

**FACOS-UFSM**

**NETWORKS, SOCIETY, AND POLIS:  
EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES  
ON MEDIATIZATION**

**Jairo Ferreira  
Pedro Gilberto Gomes  
Antonio Fausto Neto  
José Luiz Braga  
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(Editors)**



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This book is one of the results of the II International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes. In its second edition, we had the support of Capes and Fapergs.

The II International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes had a program developed at two levels: Debate Tables, with invited researchers (five tables, with the participation of researchers from Sweden (1), Russia (1), Portugal (1), Argentina (1), and Brazil (6). In the second level, the Working Groups (WGs), abstracts were submitted and selected in the following proportion of participants: 21% of professors-researchers; 33% doctors and doctoral students; 33% masters and master's degree students; 13% graduate and undergraduate students linked to scientific research and / or with research results in TCC (Completion of course work). In the first seminar, in 2016, there were submissions by 250 authors and 217 expanded abstracts, of which about 188 works were selected. In both events, half of the participants are from universities in other states (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, mainly).

Among its results, in addition to the training processes during its realization, we accentuate the consolidation of a library of reflections, through complete articles of the presentations in WGs and books, published in e-book format (with chapters produced by participants of the conference tables). The expanded summaries of the event are available at <https://mediaticom.org/anais/index.php/seminario-midiatizacao-resumos>. Full articles are available at <https://mediaticom.org/anais/index.php/seminario-midiatizacao-artigos>.

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**FACOS-UFSM  
SANTA MARIA-RS  
2020**

# NETWORKS, SOCIETY, AND POLIS: EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES ON MEDIATIZATION

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## Introduction

This book is one of the results of the II International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes.

The II International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes had a program developed at two levels: Debate panels, with invited researchers – five tables with the participation of researchers from Sweden (1), Russia (1), Portugal (1), Argentina (1), and Brazil (6). The schedule of the II Seminar and its structure are available at <https://www.midiaticom.org/seminario-midiatizacao/grade-de-programacao-2018/>. In total, there were 15 hours of debates at the five debate panels. This second event gave continuity to the first International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes, which also had guest researchers. In the first seminar, the five panels were attended by researchers from France (3), Denmark (1), Argentina (2), and Brazil (4). See: <http://www.midiaticom.org/seminariointernacional/programacao-2016/>.

Therefore, methodologically, the Seminar takes place in the articulation of debate panels with international guests and working groups, with the presence of researchers, doctors, doctoral students, Masters, and master's degree students.

We emphasize that, still in the scope of training processes, master's and doctoral students, masters and doctors, post-doctoral students and post-doctors, and members of the organizing Research Group take part in them as reviewers, in a blind evaluation, of the expanded abstracts submitted by graduates with lower titles – under the coordination of researchers/professors of the Research Group on Mediatization and Social Processes. They evaluated (in a group of more than three dozen reviewers) each of the works submitted by colleagues with training at a lower level, with classification grades, which resulted in the approved papers. Then, they were grouped by the orga-

nizing committee, successively, until the event's working groups were formed.

A total of 237 abstracts were submitted. They were selected in the following proportion of participants: 21% of professors/researchers; 33% doctors and doctoral students; 33% masters and master's students; 13% graduates and undergraduate students, linked to scientific initiation research project and/or with research results of a senior research project. In the first seminar, in 2016, there were 250 submissions by authors and 217 expanded abstracts. Out of these, around 188 works were selected. At both events, half of the participants were from universities in other states (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, mainly).

Among its results, in addition to the training processes in the course of its realization, we emphasize its consolidation in a library of reflections, in the form of complete articles of the presentations in Working Groups and books published in e-book format (with chapters produced by the participants of the debate panels).

The expanded abstracts of the event are available at <https://midiaticom.org/anais/index.php/seminario-midiaticom-resumos>. The full articles are available at <https://midiaticom.org/anais/index.php/seminario-midiaticom-artigos>.

This book of the Debate Panels of the II Seminar, in this e-book edition, is available not only in the project collection (<https://www.midiaticom.org/e-books/>) but also at FACOS UFSM (<https://www.ufsm.br/editoras/facos/publicacoes/>).

We reiterate our thanks to CAPES and FAPERGS for the financial support, which is essential for to enable this proposal of conversation via research, both theoretical and empirical, carried out by its participants.

*Editors*

## Foreword

*Wilson Gomes*

This book faces an impressive challenge in taking on the subject of mediatization. The task makes sense since the UNISINOS' Communication area, which brought together the participants of the symposium that gave rise to this collection, is recognized by studies on mediatization, as a phenomenon or concept, and concentrates a large part of the production in the area. José Luiz Braga, Antônio Fausto Neto, Pedro Gilberto Gomes, Jairo Getúlio Ferreira, and Ana Paula da Rosa form a consistent part of the bibliography on the subject, systematically organize international congresses in which they set in motion their national and foreign networks of collaborators and specialized interlocutors, in addition to years of supervising dissertations and theses in the area.

The proposal is, however, a considerable challenge, as the reader of this work will quickly realize. Firstly, because in addition to the more general understandings of the phenomena and concerns referred to by the term *mediatization*, in the most exact and precise territory of concepts and definitions there is no peace at all. And from what can be seen from the theoretical foundations present in the various essays and articles that form the chapters of this book, the authors deal realistically with the still considerable level of polysemy and the competing taxonomies and applications present in the field.

The idea of mediatization, in general, is based on the assumption that in the contemporary world there are different social fields, on the one hand, and there is the communication field, on the other, both relatively autonomous and independent, but that they overlap, they are involved at different levels of interface and synergy and symbiosis patterns, since the distinct

original fields need to reach society. There is no economy or culture without consumers, there is no politics without voters and public opinion, and public attention, audience, and visibility cannot be achieved at a significant level to get commodified in consumption, electoral decision, or support, for example, without communication.

Besides, this space of the *inter*, the *between*, which ends up necessarily constituting itself, does not, under any circumstances, consist in mere agglutination or juxtaposition, but in a chemical result in which the combined elements have certainly already become something else. The word mediatization refers to the function that the elements of communication fulfill in social chemistry, when the resources and means of communication, old and new, are combined with the elements of other social fields. But we also use that expression to designate what results from this combination, this new social form in which the elements of communication cannot be separated anymore and are a condition for its possibility of existing.

Second, there is the problem of the extension of the concept of mediatization, that is, of the set of phenomena, in the world, to which it can be applied properly. By its very nature, the mediatization of social life cannot have a very limited extension, even if we isolate particular aspects in the application universe and talk about things like the mediatization of politics, culture, entertainment, or sociability. Each of these boundaries would still contain a universe of things. Several different phenomena are mediated and mediatized, which is why the extension of the concept must necessarily be comprehensive.

On the other hand, if the epistemic boundaries are too broad, there are two risks. The first would be that ultimately the limits of mediatization would coincide, at least, with the limits of communication by traditional media and by digital means and environments. After all, when we say that there is a field of communication and a field of politics or culture, for example, we do not tell the whole truth, since communication does include a materiality of its own. There is a communication industry, with all the elements of a company under a capitalist regime; there are several professional fields of communication, with their spe-

cific social capital and productive routines and deontologies of their own; there are various logics (or grammars or any other expression which denotes systematic modes, tested models and taught and learned patterns of meaning production) at work in the fields of communication. But communication as a social fact, as meanings slipping from transmitters to receivers, as flows of content – to use this term in vogue in the digital environment – is politics, culture, entertainment, sociability, commerce.

Political communication, for example, is not the combination of politics and communication; it is communication in which political content travels, in which political content is generated, disputed, transformed into a weapon, in frames, in agendas, in information, in fake news, in clarification, in conspiracy theories, in reports of facts and mistakes and manipulations. There is no way to unravel communication and politics in political communication, as there is probably no way to make dialysis between communication and sociability or culture.

So, if media coverage is precisely the condition that creates a phenomenon like political, cultural, commercial communication, *etcetera*, after all, mediatization and communication will end up being the same thing. It may even make sense to support this thesis, but are we ready for this conversation?

Another risk is the epistemological imperialism. I remember that Umberto Eco used exactly this expression in the early 1970s, when he published his *Trattato di semiotica generale*, warning of the risk that this would represent for the discipline. It is clear that no one listened to him, and semiotics became, effectively, an imperialist discipline, advancing and annexing all the territories in which it was able to get its hands on, until it disappeared, paradoxically, “by excess” (but do not tell it to the remaining semioticians because they are still reluctant to record the fact). If mediatization is a super concept, it would hardly resist the allure of transforming itself into a formula that deciphers everything, breaks all codes, and invades all systems, explaining everything better than any other alternative. It is hyperbole, fear not, if it had pretensions or imperialist reach, the field of mediation would not be here struggling with polysemy and trying to build painful consensus. But it is also a mental ex-

periment on what can happen with concepts that have difficulty limiting their intension.

In this book, we have a collection, bravely captained by Jairo Getúlio Ferreira, of contributions by great experts on the topic of mediatization, combined between theoretical and grounding approaches, on the one hand, and applications; with possible combinations of the two efforts. Just as there are chapters with cartographies of the media research itself (Vera França and Pedro G. Gomes), or reviews of applications to a specific field (Magali Cunha, Fausto Neto), there are also articles that explore new perspectives or, at least, point out directions and challenges for future research (José L. Braga, Jairo G. Ferreira).

Among those who, in some way, conceptually or historically organize the field of media coverage are the chapters of Göran Bolin and Muniz Sodré, on the one hand, and those of Vera França and Pedro Gilberto Gomes, on the other. Almost all applied works, however, to a greater degree (such as Ilya Kiriya, Antônio Fausto Neto, and Jairo Getúlio Ferreira), to a lesser degree, devote some space to conceptual clarification or to make some recognition of the field, which seems to reflect the permanent need for this theoretical and methodological approach to substantiate, define, and justify its object.

Professor Göran Bolin offers us an exemplary case of this attitude. In his chapter, he presents a consistent approach to the phenomenon of mediatization, adopting as an analytical corpus the recording and examination of experiences and memories of the uses of media in different generations. After offering a map of the conceptual alternatives typical of the field of study of mediatization for the investigation of its object (the institutionalist perspective, the technological approach, and the culturalist point of view), and adopting the third one, and after mapping the frequent ways of looking at human generations, the author presents some elements for a phenomenological and generational approach to the social use of the media. If the scholar takes a cross-sectional sample of a historical moment, he believes it will result that different generations coexist, synchronously, with the same cultural artifacts of communication, but, diachronically, the trajectories of their generational life has dealt with different artifacts, through different cultural experiences, and experi-



encing distinct social meanings. The very idea of generation, in some way, is linked to the idea of media self-awareness, that is, the self-awareness of the media that were present in their lives in different phases, and the social uses that were made of them.

In turn, Muniz Sodré, the doyen of researchers in communication in Brazil, brings an essay on the fortunes and misfortunes of the mediating function of journalism over time, since its emergence as an organ of the modern, illuminist, and the republican public sphere, to its more complete transformation before the digitization and datification of information flows in the 21st century. In his short and sophisticated essay, Muniz Sodré takes us to visit the arc of time that goes from the moment when information mediated public deliberation and civil conversation, in its origins, until this moment of accelerated and horizontal information flows, but not for that reason exempt from processes of fabrication of narratives and hidden agendas. That, let us be realistic, is the moment when a society, paradoxically, languishes due to hunger for quality information at the same time that it is replete with disinformation, mistakes, and manipulations distributed digitally and through algorithms out of control of society.

Vera França, on the other hand, faithful to the research interest she has been supporting for some years, in the epistemology of the field of communication in Brazil, examines and outlines the history of the idea of mediatization in Brazil, South America, and Europe. França tells us the adventures through which the concept and its verbal forms are sculpted among us, by the hands of intellectual artisans such as Santaella, Muniz Sodré, José Luiz Braga, Fausto Neto, and Pedro Gilberto Gomes, only then to finish with the advances of the concept in the theories carried out by European authors (like Couldry), mainly those from Central and Northern Europe (like Hjarvard, Krotz, Hepp, Strömbäck, and Bolin).

In an ongoing act, França theoretically reconstructs a synoptic picture of the use of the concept of mediatization, across the various authors and traditions, with three possibilities: use as a general and descriptive concept, in which mediatization generally refers to the extent and “strength of the presence” of communication technologies in society; a mediatization

usage to talk about the communicational transformation of a world in which communication modifies thoughts, sensibilities, and relationships; an approach that accepts the communication-al transformation of reality, but seeks to capture this change in specific practices, such as politics or science.

The author still has enough conceptual energy to clean up the house, that is, the tensions between the concept of mediation and the conceptual formulas that seem to belong to the same family of issues: cultural industry, mediasphere, media theory, and mediation. Finally, the author presents problems and perspectives for a future agenda for mediatization studies, insisting that, if, on the one hand, the expression “mediatization coverage” is essential, the study of the phenomenon, on the other hand, is fruitful and relevant.

Lastly, Pedro Gilberto Gomes’ chapter closes the theoretical foundation quadrant, which sustains the same ambition of the Minas Gerais author for the cartography of the scientific discussion on mediatization. The starting point he adopts treats the concept as polysemic (or *plurivocal*, as he prefers), since both the meanings and their reference may vary according to the reality and the interest of those who use it. In the taxonomy employed by Pedro G. Gomes, everything depends on how much of the media is seen in the phenomena that maintain significant intersection with it, so that, for some, there is mediatization when simply the media is an intermediary cognitive sphere between politics, economics, the entertainment, etcetera, and people while, for others, there is proper intermediation when the media significantly change the very nature of other social spheres. Mediatization can, therefore, mean an interface, an ambience, or a structural transformation of other spheres of social life, including sociability itself, as a result of communication.

That established, he then summarizes the intellectual history of mediatization, until the conclusion with an examination of a major issue, namely, whether the intense digitization of social life, which necessarily involves increasing levels of disintermediation – that is, the awareness that traditional intermediaries, such as journalism or television are no longer needed for communication flows – would not be a sign that mediatiza-

tion no longer describes the essentials of our time. On the other hand, Gomes asks, as an answer to the first question, if we do not, paradoxically, see the threshold of a new form of mediatization, whose meaning and scope we are not yet able to predict.

The other set of chapters, as I said, is the application of the idea of mediatization to a specific scope of problems or attempts to theorize new sets of phenomena, based on the premises based on mediatization studies.

The chapters of Rita Figueiras, Mario Carlón, and Magali Cunha bring problems of politics as problems of mediatization. Fausto Neto and Figueiras also consider mediatization in the light of journalism – or journalism in the light of mediatization. Ilya Kiriya, in turn, deals with the mediatization industries, mapping them as creative and education industries. Ana Paula da Rosa, and, again, Carlón think about the statutes of images circulating in digital environments in light of the premises of mediatization, while José Luiz Braga and Jairo Getúlio Ferreira frontally face the problems of digital communications.

Figueiras' chapter brings us empirical research, with a robust theoretical foundation, on the political commentary in the prime time of Portuguese television as a case of media coverage of politics. The empirical universe includes the years 2000 to 2015, in which the author examines hypotheses about levels and nature of the interaction between politics and journalism through political commentary, it is understood by her as a privileged locus for examining the relationship between the media and politics. Figueiras is careful to tell us clearly which elements make up her operational concept of mediatization, which boils down to two premises: that the power relationship between the media and politics consists in the predominance of one field over the other; that the predominance has resulted in a domain of the specific logics of the media, with the consequent reconfiguration of the political sphere. Moreover, it is a matter of testing the background hypothesis of *media interventionism*, by analyzing the profiles of commentators with fixed space in TV journalistic products, from a longitudinal perspective.

Antônio Fausto Neto, on the other hand, brings us an essay on the theme of the circulation of journalistic discourse,

placing it diachronically over different phases. In his theoretical reconstruction of journalism, Fausto Neto talks about the journalistic practice that, in some way, renounces the pretensions of mediating discursively, with all the complexity that this entails, between facts and audiences, to assume a new type of interaction in which the discursive fabric and the engendering of the meanings no longer crystallizes in just one place (the newsroom, the newspaper page, the VT) and moment, but they involve different agents and agencies, synchronous and asynchronous, without linear and rigid chronology, and with distinct levels of effect.

Ana Paula da Rosa addresses the process of circulation of images and the logics that supports their significance through one of the triadic typology proposed by her: synthesis images, residue images, and circuit images. Rosa's central concern is the images that flood digital environments, in their various formats and on their most diverse platforms. A concern also shared by Mario Carlón, whose contribution examines a specific case of the political use of images in publications on social media platforms for the political dispute in Argentina, including here the forgery, appropriation, manipulation, and reactions to all of this. Carlón uses the case to extract consequences and conceptual challenges for an approach to images in circulation in digital environments from the perspective of media studies

Ilya Kiriya, as I said, brings an exciting chapter on the industrialization of culture, in a political economy approach to communication. He examines the creative industries and the industrialization of education. While Magali Cunha makes a cartography, the most complete I know, about the mediatization of Evangelical political activism, which should in no way be confused with the mediatization of religion. It shows how leaders and religious activists have recently worked to occupy the digital public sphere, dominating their resources and logics, to dispute interpretations and promote their framing of social problems and political facts.

In the two chapters on the spearhead of digital communication, José Luiz Braga suggests thought-provoking methodological questions for a consistent and fruitful approach to communication-based on digital networks, media, and environments, while consistent with the premises of the idea of mediati-

zation. Jairo Getúlio Ferreira, in a similar direction, presents prolegomena for a general theory of algorithmic applications, which are today one of the pulsating centers of the digital universe, always within the framework of a general theory of mediatization.

The result is a book that offers us a considerably high level to continue the debate on the scope, meaning, and validity of the concept of mediatization. A set of theoretical chapters leads us to this level, with concept maps and secure cartographies about where we came from and where we are now. But, also, the careful applications and thought-provoking explorations of new themes and approaches that this collection has also taken care of ensuring for us.



# Scope and variations of the concept of mediatization

*Vera V. França<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** This text, organized in four parts, discusses the emergence and the possibilities brought by the concept of mediatization. Initially, it seeks to delineate a brief trajectory of the concept in Brazil, and then resumes and systematizes the main trends in its treatment. In the third section, it promotes an approximation and distinction of close concepts, such as mass culture, mediation. The final part covers the effort to rescue the main guidelines pointed out by the reflections about mediatization, positioning itself for a kind of approach that seeks to intertwine communicative interactions, technological apparatuses, and their respective socio-historical-cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Mediatization. Communication theories. Media theory.

## I – Introduction

The creation and strength of the concepts are the results of two interconnected movements. The first – which explains why they appear at a given time – are changes, in reality, the emergence of new dynamics in the order of the world, or a more acute perception of aspects that were already present, but which are becoming more prominent at a determined time. The second is of an epistemic order and refers to how successful is the reflective elaboration that seeks to deal with these aspects or problems of the empirical world in the task of understand-

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ing them, and how much does a conceptual construction help to think about the phenomenon at the screen.

When we talk about mediatization, these two movements become very self-evident. The changes in reality, regarding the development and expansion of technological means and communication forms, have been undeniable and forceful. If the advent of the mass media, in the first half of the last century, has completely changed and innovated the communicative scenarios and forms, the digital medium – and the multiple platforms that never cease to be created – has completely revolutionized social life, forms of sociability, individual protagonism, political practices, corporate interventions. Its penetration in the different spaces of social life, in the different spheres of society, in the last two decades, has configured a new and challenging phenomenon. Faced with this new phenomenon, and urged by it, the theoretical tools were put to the test, and new concepts are being forged and tested.

Mediatization, therefore, is a term that designates the phenomenon, but it is also a concept. In this reflection, we do not focus on aspects of the phenomenon — indisputable —, but on the different efforts that have been developed to treat it theoretically. Without intending to be exhaustive, this text, of an exploratory nature, is organized in three moments. The first part seeks to apprehend discussions around the concept in Brazil. Then, we present a systematization of its different approaches to, in the final part, establish approximation and distinction of the concept of mediatization concerning similar concepts.

## **II – The concept path**

As we said above, it is necessary to, initially, distinguish the phenomenon and the concept(s). The phenomenon concerns the changes in the technical-communicative scenario that have been taking shape since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and notably in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concept refers to the different approaches and ways of understanding these changes – and it is naturally plural (since the treatments are multiple and not always convergent).



In Brazil, the theme of new technologies, digital culture, or “cyberculture” has been attracting the attention of researchers since the end of the 20th century<sup>2</sup>. The first formulations and theorizations about the new scenario are indebted, among others, to Lúcia Santaella and Muniz Sodré.

