Diretor Geral, 1825)
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	11/5/1825	Letter from a reader who defines himself as a “reader that read the newspaper for free” about the news of “Agoas Virtuosas da Villa da Campanha da Princeza” and transcription of the reader’s article (“Apontamentos, e Notícias das Agoas...”, 12 outubro, 1825)
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	1/16/1826	Thunderstorm in Ouro Preto, December 26th (“Ouro Preto, 26 de Dezembro”, 1826)
<i>O Spectador Brasileiro</i>	3/1/1826	Transcription of an article in which <i>O Universal</i> denounced a copy of a text published in the periodical by the newspaper <i>Atalaia da Liberdade</i> (O Redator, 1826)
<i>Diário Fluminense</i>	8/25/1825	Bernardo de Vasconcelos requests insertion of letter contradicting Captain Manoel José Barboza (de Vasconcelos, 1825)

Newspaper	Date	Published news
<i>Diário Fluminense</i>	9/15/1825	Denial of the accusations made by the “Amigo da Verdade” and published in issue 17 of <i>O Universal</i> (O Paraopebano, 1825).
<i>Diário Fluminense</i>	1/19/1826	Letter from <i>O Patriota</i> addressed to <i>O Universal</i> editor (O Patriota, 1826)
<i>Diário Fluminense</i>	3/4/1826	Among the news from several periodicals received, including those from <i>O Universal</i> ( <i>Diário Fluminense</i> , 1826a)
<i>Diário Fluminense</i>	3/6/1826	Letter from a reader informing that <i>O Universal</i> had published a letter accusing him of being a flatterer and asking for retraction ( <i>Diário Fluminense</i> , 1826b)
<i>Ástrea</i>	11/18/1826	Information on the Government Council Convocation (“Minas Gerais, Ouro Preto, 27 de Outubro”, 1826)
<i>Ástrea</i>	11/21/1826	Information on the Government Council Convocation (“Ouro Preto, 30 de Outubro”, 1826)
<i>Ástrea</i>	11/21/1826	Letter from the reader “Tolo decimado” [ Sad Fool] complaining about paying taxes (Tolo Decimado, November 5, 1826)
<i>Ástrea</i>	12/2/1826	Information on the sessions of the Council of the “Amigo da Verdade” and <i>O Universal</i> editor’s response ( <i>Amigo da Verdade</i> , 1826; <i>Redator do Universal</i> , 1826)
<i>O Verdadeiro Liberal</i>	3/9/1826	Information and criticism of <i>O Universal</i> for praising the Viscount of Barbacena ( <i>O Verdadeiro Liberal</i> , 1826)
<i>Atalaia da Liberdade.</i>	3/15/1826	Request to <i>O Spectador</i> to display the speech published in <i>O Universal</i> , accusing the text from <i>Atalaia</i> of plagiarism ( <i>Atalaia da Liberdade</i> , 1826)

Note. Author’s elaboration

### THE CIRCUIT IS COMPLETED: MEETING WITH THE PUBLIC

In nineteenth century newspapers, what we can call the “explicit public dialogue” is frequent under the rubric *Mail*. In *O Universal*, object of reflections that, based on a periodical, presuppose the logics and processes of a complex communication circuit between the Imperial capital and the inland provinces, it could not be different.

Covered by pseudonyms, with which the condition of constant and faithful reader is sometimes made explicit, the position or value judgment they maintain in relation to the periodicals is indicated, and they can be the *friend*

of the truth or the one who loves the truth, or even show the willingness to being critical of expressed propositions (“O mosquito pernिलongo” [The mosquito] and “O Aguilhão” [The Goad], for example); there are many examples of the reader’s presence and the public’s dialogue in the pages of the publications.

The editor often addresses the readers explicitly, stressing the importance of quickly transmitting the news he was aware of: “Ouro Preto, July 29. *It will take me just a moment to inform my readers of very interesting news* [emphasis added] of Sir Charles Stuart’s arrival to Rio de Janeiro. Here it is, extracted from O Spectador of the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the current [month] and [that] arrived yesterday by Mail” (“Ouro Preto, 29 de Julho”, 1825, p. 23).

In the small note that precedes the republication of the news previously published in *O Spectador Brasileiro*, which had taken seven days from Rio de Janeiro to Ouro Preto (since it had been published in *O Spectador* in July 20<sup>th</sup>, having arrived in the city on the 28<sup>th</sup> of the same month)<sup>19</sup>, there is also the perception of a time in newspapers that should have an accelerating dimension. Thus, he needed, as an editor, not to delay more than “a moment” to communicate the “very interesting news” to his readers.

In turn, readers left their impressions both of the periodical and of the editor, making it evident that they knew the processes of republication of news from other periodicals, which, through editor’s reading, gained (or not) a new interpretation and were again offered to readers.

Mr. “Aguilhão”, for example, sent a letter to *O Universal* in which he criticized the fact that the editor, according to him, only “transcribed the news from the newspapers in Rio”.

Mr. Editor of O Universal

Please tell me here in secret, because no one listens to us: *what is the purpose of writing in a newspaper? It is to transmit, what you see written in other periodicals:* [emphasis added] if so, I will also write. But even though this is the main work of an Editor, [...] *you should not confine yourself to such a limited sphere: but you have limited yourself to transcribing the news from the newspapers in Rio* [emphasis added]. Then you deserve the following rebuke: O Universal has only partially fulfilled its duty and that is why it is necessary for someone to incite you, and I will be your Aguilhão from now on. (Aguilhão, 1825, p. 46)

In the text, it is observed that “Aguilhão” was fully aware of the production processes of a periodical in the initial moments of the press in Brazil, although he criticizes the fact that the editor limited himself “to transcribing the news from the newspapers in Rio” (Aguilhão, 1825, p. 46). According to him, it was

<sup>19</sup> Although the document, a privileged empirical source in the approach, should also be considered in its monumentality, in its intentionality in transposing times and in its predictability (among other issues) when addressing the complex issue of memory, the search for the inscription of a past moment in the pages of periodicals reintroduces as a methodological possibility to consider – with reservations – that a fundamental opening is being created to access a possibility of the past. These issues will not be addressed, as they are beyond the scope of the article.

only part of an editor's duty. The editor should go further, including other types of information, as Official Acts, for example and, above all, illustrative texts on the most varied topics, as "Lessons on elementary education", serial publication in several issues of the newspaper; "Reflections on the Treaty of Physical Education", "Reflections on Economics", among others. However, this type of content also received criticism:

Mr. Editor, continue copying those mutual teaching lessons, which, you say, *many people in suit call mute* [emphasis added] and we will see if some read, and teach youth by this method. As everything, I must tell you that one day I was with a certain Mr., who considers himself to be a great deal, and O Universal arrived, [...], and when the lesson came, he said, *Here it is the Universal with its savorless lessons; I'm bored just looking at them* [emphasis added]; I got dumbfounded and said to myself: *sad condition of an editor, if he writes against some people, they want to kill him, and at least they hurt him with insults; if they write interesting things, like you, one says that it is tedious* [emphasis added]; the remedy is to close your ears, and continue doing good for your country. (Constante Leitor, 1825, pp. 18-19)

The long lessons on topics that should enlighten the reader, as we can observe in the letter, made the newspaper "savorless" for many, while taking a position, the explicit criticism of certain people, caused revolt. For the reader, this lack of interest was, perhaps, a sign of little knowledge, and the editor was then asked not to stop publishing this type of content:

Mr. Editor, I'm curious *to see who buys the Universal, and I haven't seen a basic education teacher buying it yet* [emphasis added]; perhaps they still haven't known it, but I'll tell you how many buy your interesting periodical. *Continue writing, because there are many people in love* [emphasis added]. (Constante Leitor, 1825, p. 19)

Signing the text as "Constante Leitor" [Constant Reader] the author of the letter invoked the condition of loyalty to the periodical to give advice and, above all, to show that the criticism made was due to some readers' lack of knowledge. Finally, it indicated that this type of content had the approval of many. That is, if there were critics, there were also those who approved the publication, declaring that many were "in love" with the journal:

I have been very pleased with your excellent periodical and I sincerely say that Universal and Patriota are periodicals worthy of being read not only in all Minas, but throughout the Empire of Brazil. . . . The articles that have been included in

them, have been treated with the greatest clarity in such a way that the same positions of political economics become so intelligible that everyone understands them and everyone judges that for the good of our homeland the publication of such interesting periodicals should not be suspended. (*O Reconhecido*, 1825, p. 227)

Signing the letter with the pseudonym “*O Reconhecido*” [He who recognizes], in fact, the reader made a great effort to recognize the value of the periodical that made it “worthy of being read not only in all Minas, but in the entire Empire of Brazil”. This, in his opinion, was mainly due to the clarity with which the newspaper was written, which made this information easy for the public to understand. Translating issues that might otherwise be incomprehensible to the public into more comprehensible language was a highly regarded value.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This text sought to know various communication circuits of the periodicals in the nineteenth century through the narrative fringes fixed as documentary memory<sup>20</sup>, in a first moment showing the several webs woven between the readers and the Court periodicals, and, in a second moment, the transits between the Court periodicals and the provinces, and vice versa (as *O Universal*, from Minas Gerais).

In the discursive fabrics inscribed in time, different communicational modes and practices of the nineteenth century newspapers emerge, in different circuits: that of the city of Rio de Janeiro, with the creation of its first daily newspaper, and the strategies – how we would call them today – adopted by the writer to transform the information (news and advertisements) sent by the public into a successful publication engine; and those of the provinces. Regarding the provinces, there are multiple circuits: the effective transit between the periodicals that left the Court towards the provinces; the news republished in the provinces and in the Court, in a bidirectional flow; the way publications reached the public; and, above all, the symbolic transits that can be seen in the dialogues with the periodicals’ editors.

The pages follow one another with impressions and meanings that readers attributed to the newspaper, as well as the uses they made of it: they asked for denials, sharpened polemics, criticized other periodicals, reported fights and confusion witnessed on public roads, doubted the interest that certain information could arouse, commented on previous correspondences and added to them sometimes exacerbated criticism, sometimes grandiose praise. The newspaper aroused public actions and reactions. There were many apprehensions of produced meaning, and

<sup>20</sup>Earlier we referred to the news of the storm that had hit Ouro Preto and which was transcribed by *O Spectador*, in Rio de Janeiro, 20 days later. Evidently, the reasons for the time discrepancy can be of multiple orders: the conditions of the roads in view of the weather, or even the information of a storm in Ouro Preto not having been considered, upon its arrival, immediately, as worthy of publication. We will never know the reasons, and it doesn't matter. Important it is to understand that going from the capital to Ouro Preto and vice versa normally took a week and understand, above all, the conditions for transferring this information (*pedestrians, couriers and mules' back*), revealing specific ways of the communication circuits of the nineteenth century.

many texts added. In the beginning of the Brazilian press the newspaper was indeed a joint work that made the public also the author of this type of publication. ■

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# Ideology and Culture: Notes for a Research

## *Ideologia e Cultura: Notas para uma Pesquisa*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study the relations between ideology and culture in three theoretical strands that depart from Marxism: the first, influenced by structuralism, was represented by Althusser and Macherey; the second, inspired by Hegel, was expressed in the works by Adorno and Jameson; the third, linked to the historicist tradition, is represented by Gramsci and Raymond Williams.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Althusser, Adorno, Gramsci, culturalism

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### RESUMO

Este texto visa estudar as relações entre ideologia e cultura em três vertentes teóricas que partem do marxismo: a primeira, influenciada pelo estruturalismo, teve como representantes Althusser e Macherey; a segunda, inspirada em Hegel, expressou-se nos trabalhos de Adorno e Jameson; a terceira, ligada à tradição historicista, é representada por Gramsci e Raymond Williams.

**Palavras-chave:** Marxismo, Althusser, Adorno, Gramsci, culturalismo

REGARDLESS THEIR HETEROGENEOUS directions, the Marxists have always stated that culture is not an autonomous sphere, and somehow holds links with the society's material basis. This consensus, however, ceases to exist when ideology is related to culture. There are so many concepts of ideology that the links with culture remain an open topic and subject to the most different interpretations.

There are those who bring the two spheres together to the point of identifying them, either immediately (such as the supporters of the *proletkult*), or on a more mediated level (such as Althusser and his disciples). Other authors, however, refuse to dilute culture in the ideological sphere (such as Gramsci and Raymond Williams).

Each branch refers to one or another passage where Marx approached the theme, but these passages do not offer us an unequivocal definition of the term. Moreover, they are often ambiguous and carry meanings that point in opposite directions.

The same can be said of Engels. In a famous letter to Franz Mehring, dated July 14, 1893, two different concepts of ideology are merged. A *negative* one: "Ideology is a process which the so-called thinker actually performs consciously – but with a false consciousness. The real driving forces that move them remain ignored by them – otherwise such a process would not be ideological" (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 109). Next, a *positive* concept emerges:

Because we denied that the different ideological spheres, which play a part in history, have an independent historical development, we were supposed therewith to have denied that they have *any historical efficacy*. At the basis of this is the ordinary undialectical notion of cause and effect as fixed, mutually opposed, polar relations, and a complete disregard of reciprocity. These gentlemen forget, almost intentionally, that an historical factor, once it has been brought into the world by other – ultimately economic facts – thereupon also reacts upon its surroundings and even affects its own causes. (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 111)

I would say, resuming a categorization proposed by Terry Eagleton (1997), that Marx has at least three concepts of ideology: one *epistemological*, another *ontological*, and a third, *political*.

### THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCEPT

On the pages of *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1867/2007) we find the epistemological concept that understands ideology as a distorted view of

reality. At the time they wrote the text, the authors were trying to turn away from Feuerbach's ideas, but they could not turn away from the theory of alienation that sticks up to the understanding of ideology as inversion (the *darkroom*). Feuerbach had criticized the Hegelian philosophy for being an alienated philosophy that started from consciousness to infer the real world from it. Feuerbach materializes the proposal of materialist inversion: the creation of a philosophy that had the being as its starting point, rather than consciousness. Marx and Engels moved the project forward, and replicated Feuerbach's critique of Hegel and his disciples. Ideology is now seen as *false consciousness*, to which the authors oppose the *material social process*. For this reason, they state, one should not start from consciousness, from what men think, as the young Hegelians do, but from *active, real men*.

In this register, ideology takes on the air of unreality, of a form of consciousness alien to the world. It would thus be an imaginary representation of the conditions of existence.

I) This definition drives Althusser's criticism (1967) that sees science, rather than real, active men, as the antidote of ideology. Therefore, he challenges the Hegelian dialectic's thesis of the materialist inversion by stating that "a science is not obtained by inverting an ideology" (p. 168). The reference to "active, real men" is understood as a direct influence of Feuerbach's humanist problematic.

In Althusser, Marxism becomes a science focused on the study of structures, by breaking with humanism. The category *mode of production* as a building made of the material base and the superstructure will give way to an interpretation that perceives it as a complex structure formed by three instances (economic, juridical-political and ideological). Thus conceived, the mode of production is interpreted as a combination of instances, each with its specific level of historicity. In place of the old simple causality (the superstructure mechanically determined by the base), Althusser proposes the *structural causality* or *metonymic causality* to designate the *absence* of structure – an invisible structure that nevertheless produces *effects*. In the words of François Dosse (1993):

This concept of the efficacy of an absence, this structure defined as an absent cause for its effects insofar as it exceeds each of its elements, just as the signifier exceeds the signified, comes close to this a-spherical structure that defines the Subject in Lacan, being this Subject constructed from the absence, from the loss of the first Signifier. (p. 341)

Scientific analysis would then seek to scrutinize the action of that hidden structure through *symptom lecture* – a technique also taken from Lacan's psychoanalysis.

On this extremely abstract plane, ideology loses its inertia and, in its relative autonomy, gains efficacy by playing in some cases the role of dominance over the other instances of the mode of production. Moreover, it gets free from the monocausal determination of reflex, being driven by overdetermination (another concept taken from Freud and Lacan's psychoanalysis).

Althusser (1980), in his notorious text "Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses of the State," from 1970, departs from the philosophical abstraction that characterized his texts until then, to understand how the relations of production are reproduced. Besides the repressive apparatus, attention is turned to the ideological apparatuses. In this register, he affirms the *materiality* of ideology understood as *practice* (this move from the realm of structures to that of practices was proposed earlier by another author who also influenced Althusser: Michel Foucault). Ideology now dwells in institutional sites such as school, family, unions, parties etc. And, it should be emphasized, in culture.

We will not discuss here Althusser's proposal for a general theory of ideology based on three basic theses (ideology has no history; ideology is a *representation* of the imaginary relationship of individuals with their real conditions of existence; ideology questions individuals as subjects). It is enough for now to point out how this concept causes culture to be reviewed from the standpoint of ideology. Althusser (1995) states that he does not include art among ideologies, because it has a "totally singular and specific relationship with ideology"<sup>1</sup> (p. 560). Art does not know reality, like science it only alludes to it. What the novel shows us is the lived experience of human existence. But this lived experience, says Althusser, is not something given, "given from a pure "reality," but the spontaneous "lived experience" of ideology in its own relation to the real"<sup>2</sup> (p. 562). Thus, what art shows us in the form of "seeing," "feeling," "perceiving," is "the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*"<sup>3</sup> (p. 561).

In the text about ideological apparatuses the reduction of art to the ideological sphere is stated in clear opposition to what Marx considered the "cultural heritage of humanity".

the Ideology of the currently ruling class, which includes in its music the great themes of the Humanism of the Great Ancestors, who realized, before Christianity, the Greek Miracle, and then the Greatness of Rome, the Eternal City, and the themes of interest, particular and general etc.). (Althusser, 1980, pp. 72-73)

Here we can perceive echoes of the Cultural Revolution in China.

<sup>1</sup> In the original: "tout à fait particulier et spécifique avec l'idéologie". This and other translations into Portuguese, by the author.

<sup>2</sup> In the original: "le donné d'une 'réalité' pure, mais le 'vécu' spontané de l'idéologie dans son rapport propre au réel".

<sup>3</sup> In the original: "l'idéologie dont il naît, dans laquelle il baigne, dont il se détache en tant qu'art, et laquelle il fait *allusion*".

Althusser's incursions in the field of arts include the following texts: "Lettre à Paolo Grassi"; "Sur Brecht et Marx"; "Lettre Sur la Connaissance de l'Art"; "Devant le Surrealisme: Alvarez-Rios"; "Cremonini, Peintre de l'Abstrait"; "Sur Lucio Fanti"; and "Lam". These texts should be analyzed in our research because, besides their interest in understanding Althusser's thinking, they directly influenced his disciples. This is the case, among others, of Michel Pêcheux's (1985) theory of discourse, and the literary studies of Pierre Macherey (1971).

One of the foremost scholars of Althusser's work, Warren Montag (2011), noted that "Althusser's most productive period coincided with a newfound interest in contemporary painting and literature, especially theater"<sup>4</sup> (p. 168). He also noted that his critique of humanism had begun with the artistic *avant-garde*. Thanks to this affinity, Althusser, unlike other communist intellectuals, came to value these artistic practices:

it was his commitment to theoretical anti-humanism that made it possible reading into the formal disruption of minimalist theater, abstract expressionism in painting, and the most austere experiments in the cinema of the French *Nouvelle Vague*, not the subjectivist rejection of social reality or elitist formalism . . . but nothing less than an assault on the humanist grounding of bourgeois ideology<sup>5</sup>. (Montag, 2011, p. 168)

II) The dialectic between the said and the unsaid, the fulcrum of the symptomatic lecture brought into the sphere of linguistics and literature a theme dear to psychoanalysis that guides the works of Pierre Macherey (1971), an author who, like Althusser, wants to see Marx away from the Hegelian legacy.

Within Hegel's philosophy, art is read as the first manifestation of the Absolute Spirit. For Hegel, art contains a *meaning*: it is the *truth of the sensible* that makes both Spirit and man self-conscious.

Marxists like Lukács refused to see art as an expression of the Spirit's self-development. Here too they resorted to the materialist inversion, replacing Spirit for social life. However, they retained the Hegelian definition of art piece as a *sensible unity of appearance and essence* (or form and content). It, therefore, is a unified totality (whether Lukács' "intensive totality" or Adorno's "windowless monad"), the result of the *creation* of exceptional personalities.

Macherey (1971) challenges the idea of creation and, along with it, that of subject as pleaded by Humanism. By extension, he also rejects the presence of a collective subject (social classes) as a reference to understand artistic manifestations, as Lucien Goldmann, among others, thinks. Macherey's critique is also against the sociological reductionism that perceives art as a direct

<sup>4</sup>In the original: "el período más productivo de Althusser coincidió con un interés recién descubierto por la pintura y la literatura contemporáneas, en especial el teatro".

<sup>5</sup>In the original: "Fue su compromiso con el anti-humanismo teórico lo que lo permitió leer en la disrupción formal del teatro minimalista, del expresionismo abstracto en pintura y en los más austeros experimentos del cine de la *Nouvelle Vague*, no el rechazo subjetivista de la realidad social o el formalismo elitista . . . sino nada menos que un asalto a la fundamentación humanista de la ideología burguesa".

expression of ideology and, finally, against the empiricism that conceives art as a reflection or representation of reality.

For Macherey (1971), by contrast, art is *work*, a special work of language, “whether this work is a form of language or a form given to language” (p. 57) – and language, he claims, “always speaks of itself” (p. 62). The author can thus speak of the existence of a *mode of production* of literature, of the work of transformation of a given raw material. The literary text is a material practice that aims, in its workmanship, at the transformation of ideological and linguistic raw materials. Here we have a clear analogy with Althusser in his interpretation of the relations of Marx’s *scientific discourse* built from the ideological raw material bequeathed by classical economics. In both cases, the referent – reality – remains outside the horizon, and therefore is not the foundation of scientific knowledge or literary representation.

As such, Balzac’s Paris is not an “expression” of the actual Paris: “it is the result of an activity of fabrication, adapted to the requirements of the work (and not of reality): it does not *reflect* a reality or experience; rather, it reflects an artifice” (Macherey, 1971, p. 59). Literature, therefore, has a *parody function*, it supposes an absence of that to which it refers.

One of the characteristics of the art piece (here, literature) is that it is always *de-centered*. In his words: “we must not, therefore, study the literary work as a self-sufficient totality,” for “the assumptions of unity and independence of the literary work are arbitrary” (Macherey, 1971, p. 56). The critic’s task should not be to decipher the hidden meaning that unifies the narrative and explain it to the audience, for the narrative is not “closed on one sense,” since it comprises “a multiplicity of its senses” (Macherey, 1971, p. 77) and, more than that, “an incompatibility of various senses” (Macherey, 1971, p. 79).

Therefore, it is not a unified totality, for it is always incomplete, a place marked by conflicting meanings. And such meanings coexist due to the ideology that makes the author silence some aspects. And it is toward this silence that the critic directs their attention, because conflicts between meanings within the work are explained by the invisible and unconscious action of ideology. Freud, says Macherey (1971), did not seek to find in conscious discourse a latent meaning, but launched a new form of *rationality* that places meaning elsewhere: “place of structures, to which he gives the name of the unconscious”. The same procedure should be applied to literary criticism, for “*knowing* a literary work would not be to dismantling it, “demystify” it, but to produce a new knowledge: *say what it speaks about without knowing it*” (p. 145).

But, after all, what does the work say? For Macherey (1971),

the work is articulated in relation to the reality on whose background it stands: not to a “natural” reality, an empirical datum, but that complex reality in which men (those who write and those who read) live, and which is *their ideology*. It is on the background of this ideology, original and tacit language, that the work is made: made not to say it, reveal it, translate it, or give it explicit form; made to *make room* for that absence of words without which it would have nothing to say. Therefore, the work should be inquired about what it does not and could not say, since it is made for not saying, for that silence to exist. . . . The order the work assigns to itself is nothing but an imagined order, projected where there is no order, and which serves to fictitiously resolve ideological conflicts. (p. 150)

### THE ONTOLOGICAL CONCEPT

There are authors who, differently from Althusser, prefer to study the links between culture and ideology starting from *The Capital* or, to be precise, from the chapter this book devotes to commodity fetishism.

While in *The German Ideology* it was a matter of an inversion (the darkroom) in which false consciousness produced an imaginary, unreal representation of the conditions of existence, the chapter on fetishism displaces the question: in it, it is the *bewitched* reality itself that produces the distorted image. Commodities, forgetting their origin (human labor), seem to rule men’s lives.

This displacement from the *subject* (human consciousness) to the *object*, social reality, is the starting point of authors like Theodor Adorno and Fredric Jameson.

I) Adorno’s position may be briefly summarized in his definition: in capitalist society, merchandise is its own ideology, or else: ideology is society itself.

To arrive at this definition, Adorno starts from Lukács’ (1974) reading of the chapter on fetishism in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács’ aim was “discover in the structure of the mercantile relation the prototype of all forms of objectivity and all corresponding forms of subjectivity in the bourgeois society” (p. 97). Going beyond Marx, who was restricted to the economic sphere, Lukács expanded the discussion to account for the subjective sphere. This universalization of the commodity-form to the subjective sphere was done by bringing together Marx’s theory of fetishism with the rationalization process present in Max Weber’s work. Lukács, thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, would have invented the “Weberian Marxism” (Frederico, 2010).

And speaking of merchandise in this context is speaking of the law of value. Marx, studying the capitalist economy, took up again the law of value previously formulated by Smith and Ricardo to refer not only to the *measure* that makes

possible the exchange of different commodities (the duration of the indifferent *abstract work*) but also to characterize the *sociability* present in a society in which the social labor of men adopts the commodity-form.

The law of value allows us to foresee the themes that Adorno will take from Marx – the *abstract* character of capitalist production (which extends to the whole of social life), and the existence of a *measure* ruling the exchange between men and subjecting the qualities, differences, to the quantitative, mercantile criterion. Here, too, the *hateful* identity, so execrated by *negative dialectics*, is present.

The bourgeois society, according to Adorno and Horkheimer (1985), is “dominated by the equivalent” (p. 23), it “makes the heterogeneous comparable, reducing it to abstract magnitudes” (p. 23). According to Adorno, the leveling domain of abstract, by making all things reproducible, is responsible for the agonizing crisis of culture.

As one can see, the law of value leaves the exclusive plane of political economy, where it was originally discovered, to explain the functioning of mercantile exchange in the society of free competition, to account for the crisis of culture in the *State capitalism* in which monopoly exists.

Instead of the democratization that some assign to the cultural industry, Adorno claims that we are facing the standardization, massification, trivialization of articles conceived as objects of commerce. The argument is focused on the changed function of culture. Before, it had an existence apparently disconnected from material production; later, it became part of the productive process and played a strategic role in the system of domination.

But what is culture, the true culture? According to Adorno’s (1962) well-known definition, it is the “perennial claim of the particular in the face of generality”<sup>6</sup> (p. 72) – a negative, utopian sphere capable of opposing resistance to the world administered.

Culture and administration are opposing terms. The former is the claim of the particular against the general, of the qualitative against the quantitative, of spontaneity against planning. Administration, on the contrary, “represents the general before the particular”<sup>7</sup> (Adorno, 1962, p. 72): it is extrinsic, external to the administered. It submits things, ranks them, orders them, puts them in separate compartments, but does not understand them. In an ever more unified world, administration encounters culture and tries to frame it. But its criteria, its norms, have nothing to do with culture, with the *quality of the object*, with its value of use.

Resistance to commodification and the triumph of reification subsists only in critical theory and *avant-garde* art – that which refuses the “*lie of representation*,” which is pure negativity and which adopts a “*second language*” in order, through it, to oppose the prevailing ideology.

<sup>6</sup>In the original: “la reclamación perenne de lo peculiar frente a la generalidad”.

<sup>7</sup>In the original: “lo general frente a lo peculiar”.

Ideology, therefore, is a *thought of identity*. All theories of ideology, says Adorno, “belong to a world in which a developed industrial society did not yet exist” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973, p. 190). Today, what prevails is “an intrinsically uniform ideology” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973, p. 200). Therefore, false consciousness “is something scientifically adapted to society,” it is “a duplication and over-rectification of the existing situation” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973, pp. 201-202), thanks to the presence of the cultural industry.

What would oppose this *false whole* is the irreducible difference, the incomparable quality, the heterogeneity. But here a controversial issue arises: wouldn't the defense of difference have prepared the cult of differences that would later become the banner of postmodernism? Adorno's interpreters are not in agreement on this point.

Divergences are lessened when it comes to one of Adorno's disciples: Fredric Jameson, an author who became famous for critiquing postmodernism without, however, ceasing to be fascinated by the object being critiqued.

II) More than once Adorno observed that the old culture, in its apparent autonomy from capital, offered a point from which it was possible to criticize the harm brought by capital to human life. Jameson (2000), writing several decades after Adorno, noted the vanishing of that supposed autonomy. In today's world, he says, there has been a fusion between economy and culture and, with it, the possibility for culture to criticize the existing order:

With regard to cultural criticism, there is not a single leftist theory today able to rule out the idea . . . of a minimal aesthetic distance, that is, of the possibility of placing the cultural action outside the compact being of capital, and using it as an Archimedean point of support from which to launch an attack on capitalism itself. (p. 74)

The left had become accustomed to granting some autonomy to the sphere of culture, seen since always as a territory of resistance to the logic of capital. More than that: as an “Archimedean point” of privileged support for critique. The expression refers to Archimedes and the use of levers. He said: “give me a point of support, and I will move the world”. Jameson's immediate reference, however, seems to be Lukács. In *Aesthetics*, Lukács advocated for the thesis that art, and literature in particular, was an Archimedean point from which it would be possible to criticize the alienated reality. This is because literature works with human destinies and, in so doing, shows how bourgeois society impedes the fulfillment of individuals. The realist writer, in his craft, spontaneously enters into contradiction with the bourgeois world.

This belief, says Jameson (2000), is no longer well-founded, for art and capital now form one single block. Art is now stuck to merchandise: it is the design, image, packaging that is definitively stuck to the mercantile artifact, building up one single thing.

Such a merge is the result of a long historical process in which culture and capital have related in different ways. Jameson (2000) then tries to periodize these moments and their artistic expressions, initially taking Ernest Mandel's book *Late Capitalism* (1982) as a reference. Thus, we would have market capitalism (realism), monopoly capitalism (modernism), and multinational capitalism (postmodernism).

In more recent works, such as *The Culture of Money* (2001), Jameson has moved away from Mandel's periodization towards the economic analyses of Giovanni Arrighi. To characterize the new moment – that of postmodernism – Jameson resorts to the concept of globalization, as defined by Arrighi. It is no longer a matter, now, of Mandel's three phases, but of the three progressive moments of *abstraction* posed by money.

Money has always been abstract, but it used to have a content: it was the money of cotton, wheat etc. In this first moment, an interest in the physical properties of objects arises and

a more realistic interest in the physical aspects of the world and in the new, more intense human relations of trade. Marketers and their consumers need to take a greater interest in the sensory nature of their products, and also in the psychological and character characteristics of their interlocutors. (Jameson, 2001, p. 155)

This is the moment of realism in literature.

Next, the intensification of reification, and the visible presence of exchange value and monetary equivalence between different objects put an end to the “old notions of stable substances and their unitary identifications” (Jameson, 2001, p. 161). The general equivalence established by money made it possible to

now buy, so to speak, its various perceptual qualities or characteristics, henceforth semi-autonomous, and both color and form are freed from their former means, and come to enjoy an independent existence as fields of perception, and as raw materials of art. (Jameson, 2001, p. 161)

This is the moment of abstraction of aesthetic modernism.

Finally, the third moment, that of postmodernism, was created by globalization, when money-capital reached its *ultimate dematerialization*: it no longer dwells in

the factory or in the old places of production and extraction, *but on the floor of the stock exchange*. Floating money now waives its referent, any material content, and values itself. Jameson (2001) speaks of deterritorialization (an expression taken from Deleuze and Guattari) to classify this moment when content has been suppressed by form and

the inherent nature of the product becomes insignificant, a mere marketing pretext, insofar as the goal of production is no longer aimed at any specific market, at any specific set of consumers or individual or social needs, but rather at its transformation into that element which, by definition, has no content or territory and, indeed, no value of use. (p. 161)

The brutal dematerialization of the world produced by the hegemony of finance capital, has as its artistic reflection the celebration of pastiche and mass culture, just as postmodernism wants.

Jameson seems to accept without criticism the thesis of dematerialization of the real. Whether relying on Mandel or Arrighi, the postmodernist theses have been partially accepted.

## THE POLITICAL CONCEPT

1) Unlike Althusser, Gramsci did not know *The German Ideology*, which had not been published until 1932, nor did he give centrality to the chapter on commodity fetishism, as Adorno did. Gramsci's constant reference to the subject of ideology is the preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In this text, Marx (1977) states that social revolutions arise from the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production, and also that men become aware of it in the superstructure or, in his words, in the "juridical, political, religious, artistic or philosophical forms, in short, the ideological forms through which men become aware of this conflict, carrying it to its ultimate consequences" (p. 25).

Therefore, Gramsci (2000b) says that ideology is not a mechanical reflection of the material base, as Bukhárin would have it; one should not "conceive 'ideology', doctrine, as something artificial and mechanically overlapped (like a garment on the skin, as opposed to skin, which is organically produced by the animal biological organism), but historically, as an endless struggle" (p. 199).

But neither should one conceive of ideology, in Croce's manner, as *appearance and illusion*. According to Croce (2007, p. 77), Marx's materialist inversion consisted in replacing Hegel's Absolute Spirit with matter. The latter would act

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behind the scenes as a “hidden God,” driving the historical process in which the superstructure would be a mere appearance.

Gramsci (1999), in contrast to these authors, understands ideology as “an objective . . . and operative reality” (p. 388), *an instrument of political action*. This positive concept of ideology, as can be seen, also differs from the Althusser’s interpretation of representation of the *imaginary relation* of individuals to their actual conditions of existence; and it also steps away from Adorno’s homogenizing view.

The *positive* concept of ideology led Gramsci (1999) to refer to the passages in which Marx speaks of the “solidity of popular beliefs” (p. 238) and of ideas that when incorporated by the masses become a material force. Based on these, he concludes:

The analysis of these statements, I believe, leads to the strengthening of the concept of the “historical bloc” in which, precisely, material forces are the content while ideologies are the form, a distinction between form and content that is purely didactic, since material forces would not be historically conceivable without form, and ideologies would be individual fantasies without the material forces. (p. 238)

Therefore, it has a material substrate – it is neither reflection nor appearance. Gramsci (2000a) thus turns to the study of the *ideological structure* that the many classes create to sustain and spread ideology. The press, for example,

is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one: everything that influences or can influence public opinion, directly or indirectly, is part of this structure. The libraries, schools, circles and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, layout and the name of streets, are part of it. (p. 78)

This materiality of ideology, which is present in these many spheres, is one of the sources of Althusser’s theory of the *ideological apparatuses of the State*. In Gramsci (1999), it is the way to think about the central theme of his work: hegemony. Hegemony is the “originator of ideology which lends the innermost cement to civil society” (p. 375). A factor of cohesion (cement), ideology is the source of a *collective will*, a *concept of the world*, a *cultural movement*:

But at this point arises the fundamental problem of every concept of the world, of every philosophy that has become a cultural movement, a “religion,” a “faith,” that is, that has produced a practical activity and a will in which it is contained as an implicit theoretical “premise” (an “ideology,” one might say, provided we

give the term “ideology” the highest meaning of a concept of the world, which is implicitly manifested in art, law, economic activity, in all manifestations of individual and collective life). In other words, the problem of preserving ideological unity throughout the social bloc that is cemented and unified precisely by that particular ideology. (Gramsci, 1999, pp. 98-99)

But this is not the only meaning of ideology that appears in the *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci (1999) also speaks of the existence, alongside a *necessary* and *organic ideology*, of an ideology that is “pure arbitrary elucubration of certain individuals” (p. 237), and also of a *diffuse ideology*. With this new concept, the author refers to the residual or not yet self-conscious classes, certain forms of philosophical thought, arts, literary production, literary criticism, questions of linguistics, Americanism and Fordism etc. In this regard, Guido Liguori (2010) noted that “Gramsci’s concept of ideology, in fact, may only be reconstructed if one also takes into consideration other words, such as worldview, philosophy, conformism, religion, faith, common sense, folklore etc.” (p. 140).

The polysemic character of Gramsci’s conception of ideology will also follow his conception of culture. Both concepts should be managed within the larger problematic of hegemony and the struggle for the *moral reform of society* – a divided society that expresses its division also in the superstructure.

Every cultural manifestation contains ideological elements, but this does not lead Gramsci (2002) to dilute culture in ideology. The reference to Shakespeare, criticized by several authors (Tolstoy, Shaw, Ernest Crosby) because of his aristocratic positions, is significant:

in all of Shakespeare’s work there is hardly a word of sympathy for the people and the working masses . . . his drama is essentially aristocratic. Almost every time he introduces into the scene bourgeois or common people, he presents them in a derogatory or disgusting way, making them the object or subject of laughter. (p. 121)

These comments, says Gramsci (2002), are directed “against Shakespeare the ‘thinker’, and not Shakespeare the ‘artist’” (p. 121). Gramsci criticizes the “moralistic bias” (p. 121) of these interpreters and thus does not reduce art to mere ideological expression.

The inclusion of culture in the discussion of hegemony, in turn, refers to Gramsci’s efforts to develop a *cultural politics*. Therefore, when analyzing a work, he seeks to separate *artistic value* from *cultural value*. A literary work may have little artistic value, but an important cultural value (it can express, for example, the way of life of the subaltern classes). Gramsci thus shifts the

focus of literary criticism from aesthetic theories to the study of culture. In this register, he suggests that literature is not a branch of linguistics, as structuralism would later affirm. Art is not only language: language is the *material*, the vehicle of literature. Therefore, Gramsci does not propose a new language, a new art, as the various *avant-garde* currents claim, but a *new culture*. This project of *culture renewal*, of the struggle for a new hegemony, nods to the defense of a *national-popular* art.

It is important to point out that the national-popular is primarily a claim, not an existing reality in Italy. The late unification of the country, and the cosmopolitanism of the church created a divorce between artists and the people – a divorce that did not exist in France and Russia. The term national-popular has unfortunately been misunderstood – it has nothing to do with *nationalism* or *populism* that would have been superseded today by globalization and by the *international-popular* culture. When Gramsci uses this expression, he models it on the Greek Tragedies, and Shakespeare (Frederico, 2016).

By opposing the image of society as a building composed of two floors – the material base and the superstructure – putting in its place the monist concept of historical block, Gramsci stayed away from theories that saw the superstructure as *reflection* or *appearance* and, by making the distinction between aesthetic value and cultural value, paved the way for cultural studies aimed at the popular classes.

The main critic to appropriate the innovations launched by Gramsci is Raymond Williams.

II) The division between infra and superstructure is emphatically rejected by Williams. Although Marx crystallized this separation, Williams reminds us that he was the great scholar of *material processes*. Against the idealist historiography that read history as the progressive victory of reason over superstition, Marx studied the material production of men, labor, industry. In Marx's view, man is a being who made himself through work. The building metaphor, however, reproduces the separation between material and spiritual spheres. To integrate both, Williams proposes a new concept which he calls *cultural materialism*.

In this new conception, culture is not superstructure doomed to passively reflect and mirror what goes on in the engine room. Art is *material*, not only because its products are material (books, records, paintings etc.), but also because the means with which it works are material (paper, oil, paint etc.). Extending this view to social life, Williams (1979) observes:

the social and political order that maintains the capitalist market, like the social and political struggles that created it, is necessarily a material production. From castles, palaces and churches to prisons, workshops and schools; from weapons of war to

a controlled press: any ruling class produces a social and political order in many ways, but always materially. These activities are never superstructural. They are the necessary material production within which only an apparently self-sufficient mode of production may be fulfilled. (p. 96)

Because it is material, *culture is a productive force*. In Marx, this expression was aimed exclusively at the material base, at commodity production. Williams says, however, that capitalism not only produces commodities, it also produces “prisons, workshops and schools” etc., without which commodity production is not accomplished, and the capitalist mode of production would not be reproduced. Moreover, in contemporary capitalism there has been an intermingling of the economy with other spheres – not only the political, but also the cultural (as can be seen from the strategic importance of the modern media). Williams does not intend to *correct* Marx, but to *update* his thinking to understand the new facts. That is why he *brought culture into the interior of material production*. Culture is productive force; it is social practice. He thus resumes the original sense of the word: cultivation, gathering, that is, practical activity.

In addition to unifying infra and superstructure, Williams advances a distinction. Culture should not be restricted to the *noble* products of human spirit, for it implies a whole *way of life*. Society is structured on the basis of certain ideas, practices, institutions common to the individuals who inhabit it. This is a clearly anthropological concept of culture, a direct inheritor of Gramsci.

One of Williams’ (2014) essays has the suggestive title “Culture Is Ordinary” (1958), culture is an ordinary thing, it is a present way of living that guides men’s relationship with the world. So culture is everywhere, and not in a noble sphere (the great art) separate from the lives of ordinary men. But culture also includes the more sophisticated artistic cultural products. Great art, however, is born within *ordinary* culture, shared by ordinary mortals, and returns to them. The material and the meaning of art come from collective social life. Studying art is to retrace the links that connect its products to social life. Hence the shift that brings our author closer to Gramsci: art should be studied as a moment in the cultural life of a people.

What should be retained here is that culture is a process that develops within a given way of life. The study of culture turns to institutions and social processes.

The same procedure will accompany Williams’ (1979) reflections on ideology. This should not be understood as an *abstraction* or *illusion*, but as a system of ideas, meanings and values, connected with “the production of material life”. And, when they are realized in products

which we call “art” and “literature,” and which are normal elements of the very general processes we call “culture” and “language,” they may be approached in ways other than reduction, abstraction, or assimilation. This is the argument that should now be brought to cultural and literary studies. (p. 75)

### OUTCOMES

As we have seen, there are diverse and conflicting interpretations of the relationship between culture and ideology among the authors studied. The ongoing research has sought to clarify the theoretical contours surrounding divergences. The partial results of the research have been published in several articles on the website *A Terra É Redonda* between 2020 and 2022. These are: “Althusser – A Crítica da Identidade” (Frederico, 2022b); “Althusser e a Ideologia” (Frederico, 2022c); “Theodor Adorno: A Crítica da Totalidade” (Frederico, 2021e); “Adorno, Ideologia, Sociologia” (Frederico, 2021f); “Theodor Adorno e o Jazz” (Frederico, 2022a); “Gramsci e a Cultura” (Frederico, 2021a); “Gramsci e a Ideologia” (Frederico, 2021d); “O Anti-Croce de Gramsci” (Frederico, 2021c); “Marxismo e Sociologia: Gramsci Crítico de Bukhárin” (Frederico, 2020d); “Dialética e Revolução em Gramsci” (Frederico, 2021b); “O Multiculturalismo em Quarentena” (Frederico, 2020a); “Gramsci, a Cultura e as Políticas Identitárias” (Frederico, 2020c); “Estudos Culturais e Crítica Literária” (Frederico, 2020b). I have submitted the essay “Arte, Ideologia: de Althusser a Macherey” (in press) to the journal *Novos Rumos*. ■

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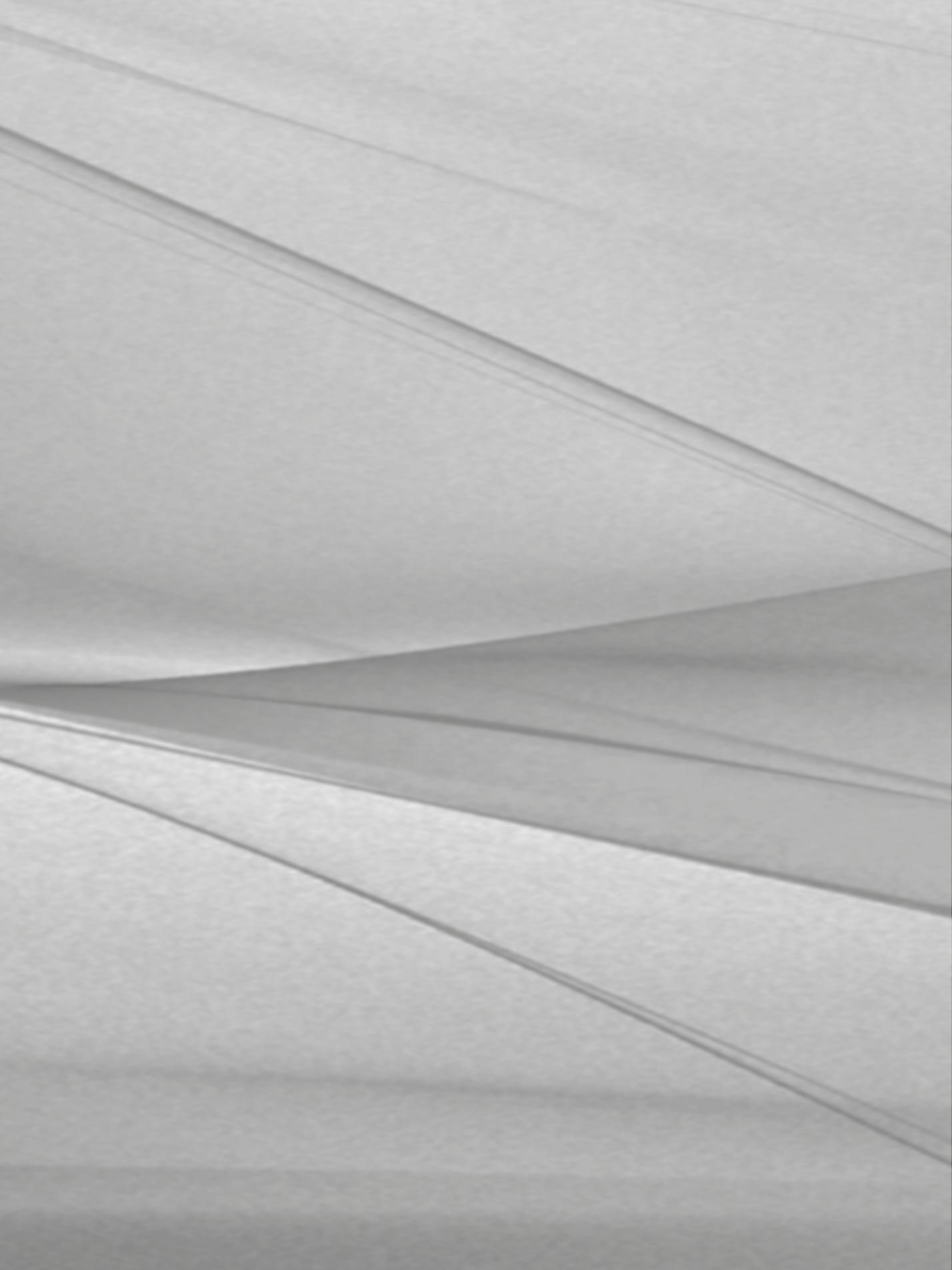
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**ENTREVISTA**

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# Néstor García Canclini: Reordering and Dissent of Culture in Digital Institutionalities in Latin American

## *Néstor García Canclini: Reordenações e Dissidências da Cultura nas Institucionalidades Digitais na América Latina*

Interview with

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A CONSOLIDATED NAME IN the Brazilian academic field for over 30 years, especially in cultural studies, Argentine anthropologist Néstor García Canclini renewed his proximity to Brazil in 2020 and 2021. Despite staying in Mexico City, where he has lived since 1976, Canclini took over the Cátedra Olavo Setubal de Arte, Cultura e Ciência (Olavo Setubal Chair in Art, Culture, and Science) at Universidade de São Paulo (USP). During the COVID-19 pandemic, he remotely developed research on “The Institutionality of Culture in the Current Context of Sociocultural Changes”. A conference scheduled for 2022 will disclose the results of this research.

In this interview, conducted by video, Néstor García Canclini spoke with us while sitting in front of his library, in the same position in which he has been conducting his field research during the pandemic. With his team, formed by postdoctoral students Sharine Machado Cabral Melo and Juan Ignacio Brizuela, he interviewed notable figures in the cultural sector of Brazil and Mexico. The anthropologist first reveals that he and his team focused on community productions and on the Aldir Blanc Law<sup>1</sup>, an emergency support law for the Brazilian cultural sector during the pandemic. Canclini considers one of their findings unparalleled in all of Latin America: the enormous participation – which began in social media – to write and pass the law in Congress and then receive funding.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal law no. 14.017, published on June 29, 2020, by the President of the Republic, provides for emergency actions aimed at the cultural sector in Brazil to be adopted during the state of public calamity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Most municipalities didn’t have local cultural councils, they had to create them to receive the fund, and this generated mobilization processes in the middle of the pandemic, which was exceptional, all digital and very little face-to-face”, he observes. Canclini concludes that Mexico’s situation is very different from Brazil’s. “It is curious that, from international information about the two countries, one can get the feeling that Brazil is Bolsonaro’s Brazil, where the Ministry of Culture has been degraded. And the international version of some sectors in Mexico is that we are experiencing a government with a greater interest in supporting the popular sectors and doing more social work, [a government] which proclaims itself as anti-neoliberal”, he compares. According to Canclini, however, the federal budget for Culture in Mexico has been declining for a decade, since before the current government; this created a complex situation that has worsened with all the paralysis from the pandemic.

The anthropologist thus believes that rethinking the classical institutions, museums, cinemas, theaters, and their contemporary forms of institutionality – digital forms – is essential to digitally provide cultural content that cannot be offered physically. He states that “there is a reaccommodation of everything we understand by institutions” and asks, “to what extent are digital platforms institutions or forms of institutionalizing, to what extent can social movements institutionalize or compete, or debate with institutions?”

The script of this interview naturally considered the pandemic context, its technological aspects, and subsequent recent Latin American political-cultural insurgencies. We also included questions regarding cultural studies which relate to the interviewers’ own research interests. Whereas an area of culture studies in Latin America is constituted as a theoretical-methodological paradigm, hybridisms are an analytical key to “slow and divergent” (García Canclini, 2003, p. 188) arts and music.

Canclini, who is 82 years old, commented on his main works, considering the latest technological-cultural transformations. He remembered his colleague Jesús Martín-Barbero, who his peers consider as another pillar of Latin American cultural studies even if Martín-Barbero does not identify himself within this line of research.

Consumption and citizenship are important bases of his intellectual production and were synthesized in the book *Consumidores e Cidadãos* (Consumers and Citizens), published in Brazil in 1995. In his most recent publication, *Cidadãos Substituídos por Algoritmos* (Citizens Replaced by Algorithms) (2021), Caclini resumes this reflection. He first emphasizes how the increased television distribution in open and paid channels gives receivers more powers whereas the “small interactive screens” expand, opposing ideas. However, he warns that being

active spectators or prosumers is different than being citizens. In the interview, the author applies this thesis to the North American theories produced since the 2000s on the convergence culture/connectivity/participation/propagation of digital content, emphasizing local differences.

Latin America as an object of critical and programmatic essay inspired another important book in the author's trajectory: *Latinoamericanos Buscando Lugar en este Siglo* (Latin Americans Looking for a Place in this Century) (2002). In this book, Canclini sought to understand the complexification caused by the globalization process in Latin America, considering the continent's cultural heterogeneity. "How to delimit what we understand as 'our culture' if much of the Argentine, Brazilian, Colombian, Cuban and Mexican music is edited in Los Angeles, Miami, Madrid and is danced in these countries almost as much as in the countries where it originated?" (García Canclini, 2014, p. 94). The author thus proposed several tasks to contribute to Latin America's reconstitution as a region, participating more creatively and competitively in global exchanges. Today, after observing demonstrations and emerging social movements, especially in Chile in 2019, Canclini reassesses the difficulties and possibilities of this continental project.

*Culturas Híbridas* (Hybrid Cultures) (1990/2000) was first published in Brazil in 1997, becoming one of Canclini's most cited and referenced books in the country. The book proposes a theoretical key and analyzes deep transformations from the late 1980s, before the internet boom, and the current use of the word 'hybrid' to refer to working and teaching practices conducted both in person and remotely with digital technologies and web connection. We thus sought the author's response to critiques and assessment of the relevance of hybridity for culture in Latin America today.

Interviews occupy a peculiar place in the field of intellectual and scientific production. They can present syntheses, operate in leaps, cross different temporalities, and risk simplification and loss of complexity. Considering that interviewees often talk about themselves – our interviewee did so after a little over an hour of conversation –, interviews, even non-biographical ones, create a character, bringing them closer to the reader.

We crossed several themes covering more than three decades, from his current research to books produced in different moments, including those aforementioned and classics such as *Las Culturas Populares en el Capitalismo* (The Popular Cultures in Capitalism) (1981) and *Culturas Híbridas* (Hybrid Cultures) (1990/2000). Very calmly and frankly, Canclini told us that some of the reflections in these books have lost potential, as if he were saying "well, I said that, it was 1990, today we are in 2020, thirty years later, I can't say the



same thing”. His retrospective thinking, greatness, honesty, and responsibility of speaking as one of the most important Latin American intellectuals in culture shows what an exemplar of an intellectual Canclini is.

This is how, that afternoon, we concluded the interview, thanking him for his availability and reverencing his words. Our interviewee, very nice, thanked us in Portuguese with “muito obrigado” (thank you very much), adding that what had moved his trajectory up to this point were curiosity, fun, and pleasure.

**MATRIZes:** For the USP Chair project, the pandemic placed your research team in front of a new situation. If, at first, you continued to think about institutionality, let’s say, in the more traditional ways, mapping institutions, observing legislation, did the context we are living through change this situation?

**Néstor García Canclini:** Yes, now we have to say that one piece of the evidence has become international: the pandemic has changed a lot, but in part it has accelerated and radicalized pre-existing contradictions. Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>2</sup> (2020) said that the pandemic is like a magnifying mirror, it shows us what we already were, in an aggrandized way.

<sup>2</sup> French philosopher who died on August 23, 2021.

**MATRIZes:** For example, the Aldir Blanc Law is an emergency project, whose future we cannot know. How can we think of institutionalizing public policies for culture in Brazil with an ephemeral law?

**NGC:** Yes, that’s right, you’re absolutely right. We don’t know, we would have to do another investigation in two years.

**MATRIZes:** How do you see yourself today in relation to your nomination as one of the great mentors of Latin American cultural studies? We know that you have spoken a lot about this in other interviews, but still we would like to strengthen [this subject] and continue talking about it, especially now, with the recent loss of Jesús Martín-Barbero, another of the great creators of Latin American cultural studies.

**NGC:** It’s a bit strange this situation because I think it’s a scenario that is more than thirty years old if we think that the great diffusion of Jesús Martín-Barbero’s work began with the book *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (From Media to Mediation), published in 1987. From the sales and citations, my 1990 book, *Culturas Híbridadas* (Hybrid Cultures), seems to have played a relatively equivalent role [with my work]. In fact, when I was writing the book – and it took me about four years to write it – I modified some aspects of my project work because when I saw Jesús’ book I said: “There are issues there that have already been studied... I will quote them, but it is not the content that I should

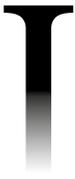
follow”. So since then and since before, even, there was a friendship and a very vivid exchange of materials between us.

But, in fact, what we have experienced since then is the effervescence of studies about culture – I don’t know if I would call them cultural studies – and they have expanded enormously in all or almost all the countries of Latin America. And, well, those two books, Jesús’ and mine, may have a sort of foundational character, but both Jesús and I have changed the axis. For me hybridity would no longer be the central issue today; it would be better to call the same processes “mixing interculturality”. And, among other reasons, because I made interpretations about the notion of hybridization that implied reconciliations between cultures, and this is not what I think or what I thought when I wrote the book. Also the book by Homi K. Bhabha (1998)<sup>3</sup>, which was more polar, since it distinguished between hegemonic and subaltern hybridizations, and others that appeared in the 1990s, paved the way for me to write a rather long introduction, published by Edusp, in Portuguese, in 1997. All this intervened in this debate, clarifying some of the ideas that had been attributed to me and, in some aspects, I recognized that perhaps my first approach was insufficient to identify some of the contradictions of contemporary capitalist societies. But what I wanted to emphasize is that we have seen, in these last three decades, an explosion of studies on culture, on communication, in all Latin American countries, and the production is enormous. However, the landscape has changed, that is, digital networks have been incorporated, [but they] did not exist when we wrote these books, and there has been a decomposition of Latin American societies, a disgovernance that, for me, is central at this moment and that will occupy part of what we will analyze in the book that will be published with the results of the Chair at USP. In other words, there is evidence of failed states, of party systems without credibility – not one or two parties, but the whole party system –, of international organizations incapable of articulating the global complexity of the relations of economic and cultural interdependence. So it is research on culture and communication, it seems to me, that needs to take charge of the general decomposition of Latin America.

**MATRIZes:** So, today, is it better to articulate and speak of interculturality rather than of hybrid cultures or hybridization processes?

**NGC:** The process of hybridization has intensified enormously since that time, and the use of the word has spread. When I wrote *Culturas Híbridas* (1990/2000) there were no hybrid cars and many other things that today are called hybrid. This relationship between the in-person and the virtual is also called hybridization, and the use of the word has expanded. In other words,

<sup>3</sup>In this book, the Indian English critic Homi K. Bhabha analyzes themes such as hybridity, post-colonialism, identity, and difference. For the author, hybrid processes do not occur in the binarism that separates two cultures in a border, but in the space of passage, where translation occurs and where the novelty enters the world, in the “in-between place”. For Bhabha (1998), “the space of intervention that emerges in the cultural interstices is what introduces creative invention into existence” (p. 29).



hybridity is still a characteristic of contemporary societies and an irreversible process, despite all the fundamentalisms. At the same time, there are terms that have a cycle of fertility in theoretical discussion and empirical research. Today, the notion of interculturality seems richer to me, more open, more neutral, and allows us to talk about intercultural conflicts or intercultural policies, intercultural universities. The term is used in many territories, many zones, for example, the real and the virtual and the combinations between them. There is no opposition between interculturality and hybridity, but I see an opposition between the notion of interculturality and that of culture, and I have said several times that the object of study of anthropology, for me, is not culture, but interculturality.

**MATRIZES:** The notion of hybridization has been widely used and problematized in studies related to processes of intersection between the modern, the traditional, the popular, and the massive. On the other hand, the current criticism, or possibly the almost abandonment of this analytical key, would be related to the emergence of theories considered postmodern that do not assume states, nations, or global arrangements as their horizon, but products of circulation, tribal behaviors, fluid identities. Do you see any relevance in this assessment that relates to postmodern theories?

**NGC:** My impression is that postmodern thinking has emerged simultaneously in many disciplines: architecture, contemporary art, social sciences. There are postmodern anthropologies, there are postmodern philosophies. [Postmodernity] had momentum in the 1990s and somewhat in the first decade of the 21st century. Its value was in critiquing the totalizing accounts of modernity or with pretensions to totalize very heterogeneous processes, and it also had the audacity to move us from the theories of the social sciences to the narratives or the accounts of what we tell ourselves about how society and culture work. My impression, again, is that the cycle of these interpretive rather than explanatory keys is exhausted. Looking at the international bibliography, it has been at least a decade, or perhaps more, since the notion of postmodernity was replaced by the notion of globalization. And what is problematic today is how we globalize and, more recently, how we de-globalize. And that's partly to do with hybridization because, as you remember, hybridization was thought of more as something that happened within a national society and partly with immigrants coming in or going out, a blending between literate or high culture and popular culture, and also between ethnicities. The notion of hybridization moved in many directions. It would be necessary to include the question of gender, which has changed. It would be necessary to think about

hybridization in relation to gender, to free ourselves from binarisms and think about the many variants of gender, since there are not only two.

Another major change I would like to refer to is that which has to do with the increase in migration, the transnationalization of capital, and the transnational corporate reorganization of production, circulation, and consumption. The highly conflictive and destructuring effects on the international, economic, social, and symbolic orders. It is impressive how many processes of deglobalization we have experienced in this last decade: the Brexit, Trump and his entrenchment in the white American society, the separatism in Europe, the loss of importance of regional bodies such as the European Union and Mercosur, which were factors of integration, of finding joint positions among several countries. And the last [process] I would mention in this list that could be much longer is the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, which seems to me one of the endings of globalization, understood as the imperial expansion of the West, of Euro-America, as David Morley called it<sup>4</sup>. We cannot idealize these defeats of the United States or Euro-America in colonized or imperialized countries, because those who come to replace them are the Taliban, the Arab Emirates – which are not precisely democratic models –, or others that are not [models] either, such as the authoritarian governments of China and Russia. There is an extraordinary complexity that does not allow one to choose, but I simply observe, from the field of social sciences, very important phenomena of globalization that are also de-westernization of the world – a de-westernization of the African, Asian, and Arab countries, and this means a loss of confidence in the project of modern Western enlightenment governance.

So, to close the answer a little bit, in this whole picture, I see that the role of postmodernity is very small. Modernity has [suffered] a very long crisis – the two World Wars are examples of this inability to build governability, governance, and this crisis became worse. All this cannot be understood with the partial and localized accounts in the postmodern way. I don't see in it powerful keys to understanding this new situation. We have to think again in open, incomplete, contradictory totalizations.

**MATRIZES:** Maria Elisa Cevasco, a researcher at USP, in a text published in 2006, says that the transit between cultures is an almost inescapable aspect of cultural production. She complements her reasoning by saying that contemporary notions such as hybridism would be conceptual elaborations that would formulate what everyone wants to hear and would allow the co-optation of those who exercise cultural hegemony. Moreover, from the side of those who assume themselves as peripheral, “thinking of themselves as hybrid opens

<sup>4</sup> David Morley has dealt with this issue in, for example, “EurAm, Modernity, Reason and Alterity: After the West?” (Morley, 2006).

the way for a re-enactment of the old aspiration of integration into a norm that was made to exclude us” (Cevasco, 2006, p. 135). Could you comment on this interpretation?

**NGC:** A key question is to ask ourselves in the face of each hybridization process who the actors are and what their projects are. No doubt there are, as Homi Bhabha had already seen 25 years ago in his book *The Location of Culture* (1998), dominant or hegemonic hybridizations that want to integrate, that want to submit to a norm, such as English Imperialism in India, etc. The examples Homi Bhabha was thinking of could be seen analogously, not equally, in Latin America, with Spanish and Portuguese colonization. But there are also other hybridizations [which] Homi Bhabha would say [are] made from below, [but that] I would say, better yet, [are] made by the interaction between the many from above and the many from below.

In my own field research in Mexico, when the notion of hybridization first came to mind, I was working with the indigenous people of Michoacán, the Purépechas, and their traditional crafts that they still make. Even back then, in the early 1980s, they were trying to relate their crafts to the culture they wanted to sell them to: tourists and urban markets. They even traveled to the United States and had somehow internalized aesthetic patterns and iconographies that they tried to include, sometimes ironically, in the Ocumicho Devils, in fabric and masks, the handcrafted goods they produced. Already there we could see an interaction and hybridization as something that transcended the position between hegemonic and subaltern.

I don't want to go back to this discussion, which seems to me to have had its time of debate when Gramsci's great influence in Latin America occurred. I remember reading many theses that lined up on one side the hegemonic actors and, on the other, the subaltern actors, as if these differentiations were so clear. My job was often to say, for example, that we had to think about how they relate to each other, to think about the confusions, not just the distinctions. And that had – and has – important political effects. For a long time and even now we still think that we have to take up the cause of the subalterns and all their confrontation and struggle. In reality, in the daily life of the subaltern sectors there is negotiation, there are pacts, sometimes with the mass media, sometimes with the corporations – of electronics and others – where one can do less because they are more authoritarian. Then I think of hundreds of aesthetic mixtures, graffiti and rock music, salsa, hip hop, bossa nova, or country melodies that enjoy taking over the repertoire of images and compositional resources of cultured or popular music from other nations and combining them, reworking them. It seems more attractive to

me to study this complexity of interactions, of playful, practical, commercial games, this line seems more productive and more complex.

**MATRIZES:** Can you call them slow and divergent artistic creations as you wrote in the book *A Globalização Imaginada* (Imagined Globalization) (2003), pointing out tangential globalizations occurring simultaneously, mainly through art? The “slow and divergent” artistic creations would represent the unresolved contradictions of global politics, such as inequality and the need of the marginalized to assert themselves despite totalizing tendencies. So, what “slow and divergent” creations could be cited today?

**NGC:** In fact, I am very interested in this topic. I don't know if I would present it that way today. That is, what entwines the slow with the divergent, sometimes, yes. But everything has accelerated so much, communication, cultural consumptions, uses of cultures, that I don't know if only “slow” and “divergent” go together. I appreciate both words very much, but perhaps it would be the case to think, in relation to “divergent”, of dissenters and discrepant. Sometimes they are simply divergent, they go in one direction and don't care at all about those who want to propose a standardization of society. Sometimes these forms are discrepant, dissident because they fight, they confront [each other].

In a way, to be slow today is to be divergent, to oppose the excessive acceleration, the agitation that sometimes you don't know why [it's happening]. I can think of several examples. There is an Argentine writer, I think one of the best there is in Latin America, Alan Pauls, a novelist and essayist, and the main collection of essays he did, published by a Chilean publisher, is called *Temas Lentos* (Slow Themes) (2012). I would say that these essays are very reflective, they give a very elaborate opinion. We need that slowness. There are many examples in Brazilian culture. In music, one of the songs that attracts me most from Lenine is *Paciência*, and so we could add others.

And, on the other hand, I am thinking of Geert Lovink, theorist and critic of communications and networks, especially networks. He talks about dissident knowledge in so-called “simulated communities” in digital networks. One of his phrases is “the idea of Facebook as a community is a joke” (Lovink, 2019), and that strikes me as a big question right now. Why are we on Facebook? Why do we want to be on the networks? On WhatsApp, on Instagram, especially on Instagram. There is definitely a desire to be seen, but in being seen, we accept being watched. And how do we work with this option? It seems that this is one of the disjunctive aspects of today's dissidence, and perhaps of the way of being slow, of leaving the daily schedules, sometimes for a few hours of tweets, Facebook, Instagram, to then move on to something else, something else, something else...



Let's stop to think what are the agendas that matter today. Jumping to a quick generalization, I see in the international press, not only in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, that every day the anecdotes change, or last one week at most. And by anecdote I mean the report of what happened: a scandalous dialogue that created many conflicts, polemics in the networks. None of these themes is related to the central dramas of society, and rarely do I find in these discussions anything about what the actors that intervene in these networks think. For example, about what could be done about femicides and all the other forms of violence that also happen to men [and] also in other types of relationships with the advance of the cartels that make it impossible to visit a large part of the Latin American territories, neither as a tourist, nor to do field work, nor to live there. And displacement is an increasingly important part of migration, displacement as an escape from a place where one can no longer live. These issues, or the economic precariousness of young people, or the difficulty of subsistence, I see very rarely in the fiery polemics of the media and networks.

**MATRIZes:** Beyond the critique of the networks, how do you evaluate the social mobilizations in Chile and Colombia? Do you consider them as political insurgencies that rely on digital technologies to mobilize?

**NGC:** I also add Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico to the list. Well, these are reasons for hope, explanatory and interpretative keys that need to take center stage in our investigation and in our social conversation. Of all these countries, the one that gave me the most expectations in the last two years was Chile – that rapid fall of the heirs of Pinochetism and the conciliators of the agreement (the classical parties). It seems to me very good news that they have not even reached the percentage of one-third of the vote to appoint those who will write the new Constitution and who will have the ability to veto. Not even that was achieved. This is some of the best news I have had from Latin America. And in turn, 78% of the Chilean population said, “we want a new constitution, we want it to be egalitarian, to have indigenous people writing it”, [meaning] egalitarian in terms of gender, regions as well, and all of that sounds like great news to me. Now there is an overlapping debate that a new president should be elected at the same time that the new constitution is being written, it's a very difficult situation to predict because of its complexity, it's very encouraging. This is the result of the violent emergence of unbearable social malaise, the malaise of gender, of the youth, and of many others, the indigenous [malaise] as well. Therefore, the main demonstrations that have managed to change the country's agenda are the Mapuche and other indigenous groups; the women's struggle or the gender struggle and the struggle of young high school students

who, since 2011, have been demanding free education and have continued to fight and have joined, in many cases, other causes, such as the indigenous struggle and the gender struggle. So, this is not clear, with that energy, that strength, with the capacity to change the institutions, that is, most of the struggles that are occurring also in other Latin American countries that have an analogy with Chile and are struggles against the institutions, with very little possibility of change. Perhaps the Aldir Blanc Law has been an interruption in these institutional operations that weaken cultural life. But we don't know what continuity this interruption will have. It seems that in the Chilean case we are in a transformation of the institutions, a new Constitution is going to be written, I don't see this gesture of re-founding as visible in other Latin American countries. There are some who, yes, try to do this, but there are, for example, countless feminists who don't want to talk to the State, and maybe they are right or partly right. There are countless precarious young people who don't expect anything from political parties. Ten years ago, when we studied the so-called creative and entrepreneurial youth in Mexico, several of them told us "politics is no longer about the parties".

**MATRIZes:** While listening to you we realized, on the one hand, how difficult it is to be a scholar of culture today, with so many changes, with this acceleration that you mentioned, with horizons that are not very clear. There are so many changes, and many are extremely fast. On the other hand, we heard you emphasize the interpretative key and not so much the explanatory key. How could Néstor García Canclini be defined in epistemological terms?

**NGC:** I have tried in many research papers to produce explanations and interpretations together with teams, most of the times I have done this with teams – research as I am doing now, with two post-doctoral students from USP and also with an assistant who is an anthropologist and works with me in Mexico.

What is the difference I see between interpretations and explanations? For those with a background in social sciences who read this interview, I think it is well known that the explanatory line is the one that seeks, at one time, causal relations, and later, more complex, multidirectional, multifactorial structural relations between phenomena, but that reach a certain degree of objectivity, that have a scientific character in the classical sense of science. And the interpretative line is that of hermeneutics, that of Paul Ricoeur, who directed my doctoral thesis in France, and many others who came to work [in the field] later, who have been producing important knowledge in the last decades, for example, in the Social History of Art, but social history not only with hard data, but with discourse, symbolic structures, understanding, or rather, trying to understand

this ambivalent, ambiguous complexity of symbolic meaning that has an effect on social life, has efficacy. It also seems to me that we have to follow both lines: one of the learnings of knowledge development in the West and also in China, India, Japan, in which the interpretative [line], the work with signs, is something inevitable. But it seems to me that working only with the symbolic, without dealing with explanations aspiring to objectivity, can be delusional; there are many examples in contemporary philosophy of conceptual delirium for working only with occurrences that rely on one aspect of the symbolic.

**MATRIZES:** On the institutional issue, situated in the political axis, in your most recent publication, *Cidadãos Substituídos por Algoritmos* (2021), you highlight the amplified powers of receptors in front of screens, with the growth of television supply and its distribution in open and paid channels at the same time as the “small interactive screens” are amplified, enabling the confrontation of ideas. However, you warn that the activity of “active spectator” or “prosumer” is not synonymous with that of citizen. The question, then, is: beyond technological empowerment, does citizenship depend on an institutional configuration that makes room for it?

**NGC:** Yes, but for all the things we are saying, we need to redefine the notion of institution. I like turning it into a verb: institutionalize, that is, actions, movements that seek to institutionalize the social, to organize it, to give it meaning, structure, if possible, but, as a dynamic act, as performative institutions. There is a very fertile line in contemporary thought, for example, that speaks of performative museums, which are those that do not exist only as an institution structured with a building, they may not have a building, and they perform, they configure themselves as Austin’s performative acts of language in the process of social interaction.

There is a magnificent book by Chilean author Carla Pinochet Cobos, an anthropologist who worked with me at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (Mexico), called *Derivas Críticas de los Museos en América Latina* (Critical Drifts of Museums in Latin America) (2016). She has worked with two museums that are examples of performing institutions, one is the Museo de Barro de Asunción, Paraguay, and the other is the Micromuseo Peruano, and [she] makes this distinction between performing institutions and more traditional, classical ones.

Returning to the core of the question, effectively, social networking sites, the technological devices, invite us to performativity. We can act, we can write messages, reply, others can comment, from likes to elaborations a little more complex, but we do not modify what is on Instagram and we have very little

capacity to intervene and reject what electronic corporations do with our data. In this sense, we can be users, we can even be *producers*, produce within the uses; however, this does not mean that we can be, in a precise sense, citizens, because being a citizen implies changing institutions, changing the ways of institutionalizing to more agile, less configured, what we can call institutions without buildings or whose buildings do not matter; it does not matter much where the central building of Facebook or Instagram is, its institutionalization operates in a transnational, opaque, and virtual way.

**MATRIZes:** Néstor, [we are] going back in time to comment on the axis of citizenship today. In the book *Consumidores e Cidadãos* (1995), you argue that citizenship was built in the context of consumption and these displaced markers that were once central, such as social class. Is this an idea that will be the same today with the transformations, with new technologies and social media?

**NGC:** With changes, I keep thinking that citizenship is also, though not only, constituted in consumption. Some communication researchers have been differentiating consumption and access. Consumption is more applied to the use of goods that are located in places in a city: I go to the cinema, I go to the theater, I go to a music festival that takes place in such a park, in such a place, in such a stadium. And I am a user of delocalized networks, other localized ones, so these networks did not exist at the time I wrote *Consumidores e Cidadãos* (1995), so it seems to me that the notion of consumption and that of access have to be expanded, we have to think as consumers and users, and as producers, too. This expands the horizon of investigation and of social practices. It also expands the horizon of possible action and unresolved questions about how to be citizens in these new virtual scenarios. However, we cannot do without [the virtual] either, because we know that there, too, citizenship is constituted by very different forces that can be mobilized [to] find alternatives to failed states, failed parties, and sometimes dispute with them.

It is not easy at all. There is one word that hasn't come up in the conversation yet, and I want to put it in: bots. Because we don't fight only against corporations. I see in many countries, including Mexico, that all the political parties, in the last elections, used bots, [including] the party that is in government, which by the way is a conglomeration of forces from several parties, and the opposition parties. I recently read a very angry article by a very young Mexican novelist named Antonio Ortuño (2021), a current affairs analyst and columnist for the daily *El País*, who spoke, for example, of "digital sicários", those who attack those who oppose the opponent, be it the government or the opposition. This neutralizes the space for reflective debate, for the confrontation of

arguments. It is a rather desperate situation, we have to take on this responsibility to think about it, and that is why I bring it up, although I am not going to develop this idea now. ■

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# EM PAUTA

NAS PESQUISAS DE COMUNICAÇÃO





# Reality and Limits of Empirical Research on Public Communication

## *Realidade e Limites da Pesquisa Empírica em Comunicação Pública*

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the concept of public communication associated with the public sphere highlighting the importance of empirical research for this field as well as its methodological limits. Due to its normative nature, the concept of public communication allows us to assess the quality of democracy. But in seeking to respond to the factual dimension of communication, empirical research can create cognitive traps, triggering the dialectic between facticity and normativity, and between being and becoming. This thought highlights the need to recognize the complexity unleashed by objects involving communication conflicts in democracy. It also indicates methodological aspects that may be privileged when contrasting social, political, and communicative facts.

**Keywords:** Public communication, empirical research, methodology, facticity and normativity, democracy

### RESUMO

Este artigo aborda o conceito de comunicação pública associado ao de esfera pública, ressaltando a importância da pesquisa empírica para o campo, bem como seus limites metodológicos. Por sua natureza normativa, o conceito de comunicação pública permite aferir a qualidade da democracia. Mas, ao procurar responder à dimensão fática da comunicação, a pesquisa empírica pode criar armadilhas cognitivas, acionando a dialética entre facticidade e normatividade, entre ser e dever ser. A reflexão ressalta a necessidade de se reconhecer a complexidade desencadeada por objetos que envolvem conflitos comunicacionais na democracia e indica aspectos metodológicos que podem ser privilegiados ao se contrastar fatos sociais, políticos e comunicativos.

**Palavras-chave:** Comunicação pública, pesquisa empírica, metodologia, facticidade e normatividade, democracia

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identify actors, relationships, discourses, media, and communication products regarding their responsibility, based on legal and constitutional provisions and especially guided by the ethical-moral posture beyond their eminently factual and immediate function.

This article discusses theoretical and methodological procedures resulting from reflections and from several studies, theses, and dissertations within the research group Center for Public and Political Communication (NUCOP)<sup>1</sup>. The problematization and considerations hereby presented are intended to add to new research approaches in the field of communication and to make its findings more robust. Thus, we approach the concept of public communication in aspects related to the communication dynamics, the factual-normative dialectics, and the theory of the public sphere so as to identify its potential and the critique on the methodology applied to the empirical analysis which is related to the public communication dynamics. Finally, the paper emphasizes the necessary complexity of methodology in research that studies communication conflicts in democratic scenarios. To this end, it points out the aspects that can be specifically privileged in studies about social, political, and communicative facts that define public communication.

<sup>1</sup> NUCOP is part of the CNPq directory of research groups and of the National Institute of Science and Technology in Digital Democracy (INCT-DD) and is linked to the Graduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. It has, under its supervision, the Public Communication Observatory, since 2008 (<http://www.ufrgs.br/obcomp/>).

## **PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

The normative concept 'public communication is constitutive of the communication and politics field as it is formed by different levels of communication from State, society, market, press, and digital media. Based on the public sphere paradigm, public communication refers to the processes that shape the public debate itself, according to Habermas (1997), and it is a necessary concept for the analysis of communication undertaken in democratic regimes linked to public interest (Arendt, 1999; Bobbio, 1986).

The conceptual interconnection between public and political communication attains relevance in democracies due to the normative character that must favor the public interest as the objective of the State's communication practices beyond political communication. For instance, the political-electoral speeches which will elect governors and political representatives also use the term public interest as a persuasive rhetoric or fallacious promises. Once elected, however, the candidates will have their speech and practices submitted to the public interest as a supporting concept for their practices and public policies addressed to social emancipation from the normative, as well as from the ethical and the constitutional points of view.



Nevertheless, to fulfill this article objective, we return to public communication as a guiding concept, identifying its normativity in different social systems that produce communication under the scope of public interest, specifically communication from the democratic state, the civil society, the market, the media, the press, and digital media. These systems trigger public debate by responding to the collective interest agenda, such as education, health, employment, violence, and corruption, among others. These are mobilizing issues for the powers of the republic, the civil society, the market, the press, and digital media, which, according to their own interests, participate and respond to the public debate, inhibiting or strengthening it with their symbolic productions.

Public events (França & Oliveira, 2012; Quéré, 2011) also raise and maintain the public debate, such as the environmental tragedies of Mariana (2015) and Brumadinho (2019) both in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil; terrorist acts that have ravaged the world; racial killings; health tragedies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic; the Kiss nightclub fire (in 2013 in Santa Maria-RS, Brazil); presidential elections, and impeachment; and wars and other events that erupt and unbalance political, social, and media routines. Participation in the public debate occurs discursively and symbolically with the use of strategies seeking to demonstrate the power of interlocution or as a way to assume responsibilities or evade them. This is the case of corporations harmful to the environment (a public interest issue), but which, at the same time, promote self-defense advertising campaigns with institutional and marketing objectives trying to spuriously qualify their public image.

Following this approach, it is possible to identify in market communication investments on issues of public interest that will simultaneously benefit the interests of society and specific audiences, but will mainly benefit their public image then associated with solidarity (vaccination campaigns) and preservation of life (campaigns against drugs or against cancer), for example.

On the other hand, democracies require governments and official institutions to publicize their actions and establish relationships through powerful systems of technology and professionals as required by the constitution and by public communication normativity. It means that all conveyed information, propaganda, political speeches, and communication products must comply with public interest. However, evidently, the State falls into symbolic and political disputes around its projects and reveals private interests due to the urgency of power, political projects, and the desire to conquer positive opinions and public image. Theoretical and legal principles (either from the 1988 Federal Constitution or ordinary legislation such as the Transparency and Access to Information Laws)

are not always respected by democratic governments and can be spotted in products and speeches disqualifying democracy. Studies on digital democracy, the reference to “hatred of democracy” (Ranciére, 2014) or the script of “how democracies die” (Levitsky & Ziblat, 2018) show the erratic path of contemporary democratic governments that do not follow the ethical-constitutional logic.

The use of processes and of public communication media by the state intends to expand the republican pact of social representation. Accomplishing this objective is related to public policies that foresee the valorization and participation of society. This welcome participation is proportional to the possibility of persuading for political projects not necessarily aligned with the public interest. Digital networks and platforms allow setting up stable relationships and continuous communication between state institutions and society. Democratic transparency and easy access to information and governance maps expand the public sphere and characterize it as digital. These changes have enabled the creation of a *digital democracy* concept which has been guiding research in the field of communication and politics (Gomes, 2018).

Civil society communication is obviously within the scope of public communication. Its organization around groups, associations, unions, identities, and networks seeks dialogue and to pressure the established powers for the recognition and enforcement of their rights in the pursuit of a better life. This process takes place within the public sphere and comprises it through a wide repertoire of direct actions such as street demonstrations, which are fundamentally grounded in communication seeking visibility and debate, and information production in digital networks or radical media (Parker, 2018). Another communication characteristic of civil society is *public communication networks* made up of groups based on common interest issues. The Kiss nightclub tragedy enabled the creation of a network of family and friends in search of justice for the 242 fatal victims and more than 600 injured, most of them young university students from the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) (Kegler, 2016). This network has created strategies to avoid the tragedy being forgotten and developed demonstration practices aiming to draw the attention of justice and public authorities. As of 2021, they still had no answers, for the state can be impermeable to society.

Finally, mediatized communication encompasses a differentiated scope in technology and objectives. If the public interest is the ethos of the press and the journalism in which public communication is practiced, this interest has another configuration for the fascinating and contradictory world of the digital media, platforms, and corporate media conglomerates. The attractor



axis is the diversity and the combination of uninterrupted entertainment and information accessible by easily operated digital devices. Digital networks have created another kind of protocol between reality, information, traditional media, society, and individuals held together by the empowerment of being able to speak out (without ethical discretion or accountability) for the purpose of fostering a persona, a political idea or prejudice. These digital networks have altered the patterns of sociability and public communication, intensifying the democratic potential of the public sphere. However, they also host their reverse: the proliferation of misinformation and fake news has become a new virus; the enclosure of audiences in identity bubbles is a new form of apartheid.

At the epicenter of all these dynamics is the public interest, a core concept to human rights and democracies which justifies the modern option for democratic regimes. Yet, it also functions as a rhetorical weapon for the disputing groups, sometimes with diametrically opposed meanings. In politics, it tends to be used for electoral purposes and to legitimize government practices and their elected representatives. The press also uses the same concept to self-reference its practices, claiming for itself the speech of the presumed public opinion. Therefore, the simplistic association of the concept of public interest undermines the democratic state institutions and allows private, individual, family, and religious interests to override the public interest. Even authoritarian regimes may seek to justify censorship and restriction of freedom in the name of *public interest*. It is worth pointing out that totalitarian states do not practice public communication even when the term is used by them. The persuasive propaganda takes the place of information directed in favor of a political project, all participation will be controlled, and censorship will be imposed which prevents public debate from taking place.

Public communication is an achievement of democracies and their societies and currently, digital devices expand the communication possibilities for civil society, market organizations, state institutions, and the press. Visibility, participation, and public debate are increasingly viable, but they may also not happen or happen in a systematically distorted way.

Therefore, research around these issues need to stress the relations between democracy and public communication. The availability of new technical devices and the understanding about new communication practices allow interdisciplinary approaches and it is important to mention some of the authors that have outlined the field of studies in Brazil, such as Brandão et al. (2003), Duarte (2009), Matos (2016), and Zémor (2009). In their studies, they value

the idea of public communication carried out by the state and its responsibility, as well as its importance to qualify communication of other social actors.

## RESEARCH, COMMUNICATION, AND LIFE IN MOTION

Our theoretical-methodological premise in this paper is to approach public communication as a social, dynamic, and essentially political phenomenon linked to the definition, construction, and defense of the public interest (Weber et al., 2017). Thus, studying issues that trigger this concept requires approaches combined with theoretical-methodological perspectives related to normative principles able to identify and analyze the scheme between public and private interests delimited by events, debates, relationships, speeches, and communicative products impacting controversial issues.