Lúcia Santaella published, in 1992, the book *Cultura das mídias*, pioneering work in Brazil in dealing with this new reality of expansion and interpenetration of different media and its impact on culture. In 2003, in *Culturas e artes do pós-humano. Da cultura das mídias à cibercultura*, the author presents a division of cultural eras into six types of training: oral culture, written culture, printed culture, mass culture, media culture, and digital culture (SANTAELLA, 2003a). If the concept of mass culture emphasized the homogenization and pasteurization of cultural contents, Santaella points out how much the diversification of the media has altered and expanded the relations between different cultural productions, the interaction between distinct codes, the hybridization of languages. Around the 1980s, the 1990s, new devices added up to the mass media environment – VCRs, photocopiers, and, then, cable TV – allowing for segmentation and diversification of consumption, as well as individualized choices, making the transition to the arrival of digital media. This period is what the author calls media culture, a preliminary stage for digital culture, a contemporary phase, marked chiefly by the convergence of the media, by the exacerbation that the production and circulation of information has reached today – “a true general fraternization of all forms of communication and culture, in a dense and hybrid boiling” (SANTAELLA, 2003b, p. 28).

More than the six eras pointed out by Santaella, it is interesting to highlight the approach that the author seeks to imprint: it is not a mediacentric approach but an emphasis on the effects of language and meaning that are felt:

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2 A Working Group (WG), dealing with this new media theme, was created at Compós (National Association of Graduate Programs in Communication) in 1995 (and the WG started to operate the following year), with the name <Communication and Technological Society>. In 2002, the WG changed its name to <Informational Technologies of Communication and Society>. In the reclamation of 2006, the WG was approved with the title <Communication and Cyberculture>, a name that it keeps until today.

[...] we must not fall into the misconception that cultural transformations are due only to the advent of new technologies and new means of communication and culture. Rather, they are the types of signs that circulate in these media, the types of messages and communication processes that are engendered in them, which are truly responsible not only for *shaping the thinking and sensitivity of human beings*, but also for promoting the emergence of *new socio-cultural environments* (ibid., p. 22; emphasis added).

Santaella does not use the term “mediatization”, but it is in this context of techno-communicative and cultural changes that the author emphasizes when naming this sixth era – the era of digital culture.

But it is Muniz Sodré, without a doubt, who brought both expression (mediatization<sup>3</sup>) and its most definitive theoretical foundations, in his book *Anthropological Mirror* (2002), establishing the mediation/mediatization distinction, rescuing the concept of *medium* as a theoretical and also naming a new era, not only cultural, but existential – the fourth *bios*. If mediation means “to bridge or make two parties communicate... due to an original power to discriminate, to make distinctions, therefore a symbolic place” (SODRÉ, 2006, p. 20), mediatization comprehends “an order of socially realized mediations – a particular type of interaction, therefore, that we could call techno-mediations – characterized by a kind of technological and marketing prosthesis of the sensitive reality, called medium” (ibid.).

The concept of *medium* goes beyond the technical device – it is the channeling and ambiance structured with its codes, it is “the communicational flow, coupled with a technical device [...] socially produced by the capitalist market” (SODRÉ, 2002, p. 20). The channeling produced by the *medium* – which is not a simple channel – has the potential to transform the lived reality; it is a “conditioning form of the lived experience, with

3 In an interview (2010), Sodré recalls that he was the introducer of the concept in Brazil, starting with Eliseo Verón (mediatization). See <http://www.ciseco.org.br/index.php/noticias/entrevistas/48-muniz-sodre-midiatizacao-como-o-acabamento-de-outro-chao>.

particular characteristics of temporality and spatialization, [...] and allows hybridizations with other forms in force in the real-historical” (SODRÉ, 2006, p. 21).

Techno-mediations, the mediations produced by the *media*, in addition to their communicational dimension and the circulation of information, act, in this way, in the very construction of reality:

Mediatization, thus, implies a particular qualification of life, a new way of the subject’s presence in the world, or, considering the Aristotelian qualification of life forms, a specific *bios*. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle conceives three forms of human existence (*bios*) in Pólis: *bios theoretikos* (contemplative life), *bios politikos* (political life), and *bios apolaustikos* (pleasant life). Mediatization can be thought of as a new *bios*, a kind of fourth existential sphere, with its qualification (a “techno-culture”), historically justified by the imperative to redefine the bourgeois public space (SODRÉ, 2006, p. 22).

For the author, therefore, mediatization, or the fourth *bios*, assumes a profound meaning, characterizing a new mode of subject’s presence in the world (another anthropological condition), marked by its particular *ethos* and a set of characteristics: a generalized aestheticization of social life, with the prevalence of form over semantic content; an exalting ethic of individual desire; submission to business and capital; new forms of relationship between individuals and concrete references (using the media to structure perceptions and cognitions); new forms of socialization.

More recently, the presence of the concept has extended to Brazilian communication researchers, with a special emphasis on the contribution brought by professors of the Graduate Program in Communication at UNISINOS<sup>4</sup>. Among them, José Luiz Braga (2006) draws attention to a double scope in the use of the term: in a sectorized approach, mediatization refers to

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4 UNISINOS Graduate Program in Communication has a research line in Mediatization and Social Processes.

the presence and interference of the logic of the medium in the development of specific fields (as when we refer to the mediatization of politics, religion, etc.). At a macro level, mediatization concerns society as a whole, which would be affected when the interactions that constitute it start to happen, preferentially, through the media.

In this second approach, and taking as a reference the central role of the interactional processes between individuals, groups, and sectors of a society in the construction of their reality, Braga highlights the particularity of the various historical moments according to the interactional processes that characterized them – orality, writing, and, at present, the transition to the “mediatized” form, marked by the introduction of new techniques. However, it is not that they (the techniques) appear “spontaneously” and modify the environment: the creation of communicational technologies, in a dialectical movement, obeys the demands of the previous interactional processes, and, by arising, generates new interactional dynamics. Thus,

the mediatization process (whose history is, naturally, much more complex and subject to contingent variations from country to country) would correspond, *roughly*, to this “evolution” of technical implantations in the service of “previous” society objectives for autopoietic derivatives in the elaboration of particular logics (BRAGA, 2006, p. 16).

According to Braga (2006), therefore, mediatization, in a macro approach, is not limited to the presence of new technological medium but concerns the prevalence of “social processes of mediatized interaction, which they start to include, to cover the others that do not disappear but adjust themselves” (ibid., p. 11). Thus, the interactional processes constitute the focus of his gaze and receive new characteristics in a mediatized society: a deferred and diffuse procedure; a complex game between the individual and the social; the tendency to open and delegitimize esoteric patterns, according to which specialized fields relate to society in general. “Everything is exposed, then everything becomes open to scanning, it becomes familiar to everyone (ibid., p. 25).”

Braga (2012) and Fausto Neto (2010) also develop a particular emphasis on the concept of circulation to think about the mediatization of society. In this, more than isolated receptions, it is important to analyze the “flow forward” of circulating products, the interactive chain processes, in a permanent displacement, an intense dynamic of decontextualization and recontextualization of messages – with the semiotic and discursive implications that this flow entails.

On the other hand, Pedro Gilberto Gomes supports Sodr e’s perspective, affirming that “mediatization is the reconfiguration of a communicational ecology (or a media bios)”, and continues:

In other words, mediatization is the hermeneutic key for understanding and interpreting reality. Society perceives and perceives itself from the media phenomenon, now extended beyond traditional technological devices. Therefore, it is possible to speak of the media as a *locus* for understanding society (GOMES, 2017, p. 78).

With slightly different formulations, there is a convergence in the questions raised by our authors: mediatization comprises a new socio-cultural environment, introduces new patterns of mediation and interaction, enables new forms of perception and cognition. If the phenomenon is directly related to the emergence and expansion of new communication technologies in society – technologies that do not replace but are added to the previous artifacts – the concept extends beyond the presence of the technique and focuses mainly on its consequences and effects, to what society becomes with/from them. Santaella highlights particularly the semiotic effects, the new languages and codes, the new dynamics of producing meaning. Sodr e’s approach is more comprehensive: there was a change in the anthropological conditions themselves, a new *ethos*, a new way of living in the fourth *bios*. Braga is observant to the change in the interactional processes, in the forms of relationship; together with Fausto Neto, he highlights the successive interactive dynamics produced in the circulation of messages, which pro-

duce and subscribe to different circuits (BRAGA, 2012). Gomes, in turn, on the path outlined by Sodr , makes an interesting note, exploring the concept of mediatization as a hermeneutic key: “society perceives and perceives itself” departing from the media – which both indicates the media as “mediators” of reality (medium acting on the perception that members of society have of their reality) as highlighted by the study of the phenomenon as a way to understand society itself.

### III – Systematizations

The topic of mediatization and media culture has been widely discussed by researchers from England (Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone) and, even more sharply, by researchers from Northern Europe (Gudmund Hernes, Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, Friedrich Krotz, Winfried Schulz, Jesper Stromback).

Göran Bolin (2016) suggests a grouping of studies developed by them in two traditions:

- an *institutionalist or institutional tradition* – marked by the study of the media logic or the discussion about the media institutionalization and its relationship with different organizations. Hjarvard highlights the two sides of the media’s intervention (its *duality*): the institutionalization of the media itself (its semi-independence concerning other instances), its interference (and transformations) in other spheres and institutions. The author places the analysis of mediatization at the meso level of culture and society (above micro-interactions but below structural levels), seeking to “specify the elements comprising the ‘media logic’ within a particular domain and to better analyze the interplay between the media and other social spheres (institutions)” (HJARVARD, 2014, p. 30). Altheide and Snow (cit. ap. HJARVARD, 2014) develop analyzes of social institutions transformed by the media and emphasize the primacy of form (of media logic) over the content.

- a *socio-constructivist tradition*, focused on everyday interaction practices – rooted in the symbolic interactionism and the sociology of knowledge, combined with a media theory. Krotz (cit. ap. HEPP, 2011; HJARVARD, 2014) understands medi-

atization as a meta-process of cultural and social change, equivalent to individualization and globalization, a continuous process, linked to a specific time and cultural context, that alters human relationships and behaviors. His perspective is shared by Hepp (2011), for whom the concept of mediatization goes beyond a theory of logic and media changes and refers to the broader panorama of reciprocity relations between media-communicative and socio-cultural changes. Also, Bolin's view (2016) seeks to focus the media in its entirety, asking how its integration historically built into culture and society has shaped the social and cultural spheres.

To these two traditions, Bolin adds a third – *technological tradition* – rooted in semiotics and structural anthropology, which deals with the affecting of culture and society by communicative technologies and their specific codes. In this tradition, he points out as an example of the reflections developed by Baudrillard and his theory of simulacrum and simulations.

Despite the importance of the contribution of Brazilian authors, it is still not possible to speak of a Brazilian perspective or to identify very defined trends in the studies developed here. Assuming the risks of simplification – inherent to the attempts of grouping and systematization, I realize that the use of the concept of mediatization among us is inscribed in three possible paths:

- a *descriptive macro concept*. We sometimes talk of mediatization just to name/describe the phenomenon (the extent and strength of the presence of communication technologies) without producing a clear and defined conception of its implications. It is rather an observation, and the idea of a mediatized society is more a premise than a key to reading. In this case, mediatization is a macro concept to identify one of the characteristics of the contemporary world and is in line with other macro concepts, such as urbanization, globalization, individualism.

- a *critical-deterministic perspective*. Here, too, we find a macro concept, but with clearly determined implications. This mediatized world is no longer the same, and media presence and mediation reorganize and impose new ways of life: the media shapes thoughts, sensibilities, ways of relationships. It is structuring a new way of life.

This would be, for example, the focus brought by Muniz Sodré's concept of media *bios* or fourth *bios*. The media field would have to do with another *eidos* (substance) – a simulated, virtual reality, endowed with its self-referential logic. In this context, the virtual assumes a higher phenomenological weight than the classic representations of the historical reality, elaborated and developed in function of a semantically objective connection with the real (SODRÉ, 2002, p. 239).

This perspective also intersects Pedro Gomes' thinking, when the author distinguishes media processes and social reality – the latter putting itself as a raw material for media processes, which would be building another reality, marked by the producer's gaze, a *third reality* – “which resembles the original reality but does not fully identify with it” (GOMES, 2017, p. 44).

- an *analytical-procedural approach*. This constitutes a combination of the two types of approaches presented by Braga – the sectorized and the macro approach. It is a type of perspective that, affirming intense changes in social life, due to shifts in interactional processes with the incorporation of new communication technologies (a macro view, therefore), seeks to apprehend these changes through the study of the new configurations assumed/produced in specific practices, intersecting different institutional fields. Such an approach encourages empirical analyzes of the mediatization processes in different sectors of society. In addition to the widespread emphasis on the effects of the “mediatization” of politics, it is possible to perceive this perspective in research conducted by Braga, on different themes<sup>5</sup>, by Fausto Neto (2012), on the mediatization of scientific discourse, among others.

#### IV – Approximation/distinction of close concepts

Innumerable concepts have been created in the last hundred years to refer to the advent of the communication society, to the emergence of means that have revolutionized com-

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5 Among the master and doctoral works supervised by Braga, we mention Monalisa Pontes Xavier's thesis (2014), which is about the mediatization of psycho-analytic therapies.



municative practices, shortening distances, accelerating time, expanding audiences. It was the era of the mass media – written press, cinema, radio, television. Despite the particularity of each one, these media, together, constituted a new communicational reality. Other communication technologies were developed at the end of the century XX, the main one being digital communication, which unfolded on countless platforms. They introduced a qualitative change in reality, and the concept of mediatization sought to account for this difference. But where and what, exactly, does this conceptual difference consist?

### **Mass culture and cultural industry**

The concept of “cultural industry”, coined by T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, emerged in the late 1940s, at a time of strong presence of the mass media. Its correlate, in other traditions of the same period, was the concept of “mass culture” (MORIN, 1962 [1977]). Without going into the distinction of the two concepts here, we can recover their central elements: the massive presence of these new media, marked by a unilateral flow; constituting massive audiences; commercial (market) nature of cultural production; ideological bias (or nature), consuming processes of manipulation and alienation. The concept referred to the performance of the written press (newspapers and magazines), cinema, radio, and television.

The *concept of mediatization*, in its turn, seeks to encompass a broader scenario that includes the determinant presence of the digital media and a process of inter-relation between them (convergence). The unilateral flow was replaced by different flows. The ideas of manipulation and alienation are problematized: the media manipulate products, but not consciences. Passive receivers were replaced by active users; differentiated uses, reinterpretations, resistances, flows, and counterflows make communication environments much more complicated.

In the current discussions (with lesser or greater emphasis, depending on the author), the reference to the strength of economic interests, the market dimension, the corporate interests that penetrate and seek to hegemonize the new environ-

ment remains. Although the concept of ideology is little present in studies on mediatization, most of them highlight how the use of new platforms heightens conflicts of interest and creates an environment of polarization.

Perhaps we can say that the concept of cultural industry, in its original formulation, has been overcome – but not the Critical Theory that supported it. Cultural industry, while a (practical) phenomenon, yet exists and has expanded enormously; if open television, printed newspapers, for example, are losing importance, streaming services (like the Netflix), alternative channels (via YouTube) show that the industrial production of culture is more alive than ever. The concept of cultural industry focused on a specific moment when the mass media were hegemonic. The phenomenon has widened; it has gained new imbrications and configurations – the concept has become narrow. However, a large part of the meanings it expressed, such as the capitalist exploitation of culture, ideological domination, marketization, manipulation itself, through directing information, remain current. That is why Critical Theory (the Frankfurt School’s thinking), after a phase of discredit, goes through a moment of rescue and re-reading.

## **Mediasphere**

A few years ago, Régis Debray (1991 [1993]) proposed the creation of a new discipline, mediology. The proposition did not go ahead, but his argument was interesting: the focus of mediology would be the study of how ideas become material strength, that is, how the materialization (the inscription on a medium) acts on ideas and the dynamics of their circulation.

In this theoretical field, proposed by the author, he presented the concept of the mediasphere – “means of transmission and transport of messages and individuals, with the methods of elaboration and intellectual diffusion that correspond to it” (DEBRAY, 1993, p. 243).

The emphasis on the support and materialization of ideas, as well as the dynamics of circulation that such supports allow, is close to the concept of mediatization. By registering how the mediaspheres changed in different historical moments,

the concept also gets close to the “interactional reference processes, by José Luiz Braga (2006).

The term, however, did not get adherence. Nevertheless, as well as mediatization, it expresses a theoretical path, a conceptual aspect in the field of Communication that takes as its starting point the ordering force of the media (supports) in the formatting of the communicative processes and the dynamics of the very life of society. In other words, even using different names, several authors have dealt with this intersection of media/society and culture.

## **Media Theory**

So, we must remember what, for lack of a better name, can be called “Media Theory. Although it is not a specific concept or school, a tradition has been building for decades, through authors who have a particular focus on the development of communication technologies. We can group here the pioneers Harold Innis (1894-1952), Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), and more contemporary names, such as Joshua Meyrowitz, Pierre Levy, Derrick de Kerckhove, Henry Jenkins. These authors are important references, whether to advocate (and anticipate) the importance of the media in configuring the profile of society or helping to understand the characteristics of digital technologies today.

Such authors (and this chain of studies), although they appear as important references for current media studies, are not exactly located at the core of the theoretical foundations of the theme of mediatization, because the emphasis they bring tends more towards the technological bias, configuring a perspective that can be called mediacentric. Although there is a variation in the approach of each of these authors, a “Media Theory” highlights the determination given by the media to the other spheres of society.

In contrast, mediatization theories would be over-emphasizing the relationship between technical media and culture/society. However, it is worth reflecting on how apart these schools are, and if this diversity of approaches does not exactly constitute the richness of the different theories on the

incidence of communicative practices in contemporary society. After all, they come together within the tradition and the already vast repertoire of Communication Theories.

## Mediation

The concept of mediation forms the most remembered pair, the counterpoint, or complement most present in the discussion on mediatization. Mediation and mediatization form a permanent pair.

Why this proximity? As already mentioned, for Muniz Sodré (and also for other authors), mediatization can be explained, in a first rapprochement, as mediation by media – a technological mediation or techno-mediation.

Our great reference, when it comes to mediation, is undoubtedly Jesús Martín-Barbero. In the classic book *From media to mediations* (1987 [1997]), the author sought to emphasize the cultural (and socio-historical) mediations that traverse communication. Talking about television, he initially points out three major mediations – family life, social temporality, and cultural competence. They are joined by production dynamics, formats, industrial logic. The idea – and great innovation – that the book has brought in the 1980s was to invert the vertical logic of the functionalist theory of Communication (what the media do for/with society), as well as the closure of the technological and semiological paradigms that came marking communicational studies in Latin America, seeking an integrative perspective of the various elements that make up the communicative process (LOPES, 2014, p. 69). Martín-Barbero sought to show that society and the audience are not *a tabula rasa*, to be registered by the media, but a dense compound of agents, history, culture. Its first formulation, therefore, brought culture, experience, assemblages of different factors (such as technological).

In the following years, Martín-Barbero (1998<sup>6</sup>) reformulated his thinking and replaced the axis of “cultural mediations of communication” for “communicational mediations of culture”. In this second formulation, in Lopes’ reading, “the

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6 According to Introduction to the 5th edition of *De los medios a las mediaciones*, Barcelona: Ed. Gustavo Gili, 1998.

gaze is not inverted in the sense of going from mediations to the media but from culture to communication” (2014, p. 71). And Martín-Barbero, quoted by Braga (2012), emphasized that “[it is] necessary to assume not the priority of the media, but that the communicative is becoming a protagonist in a very strong way”. (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2009, p. 152, ap. BRAGA, 2012; italics removed by the author).

Martín-Barbero, however, although emphasizing the role of the communicational, does not refer explicitly to the phenomenon of mediatization. The term mediatization seems to have been introduced in Latin America by Eliseo Verón, in the article *Esquema para el análisis de la mediatización* (1997), referring to that moment when the logics of the media start to reach all social practices.

In England, Roger Silverstone (2002, 2005)<sup>7</sup> prioritizes the concept of mediation when referring to how communication processes change the social and cultural environment that supports them, as well as the relationship that individuals and institutions have with their environment and with each other. Nick Couldry (2008) criticizes the concept of mediatization since it would be indicating the logic of the media – when different media operate in a different logic. The author, thus, prefers the concept of mediation, which could capture the variety of dynamics within the media flows.

It is mainly Scandinavian researchers who reinforce the use of the term mediatization. Hjarvard (2014, p. 16) points out the limits of the concept of mediation, which focuses on the communicative process itself, while mediatization would have a broader scope – dealing with long-term and large-scale structural transformations. In this perspective, the media stands as the grand and definitive mediation of cultural and social life.

In this conceptual clash, the risk (in the use of mediatization) is tending to the mediacentrism, to technological determinism. If it is very evident that current studies of the communicative scenario (and of contemporary times) cannot do without the analysis of the presence and role of communicational technologies (of techno-mediations), separate communication

and the constitution of social, communicational and cultural life, dealing with them as distinct dynamics and trying to identify which interferes on the other; for us, it seems wrong. Not being the same thing, its functioning is interwoven, and it is this insertion and crossings that should be the focus of our studies.