Currently, research subjects can be analyzed from the concept of public sphere active within the complexity of relationships, practices, and debates outlined by digital methodological engineering. Research in general gratefully submits itself to the facilitation of digital technologies that allows it to identify, measure, and link actors, relationships, information, and issues of public interest under debate. Theoretically, however, the public debate opened to high visibility participation, enabled by digital democracy, does not prevent the lack of communication. A paradox is imposed insofar as the public sphere facilitated by digital communication devices may not respond to communication and republican principles. For instance, the absolute freedom of speech and the occupation of digital spaces are not necessarily related to the responsibility and civility inherent to democracies, as stated by Maia et al. (2018) in the presentation of the book *Democracia em Ambientes Digitais: Eleições, Esfera pública e Ativismo* [Democracy in Digital Environments: Elections, Public Sphere, and Activism]:

One of the contemporary democracy dilemmas concerns the coexistence between the growing capacity of digital environments to promote political participation and at the same time the uncertainty about the purposes of such participation. Contemporary democracies have been confronted with several non-democratic attacks both in terms of practices and ideas. (p. 7)

In the recent Brazilian (2018) and US (2020) presidential elections, it was possible to identify the power of digital devices in which the voters were actively engaged: truth was downplayed (fake news) and human rights offenses and prejudices were authorized and used even by the candidates. The inevitable



polarization intensified the dispute, excluded or turned debates into simulacra, and marked a historic clash between political forces using democracy itself to weaken or strengthen it. These elections revealed that whoever masters the digital machines may win the ballot.

The delimitation of a research subject related to public communication will initially depend on its recognition in a specific historical context. Thereafter, a process of identifying the involved actors and institutions, as well as their respective interests, must take place. The identification of private/public contradictions is essential to the analysis of public communication undertaken by institutions in democratic regimes. Likewise, this opposition is important when analyzing existing debates on public interest issues with a potentiality to engage public institutions, private organizations, and civil society to pursue their respective interests and powers.

A relevant aspect is to understand if there is political contention (and its magnitude) around the subject, who are the social actors involved, and the triggered repertoires which may or may not be exclusively those in the communication sphere (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). It is important to identify whether the object is immersed in disputes of meaning or social conflicts – and it usually is. Therefore, it is important to perceive that, over the time a controversy lasts, the results of research on communication may be different if the time interval occurs in periods of *social normality* or *social conflict*. It is undeniable that issues and periods during the so-called *normality of life* can reveal a lot about the communication of individuals and organizations. However, experience shows us that, in periods of heated dispute, the peaks of controversy are theoretically and empirically more promising for unveiling the nature of each actor's communication (Locatelli, 2014, 2015). Open disputes around the appropriation of the *res-publica*, especially when time is finite and when there is a deadline for almost irreversible political decisions (such as constitutional changes, elections, or impeachment), make individuals, private organizations, and public institutions less covert. In these moments, their nature, strategies, and procedures to achieve goals are more perceptible and the links between their discourses and actions to achieve results are more evident. All actors' repertoires of political action and communication are triggered in these moments and, for the researcher, there is more room to perceive the limits on the purpose and responsiveness of each actor, the meaning of their speeches, the quality of their arguments, and their convictions and militancy.

Operationally, this non-static perspective of research in public communication requires objectivity when identifying and understanding public institutions

and political and social actors as well as their objectives, procedures, devices, and justifications for being involved in any dispute in relation to the object of research and in every moment of the dispute itself. The starting point for this power cartography mediated by communication may seem typical of the classical administration and of the organizational communication with a functionalist approach: in principle, all communication from a social actor – an organization or individual, whether from the market, the state or the civil society – is naturally strategic (in the sense of being consistent with the objective and the very existence of the actor). And, simultaneously, it contains some level of public interest since they are also a citizen, part of *civitas* as long as its demands minimally fit the principles and requirements of a liberal democracy (Locatelli & Weber, 2011).

In a normative context, the perspective of public communication supported here is clearly inserted in a strong register of democracy, specifically the participative-deliberative democracy, as communication is carried out with the strategic objective of disputing in the public sphere the meaning of problems that individuals and organizations believe to be legitimate, but, due to their own nature, they affect citizens in need for solutions beyond their reach. Therefore, they are problems that try to submit their supposed fairness and legitimacy to public scrutiny through different ways (more or less legitimate), and if they overcome other interests and arguments they may ascend to the longed-for condition of public problem in a specific moment in time; they may be welcomed by governmental decision as a public problem, typified as public interest, institutionalized and systematically contemplated by public policies until they stabilize as data within the scope of culture (Gomes & Maia, 2008; Habermas, 1997; Mansbridge et al., 2010).

In this approach, it becomes less relevant to label as a research objective whether or not the communication of each actor is public by comparing it with a predetermined concept in the literature, or to infer to what degree it would be by comparing it with other practices. What really matters is whether the communication becomes more or less public over the course of the dispute; how it behaves in the political game when faced with social facts and the arguments of other actors, media events, and the state. Ultimately, it means to identify whether the successive communication produced by the actors and released into the public space contributes to increase or limit transparency, accountability, participation, and the debate and deliberation themselves. The path of this contentious trajectory in the debate is what defines the intensity of the adjective 'public' that the word 'communication' deserves in such situations, so together they constitute a new substantive concept with two words and a single meaning: public communication.



### THE FACTUAL-NORMATIVE DIALECTIC: TRAPS OF BEING AND BECOMING

As already mentioned initially, several factors have the potential to affect and disrupt the processes and the results of empirical research they certainly must be considered in rigorous modeling. We draw attention to one in particular: the permanent tension on the boundaries between the factual and the normative levels either in the actors' daily lives or in the production of communication about their lives, and in

their interpretation through research. If not placed under intense surveillance, especially in the absence of data and gaps in one or the other, being and becoming may be treated as if they were equivalent in order to fulfill the requirements of scientific narratives, weakening the research results.

In a simple way, being is understood here as something perceptible to the senses, the observable, the phenomenological to the being that manifests itself in a visible form of being in the present, as in Heidegger's terminology (2015). The normative is understood as the expression of the becoming, of the desirable; a possibility, a claim or imposition formalized by some previous collective consensus of how the being or beings should present themselves to the world. One cannot forget that the norm is the subject of permanent dispute by different groups and its strength varies according to the institutionality itself either in the field of culture or law, for instance. From this perspective, the normative and the factual are in permanent tension and feedback by groups in society disputing the gap between the permanence of *things as they are* until the radical change pointed out by the norm itself. Therefore, time plays a decisive role in this process. The present, the observable manifestation of the entity, carries within itself its historical, factual, and normative experiences, but, to some extent, anticipates the expectation of the future. It seems rational that the entity in a situation of hegemony clings to the present, to the being accepting some becoming as long as it occurs in a sense and at a speed that allows it to transmute itself into the new world without losing the status quo. On the other hand, for entities dissatisfied with the present and its continuity, change is urgent: clinging cognitively to becoming, to the norm, they seek to question the present anticipating the future at the highest possible speed. Here is the demanding political key that the normative exerts over behavior functioning as a trigger for conflicts.

For Esteves (2011), public communication encompasses normative and factual dimensions that affect the forms of sociability and the public debate. The author understands that the factual or empirical expression "of the ethical-moral dimension is very uncertain and sporadic," subject to questioning, and "reveals another form of affirmation of what is denied by empirical reality:

the critical exercise of public space and public opinion” (p. 185). To study public communication is to mobilize the analysis principles of the “public sphere” paradigm (Habermas, 1997) to analyze the functioning of this public sphere from the publicity criteria, critique and debate that are strengthened by the principles offered by Esteves (2011, p. 211): publicity, accessibility, ability to discuss, and rationality. So, there seems to be no point in talking about public communication (even in its most liberal sense) when it involves anti-democratic actors or those who put democracy at risk, even if they occur in environments qualified as democratic.

The factual-normative tension potentially affects research in three moments: during the conception, structuring, and operationalization of a project, understood not as sequential, but simultaneous moments, although clearly one of them stands out in each moment. Its conception does not strictly refer to ideas and insights leading to a project, but rather to the permanent process of creation and re-creation that refers to how researchers structures their way of perceiving, thinking, and understanding life as well as perceiving, thinking, and understanding what emerges from it and affects the studied subject. The research structuring dimension is similar to that of its conception as it frames the researcher’s understanding and knowledge. The difference is that in this phase questions are already formulated in the form of concepts and the challenge lies in the choice of the theoretical principles recognizing that they lead and induce the work and affect the research results. In the case of research on public communication in situations of social or political conflict, the theoretical choices that most affect and direct the work are those that define the concepts of democracy, public interest, and public communication. The operationalization stage is about how to approach life in motion in the safest and most coherent way considering its complexity, dynamics, and erratic character. The difficulty is to perceive what is generally called reality (with the complications the term entails), understood here as the relation of infinite beings manifesting themselves phenomenologically as entities subjected to the factual and normative tradeoffs of other entities performed in the field of cultures. Furthermore, reality is there despite researchers and sophisticated digital devices for its measurement: observing, narrating, and interpreting are in themselves constitutive of a new reality.

In summary, when empirically researching public communication, it is crucial to perceive its own conclusions of the desirable normative, the perceived factual, and to understand that the factual-normative stages are also triggered by the actors involved in the processes and reveal their strategies in the political game.



Perhaps, one of the researchers' greatest risks – that may lead to error on how they look at and perceive their research subject – is the seduction by naturalization or idealization of life, naivety, and militant engagement which may induce, anticipate or pursue outcomes with the consequent prior arbitrary acquittal or condemnation of the other's behavior in relation to specific normative choices. Another important risk lies in the impossibility of obtaining data and the extent to which it distorts or prevents the understanding of the factual. The offer of mechanisms for capturing, storing, and classifying data no longer justifies the partial and minimal use of information. It is also worth mentioning the analytical problems caused by narratives in which the gaps of being are covered by the becoming available in the literature, databases, repositories, and in scientific production access, generating evidently fragile and preconceived results. If not perceived and adequately addressed, these aspects tend to result into fragmented works and ultimately unnecessary for knowledge accumulation as they reflect more the researcher's aspirations than its scientific view on the studied subject dynamics.

### **PUBLIC SPHERE, THE ANALYTICAL BASIS**

Esteves (2011) proposes that the understanding of contemporary public space requires special attention to its two complex structures: the factual and the normative dimensions of communication. The first, with objective structures (especially the media and its contents) and the second in its ethical-moral sense. He states:

These are complementary dimensions, but tensionally linked to each other in the sense that none of them entirely covers the current reality of public space and at the same time there is a sort of competition for supremacy between them (p. 294)

This finding, associated with previous assumptions involving the socio-historical scenario in which public communication actually takes place leads to a decisive question to be answered by the researcher: which theoretical-methodological model would be able to support so many variables without major contradictions? In our view, a choice of great potential is research on the public sphere theories of a recent Habermasian tradition, such as those of Habermas (1997), Esteves (2003, 2005, 2011), Gomes and Maia (2008), Maia (2012), and Mendonça (2016a, 2016b). In its broad sense, it is a social theory in which communication is central to the understanding and explanation of social and political lives rather than an exogenous, sporadic,

and functional phenomenon for institutions and political and social actors. It is also a theory that offers reflective paths, porosity, and safe connections for interdisciplinary exchange on issues that are generally of interest to research in public communication, such as democracy and public interest, power, citizenship, social movements and civil society, identities, representations, and struggles for recognition. This theoretical perspective also offers interesting links with issues from the journalistic field (social function, agenda, events, etc.) as well as from the field of organizational communication and advertising (audiences, public opinion, public image, etc.). In addition, theoretically it contemplates all forms of communication from interpersonal conversation to social networks, and surely the so-called traditional mass media in relation to digital media.

In practical terms, based on this social systemic reference centered on communication, in each studied situation it is necessary to assemble the socio-historical scenario, map actors and their interests, align and confront related social facts. These facts are associated with objective disputes on the political, cultural, social and institutional levels, and they contemplate communicative facts on each episode which is part of the dispute in the course of time. Therefore, it is necessary to identify how communication acts in the construction and solution – or not – of the conflict. The research complexity resides in this amplitude of relations, facts, and conflicts that mobilize publics, society, political institutions, the media, and the digital media.

Thus, in understanding the intersection of social and political facts x communicative facts we understand that some issues and variables should necessarily be identified and analyzed, at the risk of affecting the modeling and results of a research, especially the following:

- Public communication policies;
- Communication systems and structures in public institutions;
- Public communication broadcast systems;
- Digital platforms, websites, and digital media;
- State agencies communication products;
- Public interest campaigns by public and private organizations;
- Public events (political, social, environmental etc.);
- Public debates on issues that affect the whole society (health, elections, education, abortion etc.);
- Public communication networks (organization of society on vital issues);
- Public opinion and audiences' opinion;
- Reputation and public image;
- Press and public interest;



- Government advertising and propaganda;
- Public events and acts;
- Speeches of actors and political leaders,
- Communication of executive, legislative, and judiciary powers.

The choice and delimitation of these research objects depend on the problematization of the linked social and political issues and facts, and within them, the following aspects are privileged:

The conflict delimitation to be studied in terms of its scope on social, political, cultural, and communication consequences;

The identification of the actors involved directly or indirectly considering their nature, interests, and power of intervention in the political, economic, social, and communication spheres;

The period in which the conflict occurs (political regime, sociability, cultural differences etc.);

The state of mind of the public and social groups involved in (demanding, participatory, submissive, active, etc.);

The power of the issue itself in terms of its capacity to trigger sensibilities, religious practices, moral and political controversies, among others;

The potential for consensus and conflict the issue carries in the light of history, politics, and culture regarding the actors' interest in joining the public debate;

The time, the expected time length for a specific round of decision-making on a public issue (interests and actors and institutions' agendas);

The actor's actions - from lobbying to violence, the strategies of communication, and occupation of spaces of visibility;

The reconstruction of the conflict trajectory and its identification with the most relevant social facts during the analyzed period;

The actors' behavior during the conflict development and the decisions consequences and their possible reversibility.

From another perspective, the identification and problematization of social and political facts are constitutive instances of a research subject as the communicative facts delimit the working hypotheses and the methodology that lie especially in the relevance of the following aspects:

- Mapping all forms of communication related to the research subject: from graffiti to Twitter; from speeches to space occupation in the press;
- Analysis of the most used communication forms by the main actors, i.e., those with the greatest potential to affect the public sphere;
- Comparison of the communicative trajectory of each actor with the social facts in which they are involved to understand the correlation

between communication gaps, silences, systematic distortions, position changes, and their meaning;

- Identification of the actors and institutions' communication capacity to interfere in the social processes; comparison between empirical data and the chosen deliberative normative model to reveal the existence of communicative pathologies such as persuasion, systematic distortion, manipulation, and omission.

The methodological design and the instruments chosen for the selection, capture, classification, and combination of data linked to the research subject may favor the content and discourse analysis, discursive frameworks, interviews, case studies, etc. It is possible, however, to point out significant risks in three very common field procedures in research, specifically: (1) the application of content and discourse analysis methodologies when public communication is approached as an isolated fact and reduced to communication products; (2) the use of interview techniques as the single approach to understanding interests and the strategic perspective of organizations; and (3) the generalization of results obtained through case studies on the supposed communication effects, with a tendency to overestimate and distort the very concept of public communication which necessarily encompasses communication among many audiences, actors, and facts.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article addressed theoretical-methodological issues relevant to research that has in, public communication, public interest, and in democracy, its normative theoretical axis whose results seek to infer on the nature of public communication and democracy when subjected to exercises of power. The specificity attributed to public communication made it possible to highlight the complexity of the concept and its interfaces with political communication and governmental communication.

Research in this study field has been mainly empirical and responds to the factual dimension of public communication insofar as it discusses events, speeches, and communication products based on reality and life. However, it usually does so according to a normative dimension of these same phenomena. From this perspective, empirical subjects are defined by public events (political, social, environmental, electoral, governmental); public debates on issues of vital interest to social and political life; by relations between the state, the press, the media (mass and digital), and the society; by communication strategies and products developed by public and private institutions that seek to influence the definition public interest.



Accordingly, the article points out some aspects that should be taken into account when planning and developing empirical research in this domain. As an underlying issue throughout the entire process there is the fact that subjects and researcher find themselves in a dialectical process between facticity and normativity that can create traps between the perspectives of *being* and *becoming* due to the complexity raise by communicational conflicts – public and private – that happen and alter democratic environments. This tension affects all research stages – conception, structuring process, and operationalization – and requires permanent reflection by the researchers on how they think the subject and cognitively perceives life, whether they prioritize factual or normative forms, or do not even notice their differences, mixing them in the convenience of the process and academic narratives.

A second issue concerns the prior recognition that the way researchers theoretically perceive the society in which their subject is immersed

affects and even induces specific outcomes. We consider as more promising the theoretical-methodological perspectives that allow the insertion of the dynamic effects of political and communicational interactions between the different actors involved in public controversies. In other words, the choice of models that only allow static communication portraits and its effects in specific moments of disputes over time may be insufficient to understand complex social processes. Thus, we realize that theoretical-methodological models inspired by the public sphere theory of the recent Habermasian tradition have shown great promise mainly because it is a social theory that places communication as a central element, and not a stochastic phenomenon in the interrelations between institutions and political and social actors; for having a good dialogue with the politics and the ability to sustain so many variables without major contradictions.

Third, the cartography of actors disputing the public sphere around the issues under study – and their powers over society – is a necessary step to understand the nature of the communication produced by each one and their interactions in the public sphere. The identification of the social and political events that trigger, feed, and delimit disputes, especially in the intervals between times of normality and conflict, their comparison with communicative events and the chosen normative model can generate robust indicators to measure the quality of public communication and the studied democracy. In addition, they may point out pathologies such as persuasion, systematic distortions, manipulation, and omission in relation to the public interest.

In other words, the potential of this research methodology lies in its non-reductionist and dynamic character of relations and social facts by analytically considering not only isolated facts and actors, but successive interactions produced

through communication in a dispute over the public interest. Its applicability considers the context, the disputed subject, the interest and power of the social, political, and the media actors, the communication and the available time until the decision-making on issues of public interest. The analysis of the intrinsic processes of the public debate demands perception of each actor's communication and the possibilities of relating it to the expansion of transparency, accountability, participation, and public debate, identifying whether the strategy of each one of them leads to consensus solutions of any nature or, instead, closes itself off to support particular positions.

Finally, the main criticism of this kind of normative model always falls on a supposed idealization of society, especially in the altruism expected from actors in search of the common good. However, it is worth noting that every model – be it normative or not – is simultaneously a reduction and a simplification of reality. When addressing communication, research depends fundamentally on how these dimensions are activated by the researcher and by social actors during the research, observing the aspects related to public communication theory and its links with democracy. Hence, there are permanent challenges presented to the researcher during the initial perception of the problem in its conceptual definition and during the work itself. ■

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# African and Latin American Cultural Studies: Global-South Perspectives

## *Estudos Culturais Africanos e Latino-Americanos: Perspectivas do Sul-Global*

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### ABSTRACT

This text aims to discuss the so-called internationalization of cultural studies from two versions: the Latin American and the African ones. The originality of the contribution is in the presentation of the African current, little discussed in Brazilian and Latin American literature. We describe the political situation in which Latin American and African cultural studies develop, the institutional context, and present the main points that characterize these versions. We end by investing our considerations drawing approaches between them.

**Keywords:** Cultural studies, Latin America, Africa, South epistemology

### RESUMO

Este texto tem como objetivo discutir a chamada internacionalização dos estudos culturais a partir de duas versões: a latino-americana e a africana. A originalidade da contribuição está na apresentação da corrente africana, pouco abordada na literatura brasileira e da América Latina. Descrevemos a conjuntura política em que os estudos culturais latino-americanos e africanos se desenvolvem, o contexto institucional, e apresentamos os principais pontos que caracterizam estas versões. Finalizamos nossas considerações tecendo aproximações entre ambas.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos culturais, América Latina, África, Epistemologia do sul

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**T**HE OBJECTIVE OF this article is to trace an overview of cultural studies (CS) in their Latin American and African currents by a bibliographic review. From a brief recovery of the path taken by authors who tried to identify their origins, we began to observe the specificities of each tradition. To this end, we elaborated a rescue of their trajectories in each geopolitical context, describing their main themes and how they are approached theoretically and methodologically. Whereas the narrative of British and Latin American ECs has been retold in numerous publications, here and in other quarters (Escosteguy, 2001; Follari, 2002; Mattelart & Neveu, 2004; Repoll, 2010), our main contribution is presenting African CSs. We can say that this *version* is scarcely present in the genealogies published on our continent. Our intention, therefore, is above all else to observe the continuities and oppositions between Latin American and African cultural studies, with the British as a panorama.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL STUDIES: MULTITERRITORIAL EXPANSION**

Between the 1990s and the early 2000s, many cultural studies researchers began to publish articles, readers, and collections retelling the history of its consolidation – whose origin refers to England – and dedicating at least one section to the discussion of the whys and the effects of its internationalization between the 1980s and 1990s. What is agreed among them is precisely the reaffirmation of this expansion process. However, another narrative discusses the origin of CS in other territories.

In the first case, one of the first texts to critically reflect on this global shift is the work by Valda Blundell, John Shepherd, and Ian Taylor, three researchers from different educational institutions, called *Relocating Cultural Studies*, from 1993. The sentence that begins the work could not be more accurate: “This collection constitutes a salutary demonstration that Britain no longer serves as the center for cultural studies” (Blundell et al., 1993, p. i). A year later, Schwarz (1994) asks himself, in the title of his article: “Where Is Cultural Studies?”. In it, the English historian claims that this question has many answers, listing a series of geographical spaces in which the paradigm existed with vitality. He cites, for example, regions such as South Africa, countries of Oceania and Latin America, and the United States is the place where CS *success* could be best evidenced. The relevance of the U.S. as the main importer of the paradigm is also recurring when its expansion is contextualized. Mattelart and Neveu (2004) point out that in the Thatcher era (1979–1990), many older teachers

were unhappy with the precarious conditions of intellectual work, which motivated them to seek opportunities in the United States, carrying the CS in their luggage. This exchange between the two countries was also facilitated by sharing the same language.

Still in the 1990s, in the collection organized by Storey (1997), *What Is cultural Studies?*, Grossberg, one of the main actors in the perspective in the United States, participates with an article that highlights losses observed in this spread of the CS to the four corners of the globe, which would also be the subject of criticism from many other scholars in the field (Escosteguy, 2001; Giroux, 2000; Silva, 1999). For Grossberg (1997), the CSs were going through a process of *commodification* and, like every *commodity*, “it has little identity of its own and is celebrated only for its mobility and its capacity to generate further surplus capital” (p. 178). Note that, in the early days, the British CS were based on the political premises of the English *New Left* and that, therefore, their concern has always been to investigate the world of the lived and popular culture to describe the modes of operation and reproduction of power in everyday life, whether by practices or texts.

In addition to this, there is another less known perspective<sup>1</sup>, based on the conception that the CS have several origins. Maxwell (2020) identifies three simultaneous geneses<sup>2</sup>, between the 1950s and 1960s: the British, the French and Italian<sup>3</sup>, and the African. Wright (1998) emphatically attest that the latter would have been the true first version of the CS, taking place in the 1970s, more precisely in the Community of Kamiriithu (Kenya). The author bases himself on the – sometimes forgotten – presupposition that this field of study, in addition to social criticism, has as political project of progressive transformation of society. Thus, “While the Birmingham Centre represented an origin of cultural studies as a named field of academic study, Kamiriithu represented an origin of cultural studies as a community-based, production-oriented, popular education form of study” (Wright, 1998, p. 34). Wright recognizes the importance of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) for the politicization of academia and for the legitimation of CSs in the spaces of knowledge, but assesses that, in this process, the political project of intellectual enterprise is lost.

Many analysts agree with the problems related to the institutionalization of CS as responsible for a consequent depoliticization of the field of studies. Also, there is a mistrust of the immense volume of published articles that are said to be of *cultural studies*. What Schwarz (1994) observes is that they are often predictable studies that only use all the post-colonial and deconstructionist theoretical contribution, which does not necessarily make them CS. Regardless of the criticism, the “planetary expansion” (Mattelart &

<sup>1</sup> At least in Portuguese.

<sup>2</sup> See Figure with timeline in Maxwell (2020, p. 292).

<sup>3</sup> Although it is recognized as one of the origins, some authors, such as the French Maigret (2005), reiterate the difficulty of penetration of culture studies via CS given the influence of the Frankfurt School, whose conception of culture is opposed to that of the CS. So much so that the chapter dedicated to CS in his book only makes references to the British and Americans.



Neveu, 2004) is, more than a path of no return, a reality already consolidated. The authors emphasize that such success reflects how culture has gained importance for explaining social dynamics, assuming a place of relevance even in economic activities. It is worth remembering the title of the article “The Centrality of Culture” by Stuart Hall (1997). In this scenario, the CS offer almost all academic communities in the world interested in *ordinary culture* the theoretical and methodological tools to analyze it.

Just to name a few countries in which the CS penetrated, in Spain, according to Balibrea (2010), the paradigm lies in academic marginality, given the little legitimacy that popular culture has in the Spanish university environment. Also, with less expression, France, a country with a very impenetrable intellectual academic community as pointed out by Mattelart and Neveu (2004) and Maigret (2005). Despite this, some research communities recognize themselves as practicing CS. An example is the creation of the journal *French Cultural Studies*, in 1990, in whose first issue opening, editor-in-chief Michael Kelly (1990) refers to the contribution of Hoggart, Hall, and Williams and emphasizes the commitment (at the time) to raise pertinent discussions around the processes of construction of the French national identity.

According to some analysts, CS are an unexplored field of research virtually non-existent in the Eastern European region. Belarusian researcher Almira Ousmanova (2003), for example, reports that the investigation of *culture* in the region is occupied by Culturology. This, however, does not contemplate the culture of ordinary life, throwing lights exclusively to *spiritual culture*, supposedly free of structuring conditionings: “‘spirituality’ does not have gender or class, it does not depend on economic conditions, it is not bound by historical circumstances” (p. 40). Interestingly, gender studies absorbed the theoretical assumptions of the British CS: “I argue that Gender Studies promotes the methods and stakes of the Cultural Studies project in the region despite the general suspicion towards Marxism as such” (p. 40).

More successfully, as Frow and Morris (1997) indicate, in Australia, CS have greater influence on the teaching of media careers, such as journalism and advertising, helping to understand the logics of circulation of culture. At the continental level, Asia has been consolidating strongly, since the implementation of the journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* in 2000, according to Taiwanese Kuan-Hsing Chen, editor-in-chief of the journal, and Singaporean Beng Hut Chua (Chen & Chua, 2007). In North America, as stated before, CS have successfully taken root in the United States, especially due to them serving as a radical alternative to the classic functionalist model prevailing in the country’s communication research (O’Connor, 1997). The CS are also present

in Canada, where they contribute to problematize the category of nation, stressing the role of the State in the country's cultural policies, as Berland (1995) explains. In Latin America, we can cite Colombia as an example of a place where, according to Humar Forero (2008), CS articulated to mediate the political debate on the ethnic and cultural plurality of the country, that is, they had an intervening role.

This trip to some corners of the globe sought to demonstrate panoramically the different gradients of success achieved by CS over the last three decades, and some of its uses. Our text will follow, from here, entering the specificities of CS from the Latin American and African geopolitical clippings, scanning the two versions in greater detail, according to the objectives already presented.

### **AFRICAN CULTURAL STUDIES: FROM THEORETICAL DEPENDENCE TO AN AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE**

African cultural studies (ACS) are a floating signifier since their meaning can vary and is in fact being established (Wright & Xiao, 2020). Lewis (2017) gave a clear indication that the ACS are still in the forge when he stated that:

Apart from the narration of life stories of cultural studies, I don't believe there's been much attention to historicising it in relation to the politics of institutional and interdisciplinary affiliations, North-South encounters, how, why and when certain engagements with race, sexuality and gender have occurred, global cultural and economic trajectories with reference to national ones, and the ways in which canonization has functioned. (p. 2)

Exemplifying that the ACS are under construction, Wright and Xiao (2020) claim that, geographically, they can be considered as studies developed on the African continent with contributions of Africans in the diaspora. Note that this field appears in a context of the narratives of Africanization, in which intellectual reorientation and historical perspective of the CS in terms of the trajectory of the African culture is needed. This perspective begins within the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, in Kenya (East Africa), in 1970, under the guidance of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Wright, 2015). This was a community-based institution, with production oriented to popular education as a form of learning, where ACS took their first steps on the continent, until the deregistration and ban of their activities on March 11, 1982. Later, its name is changed to Kamiriithu Polytechnic and Adult Literacy Center by the Kenyan government (Mbingu, 1991), exiling its members, towards Zimbabwe (Tomaselli, 2016).



Pointing out the work developed by the connection of the University of Zimbabwe and the University of Oslo (UZ-UO) in a project called “Media and Democracy – Cultural Change in Southern Africa,” funded by the Norwegian Research Council from the State and Society, Democracy and Political Change program for developing countries, is also possible. This connection ended when Zimbabwe entered an economic crisis (Tomaselli, 2016) and some of its researchers had to look for opportunities elsewhere. According to Tomaselli (2016), funds from Norway were drained to Rhodes University and University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal. The author points out that the graduates of the UZ-UO program went to work in South Africa. Thus, this perspective, despite taking its first steps in Kenya, flourished in South Africa starting from the 1980s, which justifies our concentration in the Anglo-Saxon line of CS.

A mapping of the instruments for the dissemination of CS in Africa indicates that, in the South African context, we have at the University of Natal, Durban, the biannual journal *Critical Arts: A Journal for Cultural Studies*. It starts as an anti-apartheid publication. According to Tomaselli (1998), this journal served to problematize the studies of culture and the media, in terms of resistance. From 1994, *Critical Arts* systematically expanded its interests to include Africa in relations with the Indian ocean, south-south, and north-south border of the African continent. Thus, the editions from 1994 onwards were dedicated to cultural issues studied in Africa, whose starting points were derived from an African perspective.

Another magazine that stood out is the three-yearly *Africa Media Review*, published in Nairobi, Kenya, which, from 1992, began to deal with subjects such as the oral method and native communication, discussed under the framework of cultural Marxism, inspired by British CS, to frame them in the third world<sup>4</sup>, especially from the African perspective. In this journal, the researchers re-examined the thinking of Paulo Freire, Amílcar Cabral, and Frantz Fanon, in the context of the post-cold war and new media technologies, with the aim of improving a perspective of participatory development of communication for development.

According to Tomaselli and Wright (2011), the ACS were also spread by the *Media Development* magazine (World Association for Christian Communication, London), which provides short articles on Third World issues and space for important discussions on media and democracy in Africa. In addition, *Readings in African Popular Culture* journal provides an encyclopedic compilation of particular forms of African popular culture: from orality to television, music and singing, slogans, theater, etc. (Tomaselli & Wright, 2011). Finally, the *Journal of Cultural Studies* published by the African Cultural Institute (Nigeria) focuses on

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion on the adoption and abandonment of this nomenclature, see Prysthon (2002).

the African context and has as general concerns ethnicity, development, politics, leadership, gender, literacy, the African renaissance and its relationship with the evolution of African cultures and CS (Tomaselli & Wright, 2011). Regarding the South African context, feminists present as a dissemination instrument the journal *Agenda*, introduced in 1987 with the objective of questioning and challenging understandings and practices about gender relations, to contribute to its development and transformation.

All the thought disseminated by the magazines described above is, according to Wright and Xiao (2020), grounded in the ideological tensions between pan-Africanism and Afropolitism; Afropessimism and Afrofuturism; African feminism and African sexualities. The contradiction between pan-Africanism and Afropolitism is based on the idea that pan-Africanism fits into a movement that claims political and cultural identities unique to Black people. Kalua (2009) states that these movements call for a need to endorse and value African black individuality and personality and use race as a signifier of continental unity. From a sociolinguistic perspective of *ubuntu*<sup>5</sup>, pan-Africanism pitches a sense of connection, in which there is an “inseparable flux between continental and diasporic African-ness” (Wright & Xiao, 2020, p. 3), while Afropolitism has as its principles the reinvigoration of cosmopolitanism, African hybridism with Europeanity, Asiaticism, and other diversities in the world and a reconceptualization of universality as global openness (Eze, 2016). In short, the debate around pan-Africanism/Afropolitism can be said to consist mainly of disputes around who and what to prioritize in the new continental-diasporic flow of Africanism: pan-Africanism prioritizes the continued relevance of the anticolonial, the class struggles, and the anti-racist struggle; whereas Afropolitism has some global commercial popularity and self-definition affirmative power (Wright & Xiao, 2020).

Regarding Afropessimism and Afrofuturism, Wright and Xiao (2020) point out that the first is a classification system that functions as a developmental discourse that always operates under the naturalized guise that represents Africanity in negativity, producing the meaning that something is wrong with Africans. The authors stress that this discourse derives from the fact that Africans are not fulfilling a set of criteria generated by Westerners and that they wish to develop in Africa. That is, Europeans and Americans want Africa to function socially and economically so that the continent integrates seamlessly into the globalized economy they built over the past two centuries. This results in narratives that Africa has no hope and cannot be fixed, which point out that hope for Africa depends on the will, assistance, directions, conditions of the global powers (Wright & Xiao, 2020).

Those who advocate Afrofuturism reject the perspective of Afropessimism. Afrofuturists, according to Wright and Xiao (2020), worry about whether or not

<sup>5</sup> A central element of African philosophy, since it conceives the world as a web of relations between the divine, the community, and nature, that is, within this conception, *I am because I am with other people*, thus we live in a network of interdependence, without “being fully human alone” (Nascimento, 2014, p. 2).



there would be any future for people of color. It is within this scenario that the category “the race will continue to matter to individuals and entire civilizations” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 47), thus situating “Afrofuturism in the field of Black cultural studies, with its theories and scholarship heavily influenced with particularities in science fiction, speculative fiction, new media, digital technology, the arts, and Black aesthetics all situated and focused on the continent of Africa, the Diaspora” (Dean & Andrews, 2016, p. 2). Afrofuturism is a locus of art and political work and operates

as tool to examine the meanings of Black life as expressed in the complex intersections of religion, race, gender, and sexuality – by exploring methods and ideologies of Afrofuturism situated in mysticism, technology, new age spirituality, human and post-human identity, and the futurity of race, sexuality and gender roles in Black religion and the Black Church. (Wright & Xiao, 2020, p. 8)

Finally, the ideological tensions between African feminism and African sexuality. African feminism rejects the correlations of gender and gender roles imposed by the colonial system since it argues that, in the African context, such as pre-colonial Nigeria, this correlation was fluid and flexible, with, for example, women who were husbands, given their protagonism in commercial activities (Wright & Xiao, 2020). Also, the authors argue that African feminism arises from a political praxis that emanated from the conditions that structure the lives of African women. Taking recurrent military conflicts in Africa as an example, the authors, citing Mama and Okazawa-Rey (2012), explore how women are affected by this situation.

Speaking of African sexuality, Wright and Xiao (2020) argue it has tensions and similarities with African feminism. Regarding similarity, the global movements of queer theorization and research, for example, remain marginal and uncomfortably represented. As for sexuality policy issues, three tensions appear: homophobia, which is a political tool used by conservative politicians to promote *selfish* agendas; ahistorical representation from the Western media on African heterosexuality; and the distorted representation of African history by dictatorships on the African continent.

The ACS featured figures Handel Kashope Wright and Keyan Gray Tomaselli. Wright is a Sierra Leonean who has taught in the United States and currently teaches CS and education in Canada. In addition, Tomaselli, a South African, teaches media and CS in South Africa. The researcher is central to the development of South African media studies and studies of the cultures of African indigenous<sup>6</sup> peoples. Other voices that contribute to this field within

<sup>6</sup> Although “indigenous” in Brazil mainly alludes to the local indigenous peoples; we prefer to maintain this expression, because in South Africa the term is used to refer to the indigenous people of sub-Saharan Africa, the Khoi-Khoi and San.

the continent are: Lize van Robbroeck and Natasha Distiller (South Africa); Fibian Kavulani Lukalo (Kenya); and Sunday Enessi Ododo (Nigeria). Abroad, we have: Boulou Ebanda de B'beri (Canada); Awad Ibrahim (USA); and Ali Abdi (Canada).

In the African context, the CS developed no endogenous model to understand the relationship between the audience and the media. This perspective uses foreign models with greater emphasis on the British. In this regard, Tomaselli (2000) points out that studies developed in the apartheid period were within the contours of British CS. It points out that the British perspective, and the coding/decoding model, was very useful in the actual practice of resistance.

Tomaselli (2016) states that, whereas the use of imported theories constituted fertile ground for debate, decentralizing Birmingham, that is, africanising imported theories in terms of African philosophies and non-Cartesian forms of interpretation, was necessary. As a strategy, in the 1990s, a period in which South Africa moves towards a democratic state, the academy began to incorporate into the student body Africans from all over the continent.

Within this battle, the fighting arenas included broadcasting, media and cultural policy research, communication for development, public health in response to AIDS denial. For example, the Durban Centre, established in January 1985, includes a social justice at work approach alongside and through civil society and religious organizations (Tomaselli, 2016). In the 1990s, the Center changed and started to include communication and studies of media, politics, development, public health, and communication for development. Thus, action-research and the application of critical indigenous methodologies offered a solution-oriented praxis for a newly democratized society (Tomaselli, 2016).

## LATIN AMERICAN CULTURAL STUDIES: FROM CULTURAL MATRICES TO THEORETICAL MATRICES

In Latin America, or in some of its parts, as much as in Africa, or in some of its parts, the CS found fertile ground for political and theoretical reasons. From the political point of view, at first, according to Grimson and Varela (1999), “the field was crossed by political logics, intellectual diasporas, and exiles, which implied a weaker constitution”<sup>7</sup> (p. 15), which, on the other hand, circulated the debate and the joint work between national and exiled researchers, in a new circuit of exchanges.

Subsequently, the changes that occurred with the processes of re-democratization in most countries of the region – as a consequence of strong pressures from social and intellectual sectors (Escosteguy, 2001) during

<sup>7</sup> In the original: “el campo estuvo atravesado por lógicas políticas, diásporas intelectuales y exilios, lo cual implicó una constitución más débil”.



<sup>8</sup>In addition to the references contained in this text, Gómez Vargas (2008) lists some books published at the time: *Arte Popular y Sociedad en América Latina*, by Néstor García Canclini (Grijalbo, 1977); González, J. *Dominación Cultural: Expresión Artística, Promoción Popular*, by Jorge A. González (CEE, 1980); and *Cultura Transnacional y Culturas Populares*, edited by Néstor García Canclini and Rafael Roncagliolo, R. (IPAL, 1988).

<sup>9</sup>In the original: “a hablar de cultura porque me llegaron cosas de afuera. Fue leyendo a Martí, a Arguedas que yo la descubrí y con ella los procesos de comunicación que había que comprender... Nosotros, habíamos hecho estudios culturales mucho antes de que esa etiqueta apareciera.”

<sup>10</sup>In the original: “la idea de que hubieran sido autogenerados *in toto* desde la práctica intelectual hecha en nuestros propios países.”

<sup>11</sup>Mattelart and Neveu (2004), on the other hand, recognize specificities of Latin American CS.

<sup>12</sup>Renato Ortiz, Fernández (2011, cited in Rizo García, 2020) adds Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, among others, who do not consider themselves representatives of the CS, but of the culture studies in their various contributions.

<sup>13</sup>Escosteguy (2001) points out that, “Faced with a certain resistance to defining themselves as practitioners of cultural studies, it is only in the 1990s, and still quite timidly, that a few Latin American researchers begin to identify themselves – or be identified by foreign researchers who take Latin America as an object of study – with this perspective” (p. 40).

the years of lead of authoritarian regimes (Mattelart & Neveu, 2004) – were also factors to question the theoretical scenario of the time and open the debate to new approaches (Rizo García, 2020). Among the areas of interest at the time, result of a balance by Gómez Vargas (2008), three areas, which make room for dialogue with the CS, are identified: popular culture<sup>8</sup>, alternative communication, and new information technologies. The reframing of a deterministic Marxism to one of a Gramscian cut gave way to this scenario, which Mattelart and Neveu (2004) identify as under construction as early as the 1970s.

Regarding the theoretical scenario of cultural analysis, CS found a long tradition of studies when they arrived here. Jesús Martín-Barbero (JMB) said he did not start

talking about culture because things came from outside. It was by reading Martí, Arguedas, that I discovered it and, with it, the communication processes I had to understand... We [definitely] had done cultural studies long before this label appeared<sup>9</sup>. (Martín-Barbero, 1996, as cited in Repoll, 2010, p. 157)

This statement is disputed by Follari (2002), who wrote a harsh critique of the CS produced in Latin America, saying that supporting “the idea that they had been self-generated *in toto* from the intellectual practice made in our own countries”<sup>10</sup> (p. 52) is impossible, on the grounds that the studies on culture produced here did not escape outside influence<sup>11</sup>.

Renato Ortiz (2006), in turn, highlights a situation similar to that of JMB: “The first time I became aware that I would be a practitioner of Cultural Studies was in Berlin, at a conference organized by Hermann Herlinghaus in 1995” (p. 173), which was repeated the following year in Stirling (Scotland), in a seminar of which Stuart Hall was one of the participants: “this feeling was reinforced, since, alongside my friends Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín-Barbero, I found myself there as a representative of something that had never occurred to me”<sup>12</sup> (p. 173). He comments he was not seen this way in Brazil; he is taken simply, in his words, as an anthropologist and sociologist<sup>13</sup>. He adds that there is interest in what is produced by the British in this area, but that the terms of the discussion are different here, agreeing with several analysts on the non-universality of the CS: “they follow the pace of the changes that have occurred in North American universities, but hardly express the Brazilian, and I would add Latin American, reality” (p. 174). In Brazil and, by extension, in Latin America, according to Ortiz, “the penetration of Cultural Studies is done by the edges, that is, to use an expression of Bourdieu, on the periphery of the hierarchical field of the social sciences, particularly in communication schools” (p. 175).