## V – Summary of contributions

Although the word mediatization is widespread among us, it is necessary to say that the term per se is unnecessary, but the debates around it, reaffirming or even minimizing its scope, bring relevant contributions to the study of contemporary society – this one has the presence of the media as a mainstay. In other words: today, it is not possible to study society, in its different instances and fields, without mentioning the media.

So it is a case of asking if the reciprocal is true: is it possible to study the media focusing strictly on the communicational process, or on the characteristics of this or that support, in the examination of specific languages and codes, dispensing a contextual approach? Possible it is. However, the reflections around mediatization teach us that cutting out communication from the ground where it is established is at least limited – because communication is exactly one of the movements (perhaps the central one) that, together with others, constitutes social life and constitutes us.

Thus, and in a brief review and retrieval of the questions raised by our journey, it is worth emphasizing aspects and guidelines brought by one and the other author (of different tendencies) that are significant for communication studies – regardless of our greater or lesser adherence to the theme of mediatization:

- *Retrieving the institutional place of the media.* An important aspect of studies on mediatization emphasizes its institutional place in society. We can take an institution here in its two senses. From a broader perspective, according to Marcel Mauss and others, we consider that those ideas, practices, uses that are “instituted” are accepted and followed by everyone, such as family, language. But the institution also appoints legal

organizations, legally instituted in a society, such as a university, the armed forces.

Direct and mediated communicative practices are instituted in all societies; ours developed and has consolidated particular forms. The use of the phone and now of WhatsApp, for example, are instituted practices. However, the media or the different media also occupy their place, obey organizational policies, follow a professional performance, obey a division of roles and functions, are governed by specific legislation.

And more: if the media constituted as a proper field, an institution, it is essential to understand how it intervenes, and even causes changes, in other fields, other institutions.

- *Attention to specific logics.* The media comprises several media – several devices, with their proper functioning and logics. Hjarvard, recovering the concept of *affordance* (potential uses of an object) presented by James Gibson, emphasizes: “The ways in which media intervene into social interaction depends on the concrete characteristics of the medium in question, that is, both material and technical features and social and aesthetic qualities” (HJARVARD, 2014, p. 52). Thus, in our studies, it is not enough to talk about the media in general; a careful analysis must be attentive to the particularities of the functioning and orderings of each one of them.

- *Analysis of configurations, construction processes, media crossings.* Some communicative studies are more punctual and focus on particular situations and occurrences. However, no communicative act is isolated; they are a sequence of acts, moments of a process, chains. So even the specific studies, aware of the necessity, but also of the arbitrariness of the cuttings made in the empirical *corpus* of all research, must pay attention to the interrelationship between the different elements that constitute a presented communicative process, the nature of construction that overlays it, the interweaving that configures it – interweaving between different media practices, different interactive processes, both those mediated by new digital technologies, as well as those that happen through massive media or on direct interactions, of an interpersonal nature.

- *Combination of synchronous and diachronic views.* Communication occurs over time – and recovering the tempo-

ral dimension in the analysis of communicative processes is essential to perceive changes and permanence. In this sense, understanding the dynamics of the present (the mediatization of our time) implies combining two movements. The first is a diachronic approach: the now is the result and unfolding of other phases, of many practices, large and small changes over time. Current configurations did not result from spontaneous and independent inventions but were motivated and inserted in the experiences, behaviors, and techniques that followed.

The second movement is synchronous: changes do not occur homogeneously everywhere and at the same pace. It is as if many times coexist in a multifaceted present, times that are no longer isolated but connect and influence each other.

- *Observation of the intertwining of the multiple dynamics that animate social life.* Reiterating what has been said throughout this reflection, we defend as a basic guideline of communicational studies a necessary contextual insertion – which means thinking about communication *in* society. Discussions about mediatization encourage us to think about the penetration of media logics in the different fields of social life, the intertwining between the different practices that shape social life. It is not a matter of “sociologizing” communication but studying the communicative processes without losing sight of the interactive framework (positioning of the interlocutors, situation) and its broader context. This has been the approach of authors, such as Hjarvard and Hepp, among others, on the theme of mediatization, and should remain as an important guideline for any study on the media today.

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# Mediatization and journalism

*Muniz Sodré<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** The withering of parliamentary representation within the scope of mediatization has enormous practical effects upon liberal journalism. There is a growing number of questions about the prospects of a free journalistic activity capable of exercising a relevant mediating function in the public agenda. This is an institutional function midway between the political aspects of civil society and the organizational aspects. Under the rule of robots the newspaper might as well disappear as a republican entity.

**Keywords:** Liberal journalism. Mediatization. Parliamentary representation. Public agenda. Automata.

I will stick here to the relationship between mediatization and journalism. For me, a critical issue on mediatization studies is to investigate how power relations can offer raw material for a new type of policy, taking into account the impoverishment of parliamentary representation in the context of mediatization, which is power without a visible policy, but surely a power that deepens social control. We know now that the algorithmic power is enormous, but not unlimited. A relevant fact is that, between 2009 and 2011, the United States military intelligence services invested many millions of dollars in algorithmic models to predict political disturbances on a global scale. They were not even able to predict the phenomenon of the “Arab Spring”, which destabilized old political structures and led to the overthrow of governments.

Thus, in the face of the growing hoarding of social life by economics (finance) and technology, it is pertinent to specu-

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late on whether politics in a broad sense, that is, as an essential event for the organization of human plurality in communities, considering the systematic crisis of the State apparatus and the breakdown of traditional forms of representation, still reveals an institutional path open to civil societies. And along, an independent journalistic practice – meaning: independence as a reasonable balance between the economic corporation and social class position – capable of intervening with a relevant mediating function in the public agenda and with effects of a political nature. This function is institutional, halfway between the political and organizational aspects of civil society.

Mediation, as we have already emphasized, makes the symbolic transit or “communicates” the property of one element to another, employing a third term, which is a way of articulating two different components. There is, therefore, a dualism implicit in the idea of mediation, reinforced by the notion resulting from “intermediation”, that is, by the approximation, through a third party, between two separate terms. In the public space, this intermediary can consist of “small groups” (opinion leaders) and gatekeepers (porters or information filters). The traditional press, a hybrid entity of productive organization and institution that shelters free civil expression, has been sociologically characterized as this “doorkeeper” – in practice, an intermediary between the citizen and the public sphere.

It increases the suspicion, however, that this intermediation could be influenced by the decomposition of parliamentary policy, while new social forms and institutional embryos emerge. In fact, the prestige of the written press stems from mediation politically committed to the incipient 19th-century liberalism, focused on the question of the limits of the nation-state. The press proposes to unveil and combat the secrets of the nation-state power. On the other hand, it is culturally an heir to the Enlightenment, which contributed strongly to the renewal of living standards through the defense of rational discourse and scientific investigation.

In the second half of the 19th century, journalism was instrumental in improving the liberal conditions for discussion and persuasion, paving the way for the democracy of opinions in a public space in line with the Industrial Revolution and politi-

cal and economic liberalism. The newspaper was a republican entity. Within this scope, it would even be possible to conceive journalism as a broader political project than the “newspaper” per se. Back in 1920, the pragmatist educator and philosopher John Dewey used to say that journalism should go beyond the mere objective account of events (the model in which the press “reports” and the reader consumes) to become a means of education and public debates. Promoting direct dialogue between citizens and journalists, the journalistic activity, more than reporting, would have at its heart the promotion of a public “conversation”.

In the virtuality of this conversation, the dogmas of “people’s sovereignty”, that underlie the modern idea of a nation, are increasing. This function, which is the intrinsic virtue of the press, ethically supports the communication pact implicit in the relationship between the media and its receiving community. Whether in written or electronic journalism, the journalist’s duty to their audience (therefore, their ethical commitment) would be to say the truth recognized as such by common sense, as long as the statement corresponds to a fact.

The virtue of this public verification regime derives from the precept of civil liberties instituted by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. It was in this way that the free press could be recognized as a work of the modern objective spirit and, thus, constitute an ethical-political background that would make the phenomenon of sensationalist journalism scandalous anywhere in the world, or would render the falsification or cover-up of factual truth reprehensible by the journalist’s moral conscience. Politics and culture presided over the reinterpretation of ancient *koiné* in 18th-century Europe. The eruption of this new reality in history was one of the effects of the transformation of production relations (the Industrial Revolution), which was in line with the expansion of *bourgeois* democracy. Education and culture were strategic (in the same vein as Rousseau’s theoretical and political proclamations) as instruments of the concept of democracy as a value and as an end, and no longer just as a mechanism of government. The spread of dogmas of “people’s sovereignty” demanded the free flow of ideas, which raised the concept of public space.

The public space, supposedly the natural place for the exercise of public opinion suggested by Rousseau, has always been simultaneously political and cultural, a combination of politics and Languages (in the broad, not just literary, sense of the word). Discursively, he relied on literary institutions, arenas of debate, and editorial media, as well as the press as a “cultural promoting agent”. The association between Parliament and Languages was quite familiar to 19th-century intellectuals.

For the political case, it was very important, if not essential, as Dewey maintained, “the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public”<sup>2</sup>. The historical reality of this so-called “objective spirit” of the time is also partly a discursive projection of the famous European “Republic of Letters” or “literary republic”, which favored the rhetorical dialogue (instead of the logical formalism of scholastic *disputatio*) and, already in the middle of the 17th century, could serve as an equivalent of the word “public”, that is, the dialogue that contemplates subjects of general interest and not merely private<sup>3</sup>.

The conversation, which John Dewey refers to as a means of education and public debate, is the communicative way in the associations of sages or academies to increase the circulation of *Studia humanitatis*, in which eloquence, poetry, history, and scholarship prevailed. Although having their nerve center in Paris, celebrated as the “capital of the Spirit”, *conversation societies* developed in dispersed circles in Europe, thanks to a humanistic form of dialectics – “civil conversation”, inseparable from a philosophy of customs – intended for interlocutors who were neither doctors nor versed.

In fact, since the beginning of the 19th century, the journalistic activity was associated with the discursive rationality that, in the previous century, characterized the public sphere, materialized in cafes, clubs, and magazines. And all of this could be described by the generic term “literature” since this designation had not yet established itself definitively as an “expression

2 DEWEY, John. *The public and its problems*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1980. p. 208.

3 FUMAROLI, Marc. *La République des Lettres*. Paris: Gallimard, 2015. p. 120.

of subjectivity” materialized in romance or poetry. The press mentioned by Scottish Thomas Carlyle (exponent of romantic historiography in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England) is the space where the “man of letters” moves, understood as a professional writer, but also as an individual invested with an ideological authority similar to that of the wise man. In this perspective, the press would have replaced both the pulpit and the Senate<sup>4</sup>.

Karl Marx, who worked considerably as a journalist, for alleged economic problems – both for the German press (*Gazeta Renana*, *Nova Gazeta Renana*) and the English and the American press (*New York Tribune*) – sometimes expressed his perception of journalism now as an inessential practice, now as a tiresome thing that diverted him from his true work. Marx questions the discourse of information when taken only to their logic (which leads to comparisons with the current media): “Even the daily and complete publication can be called complete and *public*? Aren’t we summing up by substituting the written word, plans for pensions, paper stocks for real stocks? Or does the publication consist only of reporting the *real* fact to the public and not of reporting the fact to the *real* audience – that is, not the imaginary reading public, but the real, living audience?”<sup>5</sup>

Marxian critique allows the suspicion that the liberal argument about the civil right of free expression may not entirely coincide with the functioning of the press, which is classically linked to the liberal principle of parliamentarianism as “government by publicity and discussion” but which, today, is inseparable from the information system as a whole – the mediatization – ruled by the same logic of speed of movement of goods, which we have called “real-time”. Within this system, the very concept of “event” may depend more on algorithmic modeling than on symbolic negotiations between social actors who traditionally competed for the language game or “agenda” of the noticeable.

Despite the criticism and historical detours, the liberal ideas of the bourgeois press maintain freedom of expression and “civil conversation” as a background. And it cannot be oth-

4 SODRÉ, Muniz. *A narração do fato* – notas para uma teoria do acontecimento. Petrópolis: Ed. Vozes, 2012.

5 MARX, Karl. *Liberdade de imprensa*. Porto Alegre: L&PM, 2007, p. 12.

erwise, since this ideal feeds on the narrative effects of political historicity that characterized the press since the beginning of its flourishing in the 19th century, amid the Enlightenment concept of public opinion and the realization of (civil) law of expression and freedom of thought. The ideology underlying journalism is still to attune liberally and ethically (therefore, with public virtues) with the basic principles of democratic sovereignty, such as constitutionalism, civil and political freedom or with collective ideals – the visibility of decision making of the State, the establishment of the truth about vital issues for the collectivity, exempt information about everyday life, etc.

These political effects – different in nature from the mere mobilization obtained by opinion leaders in current electronic networks – have always been generated by the diversity of expressions corresponding to different class positions regarding the three powers of the State and the functioning of the economy. The reality of representative democracy is fueled by the play of differences between class positions or political alliances in the face of constitutional powers. Totalitarianism arises when this reality is replaced by a simple juridical formalism (three powers and a bureaucratically articulated Constitution without political mediation), erasing the representative plurality in favor of an effective anti-constitutional power, whose modalities vary from personal, military, class, theocratic to partisan-bureaucratic dictatorships (Russia and China, for example). The political transitivity of journalistic information has been an exclusive feature of the representative democracy.

But this liberal, parliamentary, delegated democracy – historically affirmed since the end of the 19th century – contains theoretical alternatives, sparsely suggested by authors with reformist or revolutionary tendencies. For example, Gramsci, who has always expressed theoretical distrust of the form of parliamentary democracy, suggests the hypothesis of an “advisory democracy” (or Soviet) as superior, criticizing the formalist-procedural consensus on voting as the final moment of the electoral dispute for representation and encouraging the search for a different relationship between governments and governed. Although no alternative has succeeded in real-historical terms, the Italian thinker’s assessment was perfectly rational in the sense



that the parliamentary form could not mirror “popular sovereignty” since public opinion would be artificially guided by the “hidden persuaders” of that time, that is, by radio and press, in the process of the organic renewal of the leading bloc.

In other contexts, amid the historical inertia of the social group, the political inanity of representation may coexist with its pure legal form within the scope of an anti-constitutional power conducted by corporations with strict or expanded information control. Thus, today, in tune with the juridical-social order and exclusively oriented towards the market, the organization (corporation, company, industry) overlaps the institutional logic of the classic press. It has always been politically legitimized by the preservation of civil rights, freedom, and democracy, while semiotically supported by a symbolic pact of transparency or veridiction, that is, the communication of a consensual truth.

For 19th-century jurist and writer Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market”. Holmes was an American pragmatist accustomed to the competitive ideology of social Darwinism, but his sentence matches well with the struggle for hegemony (to convince, to persuade, to influence) in the modern public sphere. Exchanging this sphere for the word “market,” however, has something of a premonitory: the citizenship that today serves as a reference to this new historical qualification of existence called *media bios* is basically consumer citizenship. The social becomes qualified by its consumption capability – it is what defines the public agenda, as well as restores the old typification of the “passive citizen”. To socialize would not be to politicize, but to consume. The individualistic conscience overlaps, in the public space, the political injunctions of social responsibility.

In the current logic of the market, the truth is a *reiterated product*, not by liberal consensus, but by the inherent automatism in the discursive circuit of media devices. Analogous to the formulation of Goebbels’ Nazi-fascist propaganda (“a lie a thousand times repeated becomes true”), the truth is like a nail hammered into a wall. But outside the scope of classic advertisement, that is, the intention to inculcate a supposedly true point of view, the current game of market and network gets consti-

tuted of technological amplification (electronics and semiosis redefine and expand space) from the perspective. This, instead of just being “hammered”, is “irradiated” (by what experts call an *echo chamber*) in the form of atomic or viral contamination.

There is no such thing as inculcation (except in deliberate disinformation strategies) but *self-deception* by subtle mechanisms of exposition: it is no longer the truth supposedly embedded in the fact as an unquestionable essence – which gave rise to the technical ideology of journalistic objectivity – but of *desire for the fact* (the one you want to receive) – articulated with the segmented logic of the market, instead of a paradigm politically referred to ideals of popular sovereignty. In effect, what we are calling “inculcation” designates an active process of introjection of intellectual content into the individual or collective consciousness, resulting from a more or less unitary discursive regime that can be called “ideology”, for less monolithic or more conceptually ambiguous as it may be. The “exposition, on the other hand, concerns the creation of an ambiance (ways of feeling, of living) that presides over *socius* as a hegemonic atmosphere, guided by a logic more emotional than the sign, more formal (the jabber, for example) than semantical, therefore, more subconscious than conscious.

What we call the prevalence of the logic of the market – corresponding, in the sphere of functioning of communication/information devices, to the phenomenon of “mediatization” – is an automatic effect of financialization, conceived as a technosocial machine capable of mobilizing different forms of power. Beside power as pure and simple domination (the hierarchy of institutionalized), we come up with the hypothesis of power as a network (the interstitial matrices of influence), which constitutes the expansion of the old press metaphor as “fourth power”.

In this configuration, the political reach of information retracts since the public space is configured primarily by the market and by information devices. The whole liberal mythology of *public opinion* is in crisis, initiated by Rousseau (first in a letter, on the eve of the French Revolution, then in *The Social Contract*) from the Enlightenment idea that public opinion, supposedly a reflection of the general will, could counterbalance the exercise of power.

Strictly speaking, there is no such “public opinion” (which is confused with common sense or with formations of ideological consensus) except as a fiction of political liberalism erected by institutional mechanisms. The free press is born as a corollary of the modern institution of the liberal-democratic consensus. Even if it were structured in business (therefore, with commercial objectives), the “institution” side would prevail ideologically over the “organization” side.

But this institutionalization is in crisis with the neoliberal reorganization of the current mode of production and forms of life. First, the scope of the national State diminishes; second, the free market and financial globalization overlap to the logic of *political society* (relations between government and political parties). Public opinion becomes “liberal-census” under the control of assessment instruments, and organizational entities become more socially visible and technologically more powerful in the exercise of that “echo chamber, which is the hegemony implicit in the media ecosystem. In this new conjuncture, the retraction or crisis of the public dialectic of the truth may invest itself with regressive characteristics, analogous to some that punctuated the fascist situations in the first half of the 20th century: fundamentalism, party irrationalism, racial exasperation, aversion to the slow temporality of democratic processes, unorthodox praise of business effectiveness, etc. It is what we are experiencing now.



# Debating mediatization

*Pedro Gilberto Gomes<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** The reality of mediatization in today's society arouses the interest and curiosity of researchers and students of social communication. The studies are within the framework of an epistemology of communication. Reflecting on the phenomenon of mediatization, researchers find it difficult to conceptualize it properly. This paper defends the idea that the concept of mediatization is not univocal. The various media continents approach it with different voices and perspectives. Each group, when using the concept, takes it in a peculiar way and with different meanings, although they are often subliminally hidden in their reflections. There is a pre-data that informs and guides both the use and understanding of the concept. It is relevant to underline that the concept is not equivocal, but includes several voices, according to the particular reality in which the study is conducted. After performing an initial overview of some positions – in our view more relevant – about the concept of mediatization, the article concludes that society in mediatization constitutes, in this perspective, the cultural broth, we repeat, where the various social processes take place. It is an ambiance, a new way of being in the world that characterizes today's society.

**Keywords:** Media. Mediatization. Media Processes. Communication.

This is a reflection on the reality of mediatization in society, which arouses the interest and curiosity of researchers and students of social communication. The studies are within the framework of an epistemology of communication.

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Despite the guiding line that emerges from the treatment of mediatization at the Academia<sup>2</sup>, reality does not express a univocity of the concept. On the contrary, the different media continents approach it with different voices and perspectives. Each group, when using the concept, takes it in a peculiar way and with different meanings, although they, in most cases, hide subliminally in the reflections made. There is a pre-data that informs and guides both the use and the understanding of the concept.

It is important to underline that the equivocality does not reside in the concept as something constitutive of it. On the contrary, what exists is a different perspective, according to the reality and the interest of those who use it. The inclination here is to say that there is a multivocality. That is, many voices for the same concept. Therefore, the concept is not equivocal, but *plurivocal*.

Here we present an initial survey of some positions – in our view more relevant – on the concept of mediatization<sup>3</sup>. The path allowed us to see the breadth of approaches and understandings of the concept of mediatization. On the one hand, some perspectives consider that mediatization results from a process of appearing in the media; that is, to be publicized, worked on, transmitted by different means. The social fields are related to each other and are affected by the media, and they also affect it in its various devices.

On the other hand, there are those visions that see the media acting deeply on social relations, transforming society. It plays an important role but still identifies with a social field alongside others. In this regard, economics, politics, and religion, for example, are profoundly affected by the social structure brought about by the mass media.

In a more sociological view, mediatization is themed as a paradigm for the study of society. In this situation, one asks what is the future of field theory since it is so dominant in contemporary sociological reflections.

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2 See: GOMES, Pedro Gilberto. *From media to mediatization*. São Leopoldo: EdUnisinos, 2017.

3 The analyzes of the different opinions in Brazil, Argentina, and Europe are included in the research report presented to CNPq.

Another dimension, mainly linked to the Argentine group<sup>4</sup> and its Brazilian partners, seeks to see mediatization as the construction of a different environment that is changing the way we are in the world. That is what we will now discuss.

Researchers from England, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (with branches in France and Portugal) have considerable intellectual production on the subject<sup>5</sup>. However, for some of them, the concept is coming to an end, its semantic burden having exhausted its ability to explain reality. We would be at the end of mediatization.

In a conference given at the International Symposium “Political communication at a crossroads,” in Milan, on March 17, 2017<sup>6</sup>, Winfried Schulz discusses the possibility of the end of mediatization, because of the emergence of social networks that permeate all social life.

His reflection is based on the importance of mass media in contemporary society. He anchors his positions in the studies of Gianpietro Mazzoleni on the relationship between the logic of the media and the party logic, visualized in the research on the coverage of the Italian 1983-campaign for general elections. The focus was on changing the relationship between political parties and the mass media in Italy, identifying two logics: the logic of the media and the logic of politics. The background is the media theory of David Altheide<sup>7</sup>, an American sociologist, who centers his theory on the concept of media format. Each and any means of communication, including modern mass media, organizes its messages using specific formats, which, above all, are a means of social control.

However, Schulz underlines, Mazzoleni introduced the concept of mediatization but did not invent it. Swedish political scientist Kent Asp, emphasizes Schulz, claims for himself the

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4 Developed at CIMI, Universidade de Rosario, Argentina.

5 See mainly the work: LUNDBY, Knut et al. *Mediatization of Communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014. (Handbooks of Communication Science Collection, n. 21).

6 SCHULZ, Winfried. *The End of Mediatization*. The International Symposium “Political Communication at a Crossroads: An International Encyclopedia”, Milano, March 17, 2017.

7 ALTHEIDE, D. L.; SNOW, R. P. *Media Logic*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979.

primacy of having created the term “*medialization*” in 1986, written with “*l*,” to draw attention to the growing power of the mass media, and the withdrawal of power from political actors and institutions. The term is older and was used to describe the process of political disempowerment in the early 19th century (between 1802 and 1814)<sup>9</sup>.

The neologism *mediatization* appeared and developed in the scientific community during the 1990s, mainly in publications by German and Scandinavian authors. Schulz says that one of the first contributions was by himself and Gianpietro in 1999<sup>10</sup>.

According to Schulz, the purpose of the article was to make this “thirteen-letters” word admissible. For this, they first distinguished it from mediation. While mediation is a neutral term, *mediatization denotes problematic or concomitant consequences for the development of modern media*<sup>11</sup>. He stresses that *mediatization* is more critical to other models of media dependence.

The peak of this submission of the logic of politics to the logic of the media takes place with the consolidation and development of television. Nevertheless, significant changes are taking place in the media world. In the past two decades, media technologies have developed a lot.

The transformation took on speed and gained ample broadcast with the so-called Web 2.0, with the introduction of smartphones, easy to deal with, applications, and social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, among others.<sup>12</sup>

This reality considerably transformed the role of the media as an intermediary that connects individuals and institutions. Levels, sectors, center, and the periphery of the political system are increasingly weakened. Therefore, all these changes

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8 ASP, K. Medialization, Media Logic and Mediarchy. *Nordicon Review*, v. 11, n. 2, p. 47-50, 1990.

9 SCHULZ, 2017, p. 2.

10 MAZZOLENI, G.; SCHULZ, W., Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy? *Political Communication*, v. 16, p. 247-261, 1999.

11 SCHULZ, 2017, p. 3.

12 *Ibid.*, p.4.



call into question the concept of mediatization. Political actors were emancipated in the face of the operation of the mass media. Why should they adapt to the logic of the media, and adapt their concerns and messages to the rules of journalistic production? Now, they can bypass the media and go directly to the public without further mediation<sup>13</sup>.

The logical question is: are we facing the end of mediatization? In conclusion, Schulz asserts that if we are ready to abandon the concept of media logic as a notion to organize the message in the television era, we will also be about to abandon the idea of mediatization<sup>14</sup>. For him, when examining the transformation of political communication in the internet age, it is more important to analyze its consequences than how to name the process of change<sup>15</sup>.

In this sense, the consequence of the change process, for him, points out to the end of mediatization. We could agree with Schulz if, like him and others, we considered mediatization as the use of the media and submission to its logic. In this case, when social media emancipate social actors (in this case, politicians) from the power of the logic of the mass media.

However, as we have already developed in several places<sup>16</sup>, we are no longer facing the phenomenon of using technological devices to transmit the message, nor as mediators of the relationship of individuals with reality. On the contrary, what the development of digital media is creating is a new ambiance, which, in turn, gives way to a new way of being in the world. The consequence of this is that instead of watching the end of mediatization, we are only on the threshold of its full development. What kind of society will be born? What way of living will be established? Only time and its evolution will tell.

From the perspective of a new ambiance, the theme has not yet been sufficiently explored, as it goes beyond the mere reflection on the media and its role in society. This conception of

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13 Cf. *ibid.*

14 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 8.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

16 More recently: FAXINA, E.; GOMES, P. G. *Midiatização: um novo modo de ser e viver em sociedade*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2016; GOMES, P. G. *From Media to Mediatization*. São Leopoldo: Ed. UNISINOS, 2017.

ambiance is a consequence of an epoch change in the history of mankind.

This situation comes to light when one asks about mediatization<sup>17</sup>. In the work that illuminates the question, we distinguish between holists and individualists in the analysis of reality, which, we think, can contribute to justifying the question. In the specific case in which we are debating, the contribution that the consideration of individual aspects has brought to the understanding of communication is undeniable. The analysis of the various means of communication as technological devices lies within the scope of the individualists' view, in the contemplation of microphenomena. Here one can talk about mediatization while appearing in the media and the analysis of the media, in particular, directs and presides over the reflection on the phenomenon. The history of research in the area shows that, in the research literature, there is an abundance of works dedicated to the study of journalism, radio, and television, and now, the internet in its various dimensions.

There is a valid and often successful attempt to interpret communication from its individual elements. In the case of mediatization, it is considered that it is an aggregate formed by actions, attitudes linked to people, and private vehicles. It is the vehicles, the professionals who are real. Groups, institutions, and collective environments are a kind of fiction. This is the scope of microphenomena, from an individualistic perspective.

However, some aspects and dimensions are impervious to this type of approach today. In this case, the holistic stance seems to be the most convenient, and appropriate. The dimension of the media processes transcends the singular facts, the microphenomena, and points out to the collective aspects, the macrophenomena, the collective social construction based on the process of a society in a state of mediatization. The question is: how to approach the media process, which today is understood as mediatization and generates a new ambiance?

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17 The following reflections were drawn from the article "How does the mediatization process (a new way of being in the world) affect social relations?" In: BRAGA, J. L. et al. *Ten Questions for the production of knowledge in communication*. São Leopoldo: Ed. UNISINOS, 2013. p. 127-139.

The object of communication is aloof and fleeting. It is imperative to educate the eyes to see beyond appearances and focus on the systemic search for the whole to find it, considering the parties without seeing them surprise the *wisp* of communication. Only in this way the researcher will find his object in the fleeting brightness of the processes. Media processes, with their relations, interconnections, connections, and interrelationships, demand that one looks, without seeing, transcending the limitation of the particular to perceive the interconnection of the universal, going beyond the beings to find the being. Even though particular devices impose themselves with their brilliance in the researcher's eyes, it is the humility of the process that allows them to unravel the media processes and discover the proper method for dialoguing with them. The object precedes the method. While the object of the research was constituted by the micro-phenomena, that is, the means of communication and their characters, the method did not mean major problems. The advance proposed by qualitative research with focus groups, life stories, ethnography was not enough to go beyond the individualistic perspective and find the system in its entirety. The macrophenomena of media processes remain sovereign, challenging the shrewdness of researchers. The environment formed by media interconnections is refractory to unique methods and approaches. It is present in all media and makes mediatization possible. However, it is aloof and hides behind singular phenomena that, only peripherally, touch the issue of the society in mediatization. The sum and junctions of individual perspectives do not provide an understanding of the environment in its entirety.

In addition to sharing methodologies and concepts between the different sciences, the problem of the mediatization of society requires a different approach. The current situation no longer allows an external contemplation, with concepts purposely formulated. On the contrary, the researcher who aims to interpret the present moment must allow himself to be touched and challenged in explaining methodologies that emerge from the object itself.

The analysis based on fields and technological devices falls short of what is desired and creates problems, when not

makes it impossible, for a correct dimensioning of the challenges posed by the current media environment.

The dilemma experienced today, within a systemic and complex view, is to overcome sectorized, fragmented, and partial approaches to understand reality. In this dimension, the sum of the different parts does not provide knowledge of the whole. Social totality is not achieved by adding the vision of the distinct isolated areas.

In this way, the mediatization process of society challenges researchers from different sciences to structure an interpretive scheme, a result of working together, in the awareness that technological devices are only a small part – the tip of the iceberg – of a new world configured by the mediatization process of society<sup>18</sup>. Today we are experiencing an epochal change, with the creation of a media *bios*<sup>19</sup> that has a profound impact on the social fabric. A new communicational ecology<sup>20</sup> appears. It is a virtual *bios*. More than a techno-interaction, a new way of being in the world is emerging, represented by the mediatization of society, which presents a new ambiance that, although based on the process developed so far, means a qualitative leap, a fundamental change in the mode of being and acting.

To grasp the totality of the object, the researcher must take distance from the distinct manifestations to contemplate the mosaic of the formed environment. Macrophenomena, in the holistic dimension, add new visions that transcend the singular and allow the formation of the image of what is structured in the society in mediatization. The meta-media reflection leads us to contemplate the issue of mediatization as a point of arrival in the evolution and development of what has been called “media society.”

The trajectory from the media society to the society in mediatization is a slow and gradual process that develops in

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18 Cf. Luhmann, “[...] the idea that all we are talking about in each case is an anexe to other function systems which make use of the mass media as a technical means of dissemination is not particularly convincing either. [...] As an effective form of social communication, they cannot simply be reduced to mere technology.” (LUHMANN, N. *The reality of the media*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2005. p. 119).

19 In the fortunate expression of researcher Muniz Sodré.

20 The ideas that follow and support the reflection were developed in: GOMES, P. G. *The philosophy and ethics of communication in the mediatization process of society*. São Leopoldo: Ed. UNISINOS, 2006. See, mainly, chapter 6.

two deeply interconnected axes. On the one hand, we have the axis of time that inserts us from the perspective of a chronological evolution that goes from the beginning of consciousness and reaches the present day. The second axis locates in the qualitative dimension of ever-increasing complexity in human relationships, interrelations, and interconnections. It is the bisector of both that mirrors the symbolic arrow of human evolution.

The society in mediatization, in this perspective, constitutes the cultural broth, we repeat, where the different social processes take place. It is an ambiance – a new way of being in the world – that characterizes today's society.

These affirmations sustained in the cited work remain relevant today. Furthermore, they are more and more pertinent and point not to the end of mediatization, but the increasing importance that it assumes today.

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# Generational analysis & mediatized social change

*Göran Bolin*

**Abstract:** In this paper I will suggest that a generational perspective is fruitful for analysing the mediatization process, and thus for analysing social change. I will first discuss briefly what I mean with 'mediatization'. I will then discuss the possibilities for analysing mediatization through the lens of generations. In the subsequent section I will suggest a model for how the media landscape can be accounted for, and why the landscape metaphor is more fitting than competing concepts for this type of analysis. In the section following that, I will discuss how one can locate different generations in this landscape, and then how one can analyze social change as a result of the ways in which generational narratives are produced. In a last section I will summarise my arguments for why a generational analysis is beneficial for the understanding of social change.

## I – Introduction

This is a photo from my family album. In the centre of the photo you find a girl in a white cap. This girl is my mother, and when the phot was taken she was 6 years old. Photo taken in the north of Sweden where my grandmother and grandfather came from, and it is was taken in 1939, probably in July. The month of July is the month when most Swedes have their vacation, and during that time my grandparents used to take my mother from Stockholm in the mid-south of Sweden where they then lived, and where my mother was born, to the north – to where they came from and where they returned each summer for a few weeks' vacation.



Figure 1. Family of three generations. Copyright by the author.

The photo in itself is fairly typical from what you can find in family albums. It is clearly not taken by a professional photographer, since the composition is imbalanced – the woman to the right is cut in half, to the benefit of a large portion of wood to the left, the photographer has avoided having the sun right into the lens, with the result that all participants in the photo have to KISA towards the camera.

Photos from family albums prompts us to think about time, and especially past time. At the moment when this photo was taken, there was still a couple of months before Germany would invade Poland, the Soviet Union was still a superpower, television had not yet arrived to Sweden and the main mass media were books, newspapers, radio, cinema, and music (shellac) records. People had telephones, but if someone would have told them that people in the future would be go around in public spaces talking to other people, at other public places, let alone taking their spontaneously arranged three-generation family photos with their mobile devices, that would have sounded like science fiction.

Much has indeed changed since this photo was taken. Not only are most of the people in the picture dead, and my



mother is not a girl anymore, but an 85-year-old woman who has her own children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. These changes, although they are very obvious to us, do not reveal the full story about social change. In order to establish such a change, we need to develop an analytical research perspective. In this chapter I would like to suggest an epistemological approach to social change, or more precisely, to the process of mediatization, grounded in generational analysis.

I will do this in three steps. First, I will discuss the theoretical framework of mediatization, and I will suggest that there are at least three ways of thinking around this concept, all of which have their benefits and limitations: I will call these three types of mediatization approaches for the institutional, the technological, and the cultural approach. Second, I will discuss the problems with studying mediatization, and I will suggest that we need to have an epistemological approach that can capture long-term social changes. This approach is the generational analysis. Third, I will give some examples of an analysis of generations in media landscapes. Many of these are drawn from my larger study of *Media Generations* (BOLIN, 2016), but I will in this context especially focus on the temporal aspect of mediatization analysis.

## II – Three approaches to mediatization theory

This section will be accounted for three approaches to mediatization as a social process. They all have their advantages and limitations, so in that sense none of them are qualitatively superior to the others. But since they are based in different ontological and epistemological traditions, they respond to different sets of questions.

I will discuss these approaches by distinguishing the ways in which they differ on a number of parameters. The first of these is the way in which they theorise the relation between ‘the media’ and culture and society, and whether there is a causal relationship between these entities or not. The second concern is what they mean by ‘the media’, that is, whether they approach the media as technologies, organisations, sign structures, or institutions. The third concern is their approach to history, and

whether they approach history as a linear process or if other historical perspectives are also included. The account will, by necessity, be brief, and a fuller account can be found in Bolin (2014).

The most commonly used perspective in mediatization research is the *institutional approach*, with proponents such as Stig Hjarvard (2013) or Jesper Strömbäck (2008). As the label indicates, this perspective emphasises the media as institutions, and most often the focus is on the traditional mass media press and television (and sometimes radio). A large portion of this research takes its departure in the media logic perspective of Altheide & Snow (1979), although without their more nuanced focus on the textual dimension, and an equally large portion focus on the institution of journalism in relation to politics – although there are exceptions such as Stig Hjarvards (2004) focus on the mediatization of the toy industry.

The relation between media, culture and society in this approach posits the media as affecting society (or sometimes culture) from outside, where the media play the role of the independent variable. This also makes the analyses in this approach take on causal explanatory models, where the historical perspective also is largely linear. The media institutions are seen as separate from society, affecting society causally from the outside. The historical perspective is often also quite short, seldom going back further than to mid 20th century. An example if this perspective can, for example, be found in this quote:

The process of the mediatization of politics can be described as a process through which the important question involving the independence of the media from politics and society concludes with the independence of politics and society from the media. (STRÖMBÄCK, 2008, p. 241)

Within the *technological approach*, the media are regarded in their capacity of technologies and sign systems. Also here it is mainly the traditional mass media technologies that are in focus, but it is their way of communicating that is at focus, that is, the limits they set up for meaningful communica-

tion. Especially the one-to-many character of the mass media is criticized since it does not allow for 'symbolic exchange' (BAUDRILLARD, 1971). This perspective, rooted in structuralist anthropology, linguistics, and semiotics, rather point to the code as the decisive mechanism (compared with the institutional perspective where it is the institution of the media that impact on other spheres of society. Also this approach is causal in its view on the relation between the media and society, where the code affect society from its outside. Similar to the institutional perspective, the view on history is linear; but here it is rather the break in the linear development that is emphasised, rather than the continuity.

Jean Baudrillard, who in his 1971 article 'Requiem pour les media', is an example of early use of the concept of mediatization, predating the institutional perspective by more than a decade. This is a quote from the English translation of Baudrillard's text, in a context in which he discusses Benjamin and McLuhan:

The object today [...] no longer has anything to do with yesterday's objects, any more than 'mediatized' information has with the 'reality' of facts. Both object and information already result from a selection, an edited sequence of camera angles, they have already tested 'reality' and have only asked those questions to which it has responded. Reality has been analyzed into simple elements which have been recomposed into scenarios of stable oppositions, just as the photographer imposes his own contrasts, lighting and angles onto his object. (BAUDRILLARD, 1976/1993, p. 63)

The cultural approach to mediatization sees the media from a more holistic perspective, as always already integrated into social and cultural processes. This approach is not restricted to the mass media but includes all forms of communication media in its focus on communication as a type of social action shaped in dialogue with wider social processes including technology and institutions. This also means that it is not necessarily linear in its conception of history. It is phenomenologically oriented, focusing on the perceptions of the mediated processes

and asks questions such as What does it look like? How does it work? How does it feel? It also works with a much longer historical perspective. The following quote by John Dewey is indicative of the perspective:

Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication. (DEWEY, 1916, p. 5)

As can be seen from the quote, society is regarded as one with its media of communication. And by 'the media' is here meant all forms of communication technologies (telegraph, photography, etc.). Modern proponents for this perspective include James Carey, Kjell Nowak, Ulf Hannerz, Friedrich Krotz, Andreas Hepp, and Nick Couldry.

In this perspective, the media have always been intertwined with human activity – state building, cultural formation, etc. In that sense, it makes sense to include early texts such as the 4.000-year-old Epic of Gilgamesh, from ca. 2.000 BC, the even older Altamira cave paintings, ca. 15.000 years old, and texts and technologies onwards through history. The media are not emphasised in terms of causality but as tools for binding people together, sharing, communifying, and their mark is the archive, the totality of human knowledge, institutionalised in, for example, the library. In short, it includes the sum of human expression, since human practice result in texts, things and practices, but under conditions, constraints and frameworks set by others:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (MARX 1852/1995)

In this famous quote from Karl Marx, the conditions for human activity is described, as a series of actions taking place

within the framework of people who have preceded us. This brings me back to the theme of generations.

### III – Generations in media landscapes

Theoretically, there are two types of generation approaches, producing two kinds of belonging or “we-sense” (BUDE, 1997; CORSTEN, 1999) – the generation as kinship, following Margaret Mead’s (1970) research on generation gaps, and Karl Mannheim’s (1928/1952) theory on generation as social formation of coevals, that is, people of same age, living at the same time, and sharing experience of historical events. In the words of Mannheim, being situated in the same location in the history. For a long time, however, generational exchanges were not dramatically different from one another. With modernity, the pace of change was seemingly increasing:

Prior to the late nineteenth century media explosion, generations came and went, all exposed to and acquiring the same print grammar. Thus media seemed to have little bearing on human time relationships. Though we still think of people as related, or separated in chronological generation time, the rapid advent of new media and the acquisition of new media grammars implies new alignments, shorter and more diverse than those based on generations. (GUMPERT; CATHCART, 1985: 31)

When this was written, the new medium was television and one can ponder about the consequences for the new and rapidly changing digital environment – if that would produce shorter generational spans, as Gumpert & Cathcart predicts.

One way to discuss this is to analyse tentative generations as located in specific media landscapes. Below can be found an example of such as landscape, based on an empirical comparative study of media generations in Sweden and Estonia (BOLIN, 2016).

The idea to situate generational cohorts in a media landscape build on the fact that every sociological cohort, that

is, of coevals, is located in a culturally and historically specific media landscape. This landscape consists on the one hand of already existing media, and on the other, of media arriving during the life time of the cohort. This means that these cohorts are confronted by a media surrounding that they have to act in relation to. It is objective, in the sense that they cannot chose away the landscape, although they might choose to use certain specific media technologies, or avoid specific media contents. However, also the technologies and contents avoided will have an impact on their lives, since – as Marshall McLuhan (1964) pointed to already in the 1960s, ‘the medium is the message’, and also those who do not use smartphones are affected by the fact that they exist.