In the wake of previous authors, Néstor García Canclini (NGC) (1991) calls “cultural studies” the trends in the analysis of Latin American culture in the field of anthropology and sociology and, in the text, only refers to British studies in a footnote, to mention similarities with what had been developed here between the years 1980 and 1990; still in the area of communication, as Ortiz (2006) also pointed out, despite mentioning literary studies<sup>14</sup>, to which one could add those in the area of education.

Thus, for many other authors (de la Roche, 2005; Escosteguy, 2001; Grimson & Varela, 1999; Rizo García, 2020) British contributions were not simply imported or extended, nor even strictly affiliated, but dialogued from what was already done here from the perspective of various disciplines<sup>15</sup>: anthropology, sociology, history, literature, communication, etc. In this regard, Pardo (2005) stresses that “there is no clear genealogical connection in what we can now recognize as Latin American CS and the Anglo-Saxon CS”.

In the interface between culture studies and communication studies, the issue of popular cultures was the key to open the debate with the British CS, since it started to permeate the discussions in congresses and seminars attended by researchers from all over the continent, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Seminar of the Communication Commission of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) held in Buenos Aires in 1983. The texts presented were published in the book *Comunicación y Culturas Populares en Latinoamérica* (FELAFACS/GG, 1987), which inaugurated an editorial series called *Federação Latino-Americana de Faculdades de Comunicação Social* (Latin American Federation of Faculties of Social Communication) and *Associação Latino-Americana de Investigadores da Comunicação* (Latin American Association of Communication Researchers) (FELAFACS-ALAIC).

For Grimson and Varela (1999, p. 69), this seminar condensed the debate that had been held by many researchers, and JMB and NGC were the main speakers<sup>16</sup>. The first developed the discussion under the title “Comunicação, Povo e Cultura no Tempo das Transnacionais” (Communication, People and Culture in the Time of Transnationals) and the second, “Do que Estamos Falando Quando Falamos do Popular?” (What Are We Talking About When We Speak of the Popular?) (FELAFACS/GG, 1987). Both bring unnamed reflections and authors that permeated the debate initiated by the British CS, such as Bourdieu and Gramsci, and JMB references E. P. Thompson regarding the incorporation of history in the discussion about the popular.

Field analysts (Gómez Vargas, 2008; Huergo & Morawicki, 2018; Martín-Barbero & Herlinghaus, 2000; Mattelart & Neveu, 2004; Repoll, 2010;

<sup>14</sup>Cevasco (2003) also identifies cultural studies in the Brazilian literary field prior to the arrival of the CS and presents a *birth certificate* for them: 1998, the year in which the Brazilian Association of Comparative Literature brings together researchers from the area in a congress with the theme “Literatura Comparada = Estudos Culturais?” (Comparative Literature = Cultural Studies?).

<sup>15</sup>Szurmuk and Mckee (2009, cited in Rizo García, 2020) say that the interdisciplinary enterprise of cultural studies in the Latin American region arises “from the 19th century essay, it is informed by the theoretical and methodological developments of the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies and crystallizes in the Latin American diasporas, mainly in the United States, but also in Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia during the eighties and nineties of the last century” (p. 168). [In the original: “del ensayo del siglo XIX, se informa de los desarrollos teóricos y metodológicos de la Escuela de Frankfurt y los estudios culturales británicos y se cristaliza en las diásporas latinoamericanas, principalmente en Estados Unidos, pero también en México, Venezuela y Colombia durante las décadas de los ochenta y noventa del siglo pasado.”]

<sup>16</sup>A special edition, that of n. 27, from *Revista Versión. Estudios de Comunicación y Política* (2017) was coordinated by André Dorcé and Omar Rincón to theme the contributions of JMB and NGC beyond mediations and hybridizations.



Santagada, 2000) unanimously point Interest in popular culture out as the inflection point of the Latin American CS, from which the studies of reception and cultural identity, two other important themes developed on the continent, derive directly or indirectly.

Escosteguy (2001) highlights the political dimension of his approach, pointing out three aspects that were overcome by the perspective of the CS, especially from Gramsci: association with folklore, mass culture, and populism. Addressing the issue of the popular, the Latin American CS faced a complex situation, as Herlinghaus (2000) emphasized, pointing out the role of mediation broker that it acquired, especially in the works of JMB and NGC, as a hermeneutic matrix for thinking about symbolic consumption.

In a similar and complementary direction, Santagada (2000) indicates that Latin American popular culture was taken by JMB and NGC as a key to understand identities, modernity, and globalization from the sociocultural point of view, that is, from the point of view of the subjects. At the heart of this process emerged the interest in reception studies, pointed out as a prominent contribution of the Latin American CS, which led Repoll (2010) to call them *audience cultural studies*<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>Jacks (1996) indicated other trends.

In this context, Grimson and Varela (1999) contextualize the emergence of reception studies from the moment JMB proposes several displacements ranging from popular to massive, from massive to popular, and popular uses of the massive. Similarly, they identify in NGC the impetus to think about cultural and media consumption when they consider that the appropriation and use of symbolic and material goods gain meaning when reaching consumers.

Very imbricated with the reception studies, the issue of identities was taken as a constitutive mediation of the interaction between audiences and media (Repoll, 2010), but was not restricted to them. Escosteguy (2001) places the issue in the media context, in studies to consider its role in the discussion on national identity and in the proliferation of new cultural identities. García Canclini (1994), in turn, suggests treating it as a sociocommunicational approach to identity, shaped by the notion of hybridization, also portrayed in the *Barberian* notion of miscegenation.

These discussions had as a scenario and angular factor the analysis of modernity and postmodernity established on the continent, formalized already in 1983 in JMB's lecture<sup>18</sup> commented above, which contextualized it "in the time of transnationals," and that of García Canclini, which focused on three factors for the emergence of the popular in the Latin American scenario: (1) socioeconomic, as a consequence of industrialization and urbanization expanding the consumer

<sup>18</sup>In Jacks (2020) the main authors who analyzed the work of JMB were gathered, and many highlight the discussion about the modernity of Latin America.

market; (2) political, via the State interested in knowing the emerging segments and via social movements in the face of the failure of revolutionary processes based on the proletariat idea; (3) scientific, operated by the social sciences crisis visualized by the collapse of the economic paradigm that generated an ideological-cultural change.

Analysts of the Latin American CS (Escosteguy, 2001; Mantecón, 2019; Yúdice, 2019) point this process out as one of the factors of internal changes in the field, to rethink the theory and, consequently, the methodology and themes for communication studies. JMB calls it *another modernity*, embedded in the notion of *destiempos*, and which Herlinghaus (1998) identified as having “begun to speak to us from somewhere we would never have expected”<sup>19</sup> (p. 11) to highlight the historical analysis made by him, identifying the specificities of the incomplete modernity lived here, in which the modern and the traditional, the rural and the urban, the popular and the massive, among many other contrasts coexist (Repoll, 2010). García Canclini (1990) speaks of the Latin American situation, “where traditions are not yet gone and modernity has not fully arrived”<sup>20</sup> (p. 13), which some authors identify as modernity without modernization.

<sup>19</sup>In the original: “La modernidad ha comenzado a hablarnos desde donde jamás lo esperábamos”.

<sup>20</sup>In the original: “donde las tradiciones aún no se han ido y la modernidad no acaba de llegar”.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, we look at two versions of CS that inhabit the southern hemisphere: Latin American and African. Some analysts call into check the origin of his *birth*, via two points of view. One of them concerns the anteriority of culture studies, as advocated by Martín-Barbero (1996). For him, this type of research was done in Latin American territory even before the CS were recognized as such. Another version disorganizes the canonical history of perspective, postulating that its origin was in Africa, at the Kamiriithu Center, in the 1970s (Wright, 1998). Regardless of their origin and legitimacy, the initial influence of the British CS for the institutional development of the versions dealt with here is undeniable.

We observed that both had as practice the dialogue with the British conceptual framework to legitimize themselves in the academic field of each territory. In the Latin American approach, this dialogue was established more vigorously in the late 1980s, with the publication of *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987), based on its theoretical-methodological proposal of mediations, focusing on reception practices (Jacks, 1996, 2014) and *Culturas Híbridadas* (García Canclini, 1990), focusing on cultural and media consumption.



The African version, despite its origin identified in Kenya in the late 1970s, as some authors claim (Tomaselli, 2016; Wright, 1998), emerges late in communication studies, at least in South Africa, since

a faculty-student committee realized that resistance in South Africa was falling, partly, because two crucial sites of mobilization were absent domestically: media and culture. These sites had been so effectively colonized in the service of Apartheid that even liberal anthropologist was wary of teaching cultural anthropology. (Tomaselli, 2000, p. 375)

Supposedly, this time lag generated some initial dependence on the British model of cultural analysis. However, with the subsequent development of communication studies, it calls for an important revision of the conceptual framework based on the Africanized updating of some issues, by teaching Afrofuturism, Afropolitism etc.

Trying to bring together the Latin American and African versions, we observed some specificities in terms of agenda, of political and conceptual projects. Regarding the problems addressed, Latin America addresses themes such as cultural homogenization in the face of globalization and the articulations between communication, culture, and power (Rizo García, 2020), with special attention to reception studies. Africans, on the other hand, treat communication from the perspective of development in the context of what they prioritize, that is, studies oriented towards a recovery of the recently re-democratized Africa in multiple aspects: literacy, public health, leadership formation, etc. The African agenda has a more interventionist approach as its guideline.

In all cases, the debate on the past, present, and future of the CS has clearly raised heated discussions, many questions, and different answers for at least 20 years. In the face of the inconclusive debate, in progress, we consider best to explore issues such as those proposed by the Latin American author de la Roche (2005), which are very provocative and certainly also serve to think the African CS.

1. Can we do cultural research in our countries without enrolling in the CS?
2. How can we articulate the influences of the growing interest in the CS, not only the British, but also of the subaltern and postcolonial studies developed by Asian, North American, and Latin American intellectuals working in North American universities, with the local traditions of culture studies?

3. How can we put into dialogue the national experiences in progress in different countries, that is, from the places of enunciation, from the different and specific realities where they develop?
4. How to approach the CS vocation of political and social intervention and the possibility of politicization of social and humanistic disciplines?
5. In methodological terms, how to articulate qualitative and quantitative research, define thematic limits (if any), and reflect on disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity?

On the other hand, and in the opposite direction, we could add the concern of Prysthon (2002), who, thinking about the scale of postmodernity and its relationship with cosmopolitanism and the periphery, believes that CS reveal more deeply the degree of cultural globalization and the way the penetration of peripheral cultural goods and of postcolonial theories in the metropolis evolves.

Other questions were brought by the event *Whatever Happened to Cultural Studies?*, promoted by the School of Humanities of the University of Brighton<sup>21</sup>, in April 2021. Among them, the institutional structures required to design a future for the CS, or provocatively, to promote their funeral were questioned. Jeremy Gilbert, one of the conductors of the event, pointed out that since 1960 CS had been present in universities without its practitioners having the luxury of occupying an institutionalized CS space. In the wake of this perception, Gilbert concluded that, in reality, more important than an institutionalization, is the work done in other disciplines, such as political science, literary studies, and media studies, with the CS approach, due to being the one that will allow a political confrontation of conjunctural issues such as global warming and citizenship.

The CS are certainly not dead, quite the contrary. Given their expansion on a global scale, they remain pulsing throughout the four corners of the world. In each territory, they faced different problems and theoretical traditions, which required reconfigurations, maintaining a certain dialogue with its British version to a greater or lesser degree.

In this context, David Morley points out the importance of legitimizing other CS versions beyond that conceived in the CCCS, that is, not taking the British as a form of academic imperialism (Escosteguy, 2001). Nick Couldry (as cited in Escosteguy, 2001), in turn, also points out the need to establish an identity for the CS: “if we are using the term cultural studies, if there is something in common to be treated, this must be because there is a list that can be identified as common values that animate our questions” (p. 295). The author points out that the common basis would be a materialistic understanding of the articulations between culture and power. In a more recent article,

<sup>21</sup>The workshop took place remotely, enabling an environment of multicultural debates. In it, Gilbert and students from the School of Humanities conducted the presentations and incited the debates. One of the key texts discussed was Gilbert's (2019). In it, the author presents an overview of cultural studies, focusing on Stuart Hall's contributions to understand current topics such as the problems caused by neoliberalism in the British territory.



Couldry (2020) discusses the role of CS in the face of the triple crisis that plagues contemporary society: institutional (collapse of political parties), cultural (cultural wars and disputes over representation regimes) and socio-technical (*datatification* of the social world and its long-term implications). Couldry sees, as a backdrop of these problems, a crisis in the democratic order. Therefore, the CS would work “by bringing the issue of today’s democratic deficit into the clearest possible focus, drawing on as many other disciplines and aspects of the crisis as possible, to build a larger view of trends, underlying dangers, and geographical variations” (p. 5).

The points raised by Couldry (2020) may make up the general aspects of an agenda for Latin American and African CSs, provided that the historical, political, economic, and cultural specificities that constitute each of these geopolitical spaces are considered. This would respect the CS prerogative that defends the singularity of all forms and cultural experiences as an object of study, putting into practice the premises of decolonial thought, which postulates in favor of appropriating the intellectual production of the Global South. ■

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# Melodrama, Excess, and Media Narratives: A Systematization Based on the *Intellectual Kinship* Approach

## *Melodrama, Excesso e Narrativas Midiáticas: Uma Sistematização Baseada na Abordagem de Parentesco Intelectual*

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents four possible ontologies through the nature, composition, purpose, and location of the relations between excess and melodrama in media narratives. The concept of *intellectual kinship* is methodologically used over three categories: identification of the common antagonist, evidence of similarity in intercommunication, and enhancement of dissimilarity as the maintenance of autonomy. The conclusions point to the non-consensual nature of melodrama; the binomial understanding of the relational composition between excess/melodrama; disputes concerning the purposes of the action of excess in melodrama; and the recognition that the materialities on which excess and melodrama focus are multiple.

**Keywords:** Comparative study, intellectual kinship, media, melodrama, excess

### RESUMO

O artigo apresenta quatro ontologias possíveis por meio da natureza, composição, finalidade e localização das relações entre o excesso e o melodrama nas narrativas midiáticas. A concepção de *parentesco intelectual* é metodologicamente mobilizada em três categorias: identificação do antagonismo comum, evidência da semelhança na intercomunicação e valorização da dessemelhança como manutenção da autonomia. As considerações finais destacam a não consensualidade sobre a natureza do melodrama; o entendimento binominal sobre a composição relacional excesso/melodrama; disputas de sentido sobre as finalidades de ação do excesso no melodrama; e o entendimento de que as materialidades nas quais incidem o excesso e o melodrama são múltiplas.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudo comparativo, parentesco intelectual, mídia, melodrama, excesso

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# A

<sup>1</sup>The Global North and the Global South are denominations that extend beyond the geographical separation between the southern and northern hemispheres, according to one of the possible definitions brought by Iqani and Resende (2019). For the authors, we are talking about a complex movement of links and distinctions (not necessarily stuck in a binary logic) of nations and societies that share a history of exclusion and oppression by processes of colonization and geopolitical projects that end up silencing or relegating certain societal experiences (including knowledge and understanding of the world) as inferior, illegitimate or not worthy of being taken into consideration. With equal importance, authors and communication theories coming from the Global South tend, and not rarely, to be seen as exotic or even confined to local experiences, without any epistemological validity of interest or pairing with other scientific processes coming from the Global North (Iqani & Resende, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>The term ontology is used according to its pre-established meaning within the field of communication. In this way, ontology is understood from the relational premise, that is, the relation that permeates the nature, reality, and existence of the entities (texts, authors, concepts, contexts) in communication. In this sense, as Martino (2019) recalls, the communication process viewed by the ontological reference is read according to “the elements that enter into relation.”

- Man, animal, machine.
- Between humans, with the divine, with the world, with aliens, with the dead.
- Human communication: with oneself, with others, with the world” (p. 15).

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN excess and melodrama are well-known not only in the academic world but also, in general, with the public, critics, and the content creators themselves, who understand such relations as key elements in the fruition process of a melodramatic work. On this subject, Singer (2001) reminds us that “Attempts to define melodrama can take a few tacks. . . . The essential element perhaps most often associated with melodrama is a certain ‘overwrought’ or ‘exaggerated’ quality summed up by the term *excess*” (pp. 38-39). That said, melodramatic excess tends, then, at least in a broad sense, to be seen as something that “appeals to what is most vulgar in the soul and taste of the audience” (Thomasseau, 2009, p. 15).

Accordingly, it is worth pointing out that the marginalization of melodramatic television objects (such as telenovelas and other broadcast TV shows) qualified as excessive – in a pejorative view, as Thorburn (1976) reminds us – is out of step with the present time. It is noticeable today that excess and melodrama invade any and all serial narrative spaces of television and streaming platforms; moreover being part of a series considered more sophisticated or (potentially) exempt from such excess (Smit, 2010, p. 154).

Hence, the objective of this work is to discuss the thinking of six recognized authors (Thomas Elsaesser, Peter Brooks, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Linda Williams, Mariana Baltar, and Agustín Zarzosa), from different intellectual generations, from the Global North<sup>1</sup> and the Global South, whose reflections are organized by four possible ontologies<sup>2</sup> in the relations between excess and melodrama, namely: the nature, the composition, the purpose, and the location of the relations. Therefore, the structure of the article is subdivided into eight axes: (1) presentation of Freire’s conception of *intellectual kinship* and its methodological use in the article; (2) excess and melodramatic *mise-en-scène*; (3) excess and melodramatic imagination; (4) rhetoric of excess and the mass popular; (5) excess as a potential quality in pervasive melodramatic modes; (6) excess as anticipation, exacerbated symbolization, and obviousness; (7) melodramatic mode and excess in the visibility of suffering; and (8) discussion of the four ontologies.

The criterion for choosing these six authors is based, first of all, on the pioneering nature and originality of their work on the relations between excess and melodrama in Anglo-Saxon and Latin American countries and the continued reverberation of their ideas, even today, in the academic environment. Logically, like every empirical cut-off point, such choice is also fraught with arbitrariness since relevant authors like Jean-Marie Thomasseau, Christine Gledhill, Ben Singer, Carolyn Williams, Ira Bhaskar, and David Mayer, for example, ended up being left out of the comparative analysis presented (without entirely dismissing their

reflections). Moreover, this work makes use of the theoretical-affective expression *intellectual kinship* (Freire, 1997) as a way to demonstrate the approximations between the thoughts of these authors who, despite being from different realities, have certain ontological affinities in their research.

### THE CONCEPTION OF INTELLECTUAL KINSHIP IN PAULO FREIRE

The first time the theme of intellectual kinship was made explicit by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was in the preface he wrote to Peter McLaren's *Multiculturalismo Crítico* (1997). Republished in the anthology *Pedagogia da Tolerância* (Freire, 2016) and now entitled "Parentesco Intelectual [Intellectual Kinship]", the text follows a pattern that transitions between a freer essay and, at the same time, a testimony by Freire about his experiences and affective relations in the academic world (Freire, 2017). At the beginning of his explanation, the researcher states that "Since long ago, as a result of my personal experience, I became convinced of the existence of what I usually call 'intellectual kinship' between people who are strangers to each other from the point of view of blood" (Freire, 1997, p. 9).

Thus, what Freire understands by intellectual kinship refers to the concept that it is possible to visualize encounters (also sometimes permeated by mismatches) between thinking subjects who are not necessarily from the same generation, gender, race, class, culture or sociopolitical realities (Freire, 1997, p. 10). More than an intellectual affinity demarcated only by a common epistemological path that unites these subjects, the *kinship* is also revealed by shared subjectivities, affection, respect, intercultural communication, recognition, and admiration between one thinker and another. Therefore, intellectual kinship allows:

a pleasant atmosphere in which intercommunication occurs easily, with a minimum of disturbance. In which the subjects about which one speaks are apprehended through similar experiences of epistemological approach to them. In which affectivity, by "softening" "sharp corners" in the subjects, helps them in their relationships, instead of hindering them. (Freire, 1997, pp. 9-10)

According to Freire (1997), it is also possible to see that intellectual kinship occurs in two ways, in two gradations (in different degrees of intensity and depth, but potentially sequential): (1) first of all, through what he calls a "suspicion" that sees its birthplace occurring through contact and sharing of read texts; and (2) "in the personal encounter in which the discourses go on completing themselves" (pp. 10-11) and, soon, the kinship is confirmed.



Something very important to consider in understanding Freire's concept is precisely the possibility that intellectual kinship thrives beyond the shared similarities: it is also through difference, dissent, and even the dispute of senses that the interwoven voices will build a "family tree" with asymmetric "branches" that at times point in one direction, and, at others, point to another slightly different path. It is necessary, he says, that the dissimilarities and mismatches be appreciated, understood, and valued in the analysis of the facts (Freire, 1997, p. 9). Clearly, once again the discourse of tolerance to difference is not only exalted, but significantly, Freirean alterity is not omitted from the dialogue: the other's experience and point of view are important because the other may become my intellectual relative even if their ideas are not exclusively a reflection of my theoretical and methodological framework. The other's view, even if refracted, is tangent to mine and soon we find steps in common even in the midst of dissidence:

If someone asks me if the "intellectual kinship" is a sine qua non for us to influence and be influenced, for us to work together, exchange points of view, add knowledge, I say no. In such a case, because we need to cultivate in ourselves the virtue of tolerance, which teaches us to live with what is different, to learn from it, to teach it, so that in the end we can fight against the antagonistic. In general, unfortunately, academics and politicians use a lot of our energies in unjustifiable "fights" among us, provoked by adjectival differences or, even worse, by purely adverbial differences. While we spend our time in petty "bickering", in which personal vanities flare up, scratch and buffet each other, we weaken ourselves for the real fight: the fight against the antagonist. (Freire, 1997, p. 11)

Consequently, relocating spatially and temporally what is meant by antagonistic in each case, situation, and context, one sees that Freire (1997) is inviting the academic world not to abandon its points in dissent, but to look at all of them and analyze them through a lens of mutual respect and intellectual collaboration among peers. In summary, the educator further explains that "Sometimes it matters little, the 'kinship' is even smaller than it seemed at first, but a stronger similarity keeps it alive and burning" (p. 9).

Following the alteritarian perspective of difference and similarity as a guiding point, this article proposes to understand the conception of intellectual kinship from a first contact, that is, from the first *suspicious* that are created between the texts discussed here. The idea of bringing such a Freirean conception is also to demonstrate the analytical potential and the elasticity of the empirical application of the intellectual kinship approach to the field of comparative observations in

the areas of communication and media studies. To this end, three foundational points of the conceptualization of intellectual kinship are used as categories of analytical and comparative discussion:

- Identification of the combat surrounding a situation or an antagonistic element common to intellectual debate;
- Evidence of intercommunication through the similarity of ideas in the construction of the theoretical and methodological bases;
- Valuing dissimilarity (mismatching) as something necessary for the maintenance of alterity and intellectual autonomy.

Next, the article presents the ideas about excess and melodrama in the media and the cultural context for each author, and finally, in the “Discussion of Ontologies” section, discusses the approximations and distances of the views that demonstrate the configuration of an intellectual kinship among the authors.

### **EXCESS AS A STRUCTURAL ELEMENT OF THE MELODRAMATIC MISE-EN-SCÈNE**

Thomas Elsaesser’s seminal work, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama” (1991) was first published in the journal *Monogram* in 1972 (since then, authors such as Christine Gledhill and Marcia Landy have been concerned with reviving Elsaesser’s ideas by republishing the author’s essay in academic collections). Interested in unveiling the processes of melodramatic sense production, the researcher calls attention to his primary goal “to indicate the development of what one might call the melodramatic imagination<sup>3</sup> across different artistic forms and in different epochs” (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 68).

In this way, the German author postulates that it is possible to extend the understanding of emotion and its link to music as elements producing other derivative meanings, that is, to increase the understanding of the melodramatic *mise-en-scène* from the way in which the meaning of “‘melos’ is given to ‘drama’ by means of lighting, montage, visual rhythm, décor, style of acting, music” (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 78). According to Zarzosa (2013, p. 107), Elsaesser’s location of excess is from the plane of rhetorical stylization, in terms of representation. This claim is reinforced by what Elsaesser (1991, p. 74) classifies as a punctuation system, that is, the melodramatic elements (including excess) as part of a grammaticalization of the forms of the story: a punctuation system that gives “expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the storyline, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue” (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 74).

By placing excess as a structural element of the melodramatic *mise-en-scène*, the author makes use of Douglas Sirk’s cinematic melodramas – such as

<sup>3</sup> As interchangeable terms, one can see that the author walks through the nomenclatures of melodramatic imagination and melodramatic mode throughout his discussion (Elsaesser, 1991, pp. 68, 72).



*A Scandal in Paris* (1946), *Take Me to Town* (1953), and *Written on the Wind* (1956) – as empirical exemplifications. More than that, one of the central ideas of Elsaesser's (1991) talk is to perceive in what way the aesthetic elements put on stage fulfill their function of symbolization within these. "The advantage of this approach is that it formulates the problems of melodrama as problems of style and articulation," reaffirms Elsaesser (1991, p. 74). As a result, excess, categorized as a rhetorical stylization, lends melodrama a symbolic plausibility in the narrative. And thus, it creates a *mode of experience*, in Elsaesser's (1991, p. 73) words, that is entirely particular, historical, and socially conditioned in which the plausibility in melodrama was not questioned.

Another point raised by Elsaesser (1991) concerns how melodrama is able to create patterns of identification, emotional involvement, empathy, and catharsis in media narratives, i.e., "on the ways the *mise-en-scène* translates character into action . . . and action into gesture and dynamic space" (p. 76). On that account, the author brings the relation of melodramatic music to the center of the debate, as in the case of 19th century opera. Therefore, in an attempt to correlate Elsaesser's structural thought to the universe of television studies, we bring the discussion undertaken by Fuenzalida (2011) when speaking about the similarities between opera (especially Italian opera) and the melodrama presented in telenovelas. About excess as unavoidably responsible for lending plausibility to the melodramatic narrative, Fuenzalida also seems to dialogue with Elsaesser – the Chilean author highlights that, in opera, the rhetoric of excess is appreciated as belonging to the fruition of the elements inherent to the work by high culture, but in TV telenovelas, on the contrary, the rhetoric of excess is seen as disqualification (p. 31).

As for the critical character of melodrama, in its possibility to question or reaffirm the social status quo, Elsaesser (1991) points to the melodramatic *mise-en-scène* as permeated by a conflicting "radical ambiguity," that is, there is an oscillation between characterizing melodrama as a "healthy distrust of intellectualisation and abstract social theory" while seeing in it an "ignorance of the properly social and political dimensions" (p. 72) of the world surrounding the narratives and their representations. By way of conclusion, it is also necessary to clarify that excess can also be seen under the aesthetic conformation of "emotional extremes [that] are played off in such a way that they reveal an inherent dialectic" (p. 83) to the melodramatic texture, according to Elsaesser. Thus, as a possible argumentative pairing, it is evidenced how excess acts in the *mise-en-scène* of television melodrama (telenovelas, miniseries, series, serials, and other possible formats) in order to create constant and coherent narrative discontinuities in its structure. In other words, there is an interweaving of emotional *highs* and

*lows*, metaphorically, like a roller coaster that operates incessant inputs and outputs in the dramatization of emotions, comic relief, crying, suspense, and eroticism throughout the duration of the dramatic arc. Even the existence of the boredom caused when traditional filler episodes (known as “barrigas”<sup>4</sup>) impede the progress of the narrative indicates an ephemeral destabilization of this mechanism of discontinuity and its dramatic effects in the course of, for example, just one episode or sequence of episodes.

<sup>4</sup>In the jargon of scriptwriters and television critics in Brazil, “barriga” (literally, belly) is the term that defines a certain phase of the telenovela in which, apparently, no new fact occurs in the dramatic arc and, thus, the spectator has the impression that he is being bamboozled by the plot.

### EXCESS AS A MODE OF MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION

The American researcher Peter Brooks (1995) discusses the concept of melodramatic imagination making a thorough epistemological rescue of the definition of melodrama and the historical context that, in a certain way, has surrounded it since the dramatic theater of Ancient Greece. However, through the literary path of Honoré de Balzac’s (1799-1850) works, his focus stops at the melodrama of the French classic, and thus, according to Brooks (1995), the use of the term melodrama, as a label that carries a “bad reputation” and “has usually been used pejoratively” (p. 11), needs further explanation, with the notion of melodramatic imagination as a starting point.

In the original publication of his work in 1976, Brooks (1995) defines melodramatic imagination thinking of melodrama not only as a genre but as a transgeneric imagination that goes beyond the barriers of formats and current of thoughts, besides transgressing the demarcation between high culture and popular entertainment<sup>5</sup>. Understanding drama as “an exciting, excessive, parabolic story – from the banal stuff of reality” (p. 2), the author brings his stance of melodramatic imagination close to this very definition. To it, the researcher adds the “polarization into moral absolutes” and an “underlying manichaeism,” in addition to the idea of the moral occult and the mode of excess as parts of the understanding of a melodramatic imagination (Brooks, 1995, p. 4) – elements which are extremely noticeable in the model of telenovela produced, for example, in Brazil and Latin America in general.

<sup>5</sup>It is worth noting that understandings of melodrama as a mode and genre also pass through Brooks’ (1995) discussion, but to a much lesser degree compared to his repeated use of the term imagination (pp. 12-14).

Therefore, with the melodramatic mode being “located” and “articulated” by the moral occult in fiction, according to Brooks (1995, p. 5), it is important to note the similarities and differentiations between each of these two bipartite concepts (moral occult and mode of excess). Brooks explains that moral occult can be understood as the reordering of the modern world (disinterested in religion and science but attached to melodrama and its representations). It would then be something that presents a function of highlighting the “polarization of good or evil” in terms of representation in melodrama (Brooks, 1995, p. 13). In this



sense, the basic principle of the moral occult is to subtly bring out some lesson in the fictional field. In this way, the statement that melodrama is not only a moralizing drama, but a “drama of morality” (Brooks, 1995, p. 20), becomes very suggestive for the understanding of the fictional television discourse. That is, it is through the moral occult of melodrama that the social order is purged and the ethical imperative is made comprehensible to society (Brooks, 1995, p. 13).

As such, the author states that, in melodrama, nothing escapes the mode of excess in the melodramatic imagination, whether in the dramatization of words and gestures or in the intensity and polarization of feelings (Brooks, 1995, p. 4). Bringing the examples of the theatrical dramaturgical production of René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773-1844) and the literary work of Henry James (1843-1916) to the center of the debate, the author is assertive in saying that nothing is unnecessary or not “amenable to discussion” under the aegis of the mode of excess in media narratives:

The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. (Brooks, 1995, p. 4)

Moreover, a compelling point of the question of excess in the construction of the melodramatic imagination centers on the way the structure of melodrama is worked, in Brooks’ (1995) words, by a “fundamental bipolar contrast and clash”, for the “world according to melodrama is built on an irreducible manichaeism. . . . Melodramatic dilemmas and choices are constructed on the either/or in its extreme form as the all-or-nothing” (p. 36). By conceptualizing the aesthetics of melodrama as “surprising” or “impactful” in our free interpretation of the term, Peter Brooks draws attention to the rhetoric of melodramatic narrative in terms of the uses of language. He states that the typical figures of the mode of excess are hyperbole, antithesis, and oxymoron. Of these figures of speech, hyperbole is regarded as a “natural’ form of expression” (p. 40) of the melodramatic.

In a Latin American context, a caveat opens: hyperboles, as constitutive elements of melodramatic imagination, are present in all telenovela productions on the continent, but not homogeneously, as Erlick (2018) points out when discussing the theme from a perspective she calls pan-Latin. Thus, it is also worth pointing out what the Chilean researcher Santa Cruz (2003, p. 28) – under strong influence of Martín-Barbero – says about the Brazilian model of television production being considered a modernizing model in opposition

to the Mexican one. However, between both models – modern and classic – the space for the occurrence of the mode of excess is extremely fertile. Just as a way of understanding the intensity of this occurrence, one sees that it often presents itself as more explicit in plots outside Brazil (Thomas, 2003, p. 12), without this, however, erasing the excess from Brazilian melodramatic television works, whether they have realistic or naturalistic characteristics (Borkosky, 2016, p. 138; Lopez, 1991, p. 601).

### **RHETORIC OF EXCESS AND MELODRAMA AS MEDIATIONS OF THE MASS POPULAR**

In the Latin American context, Martín-Barbero (1993) observes melodrama as an extremely potent force in shaping the contradictions, limitations, and potentialities of the region's multiple cultural cosmovisions. The author (who was of Spanish origin but lived in Colombia for many decades) observes that the roots of melodrama are extremely linked to the notion of the popular, but it is worth noting that in Latin America the processes of hybridization and miscegenation between the popular, the massive, the cult, and the erudite make melodrama a composite element. In other words, melodrama generates and is generated by the cultural processes of the mass popular, which can be understood as the complexity of hybridization between positions that shape Latin American socio-cultural and political-economic relations that, apparently, could seem to be opposites. However:

The phenomenon of mass in this kind of society is not some isolated social mechanism or one aspect of the society but a new form of sociability. . . . Nevertheless, to perceive popular culture from the perspective of mass does not necessarily imply alienation and manipulation. It is a new condition of existence and struggle. Mass society is a new mode of operation of hegemony. (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 230)

For this reason, more than just locating melodrama in a purist (and even naive) notion that only views the exaltation of its popular roots or judging it as a mere serialized industrial product useless for social transformations (once it is part of hegemonic capitalist interests), the author points out the need to unite plural views that ignore nothing of what was said above and still account for melodrama's structural complexity. It is important to understand how melodrama is built based on a doubly anachronistic language, according to Martín-Barbero (1993), i.e., symbolic operations that fall on the moralizing question “of familial and kinship relations as the basis of primordial fidelitics in life and the language



of rhetorical excess” (p. 118). It is precisely from the second anachronism that the author speaks of a rhetoric of excess. “The anachronism thus becomes a metaphor, a way of symbolizing the social context,” Martín-Barbero (1993, p. 119) points out. Or, in other terms, the rhetoric of excess as part of melodramatic narration brings with it the social gaze in a way that is not merely punctual, but structural: “The social emerges not only as a problem of content, but also as a style of telling” (Martín-Barbero & Rey, 2001, p. 172).

For Martín-Barbero, melodrama, in its structural and symbolic means and procedures<sup>6</sup>, uses excess as a form of expression of affections, emotions, feelings, sensory understandings, and aesthetic visions about the society in which it is reflected and refracted. Such rhetoric of excess concerns the subversive reading of melodrama by the popular. Unlike the cultures considered sophisticated and refined, the mass popular melodrama is histrionic, exaggerated, unruly, “too much,” and imbued with a vision of affections that is not economical:

Everything must be extravagantly stated, from the staging which exaggerates the audio and visual contrasts, to the dramatic structure which openly exploits the bathos of quick and sentimental emotional reactions. The acting tries to provoke a constant response in raucous laughter, sobs, sweaty tension and gushy outbursts of identification with the protagonists. Cultured people might consider all this degrading, but it nevertheless represents a victory over repression, a form of resistance against a particular “economy” of order, saving and polite restraint. (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 119)

This statement unfolds into another equally important reflection: melodrama as a mode of staging in media narratives. Thus, it becomes relevant to understand how this performance through the rhetoric of excess allows melodrama to express itself beyond the written textuality traditionally present in cult theater; that is to say that, unlike “a dramatic complexity sustained entirely by verbal rhetoric, melodrama sustained its dramatic action with a quite peculiar form of staging and acting” (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 114). In turn, corporeality gains prominence in melodrama: it presents itself as an embodiment of a scene mode, it projects itself from another textuality than the one trapped in the formal literary register.

In the wake of this thought, Martín-Barbero (1993) also speaks of an “excess of gesture” in melodrama as a way of reaffirming the centrality of the body in this mode of staging and of perceiving a voice, a text and a tone in corporality that were previously suppressed by the dominant, oppressive classes who held a univocal “way of knowing.” Meyer (1996), when speaking of the process of acclimatization of the pamphlets generated in Europe when they were received

<sup>6</sup>Examples of this are the presence of the melodramatic quadrilateral structure – Punisher (hero), Traitor (villain), Victim (young lady), and Fool (buffoon); the four basic feelings of fear, excitement, pain, and laughter; and, finally, the mélange of four genres (action novel, epic, tragedy, and comedy) in the melodramatic composition. Read in this light, Martín-Barbero’s melodramatic quadrilateral – tied to the moral occult – produces one of the most striking languages of the serial, since it is through them and in them that moralities are embodied.

in Latin America, also points out that the “shamelessly expressive romanesque literature” found a warmly welcoming space in Latin American cultural practices which (also due to its Iberian heritage) had a “taste for the excessive gestures and the exaggerated words that make up the oratory so appreciated by the illiterate populations” (pp. 383-384). In other words, the excess of gesture is still maintained today in Latin American telenovelas, for example, because it is part of a cultural matrix that can adapt to the most varied industrial formats. The possible cause of this maintenance of melodrama and the rhetoric of excess is, in the author’s words, exactly due to the mediation processes of the mass popular.

### **EXCESS AS A POTENTIAL QUALITY OF PERVASIVE MELODRAMATIC MODES**

The discussion undertaken by American researcher Linda Williams (2018) acknowledges the works of Thomas Elsaesser (1991), Peter Brooks (1995), and Ben Singer (2001) as precursors. However, Christine Gledhill (1987) is the most revered name because, according to Williams, Gledhill manages to take a small step forward in the discussion about the understanding of melodrama not as a watertight genre but as something endowed with a certain fluidity, modulation or permeability capable of transforming and *contaminating* several other genres that, at first, would never be considered as endowed with a melodramaticity since they are still seen as *classic* and *realistic* works (Williams, 2018, p. 211). Williams expands on the British author’s understanding of excess in melodrama and audiovisual studies as something that needs to be seen through the lens of malleability and reciprocal contamination between the most possible genres and narrative formats. But what is the established reference point to understand a production as *excessively* melodramatic (*disproportionate*) in relation to the world of sobriety and artistic quality?

Williams’s answer is that melodrama is the “scapegoat” undoubtedly because, in it, is allocated everything that appears to be illegitimate, old-fashioned, and tiresome in media narratives (Williams, 2018, pp. 213-214). In the case of the pioneering research of Gledhill (1987) and Mumford (1995), it is notably clear that gender relations permeate this construction of demerit in relation to melodramatic productions since they were seen for a long time – using a reasoning that can be questioned today – as works directed mostly to the feminine, to the domestic environment, to the space of absence of reflection and purely understood as objects of alienation and cheap entertainment for women.

However, the core of Williams’ (2018) argument lies in understanding excess as a potential (but not exclusive, defining or monolithic) quality of pervasive



melodramatic modes. The author throws light on the discussion by no longer seeing melodrama as a genre, but rather, from another perspective, she proposes to think of “modes of melodrama” (p. 214). These modes can be present in other works, other productions, and even other genres that at first glance would “not dialogue” so traditionally with melodrama. An empirical example of this, thinking about contemporaneity, is that Williams (2014) dedicates the totality of her book to the discussion of the American series *The Wire* (Simon et al., 2002-2008), seen by her as a television melodrama par excellence (although much of the audience, specialized critics, and even the creator of the work, David Simon, refuse to categorize it this way exactly because of the crystallization of unfavorable meanings that encompass such terminology). It would be possible, then, to understand melodramatic modes that emphasize pathos, action or even the sensations of repression and sublimation in narratives that are infinitely different from each other. This demonstrates the pulverizing, pervasive, and modular character of melodrama to which excess, as a quality, would also be linked in potency (and not as a premise). Tied to an understanding of melodrama as not only a rigid set of elements that would configure it as a genre *stricto sensu* in distinctive character or exclusive to other genres, the author seeks to discuss that the possible modulations of melodrama reallocate the discussion to understand how any kind of work, production, and genre can intersect, contaminate, and interact with melodrama (and perhaps, as one of its potential qualities, also with excess) in the most varied levels. In this evaluative reframing, it is possible to say that the melodramatic modes may be permeated by excess, but they in themselves are not the *essentialized* excess and depend much less on it to be classified as melodramatic.

It is worth noting that, in the academic circle of melodrama studies, there are distinct interpretations of Williams’ reflections on excess and melodrama. Such interpretations go in the direction of saying that Williams’ most recent works propose to abandon the notion of excess completely, to deny the qualification of excess as a possible part of melodrama characterization, and, furthermore, that such conceptual pairing (excess-melodrama) would already be outdated in the author’s statements from any potential angle. However, the reading made in this article understands that Williams (2012, 2014, 2018) does not deny, abandon or completely overcome the possible relations between excess and melodrama. On the contrary, she strongly relativizes the inherence of excess and questions its intrinsic conception and even the understanding that it would be the monolithic element of melodrama characterization since, like Williams (2012, p. 526), her criticism is directed to the distinctive conceptualization of the *classical* canon created by authors such as Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson

in American film theory. Therefore, by not exhausting the discussion about the possible pairings, it is understood that the author does not remove excess from the scene entirely since she reminds us that, even though excess is not an exclusive or sine qua non condition of melodrama, it can also prove to be present in melodramatic productions as a *quality*; alongside suspense, moral legibility, and the need to locate morality, it configures itself as one of “These qualities that are not [necessarily] hallmarks of melodrama, although it is possible to delight in them” (pp. 525-526). Thus, it is reiterated that the interpretation brought in this article attests to the understanding of the pervasiveness of melodrama that sets Williams’ work apart from other configurations (such as those of Brooks and Elsaesser, for example) by presenting a considerable dissimilarity as to the relational composition of excess and melodrama (and not quite a complete erasure of the possibility of this relationship).

Complementing this, this article will reflect on a notion of excess as a possible quality (aesthetic, stylistic, and narrative) which, by osmosis within the fluidity of the melodramatic modes, can also be seen in a dispersed way in several uses and in different works. This view stands in contrast to the idea of excess as something that can be thrown away (the *exceeded*) in function of a *sobriety* or of something *idealized without excess*. Thus, besides thinking of excess as a concept understood and restricted only in narratives that dialogue directly with the body genres (melodrama, horror, and pornography<sup>7</sup>), as Williams (1991) pointed out before, a new understanding of the term appears and displaces it to a category of quality in potency (and no longer as a substantially necessary element or univocal characterizer of melodrama). Such a view, in the interpretation of this article, reframes excess and presents it in a new conceptual reading in which it can propose effective modulations through distinct intensities and recurrences as a quality in potency in melodrama.