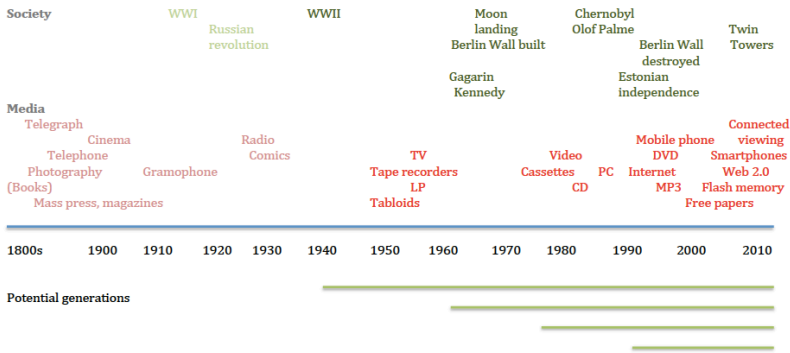


Figure 2. Media landscape of Sweden and Estonia with four tentative generational trajectories. Figure by the author.

The technological and semiotic structure of the media landscape is a structure that we act against. It is a structure that is formed by previous generations, in turn having grown up in the landscape formed by their predecessors. Those who are born into this landscape act in it according to how they perceive of its structure, and their action will in turn impact on it, creating a new structure for coming cohorts.

The four lines in figure 2 represent four tentative generations or cohorts that was interviewed in Sweden and Estonia – a neighbouring country to Sweden, just across the Baltic Sea. Although the two countries are neighbours, they have quite different histories. Sweden is a long-time democracy that was

neutral during the Second World War, which meant an intact industry and a population less traumatised compared to its neighbours who were all occupied, and where war was played out in a very manifest manner. The reason for choosing these two countries, then, was grounded in the belief that the generational experiences would differ – especially among the older cohorts where the societal conditions were most different.

Each generational cohort, in figure 2, has travelled through the media landscape, but the distance of their trajectory has not been equally long. With Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991), we can think of time as movement in space. The trajectory of a social formation, or generation, through the spatial unit that is the media landscape thus produces time, both in its linear conception as *calendar time*, and in its sense of *punctual time*, that is, time that is defined by its specific quality (GEERTZ, 1973). While individuals move around in the technological and symbolic landscape of the media, their movements give both this space and this time a unique quality that would not have been there, had it not been for the social actions of these individuals.

Time, however, is not produced solely through movement in space. It is also formed in our discursive constructions of the past, when we recount our media memories. Take the radio, for example. Among the generation brought up during the Second World War, radio was the most important medium. But the meaning of the radio differed considerably between generational cohorts in Sweden and Estonia. In Sweden, interviewees remembered the content – actual radio programmes. In Estonia, it was the technology itself, since radio receivers were forbidden during the war and shortly thereafter. The experiences that the Estonian and Swedish listeners had, was marked by the historical circumstance of their occurrence.

#### **IV – Generation as experience**

Every life story contains a relation to contemporary media – be it radio, mass reproduced lithographs, mobile phones, or computer games. This is so, because a generation is not something you are – but a *becoming* (SIIBAK; VITTADINI,

2012). It is rehearsed over and over again during the life-course, activated in certain moments, for example in an interview or a class reunion, while hibernating for most of the time. This generationing process of becoming means that to study media generations is also to study the process of mediatization. They are both processes, evolving over time. The generationing process, thus, means that the generational identity can be expected to be stronger the older the person is, since having travelled a long road through the social and media landscape means that one has rehearsed one's life story, including the component that binds people together in a generational self-consciousness. In order to capture such processes empirically, one can, as we did in the project, conduct focus group interviews, and start them with the prompting question 'Which media did you have in your home as a child? Can you tell us about your earliest media memories?' Through prompting people to remember their earliest memories, the focus group situation triggers the participants to gather around common experiences, and this, in turn, highlights the things that bring them together in shared memories of past media technologies and contents. It produces a 'we-sense', if only for the moment and duration of the interview.

This 'we-sense' is characteristic for the Mannheimian conceptualisation of generations as placed in the same location of the historical process, as can be seen from the below excerpt from an interview with Estonian respondents.

*Interviewer:* I mean, what kind of films did they show mostly at that time?

*Aire:* Indian films.

*Marika:* Yes, Indian films.

*Ruth:* French comedies.

*Aire:* Yes. Louis de Funes.

*Tomas:* Louis de Funes, yes.

*Marika:* Oktober or Pioneer, the one on Viru street where they showed one film all day and you could enter whenever you wanted.

*Tomas:* Yes, yes.

(Focus group, born 1959-1966)



The generational experience is illustrated by the participants confirming each other's memories and experiences, most explicitly in Tomas's 'yes, yes' at the end. And although this is provoked by the interview situation, there is no doubt that the participants have experienced this, and recognise themselves as a generation in the confirmation by the other participants.

If the above quote illustrates generation as a social formation, that is, the 'we-sense' produced in social interaction, generation is also formed in what could be called a 'they-sense' where one distinguishes oneself and one's coevals from other generations. In our material from the interviews there are plenty of such examples, and even those who are quite young differentiate themselves from those who are even younger, as can be seen from the quote below.

Our generation seems to have quite a lot of similarities in their media use. When you look at people who are 10–15 years younger, they are many times more superficial. It's another world actually.

(Focus group, born 1976–1980)

However, it also works in the other direction, by distancing oneself towards older generations:

*Arne:* Well, it was the same with the TV. Many [older people] thought the TV signal came through the wall socket.

*Interviewer:* Through the power-chord?

*Arne:* [Laughing] Yes, through the power cord. They could not imagine that the pictures came through the air...

(Focus group, born 1940–1945)

The quote clearly shows how Arne is distancing himself towards the older generations, whom he thinks were not up to date with the technological development. This part of the interview also consists of several such stories, where the focus group participants share stories about how ignorant their parents and other grown-ups were at the time of the introduction of television in Sweden in the mid-1950s.

Now – a generational analysis building on interviews can only reach as far back in history as we have living interviewees. If we are to use generational theory to study longer time perspectives, we need other kinds of empiric data. Such data has successfully been used by media historians such as Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) and Walter Ong (1982), where archival material can reveal past commonalities, discourses, and ways of thinking. Although they did not focus generations per se, they studied social change and such data can also be of aid in studying the mediatization process.

## V – Conclusions

In the above, I have suggested a model for analysing mediatized social change by way of focussing on generational cohorts and their trajectory through the social and media landscape. Through the relations between generations, time is produced, and thus these relations also produce social change. There is a great need to develop research tools for capturing the mediatization process as both a *social* and a *historical* process. We need to study it as a social process because the way in which historical change occur will involve human action, and will rely on how individuals and social formations perceive of the social and media landscapes.

We need to focus on the historical dimension because we need to define at what level change occur (individual, group, society), and – above all – the specific cultural character of change. Only in such a way can we empirically establish the ways in which the media contribute to social and historical change.

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# Industrial dimension of mediatization: inquiry from cultural industries approach

*Ilya Kiriya*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper places the ongoing mediatization mainly driven by digital technology within the context of industrialization of culture which is the phenomenon studied at least during last 80 years. Digital mediatization pushes some domains of the everyday life inside media industries which transforms the balance of forces on the market and contribute to the industrialization of more broad domains of the culture such as performing arts, education etc. We can see appearing the new schemes of the division of labor in that fields.

## I – Introduction

The media now are everywhere. The theory of mediatization is about their complexity and their intertwining relationship with different social institutions (HEPP; HJARVARD; LUNDBY, 2015). Such ongoing intensification of the relationship between media and social life is drastically changing the media landscape of developed countries and the configuration of business models, as well as the balance between content producers, distributors, platforms. We propose to examine this ongoing process from the point of view of the political economy of communication, so the discipline dealing with “the way communication goods are produced and unequally distributed across the

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society generating abuses of different forms of power” (MOSCO, 2009). From the side of political economy, mediatization of social process could be regarded as progressive industrialization of culture. Such industrialization changes considerably the balance of market power between different actors of the field and especially empowers the so called platforms. In other words, for us mediatization is the inclusion of new sectors into the field of cultural and media industries

For the long time the crucial function within any industrial field of culture was the function of the so called “editor” articulating the creative function with reproduction and market distribution of the cultural good (HUET et al., 1978). The central element in such process was the technical reproduction (so making mass availability of the cultural expression in space/time) which was the driver of the commodification of the cultural goods on the basis of their mass circulation. Technical reproduction was the main element of the critical theory of industrialization of culture coming from times of Benjamin (BENJAMIN, 2008) and Adorno (HORKHEIMER; ADORNO, 2002). The technical notion of the reproducibility for few dozen years determined basically non-industrial character of specific domains of culture such as theater and performing arts, education etc., maintaining them outside the industrialization process. All such domains have been considered as non-reproducible and, consequently, not considered as cultural industries. Consequently, the industrial weight of such segments within the economy of culture was not so big in comparison with historical branches of it (such as movie industries, phonographic industry, book publishing segment, television, and other media).

Now with a proliferation of digital technologies we can observe how progressively such non-industrial domains of culture become mass oriented and better mediatized which pushes them toward industrialization. Thus, theatrical performances are increasingly growing their audience through festivals and movie theater demonstration, education becomes online with invention of Mass Open Online Courses (MOOCS) and distant learning technologies, while we can see a raise of new ways of labor division inside such domains and their new strategic alliances with other fields of cultural industries and communica-

tion. This paper examines this process on the cases of some performing arts fields and education.

## **II – Cultural industries theory**

Theory of cultural industry is based on two theoretical pillars. First is the critical approach of the Frankfurt School. The second one is the political economy of communication. Central point for the early Frankfurt School was the so-called technical reproducibility which is driving the transformation of the culture into the industrial good under market economy principles and laws (such as division of labor; standardization etc.) (HORKHEIMER; ADORNO, 2002). Political economy of the communication became a generic approach for the issue during the modern theories of the cultural industries (born after 1970 mainly inside the French school and partly – British one).

The main work of Horkheimer and Adorno (*Dialectics of enlightenment*) puts forward its main critical thesis on losing by the commercial art its transcendental character and its subordination to the market logics. Thesis is based on Benjamin's idea of the reproducibility of art which leads to the progressive loss of the authenticity aura and its wide public orientation. While for Benjamin such process is more positive (because contribute to the acculturation of the larger population), for the Frankfurt School scholars it leads toward the division of labor, alienation from the result of creative work, constant loss of originality and free self-expression of the author. Here we can see birth of the main peculiarity of the concept of the industry.

In the modern economic theory, the notion of industry is used to designate the specific branch of the economy (industry of steel, automobile industry etc.). But from the critical school and political economy point of view this notion describes the mass mechanical reproduction of the good within the framework of the labor division. From this point of view, industry is opposing to the craft production. Such notion and understanding of the industry and industrialization is used in order to distinguish industrial culture from another one (which remain to be based on the craft principles).

According to the theory of cultural industries (in plural) which appears in late 1970s in France the central element of the cultural industries is the function of the editor. This function is generally played by such companies which brings together the artistic side of the process and the technical side of the process based on technical reproduction and distribution (Huet et al., 1978). Generally, the creative (or artistic) process is not measurable and is realized by creative teams mainly under the craft principles while the function of technical reproduction and distribution is just transforming such craft produced “concept” into the market good. The function of editor is performed by a publisher in case of book industry, movie company (or major) in field of movie production, musical label in phonographic industry.

So-called French school appears due to some industrial transformations of the media and communication sector in Europe in the second half of the XX century such as increasing the weight of such industries within the structure of contemporary economies, deregulation in field of audiovisual sector across the Europe, and intensification of transnational cultural exchange. Thus, the problematic was mainly oriented toward analysis of the feature of cultural industries as particular goods (HUET et al., 1978) and politico-economical nature of media as public good (MURDOCK; GOLDING, 1973).

The key element in politico-economic features of cultural industries is the individual taste-driven non-predictability of the demand and consumer value of any cultural good. Such non-predictable character poses the problem of the price for cultural products which is essentially accidental and doesn't rely on the cost of the creative production. Such creative part of the production is considered as non-measurable and as a result its cost is purely artificial. That entails the high risk for cultural production industries which is generally curbed through non-salary based remuneration of creative workers (according to models of royalties in great extend related with commercial result of the final product) (HERSCOVICI, 1994; HUET et al., 1978).

Despite some general principles cultural industries could be differentiated between them because they could rely on different generic models of functioning and different types



of products classified according to reproducibility, rareness and other criteria. There are generally two main models of functioning:

- editorial model based mainly on the direct consumer payment for the cultural good which is generally materialized and represents a particular product either material (as book) or immaterial (as digital track, for example)
- flow model based mainly on the model where the cultural production is financed non personally by the consumer but by the third part and, essentially, by the advertiser. Cultural good in this case is embodied in the service, so it's generally immaterial and means some continuity in space and time (from here come the name of the model – the flow based)

From this two generic models we can see a lot of intermediary logics mixing such two models and a high variety of different cultural products such as reproducible products relying on creative workers, semi-reproducible products which the circulation is artificially limited to maintain the rareness and high prices, social exchanges mainly organized by new social media and searching engines.

This variety of products and logics of functioning during last 20 years is largely driven by digital changes, proliferation of the mobile internet penetration and telecommunication platforms, growing diversity of the consuming devices. All such changes permitted to scholars to associate cultural industries with larger segment of “content industries” and to find a lot of common places between very heterogeneous industrial and creative forms of products in this fields (MIÈGE, 2000; BENGHOZI, 2011). The move towards high variety of platforms and broadening of the cultural industries field to the content industry has been accompanied by some corporate changes and especially – the financierization of the sector which became one of the most powerful and present in the financial market (BOUQUILLION, 2008).

This paper tries to enlarge this process by larger process – the enhancing of the industrial field due to some mediatization.

### III - Mediatized performing arts

During the last 15 years, especially after implementation of some governmental programs on creative industries (*Creative Britain. New Talents for the New Economy*, 2008), some massive new forms of performance arts and theatrical performance were raising. First, of all we can see a dramatic growth of such forms of mass theatrical activities as theatrical festival. In general festivals in all fields of performing arts (such as music, humor etc.) became more and more visible and significant in terms of the audience. In the UK, in 2016, the total audience for music festivals was estimated 3,9 million people (*Wish You Were Here. The Contribution of the Live Music to the UK Economy*, 2017). Per itself the festival business is growing up, and since we have no deal with technical reproducibility (each time artists are playing live), it cannot be entirely considered as part of the cultural industries. But masification of festivals per itself standardizes the performance, its format, and is affecting the creative part of the theatrical production. Moreover, we can observe more intense cross-sector collaboration aimed on reducing costs of the production and sharing the same location for different kind of events.

During the last 10 years after proliferation of the high-speed data transmission and HD-video we can see another trend pushing the theatrical production toward the industry. It's the direct broadcasting of the theatrical performances in movie theaters which completely brings the theater inside the technical reproducibility and media industry. In 2015, 19% of UK population watched live-to-digital arts content in cinema and 7% at home (NAYLOR et al., 2016). Suddenly, it contributes much more to the movie industry than to the industry of theater, in turnover but we can make the hypothesis that that transforms the creative process inside the theatrical production and especially its creative part. Since performances should be attractive to the masses abroad and not only on the local level, their choice is very driven by commercial logics. Performances as well as actors should be recognizable by wider public which could affect the choice of actors (they are much more oriented toward movie industry rather than to the theater per itself).

Another field inside performative arts which is hugely pushing the whole sector toward the industrialization – the raise of international musicals. In UK, for example, only about 15% of theatrical shows are musicals, but they deliver about 30% of total theatrical performances (NAYLOR et al., 2016). We consider musicals as semi-reproducible theatrical performances where individual artistic play (which still remains the part of the non-reproducible universe of the classic theater) coexists with very standardized and commercialized way of production based on mechanism of franchise. Within internationally recognizable franchises, such as “Chicago”, “Mama Mia” etc., the main property rights holder specifies and standardizes all creative elements such as music, choreography, features of artists. Such standardization makes the theatrical performance itself reproducible and creates the borderline between the creator itself (the franchise owner) and the performer considered more as a distributor. Moreover, such distinction divides the labor and alienating the creator of the performance.

The division of labor penetrates more profoundly into pop-art sector, especially in the field of humor. Our study of this field in Russia, performed in 2015, based on dozen interviews with television producers, shows that inside the television satire and humor there is a strong division of labor between those who makes the gags (the gagwriters) and their presenters.

## **IV – Industrializing the education**

On difference from previous fields, the sector of education started to be considered as cultural industry few dozen years ago, especially by French political economy of media scholars, such as Pierre Moeglin. In his book “Education industries”, he is studying such industrialized forms of education as textbook publishing, pedagogical informatics, distance learning etc. (MOEGLIN, 2010). For Moeglin, three main interconnected processes accompany this industrialization of the education: technologization, rationalization, and ideologization. The first refers to routinization and standardization of the processes of the education as activity (dealing with division of labor). The

second, deals with the organization of labor, management etc. The third concerns the ideology of progress and modernization which becomes the driver of the marketization, commercialization, new managerialism, and capitalist logics in education (MOEGLIN, 2016).

The central element of the similarities between cultural industries and creative industries is the general concern about the property rights. This issue in the period of digital platforms becomes a central element for all content manufacturers. Since the education is one of the most active players in the field, some regulatory initiatives concern both cultural industries and education (COMBES, 2007). Another important similarity resides in rather conflictual nature of the policies in the field of education which faces the radical globalization and commercialization and growth of the cleavages between public mission of the education and its competitiveness, especially in cross-national context (COMBES, 2007; READINGS, 1996).

All such studies were mainly focused on general industrialization of the education or some of its media products without, essentially, reexamine the fundamental relationship between the teacher and student, which in majority of cases remained unchanged. Our central argument is that, today, with a proliferation of digital media platforms this essential relationship is more and more industrialized, making reproducible the core forms of the higher education such as lectures and seminars. The central element of such industrialization is so-called Mass Open Online Courses (MOOCs) realized based on video lectures and different forms of automated tests and peer-assessment. Some universities (such as MIT) actually are realizing entire curricula on the basis of MOOCs. The implementation of MOOCs matches perfectly the ambitions of the universities to be global players, to compete between them for the best students from all over the world. Some of them intended to raise global students and develop towards global competitiveness.

Persistent economic and social inequalities also created the illusion that digital access to the world best education, via digital platforms of MOOCs, can resolve the problem of developing countries *by* providing their populations an affordable education to get a job or improve in the job they have (FRIED-

MAN, 2013). While digital platforms for MOOCs (such as EDX and Coursera) was proclaimed the “next billion-dollar start-ups” (ADAMS, 2018).

MOOCs are fundamentally changing the craft nature of the basic teacher’s and professor labor. It transforms the relationship between student and professor which previously was based on interpersonal communication (either non-mediatized in case of traditional lectures and seminar or mediatized interpersonal interaction, in case of textbook or videoconferences format) into mass communication oriented to virtual non-defined public through media platform. That makes the fundamental relationship based each time on individual performance of the professor (similarly as in theatre and other performing arts), reproducible on specific medium, and accessible to millions of people. That makes the online education a media product functioning according to the logic of digital media industries.

First effect of that is the “learnification” of the education (VAN DIJK; POELL, 2015), so division of the education on relatively little separately sold pieces, which could be combined into entire curricula. In classic education, its outcomes represent a wholistic object and not the sum of the isolated items. While in commercial logic, the consumer should have a choice between different elements. Another effect of mediatization of the education through digital platforms is the “uberization” of the education and implementation of the mutual client-service assessment and ranking, which contribute to the implementation of the neo-managerial practices into academia (KPI – key performance indicators of professors and academic units, usage of rank-depending salaries etc.). Together with digital bibliometrics and big data system of evaluation of the academic performance, it oversimplifies the representation of the quality of teacher’s work in academia.

Another effect making the online education like cultural industries – the new division of labor. Professor remains the key figure of the new online education industry, but his creativity needs to be mechanically reproduced and made available for the public. This mechanical reproduction is ensured both by the university (generally granting facilities to make the online course) and by the platform, which ensures the distribution. In other words, the creation of the online course is like any cultural

industry, where the creative part of work is separated from its technical reproduction and marketing. The business model in this case is remarkably similar to any networked digital product and is mainly based on selling data about users to aggregators of the advertising. The model also implicates a large part of the digital labor (a high amount of non-paid work performed by users itself for free) (FUCHS, 2015). Peer-assessment, mentoring, and other methods of self-organization of online course listeners are elements of such digital labor. Since platforms are responsible for the distribution, they are formatting the creative work of the professor, imposing the specific format (number of weeks, division of lectures on the short pieces).

## **V – Corporate changes**

The complexity of the relationship between different segments and branches of the economy and communication industry is well described (ARSENAULT; CASTELLS, 2008). But what is important is the dynamics of the market power. Thus, during 1990s, media and cultural industries companies were much more acquired by the segment of the electronics equipment. So, in 1990, Matsushita acquired the Universal Studios, in 1989 Sony obtained Columbia and in 2005 completed its expansion by absorbing the MGM. Later in 2000s, it was a turn of telecommunication companies to associate with cultural and media field. It was the case of AOL (with creation of AOL-Time Warner) and Time Warner, creation of TW Cable and acquisition of NBC-Universal by Comcast.

But during last few years, we can see a raise of the corporate power of the internet oligopolies continually active in field of education. Actually, quasi all of top-five internet oligopolies provide online education services and hold assets within this segment. Microsoft controls its platform of online courses and services for teachers developing digital skills at schools. Amazon is developing the platform AWS Educate, providing teachers and students access to cloud technologies in field of education. Google possesses G-suite, a platform of different services for trainers, teachers, and students based on collaborative technologies. Apple

is just developing platforms for together cloud managing different accounts and devices within class and schools (project Apple School). Finally, Facebook develops Facebook Education, a complex of education tools to build learning communities. All such strategies are not accidental. Big Five control huge amount of personal data of users which allows such companies to attract more and more targeted advertisers. By providing massive education solutions, Big Five companies obtain the possibilities to make personal data working permanently by proposing it each time to different advertisers, on different controlled platforms. In a majority of cases such education solutions are based on user-generated content, which is shared by different education professionals.

## **VI – Conclusion**

In this contribution, we showed how rich and diverse became the sector of reproduction of “non-industrial” domains of cultural industries which based on different forms of aggregation and mediatization of theatrical performances, gags, user generated content etc. All such changes making closer the strategies of industrial media corporations and the cultural field which previously was quite autonomous from such hyper concentrated industry. Some of the activities, mainly in the field of performing arts, became reproducible not entirely technically (not because of mechanical copying of the creative content on the specific medium or digital network) but due to standardization of their production and usage of right protection, such as franchise model. For another activities, such as education or theatrical performance, movie broadcasting, we can see how new digital distribution environment made them entirely reproducible. In all cases, we have dealt with a new division of labor between creative workers and distribution, able to generate a new business logic.

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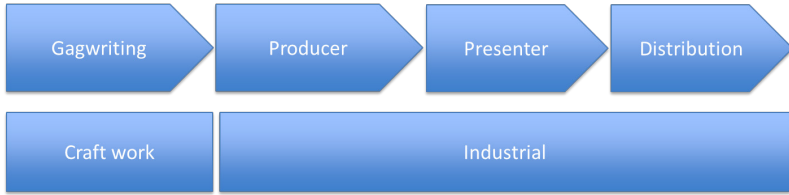
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## Annexe 1: The new production chain in gag and humor production on television



# Circulation and transformations of journalistic discourses

*Antonio Fausto Neto<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** The theme of circulation appears in a new complexified landscape of the dynamics of mediatization in process. Circulation is displaced from a naturalized comprehension to a central issue, especially within the discursive functioning of social practices, such as the journalistic ones. It is no longer understood by the transmission perspective, as conceived in the traditional view of functionalist studies, and moves to a perspective of a relational nature. According to this perspective, circulation is the result of the difference between the activities of producers and recipients of messages, whose dynamics is manifested through "bundles of relations" of discourses according to an enunciative work that points to an inevitable "misfit" of meanings. Based on these questions, this article examines the functioning of circulation in three landscapes that involve journalistic and non-journalistic discourses: in the first one, the journalistic media stood out as the place where circulation operated as a "zone of transposition" of messages, and the journalists as their carriers; in the second one, it is transformed into a "zone of articulation" woven by intertwining messages between producers and receivers, and in which journalists presented themselves as actors/mediators of the interaction between institutions and social actors; and in the third one, circulation takes from the scene journalism's mediating activity and affects the conditions of production and management of the event. These conditions begin to be woven according to operations of discourses of

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social fields that are coupled around interpenetrations, producing circuits that go beyond the systemic borders and enter unknown territories, causing bifurcations and discontinuities. The examined landscapes draw attention to mutations of circulation among discursive practices that go beyond the operations of their interface.

**Keywords:** Mediatization. Transformations of circulation. Journalistic discourses.

## I – Introductory note

The theme of circulation reappears in the first decades of the 21st century having as its landscape, the complexity of mediatization processes. It is the object of teaching, dissertations and theses, national and international events, working groups from scientific societies, as is the case of COMPÓS<sup>2</sup>, in addition to being present in national and international academic databases.

Somehow, questions about circulation are re-launched in this context; they were initially pointed out in the extensive work of Eliseo Verón, in the course of his pioneering empirical-conceptual studies, since the 70s of the last century, and then in research in which he launches new hypotheses about its manifestations (VERÓN, 1978; 1989; 2004; 2013).

We may say that, for some time, the Argentine semiologist was a solitary researcher on the concept, being accompanied only by interlocutors who were central references in his work, such as Peirce, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, Bateson. From them, he extracted references that pointed to communication from a relational matrix, and that reflected on the work he does on the concept of circulation as a central reference in the production of empirical-analytical studies. We refer to many of these data in the bibliography below – especially to those on the working conditions of journalistic discourse.

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2 National Association of Graduate Programs in Communication (COMPÓS) – Working Group ‘Reception, circulation, and social uses of media’; [www.compos.org.br](http://www.compos.org.br).

The discussion about the concept has been taking place, in the last few years, in the scientific-academic field, where the first audits are made, and hypotheses launched, removing the circulation from an automatic passage zone (FAUSTO NETO, 2009; 2010)<sup>3</sup>. Circulation had shifted from a naturalized understanding to the ambit of a central issue according to perspectives that removed it from the causal scope and placed it in an area of complexities, uncertainties, and discontinuities. These are significant moments in which circulation, in Latin America, and particularly in Brazil, is debated through two annual CISECO<sup>4</sup> meetings devoted to the theme. Debates held there resulted in books as well as dissertations and theses in the graduate programs in the area of communication, being also the object of research supported by institutional agencies (FAUSTO NETO, 2017).

We may attribute to several factors the resumption of the study of circulation according to other assumptions, which go beyond those extracted from the mathematical theory of information. It is something that was, in part – and in a curious way – abandoned by studies of functionalist inspiration, carried out within the scope of research communication. In a reduced way, we can say that the theme of circulation is reintroduced according to other analytical matrices, since we abandon the point of view that retains the understanding of communication according to a transmission notion, choosing another one, which conceives it as a relational issue.

According to this new framework, circulation would be the result of a difference in the relationship between mes-

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4 "The Discursive Circulation: between production and recognition", theme of Pentálogo VII, Hotel Albacora-Japaratinga / AL, September 19 to 23, 2016; and "Discursive Circulation and Transformation of Society", theme of Pentálogo VIII, Japaratinga, Hotel Albacora-Japaratinga / AL, September 25 to 29, 2017.

sage producers and recipients. They would relate based on different grammars and logics, which would guide the conditions for the production of meanings through “bundles of relations” organized according to dynamics of discontinuities and asymmetries. The meaning effects which could emerge from communication practices would be the result of a work of discursive interchangeability – characterized by the inevitable “disarticulation” – with the meaning produced by communication poles.

It is worth remembering, in a succinct way, that the problem of circulation would already appear surrounded by the complexity of communicative protocols within the scope of interpersonal contact, passing through the communication mediated by technologies, such as the mass media, and assuming new characteristics in the ambiance of mediatization in process. In any of these scenarios, circulation would be the result of the difference in the (asymmetric) relationship of enunciations generated in the areas of discourse production and reception.

This article does not intend to deal with the issue of circulation comprehensively but to recover, from this broad and complex scenario, some aspects that help to understand the role it has in the mutations that, over the last decades, the journalistic communication processes have undergone.

Initially, we present some characteristics of the circulation’s operation, highlighting aspects of its work of transmitting messages in the context of the media society and in which the mass media played a central role as mediating structures. The enunciation process centered on the logics and grammar of the media from which the production and transmission of messages were generated to the recipients. Circulation would have only an auxiliary function, that is, to promote the transmission of messages but, it did not stand out from any aspect of another work, such as, for example, the articulation of interactions between institutions that produce messages and their recipients.

We will highlight another perspective that situates the dynamics of circulation in the communicational architecture of the society in mediatization, in which the functioning of all social practices is reciprocally affected by techno-media logics and operations. Links are generated between old calls and new media, and the relations between the communication poles would be

made through the interweaving of operations that would manifest themselves according to complex feedbacks, of a non-linear nature, going beyond regulatory retroactions. In this landscape, circulation leaves traces, expressing clues about an interactional model that, in addition to showing that it is not just a transit zone, shows the realization of another type of work in the configuration of new conditions of production and meaning effects.

## II - Circulation in the transmission landscape

From a more classic point of view, in the communicational-journalistic process, the notion of circulation appears associated with the functions attributed to the media and their operations. Their mediating dimension is highlighted by the task they perform, the codification of reality, which they would do in an attempt to restore the “primary scene.” It would only come to light through the operations of a discursive character materialized in the news as a substitute formation. It is at this level that the role of journalism pedagogy stands out, as representational work.

This “coding system” corresponds to what Darnton attributes as the norms which are built on the frontier of the journalistic field itself, and that leads him to affirm that everything that is in convergence with its rationality is the object of the work of news (DARNTON, 1990). Thus, the mediating rationality of the journalistic work emerges restoring the real through the nature of its enunciating activity. This assumption emphasizes the centrality of the journalistic system as a specific place, a kind of *reader system*.

This perspective draws attention to the journalistic work as a transmission practice, not yet capturing that, despite its rationality, the journalistic discourse would immerse amid other dynamics of statements in whose scenarios circulation would be a dynamic instance of connections, contamination of various signs and discursivities, according to operations based on different “grammars.” According to the transmission perspective, circulation would be a passage zone of a (journalistic) message from a productive pole (A) to another (B) receiving one, in which the

work of causing the “primary scene” to emerge would be associated only with the transmission of signs, that would materialize in advertising activity according to the rules of a given productive (journalistic) system. In other words, the information discourse would be the result of a game and rules derived from the conscientious point of view according to which news is what journalists and the culture of their system define as such.

The nature of a more complex communicational process is only recognized insofar as the conditions of production of the journalistic discourse are involved in other articulations that would try to situate the circulation beyond a transmission dynamic, endowed with activity as an intermediary link between message producers and recipients. It would be an instance that would make it possible for journalistic media to realize their mediating vocation. Circulation would appear as a place of production of contact between the media and society, and it is in this sphere that the mediating vocation attributed to them stands out, because everything we know about the world, we owe to the media (LUHMANN, 2005). Giddens (1991) converges with this mediational perspective when remembering the importance of this new dynamic as a possibility of reducing the complexity resulting from the functioning of other social systems (GIDDENS, 1991). Such properties would specify the major activity of journalism as a social practice, since it is through its *dispositifs*, such as the newspaper, that meanings are prepared by its discursive strategies, reading contracts, etc. (MOUILLAUD, 2002).

Such aspects can be observed, for example, in discursive operations in information magazines through which the journalistic discourse semanticizes the impeachment processes of Collor (FAUSTO NETO, 1995) and Dilma Rousseff (FAUSTO NETO, 2017), according to the discursive economy of each publication. Discursive schemes are presented to the reader to explain the mediating task of journalistic discourse, under different perspectives from those proclaimed and circulated for many years, according to the hypotheses developed by McCombs (2009) within the scope of the agenda-setting theory.

In these conditions, beyond devices that transmit information, the journalistic *mass media* propose, through their offer-



ings of “*possible worlds*,” links with the social fabric, by placing themselves as an intermediary instance between institutions and society. These are offers that highlight the role of journalism in the management of the social organization, according to a hetero-referential activity on the thematization of issues from different social institutions. The circulation environment – no longer inhospitable, “smooth,” and just a “passage area” – assumes another configuration as a bundle of discursive practices dynamics of the interactional poles. The configurations of the communication activity would be engendered through its conformations, as well as the interchangeability of the poles in interaction would be coproduced through it. Circulation would emerge as a place of relationships in which the potentiality of the mediational activity of the discourses – and interdiscursivity itself – would be generated through the work of several operations. One of the effects of these articulations is the fact that discursivities encounter each other via loan processes, appropriations, and co-determinations, etc. It takes place when the media culture and its discursive practices operate as “production conditions” for new discursivities, affecting the functioning of social discourses, such as, for example, the political discourse. Let us remember that the first election campaign for the Presidency, after the dictatorship cycle, was organized and mediatized according to the rules of the television discourse (FAUSTO NETO, 1990). All candidates supported themselves on interdiscursivities and genders, etc. and the victory of President Collor was associated with his performance in the final debate with Lula, on television. Later, another work of circulation appears when fragments of this debate were edited to be published by *Jornal Nacional*. The first interpretations of electoral results were based on the “effects theory,” by highlighting the possibility that a discourse could affect the results of the elections. This point of view highlighted the work of media circulation as an independent variable, ignoring other operations that would permeate the activity of circulation. According to this perspective, it would be restricted to the task of transporting meanings, therefore, ignoring its links with other mediations as well as the potential they would have in the work of co-engendering meanings.

Years later, in a new electoral campaign, Lula won the elections, and his victory is explained by interpretations that de-

viate from the appreciation of circulation under the prism of media scheduling. Other links between political and media discourse were highlighted, as well as circulatory processes that generated their exposure. Noteworthy is the transformation of the winning body-image of the candidate, which would strip itself of the “old unionist” aura, and be invested by rules that would try to transform him into a “significant body” of a media nature (FAUSTO NETO, 2003). The election takes place within the scope of complex structures of media and non-media mediation that are expressed according to another circulatory landscape.

In this, the media would divide the production of meanings with other discursive practices, according to the work of different grammars and co-announcements. Circulation as a “passage zone” gives way to another, a complex one, whose borders build-up of strength and interfaces woven by strategies from various fields and their agencies. The circulation emerges invested in a dynamic that gives rise to a kind of “contact zone,” generating possibilities for complex interactions, as we will see next.

### **III – Circulation between dissolutions and entanglements**

Mutations that manifest in the journalistic landscape in the context of mediatization show that the meanings that circulate are no longer examined by logics/effects of the agenda-setting, and start to take into account a problem raised by the *transaction of agendas*. If, in the past, what we knew about reality would come from the work of media, in more recent times, levels of complexification of mediation were observed. Heterogeneous articulations are perceived between social practices and their discursive manifestations, which reflect on the possibilities of what we know about the world. Disputes of meanings intersect, increasingly, around the foundations of multiple media references and other natures. One of the first consequences of these complexifying articulations of the process of construction and dissemination of the event is the fact that its fabric is made less – and unilaterally – in the exclusive borders of the journalistic field and, increasingly, by articulation with logics, practices, and discursive operations of

other fields. In the past, in the context of media discourse, they saw the possibility of taking them as loans aiming at the circulation of events related to their strategies for producing meanings. Currently, we observe that one of the possibilities that the fields find to support the correspondence of media discourses occurs through the appropriation of the “significant practices” of the media. However, it is no longer a “loan” but appropriation that, now, is integrated into the culture of the appropriating field, especially by its experts. It is not a question of coexistence of co-announcements from different fields but submission of the fundamentals of an “episteme” determined to that of a media nature. Thanks to the transformation of the social organization into an ambiance made up of media, logics, and media operations, dimensions of media culture already go beyond the circumstance of “conditions of production” to discursive strategies in different fields. Various institutional practices are presented through media operations as a *recognition password*.

For example, police investigations mix their procedures with those that emanate from the logics of the media. And its actors, as delegates in charge of investigations, make direct use of media skills and competences to engender events, whose utterance, however, is increasingly done on the sidelines of the direct responsibility of journalists. Both the process of fact-finding and the production and circulation of materials were no longer produced by journalists, who have been transformed into recipients of guidelines and disseminators of materials generated directly by police staff (FAUSTO NETO, 2007).

These are seminal procedures that are later complexed by the interpenetrating activity of different social systems. Journalists covering topics related to the “Lava-Jato” operation receive direct assistance from specialized advisors of the legal staff, whose support is considered essential in the editing of articles concerning the investigation. At the same time, experts in the legal field carry out intensive media training courses to master the logics and operations of media production to be taken as references for mediatizing their activities. Also, due to the “access revolution” that the internet is producing in the constitution and functioning of the mediatized environment, field agents and social actors acquire media “literacy” in such a way

that operations of production and circulation of messages start to be generated outside the specific domain of professional communication environments. However, the issue of access to the environment of the media circulation of messages stands out as a central challenge for diverse institutions, sources, field agents, and the readers themselves.

It is access that goes beyond the environments hitherto controlled by the journalistic system and its operators, not just physical access, but the entry of discursive practices generated by other fields, in the very environment operated by the “mass media” or by these controlled. A pressure group, like prisoners of the prison system, uses kidnappings of journalists (transformed under coercion in their advisers), to access the television setting, to circulate a message that denounces the country’s prison conditions (FAUSTO NETO, 2006b). What is highlighted from this event is only the fact that the act jeopardizes the security of media institutions. There is no other reading about the conditions of the generation and circulation of the event. We do not draw attention to the effects that new “calendar transactions” have on the conditions of production and discursive circulation, especially the complex conditions through which the circulation of the event occurs (FAUSTO NETO, 2006b).

Displacements that involve changes in television programming routines maintain strategic links with the receiver community. The change of journalists and TV presenters displaced to new roles is not considered just an “internal routine” of television but now is subjected to careful passing ceremonies. It is no longer a matter of events restricted to the television setting, but something that connects with the world of viewers, considering the levels of contacts that the television device feeds on a daily basis, via the offer of its reading contracts, with its users (FAUSTO NETO, 2013a). These displacements that take place in the internal environment of media production go beyond the facade of the television setting, and also affect the performance of journalists, specialists, columnists, etc., which are present in multimodal activities, and displaced to the circulatory activity of the discourses. A well-known sports journalist, diagnosed with cancer, tells, daily, the process of his illness. He moves between various media and editorial sections of the company where he

worked, announcing that “I am the one who reports my treatment” (FAUSTO NETO, 2011b).

Changes in circulation generate a crisis in other routines in the journalistic environment. The ombudsman, until then considered a central character in the construction of a mediating protocol between newspaper and readers, departs from his role in the face of the newspaper’s resistance to open the column for interaction in real-time, via the internet, with its readers (FAUSTO NETO, 2008b). It is a typical situation in which the journalistic organization fears injunctions of economy and the digital logics, whose actions and strategies could remove from the journalistic practices the core of its central activity: to weave the process of news according to its logic and operations.

The effects of the complex feedbacks produced by mediatization affect the socio-communication environment. It is no longer an issue of the “era of the media” and its representational practices, enunciating meanings according to logics permeated by tentatively regulatory expectations, but rather new enunciative assemblages that take place through discursive processes that deal with then another scenario of circulation, the different (media and non-media) practices.

The effects of this new environment manifest in various stages of the mediating activity of journalism, and this field sees its configuration progressively being crossed by circuits of operations, many of which are already handled by different institutions and actors.

Illustrating the existence of a niche that shapes a new enunciative activity, we highlight the role of large digital companies that operate according to interaction schemes in which media institutions and social actors become components of interactional practices organized by them, according to other circulation procedures.

In this new ambiance, newspapers and readers become customers of macro institutions, particularly of their communicative matrices (such as Facebook) as large companies that generate interactional processes through “contact zones” that would transform the media-informational architecture and, punctually, the activity of message circulation. They are also projects that generate interactional processes involved in inter-

mediate strains, such as those that recently involved Facebook and journalistic organizations, when the presence of pages from the latter in the Facebook environment was reduced in favor of individuals. At the time, Facebook released a note explaining that the surveys carried out by the social network pointed to the reduction of moments and contacts between its users, and based on this, announced that it would reduce the space granted to communication companies on its pages (Meio e Mensagem, 2018). Somehow, Facebook stops the presence of institutional media on its page, discouraging a type of interaction that would value the circulation of journalistic services, as well as the opinion of its institutions, but something that would generate less financial income for the institution. Facebook retreats in promoting interactions between “old and new media” systems, something modest for its ambitions which go beyond a mediational place (Meio e Mensagem, 2018).

Articulations between “old” and “new” media occur through tensions generated by the mediatization of events, highlighting new problems resulting from the affects between media cultures and other institutional cultures. Already at the beginning of this century, a news story foreshadowed the effects of the coupling relationships between legal and media systems. It highlights images from the Brazilian Superior Federal Court (STF) session in which judges make use of the intranet to combine, through electronic conversations, voting on a matter about the monthly fee: “Combined vote on the network – Supreme Ministers speculate about the connection between judgment and succession in court” (O Globo, 08/23/2007). The denouncement points to marks of a process of circulation of messages and negotiations in the STF environment, escaping the areas and limits of its rituals and practices. It initiates reactions from representatives of various social fields, making the circulation of the event much complex: “OAB sees Big Brother culture; lawyers defend publication” (FSP, 08/24/2007); “Jobim states that the publication of dialogue is unconstitutional” (FSP, 08/24/2007, p. 8). The transcription of dialogues and images of conversations between judges, by newspapers, still leads to readings by various actors. The former president of the Congress, José Sarney, relates the fact to the transformation of the physical environment

of the STF: “Architecture destroys privacy among the members of the court” (José Sarney, FSP, 24/08/2009, p. 1); “Jurist-judge claims that the press invaded intimacy.” (FSP, 09/02/2007, p. 2). Columnist comments on the fact in an article, using in its title discursive constructions that are associated with the dynamics of circulation: “The invasion of journalism.” He stresses that “the relationship between journalism and invasion of privacy is much more complex than the intense discussion appears [...]. There is no doubt that the dialogues would be private acts. But it does not mean that they occur in privacy.” (FSP, 08/26/2007, p. 9). The journalist throws into the debate an issue which does not appear on the list of opinions on the subject, emphasizing the singularity of the observational journalistic processes in the construction of the event that is engendered in the mediatization environment and according to the dynamics of circulation: “[...]being close to whoever speaks on the phone and noticing the public interest in what is said, and report it; or listen, from outside an office, to a dialogue of public interest – are these acts of invasion of privacy or the function of journalism?” (FSP, 26.08.2007, p. 9).