Thus, displacing the inherent essentialization of excess as something always linked to melodrama, it is possible to realize that melodramatic modes can participate in other audiovisual fields and transit through other modes taken, for example, as, at times, more realistic and at others, more comic (Williams, 2018, p. 214). And, even leaving aside the essentialist character, the idea of excess as a quality in pervasive melodramatic modes does not at all abandon the moralizing character of melodrama proposed by Brooks (1995) when discussing melodramatic imagination and moral occult. This is perhaps where both Williams and Brooks seem to find themselves (partially) in potentially compatible agreements, in seeing morality as an important feature (for him, an end in itself in melodrama; for her, a possible path to social justice) in thinking about the relevance of melodramatic works to the societies that experience

<sup>7</sup> According to Baltar (2012, p. 127), the term body genres is a formulation by Carol Clover, borrowed by Williams (1991) and expanded by her to encompass the characteristic mobilization of this genre in a double articulation of excess in terms of ecstasy and spectacle. In turn, Elsaesser and Hagen (2010, p. 121) exemplify that the excess of body genres in Williams’ work is linked to the direct reactions of bodies in relation: the weeping in melodrama, the sweating of anxiety at the disfigurement or viewing of bloody bodies in horror, and the bodily response of the (male) spectator in pornography. To Elsaesser and Hagen’s definition, this article also adds the bodily response of the (female) spectator as a direct reaction.



them fictionally: “Melodrama is the form by which timely social problems and controversies can be addressed. . . . Melodrama has tended to be on the side of the oppressed, and thus, seemingly on the side of social change, even revolution” (Williams, 2018, p. 215). Therefore, she ends her discussion in a limpid manner by making her position clear in the understanding that “Neither excessive music nor the defeat of evil by good is essential to melodrama.” Indeed, “What is essential, I contend, is the dramatic recognition of good and/or evil and in that recognition, at least the hope that justice might be done” (Williams, 2018, p. 215).

### **EXCESS AS ANTICIPATION, EXACERBATED SYMBOLIZATION, AND OBVIOUSNESS**

As one of the most prolific researchers of theories of excess in Brazil, Mariana Baltar is responsible for bringing the understanding of excess as a powerful element of signification of image and sound in the language of documentaries, pornography, videographies available on streaming (YouTube), and, of course, melodrama. Gathering her discussions around what she calls *weaves of excess*, the author states that it is in audiovisual narratives that one finds the locus par excellence of “passionate/affective engagement.” These weaves of excess in the audiovisual are extremely understandable, precisely because it is proper of the “visual and sensorial nature of image and sound” to propitiate such manifestation (Baltar, 2012, p. 132).

Based on empirical audiovisual objects located in the sphere of media narratives, she highlights that the view of excess could be perceptible in three modulations: excess as anticipation, exacerbated symbolization, and obviousness (Baltar, 2007, p. 112). The author approaches excess, a common denominator among melodrama scholars, as a paradoxical aesthetic-stylistic element to the extent that “it is at the same time easy to understand, on the one hand, because it is supported by multiple and palpable experiences; difficult to define, on the other, as an impossible unity” (Baltar, 2005, para. 1).

For Baltar (2012), excess is, through its reiterated stimuli and reactions embodied in the narrative, greatly responsible for the connection between “works and genres as distinct as the theatrical melodrama, its cinematographic and television strands, to literary works that range from the classic novel to the writings of Balzac and Henry James” (p. 131). In this way, she continues, excess is a form of “pedagogization” that trains the look, the fruition, and, mainly, the action of/in the bodies that experience the audiovisual. That is, excess activates “an effective sensory-sentimental knowledge as an agent of perception and experience of reality” (p. 132).

Baltar's emphasis on the centrality of the body, excess, and affection in melodrama (2007) is a position equally shared by Singer (2001) and Smit (2010). The confluence between the authors is toned down by Baltar (2012) when she states, "Spectacular and reiterative visuality is fundamental to the rhetoric of excess. Especially the expression of the body as the primary focus of the machines of the visible, thus embodying the fascination, wonder and will to know that they arouse" (p. 128).

Making use of the reflections brought by Steve Neale (who, in turn, finds the Italian Franco Moretti to be a source of inspiration), Baltar (2007) presents excess as anticipation from the idea that it is a mechanism that can, in the case of melodrama, signal the "coming of the tears," that is, the anticipation demonstrates a "call" that is quickly interpreted by the spectator. It is, in the author's words, "a summons to commotion and empathy" because "anticipation strategies lead to a sense of suspension, as they put us waiting for what is about to happen, as in a chronicle of a death foretold" (p. 126). In this sense:

Anticipation works in narrative when the audience holds a knowledge regarding plot paths that the characters do not. . . . By knowing more, viewers anticipate what is to come, projecting onto the narrative something that is not yet fully expressed, but is indicated. (Baltar, 2007, p. 127)

About the excess as exacerbated symbolization, Baltar (2007) uses Elsaesser as a reference to describe this modulation of excess as a form of metaphorical effect that creates presentification from the key elements of the melodramatic narrative, "almost in a structure of substitution of conflicts and values in symbol" (p. 122). This exchange (conflicts and values versus symbols) operated by excess as exacerbated symbolization finds parallel from

an exacerbation of the "scene", where the materiality of the actors' voices and words, every object of the set and costumes, the light and the cuts and movements (on stage and on camera) are guided by a grandiloquence and a metaphorical sense of characterization. (Baltar, 2005, para. 15)

In its complementary duality (aesthetic-stylistic and cultural), excess as a form of exacerbated symbolization manages, once again, through reiteration, to present "the experience of reality and the moral values" of modern society and the processes of subjectivation (Baltar, 2012, p. 134).

On the other hand, excess as obviousness, far from being seen as an element of depreciation of the narrative construction, fits within melodrama



as “a regime of expressivity,” that is, “The obviousness becomes strategic so that one recognizes ‘at once,’ immediately, indubitably and sensorially, what is placed, from the moral point of view, by the narrative” (Baltar, 2007, p. 89). Consequently, in this modulation of obviousness, it is possible to see excess acting as an agent of melodramatic didacticism. “Through a pedagogy based on sensations, the moral teachings put on stage by the narrative” (Baltar, 2007, p. 89), it offers a kind of *spelling book* to the spectator about the virtues and deviations present in the plot. One of the empirical examples given by the author is connected to the visibility strategies built around the protagonist of *Ônibus 174* (Padilha, 2002) which, through obviousness, outline Sandro’s trajectory from his poor childhood as a street kid to the paths that led him to the crime that stopped Brazil: soon, the melodramatic elements are put into play not only for the progress of the documentary story but they also serve as a conforming narrative element of this primer that teaches us to create empathy and have sentimental engagement (Baltar, 2007). The excess as obviousness explains in detail (by reiteration) how the elements that give the formal aesthetic finish to the melodramatic work have a teaching on the level of moralization (a primer that is not always accepted, but negotiated, resigned or even repelled/resisted by the audience).

### **MELODRAMATIC MODE AND EXCESS IN THE REDISTRIBUTION OF THE VISIBILITY OF SUFFERING**

Known as one of the authors who most contradict the classical reflections of melodrama studies, Mexican researcher Agustín Zarzosa (2010b) demonstrates how melodrama can be understood as a mode (and not as a genre), and this terminological choice of the term “mode” needs, according to him, an urgent and thorough analysis.

Modes run across genres lines (and apply to more works than genres) not because they are broader or more abstract, but rather because they involve the primary need of dramatizing experience. (Zarzosa, 2010b, p. 237)

Accordingly, Zarzosa (2013, p. 4) advances this terminological search by identifying four conceptualizations of mode in studies of melodrama within media narratives, namely: (1) mode as part of a taxonomic group larger than that of genres; (2) mode as a cultural imaginary; (3) mode as a representational strategy; and finally, (4) mode as a category that follows classificatory principles incompatible with that of genres. In addition to these four aspects, a fifth could

be added from Frye's (1973) elucidative stance by clarifying that "a mode<sup>8</sup> constitutes the basic tone of a work of fiction" (p. 56).

Still, as a watershed feature in his writings, without tergiversation, Zarzosa (2010b) warns that "My understanding of melodrama as a mode of mediation is at odds with one of the most entrenched ideas about melodrama, namely, that its ultimate aim is to evince the presence of good and evil" (p. 246). Thus, for him,

melodrama does not really attempt to rebuild a shattered ethical order; on the contrary, melodrama operates on a social ground in which ideas [about ethics] debunk one another by showing how competing ideas bring forth suffering. In this sense, melodrama is more ambitious than tragedy; melodrama seeks not only to explain suffering but also to eliminate suffering altogether. Put differently, rather than dramatizing suffering to demonstrate the existence of virtue and evil, melodrama dramatizes virtue and evil to eliminate or ameliorate suffering. The clear display of virtue and evil is not an end in itself but rather a means – among others – to ameliorate suffering. (Zarzosa, 2010b, p. 246)

Thus, in Zarzosa's (2013, p. 70) critical opinion of Brooks' (1995) work, instead of thinking of melodrama as the re-establisher of a morality and sacredness in a world lacking direction in identifying virtue and deviance, he proposes to think of conflicting systems of exchange as systems in dispute. Thus, his thought that the essence of the melodramatic mode "consists in redistributing the visibility of suffering" gains strength as the author establishes that "The world in melodrama appears as a suffering totality – that is, as an expression of the social whole in terms of passion" (Zarzosa, 2013, p. 14). More particularly, he separates suffering into two confluent planes: "The first involves the totality of bodies affected or influenced by other bodies. The second involves the distribution of visibility of that totality" (Zarzosa, 2013, p. 14).

First, it is necessary to understand that, when addressing the debate about the epistemological combinations between excess and melodrama, Zarzosa (2013) points out that the state of the art on the subject divides its understandings into three perceptions: excess as action, excess as quality, and excess as a state of being. In other words, "Despite this dispersal [of understandings] across different levels, melodrama critics have regularly theorized excess in terms of representation" (p. 107). For him, on the other hand, the conceptualization of excess is as a mode of exchange, that is, "The primary medium through which melodrama redistributes the visibility of suffering in the social sphere is exchange" (p. 4). The empirical analysis of the film *The Piano* (Campion, 1993) is mobilized by the author as a way to exemplify unequal acts of exchange derived from cinematic melodrama.

<sup>8</sup> An explicit definition of the term "mode" in Frye's work (1973) can be read in: "Conventional force of action admitted to the principal characters in fictional literature, or the corresponding attitude adopted by the poet toward his audience in thematic literature. Such modes tend to succeed one another in a historical sequence" (p. 361).



Soon, when talking about the character Ada McGrath and her troubled affective and social life in the newly colonized New Zealand, Zarzosa (2010a) makes explicit that the connections between excess and melodrama dramatize the consequences of putting into circulation objects and ideas to which no exchange value should be assigned. Finally, such an understanding of excess as exchange, for the author, is directly linked to the George Bataille's perspective of excess as expenditure.

Such exchanges of incommensurable values wrapped in excess and melodramatic modes need, according to Zarzosa (2013), to have their meaning extended beyond the notion of an action that involves giving something and receiving something else in return in the same space of time. Thus, according to the author, another definition of exchange makes it possible to understand excess in melodrama as when "one relinquishes something that one does not quite own or possess, but that one could have possessed: the thing is not given but rather given up" (p. 71). From this point of view, the researcher emphasizes that it is salutary to realize that melodrama, as a way of redistributing the visibility of human suffering, has its character of representation evidenced to the extent that the very practices that conform the exchange process (as well as its dramatizations) also involve the register of representations: "Melodrama expresses the incommensurability that representations of equivalence necessarily involve" (Zarzosa, 2010a, p. 397). Finally, it is emphasized that the theoretical bases on which the understanding of melodramatic modes and their addressing the problems of human suffering, discussed by the author, are situated in the Hegelian triad (stoicism, skepticism, and conscious unhappiness).

### DISCUSSION OF ONTOLOGIES

By reaffirming the importance of a discussion that sees in the search for intellectual kinship (Freire, 1997) the possibility of understanding the complex genealogical tree of knowledge about media, excess, and melodrama; a necessary starting point is to scrutinize the ontological nature from which the intellectuals cited start to discuss what melodrama is. That is, before observing the myriad of branches that point to multiple directions, it is relevant to observe what are the roots that sustain the whole theoretical framework of Thomas Elsaesser, Peter Brooks, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Linda Williams, Mariana Baltar, and Agustín Zarzosa.

Just like Freire (1997) says in his explanation about the conception of intellectual kinship, the search for the common roots of the six authors discussed finds its primary axis in the combat against the *antagonistic*. The antagonist, rejected under the theoretical and methodological bases of the researchers, is

precisely the limited and simplistic belief of a melodrama which, if before it was already seen as of little cultural importance because of its exaggerations and clichés throughout the literary and theatrical history, now, when entering the media universe of cinema, television, and streaming, shows itself even more unnecessary, subordinate, and, above all, alienating. It is the combat against this dated view that unites the reading strands of the authors since all of them understand the melodramatic texture as a cultural manifestation endowed with complex discursiveness and rich narrativity. In what the authors brought to the debate, one can see a reinforcement of their intellectual kinship exactly because of the deep analytical look that they share towards the valorization of melodrama. Therefore, as Freire (1997) reminds us, this similarity is the “strongest” element that “keeps kinship alive and burning” (p. 9) (in all its possibilities of rearrangements and relations).

Although, as we can see, there is a dispute of meanings in the classification nomenclature of melodrama: it is sometimes understood as a genre, sometimes as a mode, sometimes as imagination. It is worth pointing out, however, that beyond a mere nominal decision, the choice of these terms also presupposes what is addressed or excluded in these investigative lines. It is still pertinent to state that the concern to conceptually determine the notion of genre, mode or imagination is not always treated with the same depth by each of the authors, that is, the almost precious way in which Zarzosa dwells on explaining why the term *melodramatic mode* is used cannot be compared to Baltar’s more rapid, punctual, and pliable discussion of genre of melodrama. Thus, one sees that it is possible for some authors to transit, with greater or lesser frequencies and explanations as to why this or that nominal election, through more than one notion (generic, modal or imaginary). One very important fact in this ontological setting is that the nomenclatures, and not their epistemological understandings (which in itself deserves another study), of each of the authors are registered here<sup>9</sup>.

One notices that the intellectual kinship, in the case of the ontological nature of melodrama and excess in media narratives, is not absent from the scene. Even though there may be confrontations or terminological disputes, looking at the dissimilarity is also a way to attest that the intellectual kinship is solid enough to know how to deal with internal dissidence and reinforce the independence of non-consensual analytical readings: “Belonging to the same intellectual ‘family’ does not mean the reduction of one into the other since it is the autonomy of both that is the cornerstone that grounds the true kinship” (Freire, 1997, p. 12).

Regarding the ontology of the composition of the relations between excess and melodrama, it is undoubtedly noted that the ideas of pervasiveness and fluidity are still little discussed in the academic environment, in opposition to

<sup>9</sup> For example, the reading of the term genre, for Martín-Barbero (2009, p. 189), has its ubiquity in the field of anthropology and sociology of culture while the term genre, for Elsaesser (1991, p. 84), is read from the systemic perspective of formal narrative conformation with its thematizations, motifs, and specific archetypal structure.

the most widespread version of a certain intrinsic essentialism of excess within melodrama (Table 1). It is clearly noticeable that the intercommunication between the authors occurs due to the evident similarity of ideas in the construction of their theoretical and methodological bases. Under this line of thought, the intellectual kinship determines the understanding of the composition of the relations between excess and melodrama in media narratives as something inclined to an essentialist reading. Even if there are divergent views (such as those of Williams and Baltar), the reinforcement of intercommunication happens precisely because of a position of similarity that privileges excess in its inherence to melodrama.

**Table 1**

*Ontology of nature and the composition of relations*

POSSIBLE ONTOLOGIES BETWEEN EXCESS AND MELODRAMA ( A )					
Scholar	Regarding the nominal nature of the relations: <i>"Melodrama is understood as a..."</i>			Regarding the composition of the relations: <i>"Excess is potentially understood in melodrama by its... characteristic"</i>	
	Genre	Mode	Imagination	Essential/Intrinsic	Pervasive/Fluid
T. Elsaesser		√	√	√	
P. Brooks	√	√	√	√	
J. Martín-Barbero	√			√	
L. Williams		√			√
M. Baltar	√		√		√
A. Zarzosa		√		√	

*Note.* Elaborated by the author.

Without discrediting or disqualifying either of the two binomial perceptions, it is valid to postulate a hypothesis: the more one expands the study of materialities other than just telenovelas or films taken as *traditional melodramas* par excellence, the more one understands the fluid penetration of melodrama as a *modus operandi* permeated by excess and, thus, potent enough to produce senses that infect, immerse, and affect materialities (generic or modal) such as pornography, horror, action, documentary, journalistic narrative, etc. In other words, displacing the fixity of thought that excess is an exclusive element of fictional melodrama consequently makes other

contributions from fields not always linked to film and television studies potentially emerge, such as, for example, the study of the discourses of public figures in political science and communication – and a very successful display of this can be seen in the work of Anker (2014).

Therefore, as much as there is no consensus or univocality on how the relations between excess and melodrama are read, as the previous discussions have shown, even so, it is possible to see that some of these thoughts walk side by side with Freire’s expression of intellectual kinship. That is, it is possible to see that even coming from different socio-demographic conditions, from asymmetric academic environments and institutions in the production of knowledge, and with stances that cross race, gender, class, and body through cultural matrices that are not always close, there are still many points of contact between the authors and their ideas (Table 2). Proof of this is the ontology of the purpose of the relations between excess and melodrama that, in an unbalanced way, presents a much greater tendency to approach one pole (*excess acts in melodrama to highlight morality and human virtue*) than the other (*excess acts in melodrama to redistribute the visibility of human suffering*).

<sup>10</sup>Even though, for Williams (2012), morality is not an end in itself in melodramatic modes, since she postulates the need for social justice as the ultimate goal, here we choose to place Williams on the side of morality because she does not shy away from moral elements as a preponderant part of melodrama at all. Unlike Zarzosa, the only one to create dissonance among the majority views, Williams (2012, p. 525) reiterates that moral legibility and the need to locate goodness are qualities in potency (but not intrinsic or exclusive) of melodrama. In this way, it is even possible that there is a possible similarity in process between Zarzosa’s thinking (of the highlighting of virtue and evil as a means of ameliorating suffering) and Williams’s thinking (that the moral legibility of melodrama aims to highlight a situation of injustice and thereby the hope that it can be improved) as possible deviations from the dominant understanding. However, for there to be recognition of injustice, first of all, the author clarifies that “dramatic recognition of good and evil” is essential (Williams, 2018, p. 215). Hence, morality reigns again as the primary (concrete) thread and hope or the quest for social justice as a secondary (becoming) consequence.

**Table 2**  
*Ontology of purpose and location of relations*

POSSIBLE ONTOLOGIES BETWEEN EXCESS AND MELODRAMA ( B )			
Scholar	Regarding the purpose of the relations:		Regarding the location of the relations:
	Evidence Morality and Virtue (good/evil)	Redistribute the Visibility of Human Suffering	“Excess and melodrama are read preferentially by the...”
T. Elsaesser	√		Cinema
P. Brooks	√		Theater and Literature
J. Martín-Barbero	√		Multiple Media-Cultural Practices
L. Williams <sup>10</sup>	√		Cinema and Television
M. Baltar	√		Cinema, Television, and Streaming
A. Zarzosa		√	Cinema and Television

Note. Elaborated by the author.



The ontology of the purpose of the relations, again analyzed comparatively by the intellectual kinship approach, demonstrates that the alternative path outlined by Zarzosa is presented as a kind of “disturbance” (Freire, 1997, pp. 9-10). In other terms, even though it does not completely preclude intercommunication between the authors, this *disturbance* represents a possibility of a temporary rupture between the visions or, in more metaphorical terms, an isolated branch which, starting from the same trunk and root that sees the common antagonist, deviates to another direction in search of new (epistemological) airs. Moreover, this signaling of dissimilarity is seen as something necessary for the maintenance of otherness and, by extension, also provides an opportunity for the continuity of the intellectual autonomy of researchers.

With equal importance, this article enabled the understanding that the fourth possible ontology concerns the location of relations between excess and melodrama in empirical materialities rich in production of meaning and, even more, complex in their peculiarities. Therefore, it was possible to see (Table 2) that the authors transited through several loci of analysis and reflection (not mutually exclusive), involving, with distinct intensities and recurrence, the cinematographic, literary, theatrical, and television fields, and even streaming platforms. More than just identifying the locus of each of the enunciations, discussing the location of the relations allows us to understand that melodrama takes peculiar and non-universal forms depending on where it is constructed and/or enjoyed. Put another way, the multiplicity of media narratives through which excess and melodrama can materialize not only emphasizes the constant (re)adaptation of melodramatic language to old and new media but, mainly, makes explicit that there are still many paths to be prescribed in future comparative analyses. In other words, the ontology of the location of relations between excess and melodrama in the media hints that unfolding an investigation which may focus only on the particularities of a television or film materiality is possible or even a study that aims to see the specific stylistic traits of each materiality that are replicated or swallowed from the contact with new languages, discourses, and media narratives that are emerging at a fierce pace in everyday communication.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The greatest challenge faced by this article lies in the difficulty of bringing together multiple voices coming from extremely distinct eras, generations, cultural realities, and television contexts. Paradoxically, this is also the best scenario a researcher can wish for when searching for the common grounds

of intellectual kinship in a researchable universe as complex and *sui generis* as the space of discussion about melodrama, excess, and media. That is, even if the risk of superficiality surrounds the summarized explanations of the ideas of each one of the authors (precisely because of the amount of dispersed information), it is by the original diversity of views that it becomes possible to search for traces of kinship that are not on the surface of the texts but that require, as the work has shown, an analytical comparative study that dwells on the similarity-dissimilarity relation as its first focus.

An important point to consider is the analytical potentiality of Freire's conception of intellectual kinship beyond its reading as an affective expression in the testimonial context of the Brazilian educator. The analytical potentiality opens the way to think about intellectual kinship based on organizing, systematizing, and classifying categories such as the three main ones created and used in this article: (1) identification of the combat against a situation or an antagonistic element common to the intellectual debate; (2) evidence of intercommunication by the similarity of ideas in the construction of theoretical-methodological bases; and (3) valorization of dissimilarity (disturbance) as something necessary for the maintenance of alterity and intellectual autonomy. Logically, as this is an experimental attempt at comparative methodological observation within communication and media studies, many other categories can be created, for example, aiming the analytical angle only at the disturbances that constitute the intellectual autonomy of the field and its objects or even approaches that privilege the maximum reduction of variables (over a universe of epistemological proposals), seeking to find the combat against the common antagonistic element that brings them together.

Of equal importance, the elasticity of empirical application proved that the methodological approach made from intellectual kinship can focus on the first gradation discussed by Freire (1997, pp. 10-11) and not necessarily move towards the concrete, lived, and shared encounter of real experiences between the authors (whether these experiences are academic collaborations or life encounters). The concept is elastic because it is possible to stick to it, as the article did, only in the "suspicion" phase in which the reading of texts and authors who, at first sight, are very different, providing an investigative start, a first trigger. But nothing prevents other observations from going to the second gradation in search of the existence or not of collaborations and academic experiences that shape the thinking of these authors.

It is worth noting that such suspicion speaks volumes about how important the field of subjectivity is to comparative studies (both from Freire's perspective and for the liveliness of research as a whole), that is, how the



curiosity fostered by the *suspicion* that something in this or that text/author seems to communicate with this or that other text/author can become the lure that primarily captures the researcher's attention. Not abandoning suspicion is essential to the first step in the search for the intellectual kinship of any work, author or set of ideas. And, from then on, the analytical potentiality (with the replication or creation of new observation categories) is allied to the elasticity of empirical application (it can be centered on the first gradation or not), making a leap from curiosity to the search for materialities that evidence the comparative study.

The article highlighted four types of possible ontologies in the intercommunication between thinkers and texts that address melodrama, excess, and media narratives, namely: the nominal nature of relations, the composition of relations, the purpose of relations, and the location of relations. As a result, it was possible to realize that such ontologies represent the following considerations: the non-consensus on the nature of melodrama (genre, mode, and imagination); the binominal understanding of the relational composition between excess and melodrama (essentialism and exclusivism versus pervasiveness and fluidity); two sense disputes about the purposes of action of excess in melodrama (highlighting morality and human virtue versus distributing the visibility of human suffering); and, finally, the understanding that the discussion about excess and melodrama is located in multiple and non-excluding empirical materialities.

Finally, given the need for the expansion and improvement of these four possible ontologies, it is necessary that new research be done to also listen to other voices besides those linked only to Anglo-Saxon countries which, to a large extent, produce a lot of research and sometimes end up monopolizing the debate centered on a single vision. In other words, it is fundamental to redirect the focus to works that permeate the excess-melodrama relation outside the Western view and not located only in the Global North, e.g., the studies by Lila Abu-Lughod (Egypt), E. Deidre Pribam (India), Panpan Yang (China), Giuliana Cassano Iturri (Peru), Tom Odhiambo (Kenya), Rosário Sanchez (Uruguay), Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (Brazil), Maria Cristina Palma Mungiolli (Brazil), B. Senem Çevik (Turkey), Amporn Jirattikorn (Thailand), and Belinda Maria Smaill (East Timor), among other sources. Thus, only by widening the horizons of reading and reflection to incorporate dissonant or unheard thoughts will it be possible, at last, to glimpse a tiny fragment of the whole international academic panorama about excess (in its many meanings as a mode, rhetoric, gesture, stylistic-aesthetic element, cultural category, and structural-structural characteristic of/in melodrama). As Freire (1997)

reminds us: “Based on certain similarities and affinities, the kinship is being ‘invented’ and reinvented and is never finished” (p. 11). ■

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# Worker-Owned Platforms: Cooperatives and Collectives of Platform Riders

## *Plataformas de Propriedade de Trabalhadores: Cooperativas e Coletivos de Entregadores*

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the emergence of worker-owned platforms in the platformization of labor context. The analysis presents six cases in Spain, France, and Brazil considering: production processes and work organization, technological challenges and construction of platforms, uses of social media for promoting organization and communication between workers, cooperation between cooperatives, and the future of self-managing experiences. The conclusions point to the central role of social media for communication and work organization, and the emergence of cooperation between cooperatives. The emergence of these initiatives may be the beginning of a broader process of digital platforms for the common good.

**Keywords:** Platform cooperativism, worker-owned platforms, platformization of labor

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### RESUMO

O artigo tem o objetivo de analisar a emergência de plataformas de propriedade de entregadores no contexto de plataformação do trabalho. A análise apresenta seis casos em Espanha, França e Brasil, considerando: processos produtivos e organização do trabalho, desafios tecnológicos e construção de plataformas, usos de mídias sociais para organização e comunicação entre trabalhadores, cooperação entre cooperativas e futuro das experiências autogestionadas. As conclusões apontam para o papel central de mídias sociais para comunicação e organização do trabalho, e a cooperação entre cooperativas. Essas iniciativas podem ser o início de um processo mais amplo de plataformas digitais para o bem comum.

**Palavras-chave:** Cooperativismo de plataforma, plataformas de propriedade de trabalhadores, plataformação do trabalho

# A

THE PLATFORMIZATION OF labor (Casilli & Posada, 2019; Grohmann & Qiu, 2020) is the radicalization and updating of other existing processes, such as neoliberal and entrepreneurial rationality (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Dardot & Laval, 2013), datafication (Chen & Qiu, 2019), financialization (Sadowski, 2020), and flexibilization of work, without discarding, of course, that it is also related to the own mechanisms of digital platforms (Van Dijck et al., 2018), as detailed in earlier works (Grohmann, 2021). Thus, platforms are, at the same time, means of production and means of communication (Williams, 2005). They are means of organizing work and communication activities, presenting themselves as organizational forms which are also political (Fenton, 2016).

This platformization, understood as the increasing dependence on platforms to carry out work activities, does not occur homogeneously. Firstly, it occurs because there is a diversity of platforms (Schor et al., 2020) with different mechanisms and materialities. Along with this, there is a multiplicity of worker profiles, with greater or lesser dependence on digital infrastructures, which, in turn, present different ways of extracting value through platforms (Srnicek, 2016). There are different work situations intersected by these social markers of inequalities and differences – race, gender, class fractions, territory, among others. However, despite the various types of platforms (Casilli, 2019; Schmidt, 2017; Woodcock & Graham, 2019), they relate to a broader circuit of labor (Qiu et al., 2014) and infrastructure (Van Dijck, 2021) in a circuit of platform labor (Grohmann et al., on press).

Platformization of labor tends to generalize itself in all work activities (Huws, 2020). However, this does not mean that workers are unorganizable or mere effects of social structures. They build tactics and strategies to act in their everyday work (Sun, 2019) as algorithmic fissures (Ferrari & Graham, 2021). Platform labor is a true laboratory of class struggles (Cant, 2019). The literature on the issue (Cant, 2019; Englert et al., 2020; Patrick-Thomson & Kranert, 2020; Sun, 2019; Wood et al., 2018; Woodcock, 2019) has highlighted the potential for organizing platform workers in the most different sectors and, as this is not a recent trend, this worker organization is the result of previous work experiences and struggles (Cant, 2019).

The pandemic context that started in 2020, as I have shown in earlier works (Abílio, Grohmann, & Weiss, 2021; Howson et al., 2020), made the platformization of labor more evident. On the one hand, the context has helped to strengthen the power of capital through the intensification and diversification of forms of control, including the media strategies of platforms (Grohmann et al., 2021). On the other hand, this scenario has made the

conditions of platform workers more visible (Graham & Anwar, 2019; Van Doorn, 2017) and has led to the emergence of solidarities (Soriano & Cabanes, 2020) among workers, with a central role of social media (Geelan & Hodder, 2017). According to Woodcock and Graham (2019), “communication is an important first step towards collective resistance and organizing” (p. 107). Delivery strikes across Latin America in July 2020 were an example of this type of workers’ organization (Howson et al., 2020), with complexities in their class composition (Abílio, Grohmann, & Weiss, 2021).

This process of building emerging solidarities around platform labor in the pandemic context raised two central questions for this article. The first is that, despite the many differences and specificities between different places in the world, there are articulations and connections in common between platform workers in the most diverse countries<sup>1</sup>. The working conditions of delivery workers in Brazil, India, South Africa, and Germany, as research from the Fairwork project (2020) has shown, reveal many similarities, although the political, legal, and social contexts are very different. This has led many workers to communicate and organize in connection with people from other countries, as demonstrated by meetings such as the International Alliance of App-Based Transport Workers (IAATW), Unidxs World Action, and Platform-Workers Forum: Global Perspectives on Organizing and Policy. These activities reinforce that there is a circulation of workers’ struggles around the world (Dyer-Witthford, 2015; Englert et al., 2020) and that struggling against platformization of labor needs internationalist perspectives both to understand and to act together with these movements still under construction.

<sup>1</sup> This research does not intend to be comparative or to present nuances in relation to the specificities of each country.

The second point is that the construction of these emerging solidarities does not take place only in strikes, associations, or unions but in the possibilities of creating platforms owned by workers in different institutional designs and mainly from the well-known platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2016). Thus, delivery workers – one of the most evident examples of the platformization of labor – from many parts of the world have sought to build alternatives to the dominant platforms through the creation of collectives, cooperatives, or other worker-owned ways.

In this context, this article aims to analyze the emergence of worker-owned platforms, especially cooperatives and collectives of delivery workers, as one of the laboratories of platform labor and the circulation of workers’ struggles. We have analyzed six cases in three different countries (Spain, France, and Brazil) from the following dimensions: productive processes and work organization, technological challenges and platform construction, uses of social media for organization and communication between workers,



cooperation between cooperatives (de Peuter & Dyer-Witthof, 2010), and the future of self-managed initiatives. The initiatives take very different paths. In Spain, some cooperatives were born from union struggles. In France, there is a stronger relationship with the federation of rider cooperatives, CoopCycle, which provides its own software based on the principles of digital commons. In Brazil, so far, there is the emergence of small collectives and cooperatives still dependent on social media platforms to carry out their work. This article emphasizes that, despite the disparate contexts, there are commonalities, such as the low number of workers, the central role of social media for communication and work organization, and cooperation between cooperatives, showing that the issue of scale does not need to be a norm in platform economy. This manuscript concludes that this is an ongoing and emerging process which could be the beginning of a broader movement of reinvention of local economic circuits of production and consumption involving digital platforms for the common good.

### **FROM PLATFORM CO-OPS TO WORKERS' PLATFORMS**

Since 2016, one of the most used terms to mention building alternatives to platform capitalism and platformization is platform cooperativism (Grohmann, 2018; Scholz, 2016), a way of “cooperativizing” existing platforms and bringing cooperatives closer to the platform economy. Since then, the directory of platform cooperativism – Internet of Ownership 2020 (<https://www.internetofownership.net/>) – has more than 300 platform co-ops (April 2021) with different profiles of workers, consumers, or multi-stakeholders. These experiences go through co-ops around sectors of cloud service photographers, musicians, journalists, games, music streaming, audiovisual, etc. Also, since 2016, works have shown the potential (Pazaitis et al., 2017; Schor, 2020; Zhu & Marjanovic, 2020) – including in relation to sustainable development – and the limits (Cant, 2019; Sandoval, 2019) of platform cooperativism, including the risks of being co-opted into entrepreneurial activism.

Platform cooperativism, strictly understood, has a specific legal profile – being legally constituted as a cooperative. But the principles of self-management and co-ownership of workers in the context of platformization do not necessarily appear under the label cooperative. As argued by Morell et al. (2020), platforms that are not driven by profit – as horizontal institutions and with value distribution among those involved – can assume different legal profiles, such as cooperatives, companies, or associations, also connecting to different sustainable development goals, such as governance, data policies,

and social responsibility. Thus, the possibilities of building worker-owned platforms include, but are not restricted to, platform cooperativism. An example is the notion of collaborative platforms (Cicero et al., 2016), which provides inspiration in cooperative and collaborative models of governance, understood from participatory decision-making mechanisms.

What is in the foreground, in an expanded form, is the democratization of work relations and self-management in processes that can be intensified with digital platforms, with possibilities for the circulation of the common (de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010; Sodré, 2014). These initiatives can also, according to Morell et al. (2020), be based on platforms (with their own infrastructure) or just be supported by them (not necessarily with infrastructure owned by workers).

Then, we can understand worker-owned platforms as prefigurative possibilities (Sandoval, 2016) – which means building experiments today of the societies we imagine tomorrow, circulating new meanings about platformization and labor in the platform economy in accordance with the idea of real utopias presented by Wright (2010). This means understanding both their potential and limits. Some of them have already been pointed out by Sandoval (2019) and Cant (2019), for example, the risks of co-optation through entrepreneurial narratives, aggressive competition with dominant private platforms – made possible by venture capital –, and the risk of self-exploitation.

This means understanding that there are inherent contradictions in the construction of worker-owned platforms – and that a dialectical movement of non-idealization of these initiatives is necessary (Sandoval, 2016). Furthermore, as Fuchs (2017) reminds us, “a cooperative is not a solving application that can abolish the problems of capitalism when combined with internet technologies” (p. 310). In other words, the construction of worker-owned platforms depends on a set of dimensions – such as governance and work organization, for example –, in addition to the construction of the platform itself.

Realistically, self-managed platforms will not replace big labor platforms in the short term, given the factors listed above. However, as Sandoval (2016) also argues, it is necessary to dialectically face the historical contradictions around cooperatives and collectives between, on the one hand, constraints and co-optations and, on the other hand, possibilities of reconfiguration in relation to the emancipation of workers. Thus, the accent is on gaps, fissures, and attempts to confront the dominant platformization (Ferrari & Graham, 2021), emphasizing the laboratory and experimental character of these self-managed initiatives. As experiments, they do not have a ready formula and have different characteristics and elements depending on the sector or location.



An interesting example of worker-owned platform is a drivers' cooperative that focuses on data democratization. At Driver's Seat, workers use the co-op's platform to share their data. Then, they collect and sell mobility information to city agencies so they can make the best transport planning decisions. When the co-op profits from selling data, drivers receive the dividends and share the wealth. This helps us to understand how the struggles for the re-signification of the platformization of labor also involve workers' rights over their data, as Christina Colclough (2020) argues. This is in line with the findings of Calzada (2020), for whom platform and data cooperatives have the potential to be feasible alternatives to extractivist and colonialist models of data governance.

According to Huws (2020), it is necessary to combat the generalization of platformization around labor with its resignification in favor of workers and the public good. This means that worker-owned platforms can be a first step toward a reinvention of local economic circuits of production and consumption through platforms that improve working conditions and, at the same time, promote mobility policies, improvements in public transport, and care services, with integration into the health system. This can be linked to principles of design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020), fair work (Graham et al., 2020), and healthy eating. However, this does not mean that worker-owned platforms necessarily must have a scale, after all, one of their strengths is precisely the ability to articulate and cooperate between initiatives – that is, intercooperation, in a process of circulation of workers' struggles (Dyer-Witheford, 2015; Englert et al., 2020).

In the same direction as the elements, Morell et al. (2020) cite democratic qualities involving digital platforms. These include data commons, free and open technologies, fair economy, democratic governance (including decision-making processes), equality, and inclusion. This means that there are different dimensions at play in the platforms owned by workers, from the design and materiality of the platforms through the work organization and production processes, data policies and algorithms, cooperation among cooperatives (de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010), and media strategies – including social media.

At this point, Fernández and Barreiro (2020) analyze the media strategies of couriers in Barcelona to create the Riders X Derechos union and the Mensakas cooperative in order to confront the grammars of the dominant platform companies that are in circulation, struggling over meanings in relation to what means working for platforms. In relation to social media, this involves understanding a dispute between workers' autonomy and dependence on WhatsApp and Instagram to communicate with customers and other workers,

for example. Thus, we position the role of social media in relation to worker-owned platforms in order to understand the contradictions of a vaunted horizontal communication and dependence on material resources and infrastructure, as shown by Schradie (2019).

On the other hand, cooperation among cooperatives is a key element that, in fact, allows the circulation of workers' struggles. According to Sandoval (2016), "going beyond the level of micro-initiatives and small-scale islands requires building connections between individual cooperatives in order to create a larger movement of cooperatives" (p. 109). This enables interactions and production processes between, for example, riders' cooperatives, coders, and farmers, rearticulating local production and consumption circuits.

The delivery sector is, at the same time, one of the highlights of both the current scenario of platformization of labor and the possibilities of organization and confrontation, whether in relation to strikes and mobilizations, or in the sense of possibilities of building self-managed initiatives. In recent years, at least 30 collectives or riders' cooperatives have emerged and their analysis is still a blind spot in the literature on platform labor.

## METHODS

We conducted exploratory research with six initiatives by workers from three countries, Spain, France, and Brazil. The choices were made because Spain, especially in the region of Catalonia, is an exponent of cooperativism and the digital commons (Morell & Espelt, 2019) and where have emerged cooperatives with great media coverage, such as Mensakas (Fernández & Barreiro, 2020). France is home to CoopCycle, a federation of rider co-ops that aims to promote solidarity among cooperatives, reduce their costs, and create a common force to defend riders' rights. The federation currently has 44 associated cooperatives – only two outside Europe, specifically North America, although negotiations are already underway with cooperatives in other Latin American countries, for example. CoopCycle has its own software with a copyleft license, created to manage the bicycle delivery activity in order to serve the real needs of workers. Finally, Brazil was chosen because it had one of the largest riders' strikes in the world in 2020 (Howson et al., 2020) and, as a result, initiatives by collective of riders began to flourish. The choice of the three countries helps us to visualize articulations, similarities, and differences, in view of a transnational perspective that reveals the circulation of struggles of these workers who are called couriers in France and riders or splitters in Spain.



However, in addition to the transnational articulations of the working class, there are crucial differences in the work relations in Europe and South America. In Europe, gig work may even be a novelty, but in Brazil – like other countries in the so-called Global South – gig economy is a historical feature before the emergence of digital platforms (Grohmann & Qiu, 2020). There were already delivery workers and other activities before platform labor. So, the history of the Brazilian economy is, in fact, that of a gig economy. Information on the context of Brazilian riders on dominant platforms can be found in earlier works (Abílio, Amorim & Grohmann, 2021; Abílio, Grohmann & Weiss, 2021).

In this article, in an effort similar to that of Davis and Xiao (2021) to dewesternize platform labor studies, we show that rider co-ops and collectives do not emerge in the same way everywhere and this is not a symptom of greater development of a particular region in relation to another. On the contrary, imprisoning rider collectives and cooperatives to the same strict model of platform cooperativism can be an epistemic closure.

We chose to analyze a microcosm of cooperatives, but there is a broader context. Other cooperatives and collectives are La Pajara (Spain), Shift (Canada), Urbike (Belgium), Kolyma2 (Germany), Zentrale (Poland), Bici Mensajería Córdoba (Argentina), Kurier (Ecuador), Levô Courier (Brazil), and TransEntrega (Brazil) – which will be present in other articles in the broader investigation that we conducted on the issue. There are factors that unite all these initiatives, such as the criticism of the dominant platformization of labor, promotion of fair work, and issues such as mobility and social and environmental sustainability. Delivery by bicycle is then re-signified through engagement at work and healthy cities. Shift, from Canada, for example, even has a CO<sup>2</sup> emission calculator depending on the vehicle used. Another common point is the love for work in cooperatives, something already identified by Sandoval (2018) in other cooperatives. Kurier workers state on their Instagram page: “we do what we like, that’s why we do it well.” Another recurring statement among riders, and visible on their Instagram pages, is that they like to do the work itself but disagree with the way dominant platforms exploit their workforce.

From the above scenario, we conducted, between September and October 2020, interviews with workers representing six cooperatives and delivery groups: Mensakas (Barcelona, Spain), Rodant (Valencia, Spain), Resto. Paris (Paris, France), Coursiers Bordelais (Bordeaux, France), Senôritas Courier (São Paulo, Brazil), and Pedal Express (Porto Alegre, Brazil). The interviews were conducted through videoconference platforms and dialogue with the initiatives has remained ongoing since then because of the

broader research context. Three men and three women were interviewed. We chose, throughout the analysis, to identify the workers interviewed only by their initiatives, as they granted the interviews as their representatives. Therefore, we do not present individual profiles because what interests us are the statements on behalf of the collective or cooperative.

With this sample, we emphasize not only the international aspect but the choice for each country’s initiatives to be from different cities in order to highlight possible articulations and differences depending on the place. From the interviews, with a semi-structured script, we chose the following categories: productive processes and work organization, technological challenges and building platforms, uses of social media for promoting organization and communication between workers, cooperation among cooperatives, and the future of cooperatives.

We also conducted desk research on the initiatives’ Instagram channels to identify values and principles of worker property platforms. Morell et al. (2020) identified that dominant platforms have the most followers on Instagram (average of 254,000) and, among non-profit-driven platforms, cooperatives have the highest average number of followers (758). This helps us to understand the digital presence of these initiatives and how their values circulate through social media – as one of the central elements of worker-owned platforms. We show in Table 1 the main information of the cooperatives and collectives of delivery workers, including the number of followers on Instagram on November 22, 2020, which are above the average raised by Morell et al. (2020), although it is still a small number in relation to digital presence. This reinforces, once again, that worker-owned platforms will not necessarily be large-scale.

**Table 1**  
Information about the research sample

Initiative	City	Founded in	Instagram followers in 11/2020	@ in Instagram
Mensakas	Barcelona	2018	2704	@mensakas
Rodant	Valencia	2020	358	@rodantbicimissatgeria
Resto.Paris	Paris	2020	3073	@restopointparis
Coursiers Bordelais	Bordeaux	2017	1004	@coursiersbordelais
Señoritas Courier	São Paulo	2018	3396	@senoritas_courier
Pedal Express	Porto Alegre	2010	3147	@pedalexpress

With the exception of Pedal Express, born in 2010, all the other initiatives were founded in the context of the platform economy, at least since 2017, which helps us to situate them as a reaction to the platformization of labor in



emerging collectivities from the circulation of other logics that focus on workers and sustainability. The choice for these initiatives is also due to the diversity of trajectories – some were born from union struggle, others focusing on gender equality – especially women and LGBTQI+ people, with different stages of development in cities of different sizes.

### VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The two Spanish initiatives analyzed were born from the union struggles around Riders X Derechos, from Intersindical Alternativa de Catalunya (IAC), which was founded in 2017 from the struggles of platform delivery men. Mensakas was born the following year and has around 15 couriers. Their media strategies, as shown by Fernández and Barreiro (2020), were crucial so they were known by more people. Its main slogan is: “we are the alternative,” highlighting the importance of disputing the dominant meanings in relation to platform labor.

In an interview with Fernández and Barreiro (2020), a platform worker says that it is about putting work above capital and relating to characteristics such as responsible and local consumption, cooperation, and the common good. These values are present on the cooperative’s Instagram from texts such as “a dream that intends to be collective,” “ecologically responsible delivery,” and “labor rights, a better service for you.” They articulate the collective struggle of workers for rights and self-management with social and environmental responsibility – they want to be a totally ecological service.

Rodant, which was born from the Valencia branch of Riders X Derechos, is more recent: it was founded in 2020 with the same argument: to fight precariousness as a demand of today. One of its statements is: “we are companionship.” They started with a crowdfunding campaign and claim that it is difficult to sustain a business if there is no fair price but that, in return, the cooperative will offer fair trade combined with not working with vehicles that emit CO<sup>2</sup>. The cooperative as a fair service is, like Mensakas, a combination of non-exploitative work and sustainable development. On the cooperative’s Instagram, the highlight is for healthy food photos.

Both Spanish initiatives have dialogues with CoopCycle. But it is in French cooperatives that the relationship with the federation appears most strongly. Resto.Paris, born in May 2020, is a platform created, with the support of the City Council of the city, from a coalition between CoopCycle – as a federation which offers software – and Olvo, legally a cooperative of Écotable couriers, a seal for sustainable restaurants. Olvo is the one who

manages the platform and makes the delivery on cargo bikes through paid delivery men – with a weekly workload of 35 hours, no matter how many rides they make. CoopCycle develops and maintains the digital platform, which is open source.

Resto.Paris, as well as others, also presents itself as a social and environmental alternative to large platforms based on the support of various elements of the local economy, from farmers to cycle-logistics companies. Its principles involve supporting restaurants and other actors in the local food chain, offering citizens sustainable, healthy, and zero-waste food from the local economy, ensuring delivery methods that are socially and environmentally responsible, promoting an economic model based on collaboration, creation, and use of the common. Moreover, for a restaurant to be part of the platform, it needs to fulfill a series of prerequisites, such as offering most recipes derived from sustainable sectors (such as organic and from agroecological practices) and containing at least one vegetarian dish and one dish for less than 10 euros. It is also necessary to promote social integration through jobs and be an association or present aspects of solidarity economy.

Meanwhile, Coursiers Bordelais is CoopCycle's cooperative in the city of Bordeaux. With six couriers and more than 12,580 deliveries and 130,000 kilometers ridden at the end of November 2020, the initiative's principles are based on the worker's voice in decision-making, regardless of their share in the cooperative's capital. Remuneration and working conditions are decided collectively by cooperative members. In the same way as other cooperatives, they refuse the exploitation and individualization of work situations. They claim that the platform service, even though it is more ethical, is not necessarily more expensive. The cooperative's position is that they offer something fairer and cheaper than the competition. Coursiers Bordelais is focused on local development and encouraging cycling, considering the city of Bordeaux a perfect place for mobility.

In Brazil, the two collectives are related to cyclist movements. The Señoritas Courier is a collective of women couriers and LGBTQI+ people who offer services throughout the city of São Paulo, but by appointment. With the slogan "affection and responsibility," the initiative was founded by Aline Os from an initial project in progress that encourages ventures based on the use of bicycles. Founded in 2018, Señoritas was born from the perspective that women are often overlooked in delivery jobs. According to Aline Os, this is because people imagine women as less autonomous and slower in traffic. According to the initiative's Instagram, "having more women cycling on the streets is synonymous with safer traffic." Currently with 37 people



registered and 14 active people, with 3 to 5 delivery people daily on the streets of São Paulo, Senõritas has as its flagship delivery in the cosmetics sector, such as flowers, but they also deliver to notary offices and, to a lesser extent, frequency, food. The values of the initiative are environmental sustainability, the empowerment of women and LGBTQI+ people, and the passion for bicycles – as a synonym for connection.

Pedal is a cooperative of delivery cyclists in Porto Alegre. Founded in 2010, it is a pioneering initiative in the country. Since its beginning, around 50 couriers have passed through the cooperative and there are currently eight workers. Its values emphasize the agility of the bicycle combined with the experience and professionalism of the cyclists. The workers are called rats, a slang term that relates cycle messengers to those who know the city's paths well and move quickly, having the street as a natural habitat. In an interview, the Pedal representative highlights the relationship of trust built with customers and suppliers: "one of the nice things about Pedal is that we work with companies that we believe in, not just anyone."

### **PRODUCTIVE PROCESSES AND WORK ORGANIZATION**

The principles outlined above – mobility and social and environmental sustainability as common points – are the basis for the work organization of worker-owned platforms. Horizontality is a principle stated by all interviewees, but we observed that Senõritas Courier more explicitly presents one of the workers as the manager of the initiative. However, there are attempts to make the decisions taken more collective, in the sense of inserting more democracy in the workplace (de Peuter & Dyer-Witthoford, 2010; Scholz, 2016).

Elsewhere, there are variations in the way workers organize themselves horizontally. Mensakas has departments created by the workers themselves (management, economics, technology, communication, logistics, and commercial), each sector with a responsible person. Together, they form a management body, which meets every two weeks, and any member of the cooperative can participate. One of the main challenges, according to the representative interviewed, is that none of the Mensakas workers had previous experience in the business sector and each one had a different degree. In this way, they learned together the best way to organize the cooperative's work.

Pedal also divides the tasks so that everyone knows a little about all the functions and presents departments like Mensakas: finance, customer

prospecting, and communication. In practice, daily, there are four cyclists on the street, a reserve, and a worker who is the base and responsible for managing and recording all deliveries. At *Coursiers Bordelais*, of the six couriers, there are four full-time ones, and always one person as a base – also doing budgets and all the administration. They also value that everyone performs all functions and tries to adapt according to delivery times. The worker interviewed says that the context of the pandemic has meant that there is not much advance planning:

since the first lockdown, we have had little predictability about which deliveries will be held during the day. Orders arrive at the last minute without being anticipated, which means that there are many gaps during the working day, but also a great rush. (Worker at *Coursiers Bordelais*, in an interview with the author)

The pandemic scenario was also highlighted by *Pedal* as a factor that made production processes difficult in 2020.

The horizontality in the organization of self-managed work is also one of the main difficulties of a collective construction of workers, as the *Pedal* representative points out in an interview: “because it is horizontal, there will always be some difficulty, a quarrel, some problem. As there is no boss, sometimes it generates heavy discussions and demands.” The worker claims that the construction of a cooperative will last forever, according to the workers involved with it at a given moment, which is normal in self-managed experiences. This shows that horizontality – as an aspect of democracy in the workplace (by Peuter & Dyer-Witthford, 2010) in cooperatives – is more a north than a totalizing reality, as it presents nuances and contradictions.

The *Resto.Paris* representative also highlights the financial difficulties of a cooperative, which end up translating into problems related to daily work: “we need to find time to recruit restaurants and communicate with them.” She points out that there is no way to compete with the large platforms because they are not profitable, and this forces them to find other types of offer and customers, as well as educate customers on issues such as cost of delivery, paid work, and responsible delivery: “our job is to deliver things, and the real price has to be paid for what it costs.”

This was also highlighted by the representative of *Mensakas*, who added the unfair competition of large platforms and the challenge of finding customers based on their ethical values related to sustainability – something that was also highlighted by the representative of *Rodant*. The *Resto.Paris* worker says that the most difficult thing about communicating with customers is that they have



the habit of being served quickly and without paying for delivery. The solution to the problem was to propose bundled deliveries, in which customers cannot make the purchase if the value of the order is less than 35 euros. For the platform representative, this means that customers have to place orders for several people, also encouraging collective consumption. They intend to focus from now on the relationship with companies, as, according to her, they are “places where people can order lunch and group orders.”

### **TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND BUILDING PLATFORMS**

Technological challenges in building delivery platforms vary from country to country. As highlighted by Morell et al. (2020), there are initiatives that are really based on digital environments and others that are only supported by these devices. In Brazil, Pedal and Señoritas do not intend, in the short term, to have their own platforms and communicate and organize themselves through proprietary social media. French cooperatives rely on CoopCycle’s infrastructure, based on their own infrastructure and based on logics that involve free and open technologies for cooperatives – as long as they are in tune with its principles. Those in Spain, on the other hand, have dialogue with CoopCycle, although they still do not effectively use their platforms.

The Pedal worker says they considered building their own platform but did not do so due to high costs and not being sure of a return. However, they included an online order page on their website where the customer can fill in the order data by computer or cell phone, which is sent directly to the cooperative’s system. Señoritas, on the other hand, developed a semi-automated form based on the voluntary work of women programmers. In this way, customers can budget deliveries to know more easily what the value will be.

The representative of Mensakas says that their initial idea was to launch their own platform but it has not yet been possible. According to her, in an interview,

we have a very powerful application under development but it demands resources and time. There will be three apps in one, with interfaces for restaurant, delivery workers, and consumers. Right now, we are finishing the delivery worker part so that the application can appear on marketplaces and restaurant websites.

The statement by the Mensakas worker reveals the limits of platforms owned by workers in relation to infrastructure, even if the platform itself is self-managed.

This means that, in the platformization context, in terms of Poell et al. (2019), workers will still depend on the app stores of the dominant platforms, so it is not possible, in the short term, to fully reappropriate the entire platform tree, in terms of Van Dijck (2021).

Mensakas will also partner with CoopCycle on their platform. Rodant, from Valencia, whose platform has not yet been launched, will work from the beginning using CoopCycle's software, as its representative says in an interview: "we consider that creating a new application from scratch is crazy when you don't have much capital." For him, with the federation application, the cooperative does not need to make a large investment in something of its own and can make investments in the most urgent needs of the organization. Coursiers Bordelais already work with the CoopCycle platform and receive support and guidance from the federation.

The Resto.Paris representative also points out that there are no financial resources to build a platform of their own and that fortunately it is possible to use CoopCycle's. The interview with the worker reveals nuances in the relationship with the federation. On the one hand, there is a good relationship, and, on the other hand, she says that the tricky part "is that the platform is not our project, so it is difficult to put in new features." However, it would be financially impossible to build a platform from scratch. She claims that if she were to work at CoopCycle, it would take a lot of working time and that that would not be a priority for her. However, she makes some suggestions for improvement on the platform, mainly in relation to user experience and better features for companies.

Thus, the different initiatives show different involvement in relation to the construction of a platform owned by workers, although the existence of operational and financial difficulties is unanimous – and it is not something restricted to Brazil. Hence the central importance of CoopCycle – even with possible divergences in relation to improvements to be made on the platform – to make possible a non-dependence of couriers in relation to proprietary platforms – as one of the central aspects to confront the platformization of the dominant work.

Moreover, even without having the construction of their own platforms on the horizon, there are technological imaginations on the part of couriers in Brazil who also do not want to depend on a European platform built on their own logic. In the case of Brazilians building their delivery platforms, this would follow the logic of dewesternizing (Davis & Xiao, 2021) the workers' platforms, that is, building technological alternatives from below, considering the needs of real workers (Englert et al., 2020).



### **SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PROMOTING ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN WORKERS**

In addition to building platforms that are owned by workers, social media are central for promoting organization and communication between workers – and also with consumers and restaurants – of the analyzed cooperatives, in line with research such as Geelan and Hodder (2017), Wood et al. al. (2018), Woodcock and Graham (2019), and Grohmann and Alves (2020). The social media most used by workers is Telegram – especially in communication between them.

For Rodant workers, each social media is used in a different way, with pros and cons for each one: “we use social media for communication and promotion of the cooperative,” with WhatsApp for personal relationships between workers and Telegram for organizing the work, something that could be translated, respectively, as social composition and technical class composition (Englert et al., 2020). The Mensakas worker reports the centrality of the different groups on Telegram for productive processes, serving to check times for remuneration, profitability accounting, and the existence of other one-way information channels. She emphasizes that it is a process in continuous construction: “we need to keep optimizing these methods. We were reducing the groups, because sometimes the information is lost. That’s why the meetings we have every two or three weeks are important.”

Pedal also uses Telegram as the main means of communication between workers on different channels, as well as a group for workers to relax. They use WhatsApp as the main social media for communication with customers and Instagram only for promoting the cooperative. WhatsApp is the main means of communication on social media in Brazil (Evangalista & Bruno, 2019) but self-managed initiatives have sought to use Telegram as an alternative, such as Señoritas. The worker points out that, before creating the collective, female riders were uncomfortable with the WhatsApp groups of delivery people who work for large platforms because they are sexist spaces, in line with findings from the research by Cant (2019). For Señoritas, it is about thinking of social media groups as safe spaces for women.

Coursiers Bordelais, on the other hand, uses Facebook and Instagram for this promotion but admit that “honestly, we are not very good at this. We are lucky to have a lot of visibility in the national media thanks to our engagement against platforms and uberized work,” according to the worker interviewed. This confirms the data presented by Morell et al. (2020) in relation to the digital presence of cooperatives in social media.

Resto.Paris, meanwhile, uses Slack for project and task management, as well as communicating with customers, but the cooperative worker recognizes that, when demand increases, it can become more complicated

to use this tool: “I think it is not very friendly for restaurants and for people who are not connected to their smartphone all the time.” In the meantime, they have created a WhatsApp group with the restaurants, which, according to them, is preferred. In this way, Brazil, although it uses WhatsApp on a larger scale, is not the only country to do so. However, for the cooperative, as for the others, the relationship with social media is a continuous, almost experimental, construction.

### COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

In terms of scale, rider-owned initiatives feature a much smaller number of workers compared to large digital platforms. However, this is definitely not a problem for cooperatives, given that one of their central points is the articulation between different initiatives. One of the central principles of cooperativism, intercooperation or cooperation among cooperatives (de Peuter & Dyer-Witford, 2010) is enthusiastically seen by the workers interviewed as one of the aspects of the circulation of workers’ struggles. In France, the relationship with CoopCycle has favored dialogue with other courier cooperatives. The federation has also had contact with cooperatives in South America, especially Brazil and Argentina, highlighting the dialogue between workers. French cooperatives also have a relationship with cooperatives of accountants and programmers, in addition to having some cooperatives as customers. Resto.Paris is thinking of launching a project with a network of farmers’ cooperatives. This shows, as proposed by Huws (2020), the potential for building local ecosystems by bringing together different sectors.

In Brazil, the two initiatives analyzed present more contacts with other collectives and non-profit entities than with other cooperatives, showing difficulties in dialoguing with the traditional Brazilian cooperative movement. Both Pedal and Señoritas present dialogue with cycle delivery collectives across the country. Pedal is seen in the Brazilian cycle delivery scenario as a reference and sees other collectives as partners: “we always see this as a partnership, not as someone who is stealing our work.” In this sense, they understand that the relationships with other similar initiatives are to aggregate and not distance, making the values of mobility and sustainability circulate among workers.

The vision of Spanish cooperatives is in the same direction. Mensakas sees the ethical criteria of cooperatives as important and potent connections for building alternatives to the dominant platforming scenario. They are in contact with several cooperatives of farmers, programmers, and delivery workers – not only in Barcelona and Europe but also in Latin America.



Rodant's relationships are more restricted to the regional scenario of Valencia but with cooperatives of all sizes from the relationship with the Valencian Federation of Cooperatives. In the cycle delivery sector, they have dialogue with about five other cooperatives.

### **THE FUTURE OF WORKER-OWNED INITIATIVES**

These connections represent emerging solidarities and collectivities in the sense of articulating cooperative principles around the world, as well as the principles of these initiatives that are put into circulation – such as mobility and social and environmental sustainability. This emergency character signals that the experiences of these cooperatives are a laboratory of platform labor. In this sense, when asked about the future of worker-owned platforms, initiatives expect more stability and growth. The Mensakas worker hopes that the cycle delivery sector will be stable and expects to receive funding and that there will be full working hours for all delivery workers, in addition to being able to raise the price of deliveries and increase the cooperative's profitability. Rodant, on the other hand, has a more modest objective: in five years, they hope to operate in the entire Valencia region.

Meanwhile, Pedal hopes to strengthen a collective entity that does not depend on the people who make up the initiative and, thus, continues to be a national reference. They also reveal a desire to participate in world delivery championships. Señoritas Courier hopes to be able to broadly develop cycle delivery based on the principles of feminist economics and, perhaps in the future, build their own platform based on these values.

For the worker at Coursiers Bordelais, the idea is to grow little by little and develop his own food supply: "you have to do things slowly and intelligently, so you don't miss a beat." Resto.Paris expects to become a reference for deliveries, especially in relation to business lunches, and also be a protagonist with restaurants that monitor environmental conditions: "maybe people who are used to ordering from Uber Eats or Deliveroo will say: 'ah, maybe it's better to order from Resto.Paris.'" The interviewee also hopes that it will be a profitable initiative and that it will not depend on public resources. And she thinks it would be interesting if, in the future, the customers themselves could be members of the cooperative.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The worker-owned experiences analyzed are from three different countries, two in Europe and one in South America. On the one hand, they present specific

social and political contexts. In 2020, Brazil experienced its biggest rider strikes and self-managed experiences began to gain more visibility. The platformization of collectives and cooperatives is still not a big issue. Moreover, if their own platforms are built, they do not want to be dependent on software with a logic that is not built from below or does not dialogue with their local realities and needs. In Europe, Spanish cooperatives were born from union struggles and French initiatives are related to the CoopCycle cooperative federation – which has even strengthened relations with groups of workers in South America, especially in Argentina – and the construction of its own platforms is essential, and something that is at hand.

On the other hand, we reinforce the international character of the confrontation with the platformization of labor and the potential of the circulation of workers' struggles. Thus, even coming from different contexts, we emphasize that the experiences have connections between them, as initiatives under construction, both from the point of view of the work organization and the use of social media – even though most of them are owned by large platforms – for communication between workers and with customers, in addition to publicizing the cooperative itself as a media strategy for digital presence. These similarities and possible transnational articulations are inserted in a perspective of circulation of workers' struggles.

Workers do not agree with the idea that the construction of worker-owned platforms is only a technological issue since even the construction of one's own platform is problematized in the financial and organizational dimensions. It is, rather, about building productive processes that are owned by workers – and, in this sense, horizontality in management and the division between departments, in which all workers have a voice, is a central aspect for democracy in workplace. In relation to production processes, the initiatives highlight that it is a continuous construction, and that horizontality is also a center of disputes and contradictions.

CoopCycle is an entity with a fundamental role in relation to the feasibility of a platform for the use of cooperatives, although it is not necessarily a project of the workers from below – as evidenced by requests for improvement by Resto.Paris in relation to the experiences of users and to relationships with companies. Although it has a smaller dialogue in relation to Brazilian initiatives, CoopCycle also has a central role in connection and articulation with other cooperatives, favoring intercooperation.

We consider cooperation among cooperatives to be a key aspect for the development of worker-owned platforms, given that self-managed experiences will not have the same scale of workers as large platforms and that this is not a problem, but a feature. In addition to fostering cooperativism and solidarity



economy, the principle of intercooperation helps in the reinvention of local economies from below based on new production and consumption circuits in which delivery workers are just one of the links in the value chain, also involving coders, farmers, small restaurants, among others. Thus, in addition to the production-consumption circuit, there is the circulation of meanings – with a central role of media strategies – of self-management experiences based on values such as sustainable development, urban mobility, open technologies, data policies and algorithms that favor the worker, and healthy food. Of these points, the data and algorithm aspects are still a blind spot in the initiatives interviewed. Furthermore, open technologies are, in addition to CoopCycle, more of a promise than a reality.

The relationship with social media for communication and work organization is understood by workers as essential but without a ready formula on how to use them. In this sense, there is the use of several platforms, still in an experimental way. Most social media are proprietary, especially in Brazil, with widespread use of WhatsApp. However, we understand that the apparent ambiguity in the use of these commercial platforms (Lazar & Davidson, 2020) is justified by the need to dispute the dominant spaces with a greater digital presence of cooperatives and delivery workers, in the sense of greater media visibility. These are frontier struggles that the workers need to face in order to put more people – workers and consumers – into building alternative circuits for the platformization of labor.

The process of building worker-owned platforms is part of emerging solidarities and collectivities and may be the beginning of a broader scenario of facing the generalization of dominant labor platformization. This can happen with the construction of platforms for the public good, in line with the aspects defended by Huws (2020). The analysis shows that the dominant scenario of platformization is not inevitable and that there is a circulation of workers' struggles for the construction of experiences – even if initial – to re-signify the meanings of work through platforms as a true laboratory of class struggles. Thus, the experiments described here are worker-owned laboratories.

In theoretical terms, we expand the notion of platform cooperativism to encompass the different institutional designs that have as a principle the self-management of workers based on the notion of worker-owned platforms. This shows that the construction of worker-owned initiatives in the context of platformization is not something that follows a predefined model or that is necessarily related to a concept defined a priori. They are diverse and have different relationships with digital presence, according to Morell et al. (2020). Understanding this diversity of self-managed possibilities is somehow also

seeking to dewesternize platform studies (Davis & Xiao, 2021), in the sense of avoiding only replicating certain successful models in Europe, for example. Groups of riders in Brazil have potential in terms of work organization and communication between workers that go beyond pre-established definitions of how these initiatives should be.

As a challenge for future studies, we address the need to analyze the entire production and consumption circuit of these initiatives, ranging from platform design and materialities and work and worker organization to media strategies and data and algorithm policies, in addition to the ways people consume worker-owned platforms. This means understanding a whole circuit of work on worker-owned platforms. ■

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# Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

## *Os Caminhos das Mobilizações On-line Antirracismo no Brasil em 2020*

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand the visibility dynamics around the 2020 online anti-racism mobilization on Twitter and online news media in Brazil. We work with two corpora. The first is a Twitter dataset ( $n = 5,811,499$ ) with mentions to *blacklivesmatter* and *vidasnegrasimportam* from May 12<sup>th</sup> to July 19<sup>th</sup>. The second one comprehends 1,650 news stories published in national Brazilian news websites about the same two topics. By analyzing the communication dynamics and temporality on both media, we seek to understand how the issue was treated by journalistic coverage and by users' mobilization. Our results indicate that Twitter incorporates violence episodes to anti-racism movements before news media do. The latter, in turn, offer a more stable coverage over time.

**Keywords:** News media, Twitter, black lives matter, vidas negras importam, racism

### RESUMO

O artigo visa compreender as dinâmicas de visibilidade da mobilização on-line antirracismo em 2020 no Twitter e na mídia on-line brasileira. Trabalhamos com dois corpora. O primeiro é um conjunto de tweets ( $n = 5.811.499$ ) com menções a *blacklivesmatter* e *vidasnegrasimportam* de 12 de maio a 19 de julho. O segundo compreende 1.650 textos de sites de notícias brasileiros sobre os mesmos temas. Ao analisar a dinâmica e temporalidade de ambas as mídias, buscamos compreender como o tema foi tratado pela cobertura jornalística e pela mobilização dos usuários. Nossos resultados apontam que o Twitter associa de forma mais rápida episódios de violência aos movimentos antirracismo, enquanto a mídia oferece uma cobertura mais estável ao longo do tempo.

**Palavras-chave:** Mídia, Twitter, black lives matter, vidas negras importam, racismo

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MATRIZES



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

**A**NTI-RACISM MOVEMENTS GAINED new momentum in Brazil during the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of episodes of violence against Black people, both in Brazil and abroad, revived the debate as well as mobilizations for social and racial justice. As we will see below, these movements gained strength from the end of May, after the murder of George Floyd, an African American killed by a policeman on May 25<sup>th</sup> in the American city of Minneapolis. But even before that, Brazil had already seen its own cases of police violence against Black people on news and social media.

Brazil has the largest afro-descendent population in the world and the violence against them is a routine issue. From 2008 to 2018, the murder of Black people increased by 11.5% while, for other populations, it decreased by 13% (Atlas da Violência, 2020). Besides that, it is important to highlight that, between May and July, Brazil was one of the main countries affected by COVID-19 and implemented a widespread policy of social isolation. During this period, people were encouraged to be at home and go out just for necessary activities. The context of the pandemic resulted in a triple increase of violence against this already marginalized population. First, there was an increase in deadly police actions resulting in more deaths; second, data indicate that COVID-19 in Brazil killed four times more Black people with low education levels than white people with high education levels; third, the Black population is the one most exposed to both precarious conditions of housing and of jobs. In that context, understanding the dynamics of anti-racism movements becomes even more crucial, and the digital environments gain centrality as spaces for visibility, conversation, and mobilization.

Considering that, this paper aims to understand the communication dynamics about the 2020 online anti-racism movements in Brazil. Online content on the topic was mostly organized using the hashtag #blacklivesmatter – which was created in 2013 and achieved several visibility peaks since then – and its version in Portuguese, #vidasnegrasimportam. Those two labels will guide the composition of our corpus. Our analysis is centered in two communication environments: Twitter as a central stage for political activism (Arceneaux & Weiss, 2010; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Rogers, 2014), and online news outlets as important legacy media in the construction of public debate.

The first section of the article establishes the context and history of online anti-racism movements, while in the second one, we discuss the roles and possibilities of Twitter mobilization and online news coverage on a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), drawing the research question and hypotheses that will be explored in this article. We then present our methods

and discuss our results before drawing some conclusions and suggestions for future research.

### **ANTI-RACISM ONLINE MOBILIZATION**

The #Blacklivesmatter hashtag was created in July 2013 (Freelon et al., 2016) in a period called, by Karatzogianni and Schandorf (2012), as the fourth phase of online activism. At that point, online political mobilizations were no longer a novelty and were turning mainstream. That phase would include the Arab Spring protests (2011), as well as those in Greece (2011), Spain (2011), Nigeria (2012), Brazil (2013), and Turkey (2013), and was characterized by the adoption of private and mainstream communication platforms. At that moment, the political use of social media was frequently viewed as a possibility for the inclusion of new voices and for resistance against authoritarian governments. Seven years later, #Blacklivesmatter is still active and the view on online activism changed radically, especially after the Cambridge Analytica scandal which raised concerns about the context of the Trump election in the US and the Brexit referendum in the UK. In Brazil, this new period of political activism is strongly marked by the 2018 presidential campaign which resulted in the election of Jair Bolsonaro.

Not only Black Lives Matter activism survived this whole period, comprising very different views on the political use of technology, but it also unfolded far beyond a Twitter hashtag (Freelon et al., 2016). The movement also gained international repercussion, including in Brazil where racism is a major issue (Almeida, 2019).

Although created in 2013, the Black Lives Matter hashtag started to gain major attention only in August 2014. A study from the Center for Media & Social Impact, based on the total corpus of tweets with the hashtag brought directly from Twitter, shows that while it only appeared in 48 public tweets in June 2013 and in 398 tweets in July 2014, in August of that year that number had skyrocketed to 52,288 (Freelon et al., 2016). That change is directly associated with the Ferguson protests in the US.

From 2014 to 2020, the persistence of #BlackLivesMatter is unprecedented, compared to other hashtags used for social causes (Figure 1). Another study, this time from the Pew Research Center, attests that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag has had a relatively consistent presence on Twitter from 2013 until 2018 with peaks related to major events (Anderson et al., 2018).

The research shows that



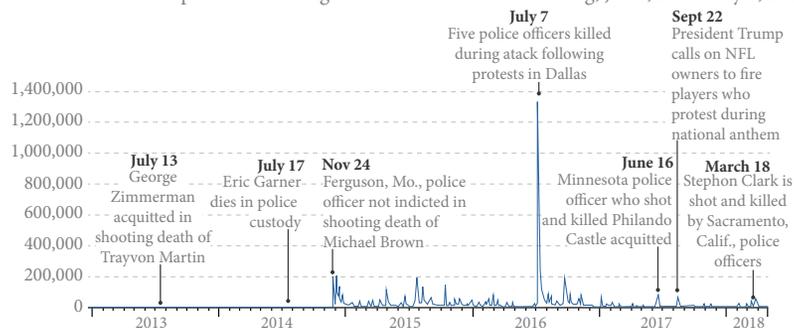
## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

one of the most notable of these spikes occurred over a period of roughly 10 days in the summer of 2016. On July 5 of that year, Alton Sterling was fatally shot by police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The following day, Philando Castile was shot and killed by a police officer in the suburbs of Saint Paul, Minnesota. On July 7, a gunman killed five police officers and wounded several others in Dallas, Texas, and on July 17 another shooter attacked law enforcement in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, killing three officers and wounding three others. Over the 10 days spanning July 7-17, 2016, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was mentioned an average of nearly 500,000 tweets daily. (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 13)

**Figure 1**  
*#BlackLivesMatter timeline from 2013 to 2018*

### Use of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter periodically spikes in response to major news events

Number of Twitter posts mentioning the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, Jan.1, 2013-May 1, 2018



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available tweets using Crimson Hexagon. "Activism in the Social Media Age"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

*Note.* Reproduced from *Activism in the Social Media Age*, by M. Anderson, S. Toor, L. Rainie e A. Smith, 2018, p. 14. Copyright 2018 Pew Research Center.

Studies also indicate that most messages with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter are posted in solidarity with the movement (Ince et al., 2017) and that eventual counter-movements – such as #AllLivesMatter – are smaller in comparison to the original one (Freelon et al., 2016; Haffner, 2019). However, we must not consider it a homogeneous movement. Haffner (2019), for example, developed a place-based analysis that shows that adhesion to the movement varied significantly according to the racial composition of localities. We also need to consider that these findings about #BlackLivesMatter should be seen in the context of several investigations that show a relation between racial attacks and hate speech and online media (Roshani, 2020; Rossini, 2020; Trindade, 2020).

In 2020, the hashtag spiked again after the murder of George Floyd, on May 25<sup>th</sup>, but the repercussion of the movement in Brazil also had its own national causes. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, the thirteen-year-old João Pedro was killed by the police in Rio de Janeiro in the middle of a crossfire. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the five-year-old Miguel fell from the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of an apartment building while his mother, who worked as a housemaid, walked the dogs of her employer. She was obliged to take her son to work as a result of the closing of schools and had asked her employer to look after him while she walked the dogs. On July 12<sup>th</sup>, a major television program (*Fantástico*, aired Sunday night) revealed that a woman had been assaulted by the São Paulo police in a very similar way to the aggression imposed against George Floyd. And those were only the cases that gained major national visibility.

In reaction to that, the issue of racism and anti-racism movements gained the public debate through both activists' actions and news coverage. On social networks, in addition to the original #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, the meaning of the expression was also translated to Portuguese as #VidasNegrasImportam. On the news, coverage also became more intense. The role of those two communication environments is the topic we are going to explore on the next section.

## NEWS COVERAGE AND TWITTER MOBILIZATION IN A HYBRID MEDIA SYSTEM

The use of online social network platforms for activism is not a new topic in the communication research field. A broad bibliography covers the relation between online mechanisms and political engagement (Aguiton & Cardon, 2008; Badouard, 2013; Bakardjieva, 2015; Bennet & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Gomes, 2011; Kavada, 2015; Mabi & Gruson-Daniel, 2018; Valenzuela, 2013), and the topic gains special interest from the scientific field from 2010 onward (Gomes, 2011). However, if the relation between digital media and activism has a broad bibliography, the literature does not necessarily take into account important issues of the contemporary hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) and frequently presents the so-called one medium bias (Mattoni & Treré, 2014) or adopts a simplistic approach to technology (Della Porta, 2013), resulting in excessively techno-deterministic views of the phenomenon.

That is why the idea of a hybrid media system, proposed by Chadwick (2013), seems to be a suitable perspective for our analysis. The author explains that the concept emerges from the premise that it is necessary to try “to integrate



## Following the Paths of the 2020 Online Anti-Racism Mobilizations in Brazil

the roles played by older and newer media in political life” (p. 4). That approach would avoid the reductionist analysis centered only on supposedly new or old media. Instead, it focuses on their interactions.

According to Chadwick (2013), when thinking about the ever-evolving relationship between media and politics, the concept of hybrid allows us to integrate three elements that seem crucial: complexity, interdependence, and transition. For the author, the concept makes an interesting bridge between old and new, hybrids being “recognizable for their lineages but also genuinely new” (p. 14). Their newness emerges, then, not from completely new elements, but rather from the recombination of prior existing elements.

Even though the relation between new and old is not always oppositional, it is frequently combined with tensions and disputes, which makes the power component very central. These disputes create an unstable environment and a changing balance between different media logics. “Particulate hybridity is the outcome of power struggles and competition for preeminence during periods of unusual transition, contingency, and negotiability” (Chadwick, 2013, p. 15).

In order to address the issue of anti-racism mobilizations, taking into account the existence of a hybrid media system, we designed our research question around the articulation of old and new media on the online environment:

RQ: What are the dynamics of the information flows about the 2020 anti-racism movements in Brazil on Twitter and online news outlets?

That question allows us to investigate the different ways in which anti-racism movements appear in these media and the eventual points of contact between them. The first issue that interests us is how these movements appear on both media during the two-month period of our corpus.

Working with two different media implicates considering two different media logics (Dahlgren, 2009) that result in different mediation and visibility dynamics (Alves, 2019; Santos, 2019). In news media, the discussion about mediation is centered on the role of journalists and the news media themselves as legitimized gatekeepers that are responsible for choosing what should be brought to a large public (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Describing the visibility process generated by news media in Brazil, Gomes and Almada (2014) build on the idea of news waves. According to that approach, media would generate a concentration and convergence of coverage around an issue during a certain period of time that would then decrease while another issue emerges (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1995). The wave would be generated by a key event and develop through reactions to it from

the political system and other implicated actors. These key events would be defined as different or peculiar as they implicate in an unfolding of the issue in the news coverage (Gomes & Almada, 2014).

In online social media, the dynamic differs. With the greater number of people that can publish information, new kinds of mediation, not necessarily related to news media, emerge. Ideas of a communication environment based on a mass self-communication dynamic (Castells, 2009), with the existence of personal publics (Schmidt, 2014) exposed to self-mediated contents (Cammaerts & Jiménez-Martínez, 2014) gain prominence in the debate. All of them highlight the central role of individuals in the communication system.

We need to consider that a new sociability emerges also from this online activism. According to Gomes (2011), hyper connection, self-broadcasting and social commenting, and social editing would be its main characteristics. The first one would lead to the end of the separation between *real* and *virtual*. The action of *going online* loses its meaning once the connection to the online world becomes constant and dissociated from computers as physical objects – especially with the increasing importance of mobile use. The digital would no longer be a separated reality. The second one refers to the increase in the possibilities of real-time broadcasting one's actions. Gomes (2011) highlights this is not restricted to a narcissistic perspective, but it is also linked to political activities as a new possibility of citizen empowerment.

The third element of this new sociability pointed out by the author would be the sharing and re-appropriation of content as a form of political action. The author calls this characteristic the “bleachers effect”<sup>1</sup>, meaning that the public that is not at the center of the action may also interfere in it by helping to disseminate related content. This reaction to the content may be done through commenting or editing, which would create a complementing role between those that act by publishing content about their presence on a protest and those whose political action consists in reacting to that content and helping to spread it.

Considering that those different logics would generate diverse visibility dynamics between news media and social media, we suppose that:

H1: There will be no positive correlation between the publication timeline of the anti-racism mobilization on Twitter and its coverage on online news media.

The differences between the communication dynamics around the 2020 anti-racism mobilizations on Twitter and on news media can also be analyzed in terms of its duration. Both events could be seen as having a short duration, according to Braudel's (1969) conceptualization that considers

<sup>1</sup> *The efeito arquibancada*, the original term in Portuguese, refers to the role of supporters of sports teams who, even if not on the game field, may influence the game by their actions of support to those that are the main responsible ones for the action. It seems that, in American culture, it would be something like the armchair quarterback.



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those kind of events as being ultra-sensitive and having brief, rapid, nervous oscillation. To him

It is the most exciting, the richest in humanity, the most dangerous too. Let us be wary of this still burning history, felt by their contemporary, described, lived at the rate of their lives, brief like ours. It has the dimension of their anger, their dreams, their illusions. (Braudel, 1969, p. 12)

But the fact is that various authors point to the acceleration of time as a phenomenon of our societies (Abranches, 2020; Lohmeier et al., 2020; Santos, 2000) and online media is certainly a central part of it. In that sense, even though both can be considered short in a historical point of view, the events on social and news media tend to present significant differences in their duration.

As described above, while news media tend to rely on news waves, social media are based on a polyphony of opinions and decisions taken by a multiplicity of actors. In that sense, while news media rely on a professional logic of generating coverage on a certain topic, on social media, the expression of interest tends to be much more decentralized and ephemeral.

Thus, we consider that:

H2: The discussion about the 2020 anti-racism movements in Brazil will be more volatile on Twitter than on news media.

H3: After a peak of visibility, the decreased tendency will be stronger on Twitter than on news media.

But not only the timelines of the movement will develop differently along the period of analysis, the starting point of the mobilization and coverage around the anti-racism movements will be different on Twitter and news media. According to the results found by Gomes and Almada (2014), analyzing the news waves in the major Brazilian television news program: “A key event is not simply an event. It needs to be understood as part of something continuous, of an unfolding, as a phenomenon or a set of consequences” (p. 17).

That characterization of the key events that will generate coverage on the news media and mobilization on Twitter around the anti-racism movement seems especially important here. Due to the different dynamics of the communication environments – news media based on journalistic coverage and Twitter, much more on mobilization processes – we assume that the key event will start first on Twitter and then on the news coverage. That is because, although the violence cases against Black people are treated as news by the

news outlet, they are not immediately associated with a long phenomenon and tend to be treated as episodic. In that sense, the coverage of the first police violence cases may not be associated with the anti-racism movement, thus not appearing in our data. On the other hand, taking into account that Twitter is a communication environment much more propitious to mobilization, that association would appear sooner. Black Twitter, for example, characterized as a movement of resistance and political organization between Black communities – both in the US and in Brazil – may be seen as a counter public in the digital arena (Hill, 2018). Thus, we assume that:

H4: The association between police violence cases and the anti-racism movement appears first on Twitter and is then incorporated by the news media.

Also due to the characterization of Twitter use as a mobilization space; we expect that hyperlinks to external content will not be directly affected by the quantity of news media reports about the movement. Previous research about the hashtag mobilization pro and against President Bolsonaro during the pandemic showed that the percentage of these links is relatively low, and that news media represent a small part of them (Santos, 2021). Also, in previous studies about the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, the presence of news media links was questioned. Freelon et al. (2016) found that “protesters and their supporters were generally able to circulate their own narratives on Twitter without relying on mainstream news outlets” (p. 5). Our fifth hypothesis goes toward that notion, assuming that:

H5: There will be no positive correlation between the number of news articles published and use of links on tweets.

## METHODS

To develop this study, we considered the period between May 12<sup>th</sup> and July 19<sup>th</sup>, covering a period of 10 weeks. As written above, George Floyd was killed on May 25<sup>th</sup>, so our datasets comprehend two weeks before the major spike of attention to the issue. That timeframe also allowed us to cover the slavery abolition anniversary in Brazil (May 13<sup>th</sup>).

Within that timeframe we built two corpora. To collect Twitter data, we used an adjusted version of the Python library Twint and set it to collect mentions in Portuguese of the hashtags #Blacklivesmatter and #Vidasnegrasimportam. We gathered all original tweets (did not consider retweets) and its 37 metainformation. Our whole Twitter collection, after deduplication, reached 5,811,499 tweets. As this dataset was very large, we hosted it in a MongoDB account and used PyMongo (another Python library) to run analysis queries.



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We chose to work with hashtags as they are natively digital objects which serve multiple functions and are specially used to organize and engage on activist actions (Omena et al., 2020). We may not disregard that hashtagging is not necessarily the consequence of human action and is often related to bot activities, but for the purpose of this article, that possibility of appropriation corroborates our understanding of hashtag engagement as collectively formed actions mediated by technical interfaces (Omena et al., 2020). They are, thus, subject to affordances and constraints of the communication environment they are embedded in.