Such a record brings up a debate around the mediatization of institutions and their effects, particularly, drawing attention to the singularity of the exercise of journalistic observation and the role of its enunciative work on the relationship between non-media and media institutions.

Marks of a new circulatory activity, as well as its effects in the context of ongoing mediatization, also occur in the street demonstrations that took place in Brazil in 2013. Among them, clues about the “dissolution” of the ways of observing journalistic mediations, specifically its coverage of the demonstrations. We saw that these were generated according to different motivations but highly articulated around digital media. They functioned as a kind of great “cloak” in an attempt to shelter, and unify meanings in profusion... This arrangement removed other mediations exercised by institutions, according to the expression of the actors on the march. They claimed that they could not be recognized in the circumstances of the march carried out, given the formation of agglomerations in which “we are all Facebook” ... The journalistic observational process also goes into a

breakdown, as the dynamics of the demonstrations would not be captured by the reporting methodologies that covered the marches: “We have to change the mirror,” shouts an editor to a reporter, present on the streets, accusing the gap between what was happening on the streets, and the journalistic attempts designed to cover them” (FAUSTO NETO, 2013b). Illustrating the outbreaks between the logics of the protesters and those of the media coverage, said a reporter, reflecting on the performance of the media in the face of the demonstrations: “They tied a knot in the head of journalists” (FAUSTO NETO, 2013b).

The dissolutions of mediations take place in events such as street demonstrations, but also in the sphere of journalistic organizations themselves. News reports the disappearance of the ombudsman in the editorial-redactional architecture of the New York Times. It is one of the most emblematic records to symbolize the profound changes that journalism is going through, especially in its *economy of circulation*. It is not just a matter of removing a journalist from his/her job but of the extinction of one of the levels of the observation process that the newspaper made use of to constitute a binding protocol with the readers. By removing the mediator, the journalistic institution would be giving up a central link, replacing structures that would try to dissolve forms that would enable the reader to have a qualitative contact with the newspaper. By ending the role of ombudsman, the newspaper plans to inaugurate other forms of (working) relations with the reader, such as expanding its comment platform, so that readers start acting as editors. As a justification, the newspaper would claim that “such a fundamental relationship could not be outsourced to a single intermediary, said the NYT editor, in a statement to the newsroom” (Meio e Mensagem, 06/01/2017).

#### **IV – Couplings, interpenetrations, bifurcations, discontinuities**

At the end of the second decade of this century, three facts are woven into the Brazilian journalistic context, calling attention to changes in the conditions of their transformation into events, according to the dynamics of new circulation



*methodologies*. The records just below stand out from different dynamics that were previously described and are under other levels of complexity, since their engendering escape the borders of the journalistic field, as they are woven into the interfaces of several social systems, already in the mediatized ambience (GOMES, 2017).

1st record (2017): The event's circulation unrolls in a hospital environment. Hours after the hospitalization of the late wife of ex-President Lula, Marisa Letícia da Silva, affected by a stroke, a doctor at the hospital sent a message via WhatsApp to a group of former university colleagues, confirming the hospitalization of the patient affected by a hemorrhagic stroke and considered as one of the most severe levels. Although medical code rules prohibit third parties' access to patient records, the report migrated not only to the medical field but to various segments, generating several types of discourses.

The media minded not only to report the occurrence taking as reference the doctor's report, already in circulation, but the newspapers opened pages for specialists to comment on the unrolling accounts of the event from different points of view (medical, legal, ethical, etc.). The message also enters the circuit of social networks through various types of reports and comments, causing even hate discourses to emerge. Although the doctor was dismissed from the services she provided to the hospital, her message went further with no obstacles or control and restrictions in the process of its circulation.

2nd record (2016): Not only the construction of the event but its circulation is engendered within the jurisdictional system. Judge Sérgio Moro, in charge of investigations of "Operation Lava-Jato", orders, despite superior authorities, the capture, through telephone tapping, of conversations between former Presidents Lula and Dilma Rousseff. He also orders that the content of the messages should be available to the news media, moments after the operation. It was suspended by him hours later, upon compliance with the STF's determination that the recorded messages should be recalled and removed from the process. However, between the extraction of data and its prohibition, the contents of the conversations had already entered several circuits of media and other institutions. Its content, in addition to

the montages made originally by the researchers responsible for the extraction of the materials, underwent editing processes by media reports, whose devices already were connected to the MPF's communication services. It should be remembered that routine contacts between the media and the legal system had already been established through complex media coverage that was given to "Operation Lava-Jato". In this case, the media construction did not receive any guidance/restrictions from the judge on the use of materials, as the preconditions were ready for its dissemination. The event gains several forums, including the "court" of social networks.

3rd record (2019): The event arises from circuits and dynamics of circulation processes that branch into formats whose origins and construction processes are not known, in terms of systemic origins. Messages arrive at The Intercept website, in the form of a recording that reports the contents of conversations between authorities in charge of "Operation Lava-Jato". Contents of these recordings are put into circulation by The Intercept, transformed into an event, gaining diverse circuits throughout practically the entire second half of 2019. The formal circuit consists of The Intercept itself, *Folha de S. Paulo*, and *Veja* magazine, which formally joined the journalistic website in the process of broadcasting the contents of the captured recordings. However, its dissemination expands in several media and other institutions, in the form of "quoted speech." The event is dealt with in a complex way in the extensive journalistic coverage timetable – blogs and websites, the agenda of institutions in various social fields, as well as within the scope of public conversation.

According to these three registers, different expedients, involving technologies and editorial processes, try to generate couplings between various systems which are in charge of the genesis, management, and production of the event, according to reciprocating interpenetration processes in their discourse coupling practices. These, when dissolved and re-enunciated by/at the borders of specific fields, gain, through technical operations, amplitudes within the scope of different circuits. The interpenetrations between the diverse social practices – of media and various natures, are made through heterogeneous enun-

ciative constructions, making it impossible to stop the course of the circulation of meanings. They draw attention to the fact that the genesis of the construction of the event is, this time, outside the specific borders of the media field, but in the combination of coupling of authorial and operations that are already in the domain of various social systems, given that the expectations about possible effects of meanings – like following unforeseen courses activated by the circulation – cannot be previously known. The event literally takes on bifurcating horizons that are permeated by different and, at the same time, unforeseen meanings.

The three events point to articulations between different social systems, however, presenting marks of enunciations of an observational work that generates the first reports operated by actors of systems, in terms of the first stages of their circulation. In the leakage about the health status of the ex-president's wife, we could observe that its circulation is enunciated from an operator in the medical field, albeit its production does not result from the formal actions of this system. It is disseminated through discursive production circuits by specialists in the same field, taking the version first addressed by the medical colleague – without the constraints of regulatory codes – to a broader ambience consisting of a diversity of readings. These unfold in others as they travel through other circuits, whose functioning and horizons are unknown.

The event results, therefore, from coupling and feedbacks engendered in the social dynamics itself, unfolding in new constructions and so on, due to significant new derivations. Meanings cannot be restrained because, like fake news, this type of report rests on the power of a circulatory process in which something escapes, entering other meaning-building processes.

Also, from the perspective of coupling and interpenetration logics, we can say that “Operation Lava-Jato” represents a level of complexity in the communication activity of social systems. Their actions are systematically coupled, according to strategies and operations articulated with the communicability logics of the event as the dominant aspect. We saw that a set of fundamentals and legal-media actions support and guide the operation, from capturing the tapping of the conversation between two former presidents to their entry into circulation. The event

belongs to an extensive family of logics and acts that transcend the legal ritual. It is permeated by the “broth” of media acts, like interviews of prosecutors to the media; signed articles, and a book published by Judge Moro; interrogation routines always broadcast to the media, from the provision of its content by the MPF communication services; also by the public relations campaigns that aim to favor the positioning of the police and legal institutions ahead of the operations; and, finally, training to which legal operators are submitted to master their media operations.

If the tapping process carried out by Judge Moro had its material subsequently recalled by determination of a higher court, the effects of the circulation of its contents would already have gone much further. Although there was a “gap” between recording and suspension of tapping, and even though the materials were kept out of the investigation process, the actions to mediate the content of the wiretapping was carried out. Other institutional concerns could do nothing else aimed at containing the dissemination of the messages from the surveillance wiretaps, in the face of the avalanche of the messages that would be capillarized, discursively, in the entire social environment. That is, if the recordings were formally removed from the circuits, they moved on in the form of other texts, streamlined by other systems, actors, and social networks.

Unlike the cases reflected above, we understand that the characteristics of the mediatization of recording legal authorities’ speeches, whose content was revealed by The Intercept, bring together other interpretive clues alongside the many that were raised, alleging, for example, their illegality, or considering that the content of their records was untrue. If both previous cases strained by the normative aspects of the systems which generated them went on, even so, the normative actions could not equally stop the paths taken by the messages of “Vaza Jato.” And although some “retroactions” believed they could retain them, such as the arrest of possible suspects for the leak, it would be impossible to stop ongoing meanings. The recordings of the legal actors’ speeches, which were besieged in a *shadow zone*, escape the borders of their universe of production, enter other circuits in the form of journalistic texts, according to systemic couplings not previously designed, gaining territories of countless discursivities.

We understand that the third case – “Vaza Jato” – raises a central issue exposed in this article and concerns the status of journalistic mediation. Throughout the reports developed here, we have seen that journalistic mediation suffers injunctions of various kinds, especially those engendered by the ongoing mediatization processes, as they affect the specificity of the work of the journalist as a mediator. We draw attention to the nature of some dissolutions caused by the complexification of the circulatory process. But we must note that journalistic mediation does another operation in which the journalist appears not as a recipient of materials, as some analysis claim. Or as an actor subordinate to machinery in which his role would only be to quote statements from one place or another. Located in another process, we must call attention to a journalistic act that values its place of observation in another way, equidistant from automated reports generally made in “interface policies” between systems (journalistic/non-journalistic), as well as the relationship of this with something that emanates from other circuits of meanings...

## **V – Concluding notes**

In this article, we sought to show the changes of circulation on journalistic scenarios, in a specific way, pointing out situations and highlighting their effects on the nature of the structural activity of journalism, of a mediational character. We relied on materials that appeared in the Brazilian journalistic context, during these first two decades, and on data located in research in development. We observed clues about the nature and manifestations of the work of circulatory process in various situations involving the journalistic act. We highlighted those in which the journalist was considered an outstanding actor in an activity aimed at the dissemination of facts, appearing as an operator and vector of meaning expansion. At other times, we would have drawn attention to the journalistic practice that had another mediating dimension. We realized that the work of news would require placing its reporting process related to external knowledge from other fields.

This attempt to unravel is not autonomous, as it goes through several mediation protocols. The 'rescue' of reality would imply making use of observation processes, whose paths show and complex the non-autonomy of journalism and its mediators, particularly its dependence on co-announcements. Its work would be subordinated to bundles of relationships, and, under these conditions, it would operate in tacit connection with multiple dimensions of the circulatory processes of meanings.

Subsequent complexities would cause journalists to deal with a new scenario in which they would see that realities of relations and borders between different social systems would start to constitute new beacons of their act. Rationalities of these systemic articulations would affect the conditions of enunciation of the journalistic act. The tentative work of 'rescue' of the 'primary scene' would be permeated by the interweaving of its dynamics, and everything suggests that their effects would only allow the construction of *possible worlds*.

The journalistic act becomes increasingly complex in the face of the ongoing mediatization process, as this brings about the emergence of new techno-media protocols, shared with institutions and social actors, resulting in the emergence of other circuits of contacts and manifestations. The production of events moves from production niches, enters circulation territories, escapes the internal protocol of the journalistic system, and is shared by a variety of systemic-institutional matrices now. The access revolution promoted by the inflection of technological processes raises possibilities for an enunciative model centered on *I alone*, a circumstance in which the individual, despite the others, would be able to invent interactive processes. Somehow, the uniqueness is removed from the journalism system and its actors' work, pointing out that there are other processes in progress, and that they pass into the hands of other universes. These would be times of dissolution of the intermediate structures in which mediating practices would also be affected by the existence of interactional rituals driven by new socio-technical arrangements that give rise to two communicational scenarios: the first, constituted by the actions of individuals, driven by the so-called new technologies that cause to emerge determined techno-media architectures. And a second scenario consisting of

systemic practices, mixing around processes and couplings that are dynamized throughout complex retroactions and feedbacks. The event results, in this case, from multiple interventions, logics, and rationalities that are mixed with the injunctions of systems and their socio-media practices, operated through “systemic-mediation” mediators.

The event takes place in circulation. It is enunciated in dynamics of socio-discursive practices that are engendered and disseminated by circulatory activity, which, in turn, is not smooth, but consists of inputs of logics and grammar, rules, discourses from different institutions and wisdom. The event results from the difference in the relationship between interactional dynamics, cultures of systemic couplings, discursive constructions, interpenetrations, and their effects.

The theme of the effects returns on the conclusion of this text. It is impossible not to approach it in the face of a communicational scenario in which we observe that the interchangeability of meanings is manifested and disputed in rhythms of struggles and inevitable differences, in terms of meanings. The effects return, this time around a new problem, that of complex retroactions, and not those conceived in terms of regulatory mechanisms, as predicted by functionalist systemic thinkers. We realize that the interactional processes that constitute the ambiance of mediatization point to structural and qualitative transformations that involve fields, new circuits, and the nature of transformations in the journalists’ mediating activity. We emphasize the issue of discontinuities, as the effects of interpenetrations between systems, which are often not capturable because they escape the causal logics through which couplings are operated within systems. Discontinuities could be attributed to the effects of discursive processes that clearly could not be contemplated, as it is unknown what would happen in circuits whose production of meanings would still be underway.

From such lags, new observational journalistic processes emerge, as mediation activities that enable the externalization of meanings that, until then, remained retained at the boundaries of *shadow zones*, prevented from being sent to contact zones. The observation processes whose contents The Intercept brings to the fore, through its operations, bring into

play – and under discussion – another model of enunciation, requalifying the specificity of an observational activity, far from ventriloquism and also from the constraints of inter systemic practices, of instrumental and regulatory requirements.

Reports of ‘private conversations’ between officials in the judicial world, and leaked through circuits, go forward. The effects of their couplings are, therefore, unknown. The “communicative action” draws attention since its contents come at stake because of discontinuities, or displacements that are not controlled by their process, as well as by the logics that generated them. Something escapes them, transcending the very frontier of the act that produced them, passing captured messages to circulate driven by *peripheral systems*. When they leave the borders of a determined productive process, statements enter the “inertia” of the gap in circulation or are captured by it, where other circuits care of giving them other courses and directions. They enter, for example, the scope of other observational processes, which are mediatized by other methodologies that bring together mediating potentialities. As mediatization phenomena are subordinated to temporalities and procedures, the observations developed here describe only records of small stages in the dynamics of journalistic (and also some non-journalistic) practices increasingly subordinated to the work of circulation. The marks left by the traces of this activity suggest some hypotheses for further studies on the implications of circulation for journalistic changes.

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## Discussing mediatization of politics based on the portuguese case

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on the comment space in prime-time newscasts on generalist TV and cable television channels in Portugal. The concept of the mediatization of politics is used to guide empirical research. The study results indicate that the comment is a manifestation of the association between the media and politics. The results also offer clues to debate the concept of mediatization.

**Keywords:** Mediatization of politics. The politicization of the media. Journalists. Politicians. Newscasts. Commentary. Commentators. Portugal.

### I – Introduction

The comment reached Portuguese television in 2000 with the hiring of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa to comment on the main newscast of the private station TVI, where he remained until October 2015, shortly before beginning his campaign for the presidency of the Republic. Marcelo was known only among the national elites when he started commenting on television, but after 16 years of speaking directly to the Portuguese for almost 1 hour a week, he became the most popular figure in the country. And in January 2016, Marcelo was elected president of the Republic in the first round in an election between 10 candidates.

The inclusion of the comment in a popular and high-rated newscast, such as that of TVI, democratized the access

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to enlightened opinion and widespread the consumption of an elite product previously only available in the reference press and consumed by the national elite (FIGUEIRAS, 2009; 2011). Marcelo also brought a new audience profile to the information space, with the other *media* echoing his views and the TVI newscast gaining the status of *agenda-setter* for other media, leading journalists, and the spheres of power in Portugal.

The hiring of Rebelo de Sousa by TVI placed the figure of the commentator in Portuguese society on a whole new level. Therefore, the “Marcelo phenomenon” is fundamental to understand why the comment in Portugal became a structuring component of the broadcasting of television channels in the new millennium while consolidated as a space of power. As an interface of power, the sphere of commentary is a privileged place for analysis of one of the instances that is, simultaneously, central in the formation of public opinion and the representation of the spheres of power in Portugal.

This article focuses on the commentary space, and the commentators, on the prime-time newscasts on generalist and cable television channels in Portugal, between 2000 and 2015. The study views the comment as an indicator of the relationship between the *media* and politics and uses the concept of the mediatization of politics to guide empirical research. Adopting this construct as an analytical tool does not mean ignoring the existing debate around it (DEACON; STANYER, 2014; 2015; HEPP et al., 2015; LUNT; LIVINGSTONE, 2016), but recognizing, in line with Frank Esser and Jesper Strömbäck (2014), that the theoretical framework of the mediatization of politics is relevant to explain the relationship between the *media* and politics.

The rise of digital communication platforms and the cultural imaginary associated with the “power of flows”, as opposed to the “flows of power” (CASTELLS, 2009), changed the role and authority of the *media*. However, in the age of the internet, there is a danger of overestimating dimensions of technological change and underestimating those of social continuity. Hierarchical communication and network communication are two models of social organization that coexist in contemporary societies, as well as in the past, although with different intensities. In this way, as the *media* define structures for institutional



deliberation – as is the case with the commentary sphere, it remains a relevant research question in the age of the internet and social media.

## II – The relationship between the media and politics in the Western and Portuguese contexts

The interaction between the *media* and politics in the Western world has always been characterized by a high level of ambivalence, oscillating between complicity and confrontation, since both need each other's resources to achieve their goals.

This mutual dependence has taken on different shapes over time and in different political contexts. The variations oscillate between the partisanship of the *media* (McQUAIL, 1992) and different degrees of control between journalists and politicians, in an ever-changing balance of powers (DAVIS, 2009). The most recent literature, however, has challenged this perspective, arguing that politics is progressively more dependent on the *media* as a result of mediatization.

The term signals the political process centered on media logics (BLUMLER; KAVANAGH, 1999; MAZZOLENI; SCHULZ, 1999; ESSER; STRÖMBÄCK, 2014; MARCINKOWSKI, 2014; FIGUEIRAS, 2017a). However, this process should not be understood as a direct result of the development of the *media*. These are a necessary condition, but not sufficient to explain the mediatization of politics. Thus, the history of the mediatization of politics is not explained by the development of the *media*, but by the historical developments that produced the possibility of mediatization. The mediatization of politics is part of a more general process underway in developed and post-industrial democracies.

In the process of modernizing societies, mediatization is a consequence of social complexity resulting from the growing functional differentiation of specialized and autonomous systems that fight for the defense and expansion of their interests (LUHMANN, 1997). This specialization, however, produced limitations in each system, making them dependent on the action of others to ensure specific structural needs. Within the scope

of the political system, mediatization may then get understood as a reaction to a structural deficiency in this system, due to its inability to guarantee public attention and to ensure, efficiently, its visibility (THOMPSON, 2005).

Public visibility anchored in media logics has given the *media* an increasing power in the (re)presentation of political reality. The *media* build a certain political reality by using determined explanatory frames (frameworks) that are negotiated with political actors (interaction between the *media* and politics) and that impose a specific definition of reality (definition of the public agenda). The *media's* ability to influence public attitudes and opinions is considerable, even though it is always difficult to find clear evidence of a causal relationship between a given stimulus and a certain response.