The size of our Twitter corpus is quite significant compared to previous research. Ince et al. (2017) estimated that there were 660 thousand tweets with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter during an 11-month period in 2014, while Freelon et al. (2016) identified 4,312,599 mentions to the term in the period of one year between June 2014 and May 2015. Anderson et al. (2018) make a longer analysis, from July 2013 to May 2018, identifying 30 million mentions throughout the period, an average of 17 thousand per day. It is necessary to consider that all these studies are based on a corpus in English, the movement's original language, where the mentions are supposed to be higher.

Our second corpus was composed by online news media articles. To collect data from news media, we used Media Cloud (<https://mediacloud.org/>), an open platform to extract data from online journalistic outlets. We collected articles that cited “Black Lives Matter” or “Vidas Negras Importam” during the same period of the Twitter collection. By doing that, we got 1,650 different articles.

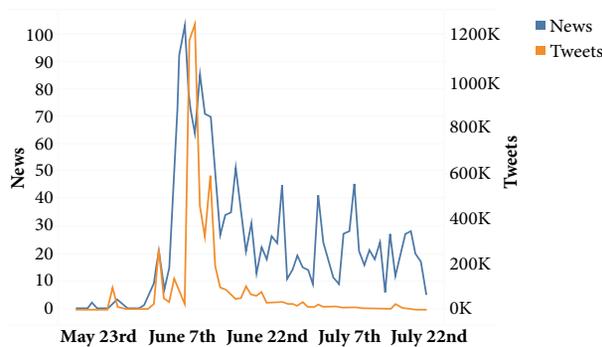
After a pre-analysis using PyMongo, a Twitter workable dataset version was generated as a json file. Mediacloud data were on CSV files. Both were analyzed using the Tableau software to identify patterns, verify trends, and calculate some metrics. At the end, final calculations were done in Excel files. Most of the analysis we do here are descriptive or exploratory statistical, the best method to answer our Research Question.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To investigate the dynamics and inter-influences between information flows about the 2020 anti-racism movements in Brazil on Twitter and online news outlets, we started by testing our first hypothesis. It suggests that communication dynamics on Twitter and news outlets are different in so many aspects that there will not be a correlation between publication timelines in both communication environments.

To test that, we first calculated the Pearson’s correlation for all our period of analysis. The result was 0.54, suggesting a positive correlation between the publication trends on Twitter and online news media outlets. As we can see in Figure 2, both timelines present the same pattern: low volume at the beginning of the timeline, with a huge peak just after, followed by a long decrease until the end of the studied period. So, testing the timeline as a whole, our hypothesis was falsified.

**Figure 2**  
*Twitter and online news media timelines*

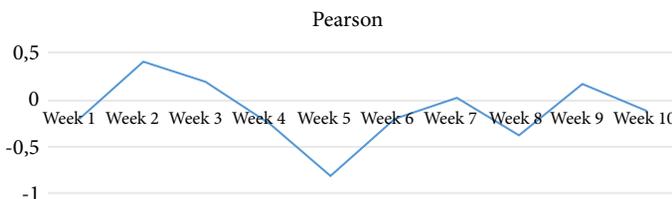


Note. Made by the authors.

But that did not seem enough, taking into account that we could visually see that the dynamics were significantly different in some of the analyzed periods. So, we decided to calculate the correlation within each week of the studied period, and there we can see (Figure 3) a very different landscape.

On the one hand, Weeks 2 and 3 show the highest correlation and concentrate most of the content published. This period is strongly influenced by George Floyd’s murder and the street protests in reaction to it. So, there was an external event that drove content production both on news media and Twitter.

**Figure 3 –**  
*Correlation between Twitter and online news media timelines per week*



Note. Made by the authors.



On the other hand, week 5 presents a strong negative correlation, followed by week 8, with a significative negative one. So, looking at shorter time windows, where the endogenous dynamic of each media can be better perceived, we can see that, although the general trend is positively correlated, there are significant internal differences during the studied period. In other words, in a longer timeframe, both timelines tend to follow external events with different rhythms but with a similar trend: lower volumes before a key event, a fast increase leading to an enormous peak just after the key event, and a slow decrease after that. But if we break a large period into smaller ones, differences in rhythm get more relevant. Significant positive correlations appear in only two of the analyzed weeks. So, we can say that our first hypothesis was partially falsified.

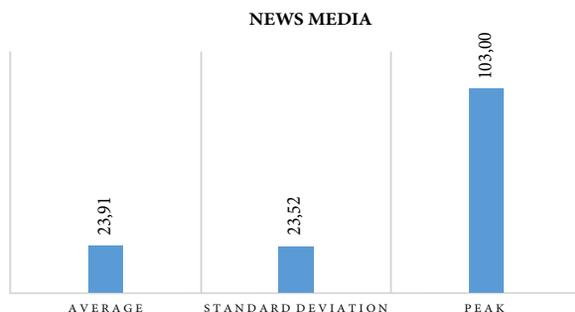
To further explore this issue, we approached our second and third hypotheses, which explore the temporality of the coverage on news media and the mobilization on Twitter. First, we expected a larger volatility on Twitter than on news media sites (H2). To test this hypothesis, we calculated the standard deviation, average and median, and the proportion between standard deviation and average. The larger this proportion, the larger the volatility in our sample. On the same way, the larger the difference between average and median, the more disperse are the numbers in our corpus.

Figures 4 and 5 show that while for news media the difference between average and median was relatively small (26%), 24 against 19, for Twitter the difference was huge: 546%, with a median of 13,396 and an average of 84,224. That shows how daily volumes vary much more intensely on Twitter as compared to news sites.

Besides that, on Twitter, the standard deviation represented 263% of the average and 1,658% of the median. On news media, the same analysis showed a result of 98% and 123%, respectively. At last, the peak of publications on Twitter represented 15 times the average of publications (and 94 times the median), while on online news outlets, the peak was four times the average and represented five times the median. So, our H2 was confirmed: The dynamic of anti-racism movements on Twitter was more volatile than on online news media.

**Figure 4**

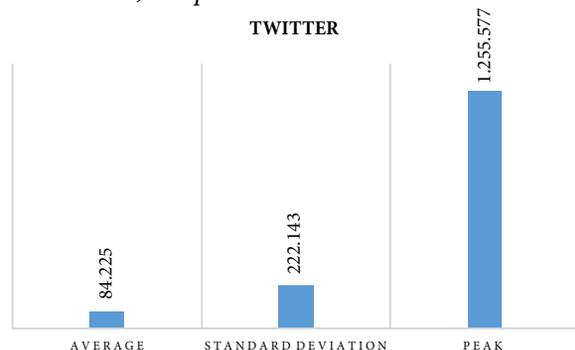
*Average, standard deviation, and peak on online news media*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

**Figure 5**

*Average, standard deviation, and peak on Twitter*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

In terms of temporality, we also devoted specific attention to the moment after the peak. In that sense, we investigated the intensity of the decrease in publications expecting that there would be a stronger decrease in volume on Twitter than on news media (H3).

In order to analyze that, we considered only week 5 to week 10 of our corpus, since the peak took place on week 4 on both Twitter and online news media outlets. We then compared the decreased intensity in both communication environments.

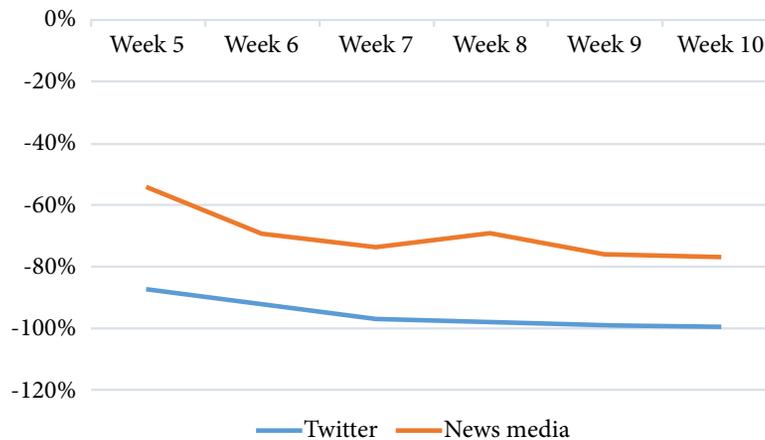
As we can see below (Figures 6 and 7), our hypothesis is confirmed. After week 4, the decreased intensity was higher on Twitter. Tweet volume on week 5 was 87% smaller than on peak, while, on news media, this figure was smoother (54%). In all weeks after the peak, Twitter presented a reduction in volume, while news media showed an increase. Besides that, we can also see that the decreased tendency is stronger on Twitter than on news media.



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**Figure 6**

*Decrease rates per week on Twitter and online news media*

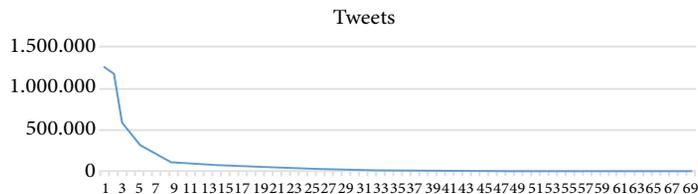


*Note.* Made by the authors.

However, we must highlight that those findings do not mean that the anti-racism movement vanished from Twitter. The volume of tweets on week 10 was almost 10 times higher than on week 1, what shows a resilience of the issue on this social media platform. The distribution of Twitter publications strictly follow the so-called Pareto rule (Pareto, 1971), commonly found in organic digital phenomena (Reis, 2018). The two weeks (20% of the analyzed period) with the highest volume concentrate 80% of the tweets.

**Figure 7**

*Decrease rate on Twitter per day*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

News media shows another pattern, where the coverage extends over time in a more nuanced way. That can be related to the journalistic work itself, which tends to seek and cause repercussions around the topics on its agenda, a phenomenon that can be approached through the logic of news waves (Gomes & Almada, 2014).

Our fourth hypothesis test will also take into account that difference of logics between Twitter and news media. While the first is a more suitable place for activism, the second functions according to the journalistic industry. In that sense, we supposed that the association between police violence cases against Black people and the anti-racism movement would appear first on Twitter (H4). That means the first police violence cases would be rapidly associated to the Black Lives Matter and *Vidas Negras Importam* movements on Twitter, while, on news media, that relation would take some time to be incorporated.

As we can see on Figure 8, there was a peak of mentions on May 19<sup>th</sup> on Twitter. This volume was provoked by the repercussion of the murder of João Pedro, a Brazilian Black boy who was killed by a police bullet in Rio de Janeiro and whose body disappeared for 17 hours. On Twitter, this case created a wave of tweets related to the anti-racism movements, while the same did not occur on the coverage of online news media outlets.

That does not mean news media did not cover the case. We found 32 media articles that mentioned the case, but they did not associate it to the anti-racism movements. In the case of the media outlets, the key event that will trigger a news wave about the movements is the murder of George Floyd, almost 10 days later. So, as we can see, tweets were faster in associating police violence with anti-racism movements and we attribute that to a more activist role of users on Twitter.

Thus, although a general view of the phenomenon suggests that the dynamics on both communication environments are highly correlated, a closer look shows significant differences between them. The association between police violence against Black people and the anti-racism movement is made more rapidly on Twitter than on news media. As we mentioned, the first police violence case of the studied period (João Pedro's murder, on May 18<sup>th</sup>) was covered by the media, but not related to the movement, what happened immediately on Twitter.

In other words, despite being considered a fact worthy of coverage, the assassination of João Pedro itself was not capable of triggering a wave of news about the anti-racism movements, a wave that will start to form on journalistic sites after the assassination of George Floyd. This can be interpreted following the logic of news waves, proposed by Gomes and Almada (2014), according to which the news would be based on successive themes that are explored until their exhaustion, seeking to generate repercussions on one of them with different social actors. These waves “would be triggered by key events, which are defined as different or peculiar events, as they imply an unfolding of a certain theme in the news” (p. 17). When analyzing coverage in *Jornal Nacional*, the



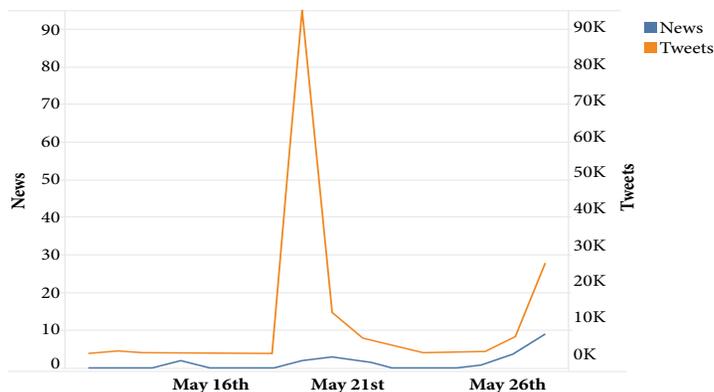
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authors conclude, however, that “the key event is not simply a mere event. It needs to be understood as part of something continuous, of an unfolding, as a phenomenon or a set of consequences” (p. 17).

If, on the one hand, the dynamics of news waves may seem not to incorporate the activist logic as quickly as Twitter, on the other hand, it also generates a coverage of the topic that is more time-paced. The two weeks with the highest volume of published articles represented only 45% of the total period (on Twitter, they represented almost 80%). Again, this is related to the journalistic work itself that tends to seek and cause repercussions around the topics on the agenda on the news sites. On Twitter, a significant part of the publications is not made by professionals committed to keeping the topic in vogue. Thus, the volume of mentions falls rapidly, even if it does not disappear completely, since the volume on the tenth week was 10 times higher than on the first one.

**Figure 8**

*João Pedro's assassination effect on Twitter and online news media*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

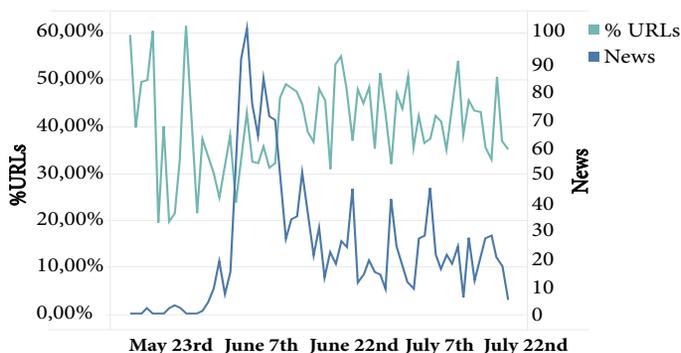
We also need to highlight a possibility of a difference in media coverage between national and international cases of racism. Our study does not include qualitative analysis and thus, we could not deepen this issue, but historical power relations may suggest that US events tend to gain intense coverage in Brazilian media. Not only events from dominant countries gain attention in national media but they also serve as important actors in framing what are considered to be social problems. On the other hand, prior articulations on Twitter related to Black communities – such as Black Twitter – may have accelerated the incorporation of the issue on that communication environment.

Our last hypotheses focuses on possible inter-influences between news media dynamics and the Twitter one. So, we tested to see if the number of news articles was positively correlated with the number of links present on tweets. Based on previous research (Freelon et al., 2016), our assumption was that there would not be a positive correlation.

The result of the Pearson's correlation showed a slightly negative correlation between the two variables of -0.14. Figure 9 illustrates our findings: the increase or decrease in the publication of online news media articles does not affect the use of links on Twitter. This result is confirmed even when we look at a weekly timeframe. Only in one out of the 10 weeks of our dataset there was a positive correlation, while in five weeks there is no correlation, and in four there is a negative correlation. That may suggest that content produced by media outlets were not highly used on the Twitter conversation. To advance that relation between not only communication dynamics but also content circulation, further research is need.

**Figure 9**

*Correlation between the number of online news media articles and the number of links on tweets*



*Note.* Made by the authors.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper, we tried to contribute to the understanding of the communication dynamics behind the online anti-racism movements in Brazil, approaching the posting dynamics on Twitter and the coverage on online news media. In order to investigate that, we compared both communication environments general trends, their temporalities, the way they link violence episodes to the movement, and possible inter-influences.



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Analyzing the communication dynamics around digital activism requires complex approaches. In our case study, while the role of Twitter activism is more agile and efficient in associating events with a movement, giving them a historical and not an episodic perspective, the media play an important role in giving more stability on the coverage about the subject, contributing to a greater longevity of the debate in the public sphere. Those findings contribute to refining interpretations on the social consequences of online debates.

As Chadwick (2013) states, to think about the political impacts of communication environments, we have to consider not only relations between social actors, but also relations between social actors and technologies. What this study shows is that different communication environments embed different media logics (Dahlgren, 2009). Those logics impact, in real time, the path social mobilizations may go through. Although our effort here was to differentiate the dynamics of news media and Twitter, we may also highlight the interference that characterizes hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2013). That means that the identified dynamics happen considering the interaction between these media in the social arena. The removal of any one of these media should affect the whole behavior of the system. Therefore, a digital activism capable of producing alternatives and effective social changes cannot be dissociated from an integrated and systemic view of the digital communication environment.

Also, the idea of media waves as a process of concentration and convergence of coverage around an issue during a certain period of time (Brosius & Kepplinger, 1995) seems to be very typical of news media, but not of a social medium such as Twitter. In this last one, the overlapping of issues that gain attention simultaneously is higher, as there are much more voices in the conversation. Moreover, the temporality of the communication process is much faster, making the peak of interest much shorter. Without professional journalists seeking repercussions and new reactions to a topic, we could say that the idea of news waves would be replaced by a more acute dynamic, something such as visibility hiccups.

We would also like to highlight the limitations of this study, especially due to the lack of content analysis of the corpus. Surely, a more qualitative approach will be very enriching in understanding the possible inter-influences between the two communication platforms and will also enable a deeper comprehension of how different meanings and appropriations of the topic circulate .

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# Between Moralities and Visualities: Cinema and Religion During Primeira República<sup>a</sup>

## *Entre Moralidades e Visualidades: Cinema e Religião na Primeira República*

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### ABSTRACT

Focusing on the consumption of religious movies during the Holy Week, this article analyzes the relation between cinema, visual culture, and religious practices in Primeira República in Rio de Janeiro and Recife. Our goal is to examine the ways spectators, film exhibitors, and the Church negotiated a common sense related to religious practices. In the treatment of the sources, the indicative paradigm proposed by Carlo Ginzburg was used since, as a method of textual criticism, it is more adequate in the analysis of sources that do not represent discursive units. We conclude with the verification of some negotiation strategies by the exhibitors, such as the broadcasting of sacred movies on some days of the holiday.

**Keywords:** Cinema, visual culture, Church, Rio de Janeiro, Recife

### RESUMO

Tendo como foco o consumo de filmes sacros durante a Semana Santa, este artigo analisa alguns aspectos da relação entre cinema, cultura visual e práticas religiosas durante a Primeira República, no Rio de Janeiro e no Recife. Nosso objetivo é averiguar como os espectadores, os exibidores cinematográficos e a Igreja negociavam um senso comum ligado às práticas religiosas. No tratamento das fontes, utilizou-se o paradigma indiciário, proposto por Carlo Ginzburg. Sendo um método de crítica textual, este mostrou-se adequado na análise de fontes que não representam unidades discursivas. Concluímos com a verificação de algumas estratégias de negociação por parte dos exibidores, tal como a veiculação de filmes sacros em alguns dias do feriado.

**Palavras-chave:** Cinema, cultura visual, Igreja, Rio de Janeiro, Recife

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# A

THE FIRST DECADES of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a deep transformation in Brazilian cities, mainly in infrastructure and population. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, the reform undertaken by Pereira Passos remodeled the Federal Capital, expelling the lower classes from its noble areas and redefining many cultural practices at a time known as *Belle Époque carioca*, clearly in line with European standards of consumption (Needell, 1993).

In turn, there were also several changes in the urban structure of Recife to meet the needs of a modernization imposed by local elites who sought to consolidate their own interests (Moreira, 1994). The city expanded its commercial activity and its social exclusion to the point that it would culminate in a demographic redistribution of classes across urban space (Bernardes, 1996).

In these highly hierarchical scenarios, cinematographers<sup>1</sup> began their activities and set the use of free time by various social groups, showing themselves as relevant spaces for sociability and as propagators of new or even known repertoires to the public, but gained new approaches.

In Rio de Janeiro, the Parisiense Movie Theatre was the first cinematograph opened on Avenida Central, in August 1907; in Recife, Pathé Movie Theatre opened on Rua Barão da Victória in July 1909. In these cities, movie theaters appeared in a reasonable amount and in a short period (Araújo, 1985; Saraiva, 2013). They helped to insert spectators into symbolic networks which disseminated the modern ideal, in addition to acting as legitimizers of the image of Rio de Janeiro as a showcase city for the Brazilian nation (Kessel, 2001) and of Recife as a regional center of cultural consumption<sup>2</sup> (Arrais, 1998).

In parallel, the Catholic Church, an institution officially linked to the Brazilian State until the end of the Empire, found itself disconnected from it in one of the first acts at the beginning republican regime. Edict 119 (1890) officially marked the separation between State and Church in Brazil. Hence, the institution needed to remodel its structure and adapt to the new political and social moment (Aquino, 2012), but it did not do so without showing reservations about some consumption habits related to modernity.

This article intends to address some connections between cinematographic consumption and religious practices in Rio de Janeiro and in Recife during Primeira República<sup>3</sup>, more precisely in some changes linked to visual culture from this relation. We start from the definition of consumption by Douglas and Isherwood (2004), who highlight its ritual aspect in the delimitation of social boundaries and in the distribution of goods among different groups,

<sup>1</sup> We will use the term cinematograph to designate both the image projection technology and the film exhibition space, as it was used by the sources collected for the preparation of this article.

<sup>2</sup> We recognize that the projection of films already took place in the decade prior to the inauguration of the cinematographs, as attested by Araújo (1985) and Silva (2018), in other spaces such as theaters, bars, and cafe-concerts. We only highlight the role of movie theaters in the reconfiguration of urban spaces during Primeira República. On films related to the life of Christ in this period, see Vadico (2006).

<sup>3</sup> In Portuguese, the term Primeira República refers to the period of Brazilian history between 1889 and 1930, marked by a deep social, economical and political instability. We chose to keep this term due to its own historical meaning, which cannot be found in English.

in a process that “uses goods to make firm and visible a particular set of judgments in the fluid processes of classifying people and events” (p. 115). We incorporated Miller’s (1987) criticism to this definition of consumption since consumption does not operate in power vacuums but it is immersed in networks of commercial relations and between States and institutions<sup>4</sup>.

Admitting the impossibility of exhausting the theme within the limits of an article, our focus will be on the analysis of some sources published by Rio de Janeiro and Recife presses which approached cinema attendance during the Holy Week. We will also situate the readers in relation to the profile of some newspapers, the formats disseminated by them and their materiality.

Sticking to the definition of sacred film as a genre which portrayed important aspects for the Christian faith in the First Cinema (Costa, 2005, pp. 55-57), our initial question is: in what ways did the spectators, cinema owners, distribution companies, and the Church negotiate in the consumption of sacred films? Trying to keep ourselves in the delicate balance mentioned of neither essentializing nor historically limiting spectators to the extreme (Foster, 1988, p. XI), we argue that cinematographic consumption in the period was situated within the horizon qualified as pragmatic secularity by de Aquino (2012)<sup>5</sup>.

The author defines pragmatic secularity in relation to the State during Primeira República as “characterized by the recognition of the legal personality of the Religious Confessions which, among other reasons, would accommodate a good part of the social tensions inherent to the prelude of the republican regime in Brazil” (Aquino, 2012, p. 152), differentiating it from French and American anti-religious secularities.

We expand the author’s argument to emphasize that this pragmatic secularity also encompassed other social groups, such as entrepreneurs in the entertainment industry and a considerable part of the audience at the cinemas and readers of the periodicals which circulated in the cities covered. This conciliation between the mundane and the religious domains went beyond the borders of State actions, permeating the daily lives of the dwellers of large cities and configuring a structure of feeling (Williams, 1979) important in the dissemination of a common sense of the period. The Church was also vigilant against these quick social changes, tensioning and negotiating through the dissemination of these repertoires displayed by cinematographs.

We need to make a brief consideration about the evidential paradigm, a method developed by Ginzburg (2007) and used in the treatment of these sources. On another occasion (Lapera & Souza, 2010), we argued

<sup>4</sup>Some visual culture theorists (Mirzoeff, 2006; Mitchell, 2002) defend the focus of the studies in this field on consumption and spectators, although they do not define well what they call consumption in their analyses.

<sup>5</sup>It is important to point out that the projection of sacred films was not limited to the Holy Week or other Christian religious holidays, with only a greater concentration on these dates.

that the heterogeneity of the collected sources and their fragmentary disposition led us to adopt the evidential paradigm since

the existence of a deep connection that explains superficial phenomena is reinforced at the very moment when it is asserted that direct knowledge of such a connection is not possible. If reality is opaque, there are privileged areas – signs, indications – that make it possible to decode them. (Ginzburg, 2007, p. 177)

Some information contained in these sources can be seen as signs of this *opaque reality* to which we are allowed access – even if precarious.

We also express our concern with “mapping the field of past experiences in which the massive consumption of images occurred” (Lapera & Souza, 2010, pp. 389-390) and, as it is a method of textual criticism (Ginzburg, 2007), the evidential paradigm proved to be adequate in the treatment of apocryphal sources that do not necessarily represent discursive units, but fragments.

Finally, we consider that Rio de Janeiro and Recife were going through strongly hierarchical reurbanization processes at the time and experienced, at very close moments, the dissemination of cinematographs and the normalization of the act of going to the cinema. Due to these structuring processes, we believe that many of the questions raised by the chroniclers in the periodicals of the two cities are similar, especially in situations of conflict between spectators and local exhibitors and in the affirmation of cinematographic ritual practices, such as the sources collected for our article.

Moreover, this type of analysis is possible because these cities represented important centers of cultural activities and, in a way, many chroniclers<sup>6</sup> from Recife pointed to Rio de Janeiro as an important source of comparison, certainly one of the answers to the fact that the then Federal Capital was trying to consolidate itself as a civilizational reference in South America from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onward (Benchimol, 1992).

<sup>6</sup>In the chronicle “Esparsos...” Ademar Tavares (1909) compares Rua Nova (Barão da Victoria) with Rua do Ouvidor, in Rio de Janeiro because these streets had cinematographs.

### “É CRISTO EM ESPECTÁCULO”: CINEMATOGRAFIC CONSUMPTION IN RIO DE JANEIRO AND RECIFE OF PRIMEIRA REPÚBLICA

First, let us consider, in Figure 1, the photo published on the cover of the newspaper *A Época* on 4.21.1916 (“Como os Tempos Mudam!”, 1916) and the headlines which illustrate it:

**Figure 1**

 News from the newspaper *A Época*


Note. Reprinted from *A Época*, 1916. In public domain.

Occupying the right corner of the newspaper cover, the images operate in an antithetical way by pointing out the expressive presence of the public in front of the Odeon cinema and the void at the door of a church in Rio de Janeiro, which is neither mentioned in the subtitle nor in the body of the article.

Throughout it, the anonymous author regrets the loss of audience by the churches on the Holy Week holiday and condemns the exchange for cinematographs: “The houses which show Passion tapes do not have the capacity for the mass of competitors to their seats. What is certain is that this displacement of the faithful results in some churches becoming almost deserted”<sup>7</sup> (“Como os Tempos Mudam!”, 1916, p. 1). Continuing his argument, the author ascribes the preference for films to a change in the public’s sensibility:

<sup>7</sup> It is important to emphasize that we have chosen to keep the original spelling of the sources throughout the original version of this article in Portuguese. In the English version, we preferred to update their writing to make reading easier.



It is just that times change, and with them our customs. A few years ago, who would go to a theater just today?

There was less expansion in religious feelings. Much less. There was no noise, either at home or on the street; any work was prohibited; the only reading allowed was that of the sacred books....

In this way, it was natural that the churches were small as they were indeed, to contain all the believers; but nowadays... that fasting is no longer observed and the cult of the divinity has lost all of its ascetic character, it is not surprising that Catholic temples suffer from the profane competition of cinematographs. (“Como os Tempos Mudam!”, 1916, p. 1)

Focusing on the relation between text and images, it is possible to deduce that the latter have the function of reiteration and synthesis of the idea defended in the article, occupying a key place in the visual economy of the newspaper – the cover, used to draw the attention of passersby to its content. Along with the title and subtitles, they help to include readers with a lower literacy level in the consumption of the newspaper, as the summary of the argument becomes more accessible, without the need for a detailed reading of the text<sup>8</sup>.

In the article, the author highlights a significant change in the public’s sensitivity. First accepting restraint and religious asceticism, churchgoers and (now) spectators would start to seek an expansion of the sensorial universe, as of the act of watching a projection. Although relevant, it is not only about a change in the visuality regime (Mitchell, 2002) of the sacred theme but also the incorporation of sonorities<sup>9</sup> and of the tactile in the reaffirmation of religious feelings<sup>10</sup>.

We found other articles published by the Rio de Janeiro press of the period about Catholic believers going to the cinema during the Holy Week, which varied in tone and approach to the issue. Together, they reveal that to be a topic considered important by the editors of some newspapers. In the period covered, we remind the reader that newspapers were a medium endowed with a strong cultural legitimacy for broadcasting debates on the public scene and many of their chroniclers were intellectuals who used the medium to assert their position in these debates and expand their dialogue with the reading public. (Sevcenko, 1983; Sússekind, 2006).

In turn, the newspapers used in our article were founded at the end of the Empire and throughout Primeira República. In general, they portrayed the point of view of the elites and the middle classes which were beginning to gain a voice in the public scene, albeit with some limitations.

At this point, it is important to stress Ginzburg’s (2007, pp. 158-161) consideration of textual criticism, taking into account only the material dimension of the text and dissociating it from the entire sensitive universe which generated it.

<sup>8</sup> De Luca and Martins (2006, pp. 42-43) attest that the inclusion of photographs in newspapers occurred late due to its high costs and the legal uncertainty related to copyright of the images.

<sup>9</sup> In cinematographers’ advertisements, it is possible to find references to conductors and orchestras as a form of commercial dispute, which is extensively explored in the case of sacred films exhibited during the Holy Week.

<sup>10</sup> In her thesis, Carolina Azevedo di Giacomo (2019, p. 92) recovers the experiment with travel simulators in Rio de Janeiro. One of them describes in detail a trip to the Holy Land.

Affiliating ourselves with the method proposed by him, we perceive the texts published by the press as vestiges of material practices related to the act of going to the movies and to the feelings of religiosity addressed in these sources.

Another apocryphal chronicle, published by the newspaper *A Imprensa* on 4.13.1909, pointed out the importance of the religious holiday for the profit of cinematographs and the disadvantage in the competition of the churches against them: “In churches, only tearful sermons, when they are eloquent, can impress as much as the long films of the great cinematographers” (“Films”, 1909, p. 2). Again, there is the enhancement of the expansion of the senses provided by going to the cinema.

The chronicle also reports a change on the part of the films in narrating the Passion of Christ, which, from a picturesque and even slightly spicy tone in a version seen by the author on other occasion<sup>11</sup>, began to adopt a more solemn tone: “The dramas were serious. So serious that they made colossal competition for the churches!” (“Films”, 1909, p. 2), which reveals an adaptation of the cinematographic market based on a previous demand by the public, respecting the religious sentiment propagated by common sense at the time. Even though these films are of foreign origin, the exhibition in Rio de Janeiro can be seen as an indication that carioca spectators were in agreement with this feeling, in connection with audiences from other places.

At the end of the text, the author recounts the visit of a well-known industrialist to the cinema with his wife and daughter and reproduces his statement: “– What a horror, my dear! You know I don’t have very good eyes. Because the girls forced me today to watch more than twenty films in several houses... Consequence: my eyes are full of *films*! How horrible!” (“Films”, 1909, p. 2). It is interesting to observe the author’s irony toward the consumption of films in relation to the attention mechanism required by them. Crary (2013) highlighted the saturation of this attention on two levels: in the time dedicated to work and in the presence of new means of producing images. In the latter case, this refers to the moments of leisure of different social groups and, in this way, the author of the article describes a phenomenon to which the concerns of intellectuals such as Jean-Martin Charcot, William James, and Gustav Fechner were dedicated in an immediately earlier historical moment, recovered by Crary (2013, pp. 33-105).

In relation to sacred films, this saturation of attention operates as a moral punishment formulated by the author of the article, in the sense of showing a decline of religious feeling in the churchgoers who went to the cinematographs. Still, we can understand it as an exposure to a danger in the contact with these technologies by the spectators, in relation to an ideal of purity of Catholic religious beliefs (Douglas, 1976).

<sup>11</sup>We assume male authorship due to the comment on the actress who played Maria in the film: “In the most solemn moments, she would look at the audience and make a few motions of the eyes so suggestively Parisian... The girl was devilish and she was definitely dating some operator from the Pathé house!” (“Films”, 1909, p. 2).



This moral condemnation was also present in an apocryphal and untitled chronicle published in *Gazeta de Notícias* on 3.25.1910. It begins with an allusion to two main routes in Rio de Janeiro after the reform undertaken by Pereira Passos, which had several leisure spaces reserved for the middle and upper classes: “Yesterday, Holy Thursday. Until noon, the eucharistic solemnity made Avenida Central and Rua do Ouvidor two avenues of communication for the enormous concurrence of the churches” (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 1910, p. 2).

Subsequently, it describes the crowd in black clothes which occupied the newly renovated area of the city, a narrative resource which refers to visuality, a way of competing with photography and cinema in their sensorial appeal to readers: “Exceptionally, once in a while, a colorful ‘toilette’ scintillated sinfully in a prettiness full of daring. Moreover, in outing dresses, black dresses throbbed, black ‘toilettes’ colleting in a ‘frou-frou’ of bruised silks” (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 1910, p. 2).

At this point, there is a reference to the presence of women in the urban space of Rio de Janeiro, presented as avid viewers of cinematographs and, simultaneously, endowed with a strong religious feeling and inserted in a very restrictive project regarding the gender roles fulfilled by women, as responsible for a public image of respectability and restraint in relation to the bourgeois nuclear family, a fundamental institution to the republican project in Brazil (Caulfield, 2000, pp. 85-87).

Finally, the chronicle indicates the main change concerning religious iconography, that is, the exploration of the theme of the Passion of Christ by cinematographers:

But modernism wanted to invade religion as well. Cinematographers revived, in the reconstituting magic of their colored tapes, all the tragedy of immense love, unfolded under the most beautiful sky in the East, in the most beautiful land of Palestine, watered by the blood of the purest of men and the most loving of Gods. The operator’s handle revived, in the eyes of faith, in the midst of the most absolute respect, the drama of salvation which, if it had no other merit, it would have been enough to be the first story which moved us and made us cry, when we had understood, told by our mother... (*Gazeta de Notícias*, 1910, p. 2)

A foundational narrative of the Christian faith transmitted secularly in the private universe through the interaction between family members and strengthened by the bourgeois ideal of a nuclear family (Gay, 2002) was updated by the commercialization of sacred films and the physical effort of film designers to show these films to an audience increasingly interested in them. It is important

to note the stylistic resource of alluding to the figure of the designer as a way of familiarizing the public with details of the very act of going to the cinema, emphasizing its conventional aspect.

The chronicle ends with a double accusation: “And so, calmly, unctuously, after killing the theater, the cinematographer wants to compete with the houses of prayer” (Gazeta de Notícias, 1910, p. 2). In addition to attributing responsibility for the theater’s financial crisis to the cinematographer, it also relates this crisis to the lower influx of audiences to churches, explicitly condemning cinema owners and believers who exchanged religious ritual for cinematographic ones.

In turn, the text “Semana Santa: As Igrejas Cheias, os Cinemas Repletos” (1914) – published on the cover of the 10.4.1914 edition of the newspaper *A Noite* – addresses similar points from the previous articles, but in an overtly more positive tone. Even recognizing the loss of audience on the part of the churches, it defended the commercial use of the date by cinematographs, stating that they are “the great days for cinemas; there are poor companies that even wait for Holy Week to use the sacred films to compensate for possible losses during the year” (p. 1). It also highlights there were traveling exhibitions in rural areas during the commemorative date.

The article narrates in detail the competition between film factories to conquer the public. As the theme is the same every year, it was pointed out that they “have appealed to the most expensive and varied expedients to get the best work, which most pleases the audience” (“Semana Santa”, 1914, p. 1). Further, it says that one of these films had been filmed in the “Holy Land,” but it had not been successful for that reason: “Here in Rio, at least, despite the formidable announcement made of it, its success was not so more auspicious. If it paid its expenses, it was the best” (“Semana Santa”, 1914, p. 1).

Then, the text directly poses the question of whether or not going to the cinema has reduced church attendance, and answers it in a dubious way. At the same time that it does not directly recognize the link between the facts, it demands from cinematograph owners an effort to reduce the difference between their audience and that of the churches.

At last, the article mentions some strategies on the part of the churches in the competition against cinematographs, such as the life-size presentation of the Lord’s Supper, engravings with images of the Passion of Christ, and a work of ornamentation and lighting in the decoration for the special date. This emphasis on the commercial dimension of the exhibition of sacred films meets the expectations of the newspaper readership, which, according to Carvalho (2012, p. 43), was also made up of subjects belonging to the middle sectors. The editors of the newspaper openly tried to include them in its consumption,



assuming some of their points of view in the analysis of the political and social life of the period.

<sup>12</sup>Pseudonym of journalist and writer Paulo Barreto (1881-1921).

<sup>13</sup>On cinema and literature in the work of João do Rio, see Gomes (2010).

<sup>14</sup>This chronicle has already been analyzed by Araújo (1985, pp. 292-293) and by Vadico (2006, pp. 97-98).

Written by João do Rio<sup>12</sup>, a writer known for his fascination with cinema<sup>13</sup>, the chronicle “The Film Revolution” (Barreto, 1909)<sup>14</sup>, published in the *Gazeta de Notícias* on 10.4.1909, is the one that most openly defends cinematographs, and it can be read as an engagement in the expansion of the senses in the act of going to the cinema.

Throughout the chronicle, we see the narration of this multisensory dimension present in cinematographs, which occupies a key position in the text. Qualifying cinematographs as the “new temples,” João do Rio considers that “religious crises bring crises of sensuality” (Barreto, 1909, p. 1), to present the spectacle provided by the crowd present at the cinemas and which assembles at its entrances: “there was a sweaty and feverish crowd up to the middle of the street fighting to get in and slowly advancing against a wave of happy people that came out” (Barreto, 1909, p. 1). However, not without first pointing out what attracted that crowd: “the cinematographer has just made the great revolution.... *It is Christ in show* [emphasis added]” (Barreto, 1909, p. 1).

It is possible to connect the author’s narration to the logic of the hierarchization of urban space and its spectacularization in wealthy areas in Rio de Janeiro. In line with a civilizing principle articulated by the nascent republican State in its relation with citizens and in service of the interests of dominant groups (Benchimol, 1992, p. 205), the visuality narrated in the articles is permeated by a model of a city in which some citizens are on the public stage to appreciate the city novelties and transformations and, at the same time, to be seen in it.

Going to the cinemas on the occasion of the Holy Week thus proves to be a special opportunity in the process of converting economic capital into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2006) by some of these subjects – the case of the industrialist’s family in the article published in *A Imprensa* – but also signals some potential for subversion of this republican order represented by the urban reform of the Federal Capital. João do Rio’s chronicle, it shows the presence of pickpockets and narrates of the kleptomaniac women who “cut bags and skirts,” taking advantage of the confusion caused by the crowd.

In his conclusion, João do Rio is assertive in the defense of cinematographs:

And is it an evil for religion? No. It is good. In church, the spectacle is always the same: sad in appearance but forcing people to think, to work their brains to be touched. Three and a half parts of the visitors are not touched, but rather indulge themselves in a ride of sensual excitement. In the cinematograph, the crowd immediately feels attached to the visible fact, the crowd sees the agony, the crowd suffers tremendous

injustice and cries, and shivers, and gets better. Suggestion elevates it. Better than visiting twenty churches without faith, among people without faith too, is to attend one of these sessions, naively a believer. One comes out reborn with the example, one comes out with kindness – that lyrical feeling which decays – much more increased. This week the cinematographers did a much greater work for the church than Father Maria did with his lectures.

Of course, the cinematograph can and is used not only for the development of scientific knowledge, for the expansion of serious notions, but also to excite laughter and depravation. But the “film” lovers themselves, those great wordless educators, may not remember that in the winning crisis of movie-entrepreneurs serving the city thirst for real illusion, the cinematograph, a simple application of electricity, industry, science for useful disclosures, eager servant of the Faith, came to make in their indifference, the flame of Belief brighter, the Religion more ardent, a little better – at least for the moment – the men to whom the gods have always done well... (Barreto, 1909, p. 1)

Conceiving the cinematograph from a supposed neutrality of its technology, the author considers that it can amplify sensations in the act of showing sacred films and, in this way, act directly in the expansion of religious feelings. His emphasis on sensations such as seeing agony, crying, and shivering are evidence of a visual culture which incorporates and potentiates them in the face of religious ritual, portrayed as monotonous, uninteresting and, at its limit, even disruptive toward churchgoers.

João do Rio’s chronicle also condemns the greed of cinematograph owners, placing them in what Sevckenko (1983, pp. 25-40) called “aggressive cosmopolitanism,” that is, an urban environment marked by fierce competition, by social climbers, by the use of private relationships to obtain advantages from the State, and by a strong social hierarchy in terms of class, race, and gender.

This hierarchization also appears elsewhere in João do Rio’s article. When reporting the maximum capacity of cinematographs on Avenida Central and his journey to other cinemas in the region, the author considers, in a mixture of resignation and bitterness, that “we managed to get into one which was of a low standard, and that was because the mass forced us to” (Barreto, 1909, p. 1). That is a vestige of this hierarchy, which involved the appreciation of entertainment places frequented by different social groups.

Analyzing the advertisements broadcast by cinematographers between 1908 and 1917 in the newspapers *Gazeta de Notícias* and *O Paiz*, we noticed that the exhibition of sacred films was massively concentrated on Thursday and



Friday of the Holy Week, whereas on Saturday and Sunday, the programs put aside those sacred films.

In 1908, we found four advertisements which displayed sacred films on Thursday and on Friday of the Holy Week, whereas on Saturday and on Sunday that number dropped to just one. The number grew and peaked at eight advertisements on Thursday and on Friday in 1913 and just one on subsequent days. By 1916, possibly because of the sharp drop in the film trade brought on by World War I, that number had declined to two on Thursday and on Friday and none in the following days<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup>We stick to the numbers without mentioning which movies and movie theaters due to the limits imposed on our article.

We found a source which deals with the competition between theater and cinema, in which there is a mention of the fact that cinematographers were pioneers in showing sacred films and these “suffered the direct competition of the so-called performances by sessions and then some three years ago, the theater also competed with cinema and the Church, during the Holy Week and in the All Soul’s Day, representing the so-called sacred plays” (“A Semana Santa nos Theatros,” 1915, p. 1). This information is confirmed by analyzing the advertisements in the newspapers. From 1913 onward, there was a gradual increase in the advertisement of sacred plays by theater companies during the Holy Week.

In addition to contradicting the idea defended by part of the historiography that cinema would have been a mere compiler of theatrical themes and genres, in a clearly evolutionary logic, this source presents a specialization of the *carioca* entertainment market. Finally, it points out that “no less than six sacred pieces will we have during the holy days” (“A Semana Santa nos Theatros”, 1915, p. 1), which is an indication that the demand of the *carioca* public for these products has increased over the years. In practice, this represented an even greater competition with the churches.

It is also interesting to indicate the analysis of the advertisements broadcast by cinematographers in the newspapers from 1908 onward. Occupying another important place in the visual economy of the newspaper than the cover – the back, insofar as the advertisements could be consulted without the readers being obliged to open the newspaper –, these advertisements were very succinct between 1908 and approximately 1911-1912, with the name and location of the cinematograph in addition to the title of the films exhibited on the day and a brief description of their content.

However, as the competition between them advanced, the ads also became more sophisticated, increasing considerably in size and content. Initially just a few-centimeter space on the back of newspapers, some film companies and some cinematographers started to buy more space<sup>16</sup> to broadcast their programming.

<sup>16</sup>In some cases, a third of the page, occasionally half and even a full page.





or a movie company (distributor), the purchase of this space is an indication of a more than desired, even anticipated, profitability by those who explored the cinematographic trade.

Due to the theme and the holiday, there is an exploration of the image of Christ in the advertisement, in a horizon very close to the republican project of approaching a classic religious iconography, conveying it to well-known figures – such as Tiradentes and Frei Caneca –, in search of a symbolic legitimacy for the nascent regime (Carvalho, 1990, pp. 55-73). Although the advertisement does not mention these figures valued in the republican project, it is difficult to disregard that they were part of the visual culture of the analyzed period, especially related to the theme of the crucifixion, which also referred to the corporal suffering imposed on Tiradentes and Frei Caneca (Carvalho, 1990, pp. 64-67).

Observing the connection between the described project and the performance of subjects such as cinematograph owners helps us to perceive the expansion of the horizon of pragmatic secularity (Aquino, 2012) beyond the limits of State action, in which there is a reaffirmation of a common sense linked to religious practices and the image of Christ affiliated with values such as sacrifice and redemption. In its limit, this was also in line with the pretensions of the Catholic Church to air its beliefs in a setting in which it had recently lost its official status.

In parallel, in Recife, the first cinematographs were set up on Rua Barão da Victória, in the district of Santo Antônio, a region of commercial importance (Arrais, 1998, p. 25). In a short time, changes were already noticed in the urban space in which these concert halls were located, according to Arrais (1998, p. 51), with the advent of nighttime exhibitions, streetcar schedules were reported by the press, as well as other types of transport to ensure greater comfort and safety at the end of the sessions.

About the Recife press, in which we collected the sources for our research, the newspapers *Diário de Pernambuco*, *A Província*, and *Jornal do Recife* were created in the imperial period and, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were already the best sellers in the city. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we highlight the *Diário de Pernambuco*, *A Província*, and *O Pequeno Jornal*. Their editorial lines were closely linked to the political position of their editors/owners, which denotes an often-personal approach (Nascimento, 1966).

Film consumption in Recife was not unnoticed by the Church, an institution of political and social relevance in the city (Arrais, 1998, p. 139). It sought to observe and insert itself in this new type of modern entertainment, even before exhibition halls: in the period of itinerancy of projections, its members already frequented this place. As we can see below:

**Bellisimos** – Yesterday, the hall on Rua da Imperatriz was small to contain twice the large number of families which went there to watch the paintings of the Passion of Christ, which are of a very beautiful effect. The martyrdoms are reproduced in such a way to touch the religious sentiments of the people, who are sometimes touched and, at others, feel joy for the belief they hold. There is a lot of truth in capturing the scenes, with some very clear photographs. Still today, and upon request, they will be reproduced at 7 o'clock, 7 3/4 and 8 1/2. Satisfying the owner of the Cinematograph, we make this notice not only to the families but also to the clergy, who have attended all the places in which they have been exhibited to the paintings (“Bellisimos”, 1900, p. 2).

It is noticed that, in an improvised space on Rua Imperatriz, an elite region (Arrais, 1998, p. 25), a sacred film about the Passion of Christ was exhibited and, according to the article, it had a significant audience. As the film approached a well-known story, the narrative would be well used by the exhibitors as it was easily understood by the public.

This positive reception was observed by the (Catholic) church, which, through delegates, attended the exhibitions, as another report informs a few days later: “and even members of the clergy have attended [the sessions]” (“Bellisimos”, 1900, p. 2). This is important information, as the clergy viewed the cinematograph with distrust, as it was a *mundane* device (Marques & Amaral, 2013, p. 292).

Nevertheless, this new space of sociability and entertainment could serve the church in establishing a visual culture of practices and representations as part of a religious iconography. From a certain point, already with several cinematographs, we noticed a frequency of sacred films nearby, during and after the Holy Week feasts.

Helvetica – As advertised, this establishment held carnival shows, with good public and complete order every day. Today, for the beginning of Lent, the great sacred film of 1500 meters in length will be shown, divided into 40 frames and an apotheose <The Childhood, Passion, and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ>, this film was ordered to be colored expressly for this house and it has an admirable clarity. (“Diversões”, 1911, p. 2)

As described in *Jornal Pequeno*, the article highlights a supposed exclusive coloring for Helvetica for the beginning of the Lent period. We observed that the exhibitors set up a specific repertoire to attract the public during the Holy Week, with films which represented stories of sacred content.



From 1911 on, during the Holy Week period, this repertoire intensified in cinematographs in Recife. In an advertisement, the “Inauguration of shows appropriate for the Holy Week. The grandiose full-color film will be performed expressly by Pathé Frères for this establishment” (Theatro-Cinema Helvetica, 1911, p. 2).

However, at certain times, not only the films and who produced them were described. Some robberies were reported, such as that of a merchant coming from the countryside for the Holy Week festivities. This one was followed by a man who, being cordial, invited him to go to the cinema and took advantage of the innocence which the merchant felt after seeing the films and robbed him. Nonetheless, the victim managed to call the police, who arrested the thief (“Mais um Conto do Vigário”, 1911, p. 2). It is interesting to see how, from this case, we can infer the presence of an audience coming from the interior of the state during the religious feasts, corroborating the fact that Recife is a cultural center in the region.

While observing the pages of newspapers, especially at certain times of the year, such as the days anteceding and preparing for the Holy Week, one can see, on the same page and in several copies, a relation of parallelism between informative columns about the schedule of the festivities – what would be celebrated in each church, temple or even open-air processions – and the cinematographers’ ads<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup>This correlation between the arrangement of texts referring to the church and cinematographs was observed from 1910 onward.

Especially during the sacred festivities, these arrangements were repeated in different periodicals, mainly the newspaper *A Província*, in 1910 and 1913, for consecutive days, and some of them are highlighted on the front page. In another newspaper, *Jornal Pequeno*, this also occurred. As an example, the column “Semana Santa Actos do Dia de Hoje” (1915) quoted: “as the holy week began today, in almost all the temples in the capital and in the countryside, the acts of Lent began” (p. 4). Next to it, the column “Theatros e Cinemas” (1915) described what would be shown in each cinematograph (p. 4).

Another important point is the size of some programs in the newspapers. Bringing the film *A Vida do Martyr de Golgotha* (Maître, 2013), which would be displayed in cinemas on Holy Thursday and on Good Friday, the advertisement in *Jornal do Recife* (“A Vida do Martyr do Golgotha”, 1914) describes the details of the plot and informs the expenses of the production of the film, with clothes and scenarios, and even includes small pictures drawn with the phases of Christ’s life (Figure 3). We can verify that the programs of these exhibition houses were linked to films distributed by Companhia Cinematográfica Brasileira and used repertoires from other regions of the country (Butcher, 2019, p. 170).

Figure 3

*Companhia Cinematographica Brasileira's advertisement for the movie A Vida do Martyr de Golgotha*



Note. From *Jornal do Recife*, 1914. In public domain.

To attract the reader, the phrase “great cinematographic event” was highlighted, in addition to “solemn presentation of the magnificent sacred film,” as well as an update of a previous film: “film completely enlarged and unmistakable with the previous VIDA DE CRISTO (in 5 parts) of ‘Pathé Frères,’ also from an old edition of more than six years ago” (“A Vida do Martyr do Golgotha”, 1914, p. 5). It indicates that there was a renewal of film repertoires, inspired by European productions. That is, the relationship between newspapers, exhibitors, and sacred subjects, even if observed in the filmic theme, converged in different visual experiences, which can be understood as the “result of processes of production of meaning in cultural contexts” (Knauss, 2006, p. 113).

In turn, on 4.9.1914, in the program published in *Diário de Pernambuco*, the sessions of Polytheama (1914) were dedicated to the Church, and the advertisement informed that the sacred film would be a “last copy, imported by the capitalist J.R. Staff. This film of ours is the true one adopted in the Catholic Religion” (p. 6). We can observe the name of J.R. Staff, an important exhibitor from Rio de Janeiro and representative of the Companhia Cinematográfica Brasileira (CCB) in the northern region of the country, incorporating to our argument the fact that several of these sacred films shown in Recife came mainly from Rio de Janeiro (Butcher, 2019, p. 170).



At Theatro S. Izabel (1914), discursive artificers were used to attract spectators, such as “the great and wonderful cinematographer, the most important in South America” (p. 6), probably because of its history as the main theater in Recife in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but its prestige began to decline at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Arrais, 1998, p. 23). By showing possibly the same sacred film as the Polytheama, it sought to bring new elements to its exhibition, one of these resources being “the orchestra will play excerpts specially rehearsed for this film” (p. 6).

At Helvetica (1914), this sound resource is also present, informing that “the orchestra will perform a beautiful original sacred score with 40 numbers of music by conductor Verdi de Carvalho. On the occasion of the miracle of Santa Veronica, it will be sung by the lyric singer CLARETTA: AVE Maria, by Gounod” (p. 6). Thus, not only does the use of different repertoires to attract the public become evident but it also provides us with indications of an exclusive visual and sound structure for sacred films screened in Recife.

Finally, on that same page of *Diário de Pernambuco*, Theatro Moderno (1914) announces that “today and tomorrow: we will exhibit for the second time in this Capital the sacred film which pleased our costumers: *A Vida do Martyr Golgotha*” (p. 6), the same film which had been shown in several cinematographs in other years. Thus, we noticed that the speeches uttered in the newspapers, through advertisements, used a specific language through words such as *exclusivity*, *programs never displayed*, among others, to influence a competition for space in the cinematographic market, profitable for exhibitors and newspapers.

From 1916 onward, we noticed a decrease in sacred films advertised in the newspapers during the Holy Week<sup>18</sup>. The sharp drop in film imports during the First World War may have caused a forced change in programming during this period, as was also the case in Rio de Janeiro. In 1920, this configuration was reproduced again; in a column entitled “As Tradições que Não Morrem – Impressões da Semana Santa” (1920), in *Jornal Pequeno*, the strength that the tradition of the Catholic faith has in Recife is described since “what was seen in the churches where the solemnities of the Holy Week were celebrated is worth a strong affirmation that the religious tradition of the Pernambuco family remains alive,” with “the attendance at various temples extraordinary, in all classes” (p. 3). It still reinforces the emptiness of the city, on Thursday and on Friday because of the gathering of families. Yet, this emptiness in the streets was modified at night, because “on the night of those days, cinemas were at the forefront, showing the magnificent film of Christ’s life and sacrifice” (p. 3) in a process very similar to what happened in Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>18</sup>Between 1909 and 1920, in *Jornal do Recife*, we noticed that the exhibition of sacred films was concentrated on Thursday and on Friday of the Holy Week, more frequently in 1911, 1913, and 1914, but on Saturday and on Sunday, we do not find views at the same rate.

This interrelation between the space of the church and the cinematograph created a regime of visibility (Mitchell, 2002) which, in turn, replaced the orality of the masses during the day, with readings of sacred texts and sacred chants, to a visibility of the moving images, that is, a selective perception (Sérvio, 2014) provided by the context in which such practices were inserted by cinematographers.

In addition to some reactions on the part of the Church, already presented, others were also published by the press at the time. In the edition of 5.29.1912, *A Noite* reproduced with comments an article from *Ossertavore Romano* – a newspaper edited by the institution in the Vatican – about cinematographic projections in churches in the news “O Cinema Conquista a Igreja” (1912). Emphasizing the cinematograph as one more possible source of income for the Church, the rules imposed on the realization of these projections were enumerated: separation between the genders at the moment they occurred; prohibition of a totally dark ambiance such as in movie theaters; choice of films restricted to those with moral and religious themes approved by the institution which, therefore, must be previously approved by the local bishop; and, finally, the priest was responsible for the supervision of the sessions to monitor the behavior of the believers.

Thus, that piece of news underlines that these are guidelines to be disseminated by the Church, which was quite concerned with the rapport between the genders, with the dissemination of content which was against its precepts, especially those consumed by its believers and also, using a moral reservation in regards to the habit of going to the movies, as we have already analyzed on other occasions (Lapera, 2019, 2020). Even with guidelines applied to the institution as a whole, it is possible to infer that these norms echoed in the Brazilian republican project for the nuclear family and for the division of gender roles (Caulfield, 2000; Esteves, 1989).

The newspaper *Brizas do Campo: Órgão do Christianismo Interdenominacional*<sup>19</sup>, whose editorship was focused on religious themes, also addressed the same phenomenon in its column “Cinema na Igreja” (1912), published in the edition of 7.14.1912: “According to the latest news of Rome, Pope Pius X has just allowed the operation of cinematographers inside the churches. Throughout the Catholic world, this act of the Pope caused a surprise ... beautiful and useful conquest of science” (p. 4) and, also, “a useful invention – unquestionably – and it is impossible to deny that its effectiveness can be great as means of moral and religious education” (p. 4).

In turn, some conflicts between the cinematograph and the church in Recife were reported by the press, such as the case of a cinematograph ironically

<sup>19</sup>Although this newspaper was edited in Campos dos Goitacazes, we decided to highlight this source as it brings complementary information about the reaction of the Catholic Church to the cinematographic sessions.

called *Cinema Alegre*. Located in the São José neighborhood, it would be attended only by men and managed by a small society composed of two men and one woman (“O Caso do Cinema Alegre”, 1915, p. 3). The latter would become the main target of the press after having her name publicized, for having opened this space for exhibitions of adult content. Despite obtaining the necessary licenses for its opening, the exhibitions in this cinema were suspended by court order. This episode allowed us to infer some evidence about the role of the Church in Recife, especially from its influence on the middle classes of this city, based on the text written by Father Heliodoro Pires.

Since this priest was an important figure in the Catholic circle of Recife, a collaborator of the Instituto Arqueológico Histórico e Geográfico de Pernambuco (IAHGP) and a professor at several colleges, he was responsible, at the 2º Congresso Católico de Pernambuco (“2º Congresso Catholico de Pernambuco”, 1914), for preparing an essay on the fight against pornography entitled “A National Scourge” (1914)<sup>20</sup>. A few months after the publication of this material, he wrote a letter entitled “O Meu Protesto Vehemente e um Grito da Alma Católica” (Pires, 1915), published in *A Província*, in which he reports the existence of a cinematograph for “cheerful” or “free” films<sup>21</sup>. According to him, “pornographic cinemas are the most terrible, most furious, most terrifyingly disastrous agent of social dissolution, the breakdown of race, and the nervousness of characters” (Pires, 1915, p. 1).

The priest’s letter enunciates several points on which he considers to be the role of public authorities in maintaining moral order and projecting data which he judges “authentic and unmistakable” (Pires, 1915, p. 1) against this deviation from a city which “believes to be civilized” (Pires, 1915, p. 1). Along these lines, he highlights a liberal civilizing project ongoing in Brazil through the construction of a social imaginary but he takes some care not to harm individual values, in favor of a strong and sovereign nation, when he states that:

The state could not allow individual freedom, when it results in collective, social, national damage. The state could not give freedom to crime, to the apotheosis of evil. Exposing a pornographic screen, promoting debauchery, is certainly a crime. Faith, race, traditions, nobility of feeling, character, the future of the country, national greatness – are above all. (Pires, 1915, p. 1)

When requesting control mechanisms on the part of competent authorities, we observe the defense for a censorship which could provide a moral order, a discursive basis cited in several moments of his text. The appeal for morality is addressed to the “Mothers of the Pernambuco family,” so that

<sup>20</sup>We could not find this text. According to a note in the newspaper *A Província* (“Um Flagelo Nacional”, 1914, p. 1) around 200 copies were printed. It had 22 pages and would be written by Philon, the pseudonym of Father Heliodoro Pires and published at the II Congresso Católico de Pernambuco, in 1914 (“Um Flagelo Nacional”, 1914, p. 1).

<sup>21</sup>According to Lopera (2019), the terms cheerful and free are euphemisms for pornography in this period.

they “do not hide your indignation of wounded lionesses!” (Pires, 1915, p. 1), that they take care of their children so that they do not see such obscene scenes on screens, as this will affect them when they become men and future husbands. For the author, “cinema will encourage infidelity and mockery and when the father is disgraced, a type without any moral elevation, for whom the laws of marriage are worthless, the family has already begun to disintegrate! Doubt it, if it is possible!” (Pires, 1915, p. 1).

For the priest, the fact that men attended the cinematography did not make sense, because “if the cinema is for men, our young men and women, aged 13 and 14, could claim the right to be included in this category. And no one under heaven will tell them which they are not men” (Pires, 1915, p. 1). Questioning the police supervision of young people, the author of the letter attests cinema as a place for learning lust and depravation since these young people will not “be sufficiently prepared, physically nor psychically, to resist these terrifying suggestions, to these low, filthy, raw scenes, to these exciting nudities, to this deadly intoxication?!” (Pires, 1915, p. 1).

Therefore, the priest’s request to the women to stop the advance of the destruction of an ideal of the Brazilian family would be linked to the many associations created to fulfill “a role of social cementing, of conservation of the ideological unity of the social classes, specifically the elite” (Marques & Amaral, 2013, p. 299). Thus, the concepts and precepts established by the Catholic Church on morality and sexual honor could be ensured.

In the letter, the author describes protective laws against pornography in several countries as a way of showing that “civilized” countries are taking measures to prevent the exhibition circuit from becoming a school of immorality. In the end, he concludes the letter by thanking the press and writers who “find themselves so noble and beautifully united in this campaign against this national scourge: pornography” (Pires, 1915, p. 1). While looking for a thread about this cinematograph, we found several texts in newspapers in Recife between January and April 1915, with criticisms based on municipal and state laws, as well as prerogatives to establish the conservation of the social order, based on Catholic precepts, which would serve to close this cinematograph.

According to Ginzburg and Poni (1989, p. 172) serial data can be found, with which it is possible to reconstruct the intertwining of different conjunctures. Thus, through dispersed and fragmentary testimonies, we can observe a social fabric in which the name of Father Heliodoro, as well as the mentions to the *cheerful* cinematographer by figures from the middle sectors, such as Olympio Galvão and Mário Sette, are distinguished by means of a thread crossing and intertwining in a system of negotiations between the church



and these social sectors, for the maintenance of a moral order. Therefore, as Lopera (2019) points out, “the political, administrative, judicial and police persecution against pornography was on the agenda of the creators, and the keepers of order in Primeira República” (p. 14).

Comparing the two cities, it is possible to affirm that, both in Rio de Janeiro and Recife, the public portrayed by the observers who were privileged participants in our analysis (journalists, writers, writers of advertisements) is heterogeneous in its composition, in its expectation of the cinema and presence on the public stage.

Even so, some considerations are possible regarding this audience. The presence of subjects in the countryside and in rural areas exploring cinematograph technology and using it in religious practices linked to Catholicism is something noteworthy. Moreover, in both cities, some subjects related to the upper and middle classes seem to explore a visibility in the public scene during the Holy Week.

The owners of cinematographs were also active subjects in this negotiation around pragmatic secularism (Aquino, 2012). Although we have seen projections of sacred films throughout the years in a diffuse way, the exhibition is concentrated throughout the period close to Holy Week and other festivities linked to the Church.

Furthermore, the strategy of the exhibitors in Rio de Janeiro and Recife to put sacred films on the schedule mainly on Thursday and Friday of the Holy Week can be seen as a vestige of the negotiation operated between exhibitors and the Catholic Church, so that the former were not targets of such severe campaigns by an institution which, although no longer official, still held a strong accumulated political and social capital (Bourdieu, 2006). On the other hand, it seems that the Church was also not interested in turning ostensibly against a medium which was attracting attention and gaining popularity among its believers.

In the case of Recife, the sacred films shown in the city came from foreign producers who, through branches established throughout the country, especially those which existed in Rio de Janeiro, disembarked at the port, proceeding to the exhibition places with strategies to attract the public, linking the repertoires to the Holy Week festivities.

It is also possible to highlight a greater specialization of the entertainment market in Rio de Janeiro compared to Recife in terms of the commercial exploitation of sacred films during the Holy Week. Not only were more cinematographs found in Rio de Janeiro but initiatives by the Church and other media (such as the theater) to compete with them (the lighting and ornamentation of the churches reported in one source and the phenomenon of sacred plays alluded to in another). Within this logic of competition, the relation

of competition between cinematographs and the Church was more evident in the case of Rio de Janeiro than in Recife, with, in the latter case, a greater peaceful coexistence between them.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even though some sources were consulted regarding some transgressions against the limits of Catholic religious morality, we did not find in any text the request for closing cinemas during the Holy Week or other religious holidays or for the punishing the owners for exploiting sacred films, which indicates that the institution tried to negotiate with these new repertoires and with these subjects who occupied the public scene.

Regarding the sources, it should be noted that we found a great asymmetry in the number of journals available in the physical and digital collections of the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (Brazil). In the database of the institution, there are 614 periodicals in the physical collection, microfilmed and/or in digital format edited in the city of Rio de Janeiro between 1900 and 1919, whereas only 47 were edited in Recife in the same period. We took as a basis the collection of Biblioteca Nacional because of its legal mission to receive periodicals published in Brazil. Although there are collections such as those of Fundação Joaquim Nabuco and Arquivo Público do Estado de Pernambuco, we do not believe that this gap will be filled.

This fact implied a quantitative and qualitative difference in the sources collected between the cities and, therefore, in the weight of these sources for our analysis. About Rio de Janeiro, articles and chronicles were found in greater quantity and, thus, the advertisements were in the background, whereas, in the case of Recife, these advertisements, together with some fait divers, ended up playing a central role in our approach.

Finally, we emphasize that, due to the quarantine related to COVID-19, we did not have the opportunity to continue our search for sources in the public collections, since they are closed. In this way, we selected sources which we had already collected alongside others available online. ■

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# RESENHAS



# Barbarism and Mediatization According to Muniz Sodré: Is Neoliberalism to Blame?

## *Barbarismo e Mídia Segundo Muniz Sodré: A Culpa é do Neoliberalismo?*

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Vozes.

### ABSTRACT

*A Sociedade Incivil* continues the reflection on culture, media, and journalism started by Muniz Sodré in the early 1970s. This article discusses the main theses developed in the book, highlighting the originality of its premises and approaches. The discussion does not, however, free the book from criticism, accusing the lack of dialectics in its hermeneutics of the media and the imprisonment of its analyzes to a vision of neoliberalism that has become stereotypical.

**Keywords:** Muniz Sodré, communication theory, mediatization, neoliberalism, hate speech

### RESUMO

*A Sociedade Incivil* prossegue o trabalho de reflexão sobre a cultura, a mídia e o jornalismo iniciado por Muniz Sodré ainda no início dos anos 1970. Discute-se no artigo as principais teses desenvolvidas na obra, salientando a originalidade das suas premissas e abordagens. O argumento nem por isso a livra de crítica, acusando a falta de dialética presente na sua hermenêutica da mídia e o aprisionamento de suas análises à visão do neoliberalismo que se converteu em estereótipo.

**Palavras-chave:** Muniz Sodré, teoria da comunicação, midiatização, neoliberalismo, discurso de ódio

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A LEADING PERSONALITY IN communication studies in Brazil, Muniz Sodré confirms this condition in *A Sociedade Incivil* by projecting a reflection on culture, media, and journalism which began in the 1970s to new thematic levels. However, whoever trusts the title will be misled: the work does not have a monographic nature. The attentive reader will not see, in its pages, the elaboration of the expression stamped on the cover into a concept, though the book deals with the levels of civility mass communication currently hold.

*A Sociedade Incivil* is a collection of relatively disconnected essays, in which the author, starting from the recapitulation of the guiding propositions of his theory of communication (pp. 9-39; 77-88; 91-138), on the one hand embarks on new territories, such as the philosophy of political economy (pp. 43-77) and the theory of automates (pp. 203-228), and on the other renews or deepens old ones, such as the feeling of hate in the media (pp. 229-265) and the trends in journalism (pp. 139-200).

The starting point for the appreciation of the work is, for us, the book's recapitulation of the foundations of the author's theorization about the common and communication, which had been presented in a systematic way in one of his previous works (Sodré, 2015). Sodré's theory seeks to escape the identification of communication with the media, noting that the practical and reflective spectrum of the first concept is broader than that indicated by the second. Communication derives at all times from what the thinker calls *common*, the symbolic order without which there is no link between human beings. The media, in turn, corresponds to its modern definition, referring to its kidnapping or codification by the capitalist economic system and technological power.

Regarding the emergence of a way of life (*bios*) promoted by capital and technology (p. 45), Sodré hesitates or does not make it completely clear whether the media represents a break with the common or, even if radically new, is just a stage in its development. On the one hand, he emphasizes that the media is characterized by the lack of organic connections with the common, but, on the other hand, he requests that, as such, we understand it as "a general field of processes of organization and reverberation of influences within the scope of social cohesion" (p. 26). In the end, we have the impression that, in the author's view, communication is related to, but not to be confused with, the media, insofar as, although they are distinct, the sharing and vital exchanges characteristic of the former, as well as the viral and simulated exchanges typical of the second, are defined from a historical-ontological a priori, from a symbolic organization inherent to the common (p. 82).

Continuing, the author reiterates his idea that the academic field of communication owes much of its damage to the fact that it emerged from and, in part, continues to be prisoner of North American theoretical schemes and research models. The formidable economic and technological development driven by capitalism in the United States grounded this area of knowledge, for better or for worse. With time, this will give rise to communication's relative autonomy, but, on the other hand, created an epistemological situation that still contributes to suppress or even to repress a thorough reflection on its fundamental assumptions (p. 31; see Queré, 1984).

Reducing communication to the media and understanding it as a variable essentially determined by technology hides the fact that it should not be analytically confused with the media, which needs to be understood as a block with capital. But also that both must be thought of together, under the background or instituting ground represented by the *common*.

According to the author, the *common* would be something *inherent to the human condition*, the *symbolic order* that communicatively institutes language, the subject, politics, the family and all other figures in history, insofar as, as it allows contact and exchange, it concatenates or relates – in increasing degrees of complexity, starting from the individual – forms that, without appealing to such an assumption, would only be thinkable separately. Ultimately, communication is “the same as symbolic sharing, operated by mediations (the “with”), of a being-in-common or of a community conceived [imaginarily?] as original identity” (p. 81).

It means that the common, as such, is no more than an abstraction; that is, it still needs to be understood concretely, as something that if, on the one hand, enables, on the other, is generated in the historical movement of human aggregation, in the midst of which all institutions, including the typical modern ones, which the author generically calls a “organization” (pp. 107-118), arise. As a socio-technical device of economic and technological appropriation of the symbolic order, the media is included in it and, therefore, is not limited to transmitting the experience, becoming, rather, a new way of life. In the modern age, communication triggers “modalities of existence in common, in which [in the media age] this space [the common] is technologically redefined so that signs, images and digits create a world of their own, and so that displacement is completed in a virtual (electronic) sphere” (p. 45).

Using the term “mediatization” to theoretically designate this process, the author makes it clear that he is not dealing with something from experience, but with a conceptual construction (p. 122), which “synthetically describes the articulated functioning of traditional social institutions and of individuals, with

the media organizations responsible for creating an electronic sea in which we are already swimming” (p. 118). That is to say, mediatization consists of a critical-hermeneutic concept since it is not subject to empirical indexation, whose usefulness would reside above all in an intended ability to think about the cultural processes underway today (pp. 118-119).

Luhmann (2017) understood money as a symbolically generalized form of communication, seeing it as an institution capable of allowing contact and exchanges between social agents in contexts of high functional differentiation and systemic complexity. Sodré, in a way, takes up this thesis, proposing a critical theory of its advanced state marked by what he calls financialization, but relying more on Baudrillard (1973) than on Simmel (1900/1990), a pioneer of the social theory of money.

For the Brazilian author, modern communication tends to be reduced to the media, as the common is metamorphosed or gives way to what he calls code, borrowing the expression from the French thinker (p. 47). That is, it gives way to the articulation that forms “a new socio-technical order, driven by information at all levels, which can be defined as a generalization of existence through finance and technology” (p. 47). Originally economic, the law of value, monetarily regulated, is beginning to encompass other sectors of life, through the progressive computerization of the totality of social relations (p. 71).

When capitalism appears, we testify the imposition of political economy, whose exchanges are mercantile and, therefore, the code is inevitably money, there being no other way to keep the calculations. When money becomes the main market, since everything revolves around it, and information technology develops, digital communication defines the code. This stage is that of “neoliberal finance” (p. 63), since the truth of what was called code almost half a century ago, instead of sign, is, as more or less predicted, the algorithm (see Baudrillard, 1973, p. 110, note 3).

Despite noting that the mediatization associated with the totalization of life in the plane of virtuality (p. 62) lacks a single command center (p. 119), Sodré, as a rule, speaks of the media as a subject. Thus, it is not surprising that, in one of the most stimulating sections of the work, he accuses it of being “a great operator of [current] hate speech” (p. 245). Certainly, the problem is not new: arising in structural correspondence with love, hate is a feeling that is both original and ambivalent (p. 258). Hatred has existed since at least Christianity (Nietzsche, 1887/1998).

As Sodré says, more than an individual, isolated feeling, hatred is a “social form” which can be transacted, but would prove to be virtually insurmountable (p. 256). A condition of difference from one individual to another, hatred, like

so many other feelings and emotions, is a possibility inscribed in every social interaction (see Sodr , 2006).

The fact to consider, according to the text, however, would be that, with our surrender to it, mediatization would be exacerbated instead of mitigated (p. 251); pressured by neoliberalism, there would be a perverse affirmation of the aforementioned social form, through which subjects would need others to spew their hatred for, and hatred would become “a unanimous emotion” (p. 254).

For Sodr , the search for someone to blame and hate – or to persecute, in the extreme –, came to have an analytical, intrinsic relationship with mediatization and, therefore, with neoliberalism (p. 247). However, does this hold up? According to the author, corporations exploit the hateful passions that are supposedly born from the insertion of the masses in existing production and exchange relations or their exclusion from them – but it must be remembered that the media does not only play with the fears and desires that increase terror. “Contact without measurements, fast, hallucinatory”, which reduces human relationships “to crude binary options” (p. 259), is a fact in the media – but it should not make us forget about the campaigns and humanitarian actions, which, also through the media, often arouse moral conscience and help the banal subject prevent the worst among his fellow men.

The perspective of understanding the media as mediation seems to us more advantageous than understanding its hermeneutics as a parallel reality, a form of life of its own, relatively autonomous before other processes, instituted and contradictorily transformed through social praxis. The aesthetic and moral abominations that, from an enlightened conscience perspective, swarm the media should not make us forget its role in the formation of a critical attitude and in encouraging philanthropic actions that, despite their lightness and superficiality, foster citizenship and humanitarian sentiments among masses that would otherwise probably be more, not less, barbaric.

The Sodrerian statement that hate reveals itself as a “brute form of hegemony” (p. 252), valid in situations of underdeveloped capitalism and despotic regimes, does not apply to free and open societies, which arise from economic progress and are maintained with enlightened ideas. The association of the white “media class” with the narcissistic aversion to others as people who could disturb or divide the respective place of speech or occupy its space (p. 262) sounds stereotyped by a primary leftism. The proposition may, with nuances, apply to a part of this segment: essentially, it only serves, however, for catharsis; it does not academically and critically account for the conduct and moral conscience in the media age in advanced societies (see Bauman, 1993).

“The failure of the fiduciary bond with society”, which, without a doubt, “can feed hatred as a fundamental passion” (p. 254), is a relative phenomenon and should not be put into the mediatization account unless we understand it in a different, more open and dialectical way as a mediation process that, as far as one can see, does not matter as a whole and necessarily in the cancellation of reciprocal social praxis in changing and contradictory situations.

Apparently convincing, the Sodrerian reflection on hate speech, in essence, is only seductive, because although the thinker teaches that communication is *pharmakon*, that is, poison and cure, this is not what is seen in his analysis of hate speech on the internet. Sodré overlooks the role of capitalism in the civilization of manners and the much more brutal ways in which it expressed itself in the past, accused even by Marx. The caveat that hatred precedes the emergence of the media, which would only radicalize it in speech, seems to ignore that, previously, hatred and hate speech were much more every day and that, since its origins, the media is ambivalent about them. For better or worse, the media has contributed to the civilization of manners and the advancement of humanitarian morality (Lipovestky, 1994, pp. 147-180; 243-320).

Taken by righteous indignation at the persistence of stupidity among us, Sodré seems to see only the barbaric forces in the market, as if those forces, before the expansion of that institution, were always noble or even better. The theme requires historical and dialectical apprehension. It is undoubtedly surprising that, in the midst of an age of jealousy for civilization, humanity surrenders to persecutory passions and destructive fantasies, dreaming of scenarios where everything would be allowed by practicing their communications (p. 247).

However, it is worth remembering that, in situations where the law is in force and people have some social and economic protection because of wealth generation and distribution, this is less and less acted upon. To consider civilization in its ambiguity (Elias, 1993), today, necessarily involves accepting its inevitable intertwining with barbarism, its reciprocal and perhaps endless provocation, which could however be mitigated by politics and thought. There is no more way to admit analyses conducted with the uncritical endorsement of the historicist belief of establishing perpetual peace and universal happiness.

The chapter on journalism contains another sign of the capture of the author's ideas by a negative dialectic of philosophy of history related to the thesis, which is that instead of a social order, we are seeing the irruption of a new barbarism via the internet. Despite subscribing to the thesis that there can be “an information system capable of rationally expanding the transparency of major social problems, opening the way for a deliberative democracy” (p. 169), Sodré leans toward the apocalyptic judgment, taking up Dewey (1927) and

Habermas (1984) to argue that changes in public information are destroying this possibility (pp. 139-200).

According to him, the idealized vision of the press and the democracy of opinion must be counterbalanced by understanding the former as a collective intellectual of the ruling classes – not necessarily as their instrument, but as an institution inscribed in a form of hegemony, since, despite serving political interests, journalism inevitably reveals its contradictions (p. 169). Whenever the public sphere remains open, with several sources of information, the democratic consensus is exposed to argumentative diversity, without losing its transforming potential, since the journalistic text articulates several possibilities of apprehension of reality without being stripped of the ideological “background [represented by] consensual truth” (p. 168).

The news is always tied to the logic of the fact, being a discursive formation of a potentially argumentative nature open to others (p. 157). It is sensible “to the transformations and passages inherent to the dialogic work of the historical reality” (p. 142). Parliamentary politics and the exercise of citizenship, with their struggles and disputes, consensus and questioning, are unthinkable phenomena without the mediation of the free press (pp. 151-152). Journalism cannot be thought of if we separate it from the duty to tell the truth,, i.e., respecting common sense and not ignoring the facts, as the social-historical order stipulates them (p. 144).

In spite of everything, journalism is fundamental in improving public discussion and argumentative conviction, which arise from the democratization of opinion and the development of citizenship. It was never reduced to an instrument of deception and never had the sole function of informing, carrying at its core the incentive to public conversation (p. 143).

Today, however, we would see what the author calls the organization overlapping the hegemony. Corporations supposedly are imposing their will on the games and struggles for opinion. The public space was colonized by the media device, making the “paraliterary rhetoric of journalism” retreat before the “scenographic exposition of images” (p. 156). The discursive rationality is leaving the scene, leaving only the emotions as a means of learning the facts (p. 176).

The presupposition is represented by an intersubjectively understood civil society, moved by ideological arguments, retreated in the face of a mass atomized in bubbles, thirsty for emotions, ready to make affective discharges in mere images (p. 171). The civil power that represented the press of the past gave way to the logic of algorithms and financial markets underlying the computerized economy. The supply and demand of excitement mentioned by Elias (1986)

prevails over the observance of the distinction between true and false, reducing respect for information verification mechanisms (p. 158).

Events lost the conditions of politically negotiated discursive elaborations to become a function of algorithmic mechanisms in virtual forums. The public's idea of a more or less cohesive and coherent character was replaced by the notion of "individualized followers of a publisher emotionally chosen as a guide in the electronic network" (p. 149). The power to schedule the facts that would belong to the press became much more fragmented and variable in the midst of a scenario dominated "by sensations and emotions emptied of any argumentative ballast" (p. 181).

Social subjects tend to know less and less of what they are talking about as they allow themselves to be taken by the "ecstasy of contact". Facts are being converted into stimuli that epidermically adhere or can be irrationally adapted to the subjects' desires by "a logic segmented by the market and distant from a paradigm politically referred to ideas of popular sovereignty" (p. 156). The old media transformed the truth obtained by consensus of the liberal era into a product reiterated by the mechanics of mass production of images (p. 154-155). The new one relies on this essentially sensitive and affective basis to promote "a scenic game of facts that makes them undecidable" from the angle of truth accessible to common sense by leaving its meaning "to the free choice of the receivers" (p. 156).

From our view, all of this sounds quite plausible as a general diagnosis of the epoch in the history of the public sphere, although one should not believe that information has simply lost its roots in the broader facticity because of its sublimation in the virtual bios engendered by the combined action of technology and finance capital. We would argue that the emergence of a "parallel reality", capable of trapping subjects in the "vicious circle" of a "media bios" (p. 174), is a moment or aspect only, not the essence or substance of social praxis even in the most advanced zones of the planet. It seems undeniable that the processes of citizenship formation and morals and of liberal and democratic political integration in traditional institutions are in crisis or running out; however, if we understand them as the willingness to defend the agonistic game of differences and tensions between their social subjects, the rules are socially instituted to keep all this free and open (p. 185).

Sodré defends the thesis that society is becoming barbarized, insofar as neoliberalism, converted into the origin of all evils, a spectral subject of history, gives rise to a *proto-fascism* by inciting different social groups to propagate fear and express hatred amid the financialization of life and its sublimation into an essentially virtual form of existence, in the "media bios" (p. 167). The author's

stance, however, does not seem convincing to us: the suggestion that, through the *activism of capital*, neoliberalism would have transformed civil society into its opposite, that is, into wild terrain, is essentially impressionistic. Unless provided empirical evidence of the contrary, the financialization of life and the technologization of existence do not seem to have, in theory, a direct and linear connection with the reactions to political corruption, nationalist outbreaks, and the mental confusion caused among many people by “the accelerated transformation of customs and the ephemerality of events” (p. 165).

No one will deny that the destruction of jobs and the consequent lowering of general standards of living caused by the economic and technological development of capitalism, even if unevenly, have a negative impact on the conscience of countless social groups. However, it would be unreasonable to think that the expansion of the system benefits only “the pole of the ruling classes” (p. 77), being enough, to be convinced, to consult the evolution of indicators on poverty, health, education, housing, and democracy in the last 40 years in the graphics and studies on the Our World in Data website (<https://ourworldindata.org/>). Whoever proposes to explore this subject needs to examine without prejudice the role of the State in the accumulation of capital, in the bureaucratic appropriation of wealth, in the political generation of inequalities, and in the provision of public services – which, in the book here addressed, is not considered by Sodré.

Moreover, it should be noted that the proto-fascism underlying contemporary hate speech, that is, the “ambiguous and mutant attitude, refractory to tolerance and to the rationality of opinions”, which, sheltered in networks, feeds on cruelty and serves politically degenerate processes (p. 166), is no longer an exclusively right-wing phenomenon, but also verified among the collective leftist movements that, more recently, have come to use the particularist banners of reaction to articulate power projects that abdicate from democracy and could result in a loss of freedoms.

The idealized and nostalgic rehabilitation of god, homeland, and family is not essentially different from the sectarian and patrolling promotion of race, gender, and cultural exceptionalism: both of them are sinister exasperations of an authoritarian bent, phenomena capable of eliciting destructive dreams against the other, if not delusional fantasies of an “amorphous discursivity, more emotional than argumentative” (p. 167), which, as the author says, give rise to regressive processes, “facilitators of the action of politically perverse leaders” (p. 167).

Muniz Sodré sustains with subtlety and rare elegance the thesis of communication as a form of domination, accusing its promotion of political neutralization of cognition and sensitivity as it becomes a form of artificial life that, in the decades before, he had identified as telereality, simulacra, and mediatization.

The reading report summarized above sought to contribute to the analysis of Sodré's work, suggesting questions to critically revisit it and keep the space of theoretical discussion alive in the academic field of communication. ■

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