The rules involved in political coverage include at least three interconnected regularity systems (MARCINKOWSKI, 2014, p. 7): selection regularities – a conscious choice of events, situations, and issues; narrative regularities – the way of telling stories that obey a standardized sequential structure; and regularities of interpretation – a patterned construction of meanings. The *media* use these routines to select and present public affairs to the audience in familiar formats. Under such conditions, the political communication produced by the media often has predictable properties, such as a focus on strong images, a preference for events over structures, as well as for people over institutions or ideas. The *media* also pay special attention to conflicts and deviations from the norm and to interpretations of politics as a competition.

These systems of interconnected regularities allow the perspective of news organizations in the northern hemisphere as an inter-organizational institution (ESSER; STRÖMBÄCK, 2014). This is because their constituent organizations – which we commonly refer to as *media* or news *media* – are structured in identical ways, following well-known patterns of what is considered proper professional behavior, operating in similar economic and political environments, and adopting the same basic rules about what they define as important and interesting to be transformed in news.

Toril Aalberg et al. (2012) consider that interventionism is one of the primary strategies used by journalists to main-

tain control over how they (re)present the political world. The main implication of this conduct is the framing of political reality in specific privileged schemes, such as the “game” and “strategy” approaches.

The framework of the «game» results from the integration of opinion polls in the journalistic narrative. It refers to news that portrays politics as a dispute. It focuses on who is winning and who is losing elections, the battle for public opinion (opinion polls, *vox pops*), and the struggle between personalities in politics in general. In turn, the “strategy” framework is a consequence of the interpretive drift of journalism. This approach produces news focused on interpretations of political actors or motivations for particular actions and positions. It is also interested in the strategies and tactics used to achieve determined goals and the veiled choices about leadership, including personal character traits.

The predominance of the “game” and the “strategy” has also prevented politicians from being subjects with a voice in the news pieces. Another example of journalists’ interventionism is given to us by the length of the politicians’ statements included in the news pieces. The *sound bites* of politicians have shrunk dramatically and in proportion to the voice of journalists. It is the *media* that decide how long politicians are allowed to speak on direct speech in the news pieces.

Another example of the growing *media* interventionism is the degree of journalistic visibility, that is, the visible presence of journalists in television plays (GRABE; BUCY, 2009). This visibility reveals itself in the presence of journalists in front of the camera while opening and/or closing the pieces and interviewing politicians. Interventionism also occurs when journalists, when closing the rights, reorganize the politicians’ discourse with what they consider to be the most relevant of what was said by a determined political protagonist. Another important element is the predominance of the journalist’s voice, in *voice-over*, *over* politicians’ images.

In all these types of media interventionism, journalists are somehow silencing politicians and managing their visibility. This reveals the media’s discretionary power (BLUMLER; KAVANAGH, 1999) of molding politics – political agenda, political rep-

resentation and public perception of politics-, according to their interests. This is a consequence of journalism intending to fulfill professional and economic objectives, but it also corresponds to a desire to demarcate itself from politics, which increases as the communication of institutions and political actors becomes more sophisticated. This means that the more politicians develop strategies to determine media coverage, the more journalists react by increasing interventionism to maintain control over how they (re)present the political world.

Structural aspects that shape the *media* system and the political system must also get considered when analyzing the relationship between both. Media systems are structurally and historically connected to the development of political systems, evolving both indissociably (HALLIN; MANCINI, 2004, p. 5). Dan Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) identified three different models of the relationship between the *media* and politics in Western societies. The pluralist-polarized model describes the countries of southern Europe (Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece) and is defined by political control of the *media* by external actors, like political parties and economic agents, to obtain political influence. This relationship can also be described by its clientele nature (HALLIN; MANCINI, 2004; FIGUEIRAS, 2017b).

These characteristics are in line with what Gianpietro Mazzoleni (2004) defines as a “collateral model” between political elites and the *media*. They share points of view expressed by the elites, which leads them to support positions close to the *status quo*. This compatibility of interests between politics and *mainstream media* happens because traditional politics offers better guarantees for *media* companies to continue to operate in a determined political-economic macro context. According to Mazzoleni, in opposition to the Anglo-Saxon “adversarial model”, the collateral model better reflects the European tradition of cultural ties between the *media* and politics, even though different degrees of intensity exist in different countries. In national contexts where political control of the *media* seems to be stronger, like in southern Europe, the interests of the *media* and political elites tend to be closer.

Although the Portuguese case gets systematically integrated into the pluralist-polarized model (HALLIN; MANCINI,

2004), the relationship between the *media* and politics in Portugal is much more complicated than the one proposed by that theorization (FIGUEIRAS, 2017b).

The instrumentalization of the media by political parties in Portugal was less intense than in other countries in southern Europe, and this differentiating characteristic is explained by the combination of various factors.

To better control the country, the dictatorship of António Salazar (1933-1974) broke the political culture that was under construction in Portugal and based on political parties, creating, instead, a single-party regime that lasted more than 40 years (COSTA PINTO, 2002). On the other hand, after the Carnation Revolution (1974), the newly formed political parties shaped their identity more around the definition of the Portuguese regime – a Western democracy or a Soviet-inspired socialist republic – than around an ideological definition (FREIRE et al., 2004). Besides, the instability that the *media* encountered, due to the intense partisanship of newsrooms, led to a legacy of aversion to the journalists' instrumentalization and the desire to consolidate the journalistic professionalism. It is also important to consider that the competition between political parties to conquer part of the media space, as a manifestation of association (MANCINI, 2009), has developed more in the largest and most competitive markets in southern Europe. The small size of the Portuguese market did not favor a division such as that seen in Spain and Italy, for example.

These factors led to the erosion of the characteristics of the pluralist-polarized model, which characterized the panorama of the post-revolution *media* in Portugal and promoted a different evolutionary path. Currently, the Portuguese media landscape incorporates some of the original characteristics of the pluralist-polarized model and the professionalization of journalism, framed by regulatory practices and bodies, together with a dependence on the market.

It is in this specific political-media configuration that the study uses commentary as an indicator of the relationship between the *media* and politics in Portugal, having in view, also, the debate on the concept of the mediatization of politics. However, before exposing the empirical results, we present the methodological options of the research.

### III - Methodology

As in other Western countries, television remains the most important source of information in Portugal (Reuters Digital News Report, 2017). For this reason, the analysis focuses on commentary on generalist and cable television. The country has a dual system of public and commercial service: two state channels, RTP1 and RTP2, and two private television stations: SIC and TVI. The study has as its contextual unit the analysis of prime-time newscasts on the generalist channels RTP1<sup>2</sup>, SIC and TVI (broadcast at 8 pm) and on cable channels RTP3<sup>3</sup>, SIC Notícias and TVI24 (broadcast at 9 pm).

The analysis covers the period between 2000 and 2015. The choice of this period is because it was in the year 2000 that the fixed comment, and of weekly regularity, was instituted in the prime-time newscasts on Portuguese television. Also, it was in this decade that cable channels began to operate, increasing competitiveness in the *media* market. It was also during this period that the professionalization of political communication in Portugal was witnessed, visible in an active adaptation of political actors and institutions to the media logics, hiring specialists, and accommodating departments with the centralizing task of defining, implementing, and managing a political strategy guided by media logics.

The systematic and longitudinal approach followed by this study aims to investigate how the profile of commentators has evolved over the years and to apprehend the relationship between the *media* and politics. To this end, we use the concept of the mediatization of politics to guide empirical research. Based on what we exposed in the previous section of the text, this concept may be summarized in two main premises: (1) the relationship of forces between the media and politics is structured in the predominance of one field over the other, and (2) the growing interdependence between different areas of life and technological

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2 As RTP2 was designed to meet the expectations of specific niches and does not follow the same type of generalist strategy as other open access channels, RTP2 was excluded from this analysis.

3 RTP bought the news channel in 2004, and since then the channel has changed its name three times: RTP Notícias (2004-2011), RTP Informação (2011-2015) and has been called RTP3 since 2015.

communication infrastructures (DRIESSEN et al., 2017; COULDRY; HEPP, 2017) led to the mastery of media logics, and the re-configuration of politics (MEYER, 2002; STRÖMBÄCK, 2008; COULDRY, 2010; MARCINKOWSKI, 2014; ESSER; STRÖMBÄCK, 2014). These premises are at the base of the operationalization of the concept of the mediatization of politics, and, consequently, of the hypotheses developed to substantiate the study. In this way, the quantitative analysis of the commentators' profile aims to test the subsequent hypotheses.

Taking the comment as a component of the newscast and considering that the comment produced by journalist commentators may be understood as another component of media interventionism, the first hypothesis of this study is the following: the visibility of journalists as commentators will increase with time. That said, taking into account the hybrid nature of the Portuguese media system – namely, the tradition of patronage between politics and the *media* – and considering that the comment space is a strategic place for politicians to comment on political issues on television, the second hypothesis is: the visibility of politicians as commentators will not decrease over time.

Under this tradition of support, established parties in Portugal have a privileged relationship with the *media*, and this complicity leads to the third hypothesis: commentators come principally from traditional political parties. Bearing in mind that in the period of analysis the two power parties in Portugal – the Socialist Party (PS, center-left) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD, center-right) – governed the country for approximately the same number of years, the fourth hypothesis is as follows: the presence of commentators from the two main parties has been balanced over the years.

The longitudinal study, structured in this way, will provide evidence to debate the relationship between the media and politics in Portugal, as well as the construct of the mediatization of politics in the final section of the text.

## IV – Results and discussion

We started by knowing the profile of the commentators who received fixed spaces of opinion on Portuguese television.

Table 1 shows that the comment spaces were opened by politicians and that this profile has stood out over the years. These commentators have in common the fact that they are performing, have performed, or will perform top positions in national politics, as in the cases of the already mentioned Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, but also of António Costa, José Sócrates, and Pedro Santana Lopes. If the second is the current Prime Minister of Portugal, the other two commentators previously held that same role.

Despite a more numerous presence of commentators coming from politics, the space of opinion has been shared with journalists. The aggregate data indicate that, between 2000 and 2015, the presence of politicians and journalists in the commentary spaces in generalist newscasts has combined different modalities: equitable sharing between both (2000-2001), more politicians than journalists (2002-2011; 2013-2014), and more journalists than politicians (2012; 2015). It should be noted that, in all channels, we have not found in any year only journalists or politicians commenting on the news.

However, if we look at each of the broadcasters, in particular, we find nuances that suggest different strategies for managing the comment space. RTP1 had commentators exclusively from politics for 15 years to, in 2015, radically change course: in that year, we found only journalists as fixed commentators, with their presence in the news not defined by any periodicity but by the topics on the agenda.

At TVI, the distribution of the comment by the two profiles mentioned has also combined different modalities over time: equitable sharing between journalists and politicians (2000-2004; 2012-2014), only journalists (2005-2009), more politicians than journalists (2010-2011), and only politicians (since 2015). SIC started by having commentators exclusively from politics (2003-2004), only to, then, have commentators from journalism (2010-2012), and, finally, to share the space of opinion between them (from 2013).



Table 1: Profile of commentators by television station

Emiss./ Perfil		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
G E N E R A L I S T S	<b>RTP1</b>	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	3
	J.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	P.	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	0
	<b>SIC</b>	0	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2
	J.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
	P.	0	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
	<b>TVI</b>	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	2	2	2
	J.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
	P.	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1	1	1	2
	A.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	2	2	4	7	6	3	3	3	3	4	7	5	3	6	6	7
	J.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	4
P.	1	1	3	6	5	2	2	2	2	2	5	3	1	4	4	3	
A.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
C A B L E	<b>RTPINF</b>	-	-	-	-	-	9	10	13	12	4	4	5	5	5	5	8
	J.	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	0	4	4	4	5	5	5	0
	P.	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	A.	-	-	-	-	-	7	8	8	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Outros	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>SICN</b>	-	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	7	7	7	9	15	15	14
	J.	-	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
	P.	-	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	5	5	5
	A.	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	3	3	2
	Outros	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	2
	<b>TVI24</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	10	10	17	10	11	18
	J.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	2	0	0	1	5
	P.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	5	5	16	10	10	13
	A.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	3	0	0	0	0
	Outros	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	-	6	6	6	5	14	16	19	18	32	21	22	31	30	31	28
	J.	-	6	6	6	5	7	7	7	5	11	10	9	8	8	9	16
	P.	-	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	7	16	5	6	18	15	15	18
A.	-	0	0	0	0	7	8	8	5	5	5	5	2	3	3	2	
Outros	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	4	4	2	

Caption: Emiss. = Issuer; J = Journalists; P = Politicians; A = Academics.

Regarding commentators from politics, we found that, in the prime-time newscasts of RTP1, there was always the same number of commentators from the two power parties in Portugal, that is, from the PS and the PSD. The pluralism principle is expressed in the Television Law as one of the general obligations of generalist operators and, in particular, as one of the duties of

the public service. The 6th Paragraph of Article 38 of the Portuguese Constitution requires that the “possibility of expression and confrontation of different currents of opinion” be ensured in the media public sector. This legal context helps to explain the balance of presence of commentators from the PS and PSD areas in the main news of RTP1 in the analyzed years.

In turn, the private channels have commentators from the PS and PSD areas, with the latter standing out in number and the longevity of the collaborations. In several years, we found, even, only politicians of this party in the comment of TVI (2000-2004; 2010; 2012-2014) and SIC (2013-2015). In general, commentators align with their political area, and politicians not aligned with their parties are an exception in the commentary in Portugal. This tends to be a space engaged with the perspectives of the political commentator’s party.

In the cable channels, the comment has been an important element in the broadcasters’ strategy since the start of SIC Notícias, in 2001, RTP Notícias, in 2004, and TVI24, in 2009. This investment has been continuous over the years; and, in prime-time newscasts, alongside individual commentary spaces, we find others that include two commentators on a fixed day of the week.

Contrary to what was verified in the generalist channels, it is the journalists who inaugurated the comment spaces in the prime-time newscasts on cable TV, namely SIC Notícias, in 2001. Politicians arrived in this space in 2007, the year in which academics are the dominant profile, but whose presence starts to decline in 2008, when that of politicians and journalists increases. This trend contributed to the fact that the diversity of profiles identified in cable TV, in the first years, decreased and converged into the image of generalists, into a space dominated by commentators with links to the political and journalistic spheres.

Because of this general characterization, we highlight specificities of each of the prime-time newscasts. The politicians came to the comment of RTP Notícias in 2007, but, since 2009, the newscast has only journalists. At TVI24, politicians were always in a clear majority while, at SIC Notícias, the comment was the exclusive prerogative of journalists until 2005. The decrease

in their presence coincided with a diversification of the commentators' profile, starting in 2009, and, even more significantly, starting in 2011. Since then, we have met journalists, politicians, academics, and lawyers, even though politicians have been the dominant profile since 2013.

Overall, we found that the change in the profile of commentators in prime-time newscasts on public television, from politicians to journalists (2015), had already started on RTP's cable news channel, a few years earlier (2009). In the commercial channels, the data indicate a distribution of commentary spaces between journalists and politicians, sometimes in a balanced way, sometimes with a distinct prevalence of one profile over the other, with the politicians still standing out.

The data, therefore, confirm hypotheses one and two in this study: the visibility of journalists has not decreased over the years, while the visibility of politicians has increased during the period of analysis. The dominance of politicians in commenting on private stations may be interpreted as a dimension of the ongoing reaffirmation of the coalition between the *media* and politics in Portugal.

It is also relevant to have in mind that the comment helps to build the career of the politicians who play the role of commentator. Let us recall the case of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, presented at the beginning of the text, and see some more examples. António Costa, current Prime Minister of Portugal, was Minister of Justice in a PS government (1999-2002) before commenting on the SIC news (2003-2004). During this period, he campaigned for the European elections and became a MEP. In 2007, he was elected Mayor of Lisbon, and, the following year, he has joined the panel of commentators of one of the most important comment programs in the country at SIC Notícias, *A Quadratura do Círculo*. In 2014, he was elected leader of the PS, and, in 2015, he left the comment and the Lisbon Chamber to run for the legislative elections that year.

Pedro Santana Lopes was affiliated with PSD. He began his comments at the Portuguese public station in 2002, when he was Mayor of Lisbon, and commented on RTP1 until 2004, a few months before becoming Prime Minister. In 2010, he returned to being a commentator on TVI24, and, in 2012, he was hired by

SIC Notícias. On RTP1, he shared the comment space with José Sócrates, minister of the PS government (1999-2002). In 2004, Sócrates became the leader of the PS and Prime Minister the following year, succeeding Pedro Santana Lopes in office. Sócrates was Prime Minister until 2011, and, in early 2013, has returned to RTP1 as a commentator, but this collaboration ended with his arrest in late 2014.

Table 2 tells us that politicians comment on generalist and cable channels and that they have connections to the parties represented in Parliament. However, the data show that there are differences in the parties present in the *prime-time* comment when comparing open signal channels with subscription channels.

The politicians who comment on generalist broadcasters are members of the PSD and the PS, which means that the space of opinion in the prime-time newscasts of open television channels comes only from these two parties of power. When we consider the data by year, we realize that the center-right has had a more substantial presence in the comment spaces than the center-left. However, there are differences when considering public service versus commercial channels.





It is from 2007 that we started to find politicians in the commentary of the newscasts of RTP and SIC Notícias. In the public channel, politicians comment until 2008, and, despite the extension of public service in the fulfillment of political pluralism, in none of these years, we have found commentators of the Communist Party (CDU) in the prime-time newscasts of the public channel.

If in 2007 we found only commentators from the PSD and the right-wing party (CDS) on SIC Notícias, when politicians return to the channel's news, in 2011, we found, in that year and the following, only one commentator from the PS. In 2013, the comment space was composed of members of the government arc parties, that is, PS, CDS, and PSD, with the latter party standing out. From the following year, Francisco Louçã, former leader of the Left Bloc Party, integrates this area of the ideological spectrum in the commentary of the main channel news.

TVI24 has had the collaboration of politicians in its prime-time newscast since the start of its broadcasts in 2009. This is the channel with the most commentators coming from politics, and it is the channel with a portfolio of commentators with a greater party diversity. Only in 2010 and 2011, since these were years in which we found commentators exclusively from the PS and PSD, the remaining parties with parliamentary seats did not comment on this channel's news.

If we subdivide the results according to the time frame of each legislature, during the period of the PS government, led by José Sócrates, there is a configuration of the comment that may resemble a counterpower, manifested in a higher presence of elements of the PSD and the CDS on all cable channels. The prevalence of members of these parties continued to be seen when both of them were in coalition in the government, but the data indicated a new distribution of forces on the left, as the 2015 elections approached.

In general terms, we highlight a composition that denotes a relationship between parliamentary representation and political party distribution in the commentary. The presence of commentators with party connections gets made along the lines of what we may call a representation of a conventional nature, that is, of party origin (FREIRE et al., 2004). None of the

commentators come from a party without parliamentary representation, power parties dominate (PS and PSD), and there is a higher presence of commentators from the right-wing parties (PSD and CDS) than from the left-wing parties (PS, CDU, BE).

In summary, while in the generalist channels the comment space is configured around the parties of power, on the cable TV, we find something close to *party democracy*, even if, again, in favor of the PS and PSD. On cable television channels, audiences are reduced and fragmented between the various channels, and the diversity of opinions is greater. In turn, the comments made on generalist channels reach a much wider number of viewers but have a smaller range of opinions. This alliance between the parties of power and the dominant *media* has benefits for both parties, because both address or intend to address, the same groups of individuals, and are interested in obtaining high audiences for their messages. Thus, the comment in prime time presents itself as an extension of the politics in dominance, and this conformity of the *media* to the party needs may explain why the political commentators are mostly coming from the power parties on the generalist and cable channels, confirming, thus, the third hypothesis of this research.

Previous studies on commentary on television have noted the over-representation of right-wing political commentators in the news in Germany and Denmark (HOPMANN; STRÖMBÄCK, 2010). During the 16 years analyzed, the PS and PSD governed approximately the same number of years in Portugal, and this study expected to find a relatively balanced presence of political commentators from the center-left and center-right. However, the results did not confirm the fourth hypothesis in full. When politicians dominated the opinion space on RTP1, there was always a balanced presence of commentators from the center-right and center-left, due to the guidelines of the state regulatory organization which links the public *media* to the political balance between the left and the right in all informational content, including opinion. However, on commercial television, the data showed a stronger representation of right-wing political commentators, which is even more evident on generalist television channels, where it reaches a much wider audience.



While the model of minimal State intervention in the *media* sector, defending the privatization of Portuguese public media, has been the dominant perspective of the right-wing parties (PSD and CDS), the expansionist model, which defends an intervention and regulation of the sector by the State, has been a component of the discourse of the left parties (PS, CDU, BE) (CONDE, 2019). Therefore, in addition to the traditional historical relationship between the media and political parties based on a coalition around the parties of power, political alliances are an important factor in the *media* business – especially in a market whose *media* business is weak and as volatile as the Portuguese, and this need may also offer clues to explain the prevalence of the right in commentary in Portugal.

## V – Conclusion

The internet and television channels that operate 24 hours a day have changed the character and the content of information programs and made commentary a structuring component of information nights. The emphasis given to the comment can be explained, at least, by three intersecting orders of reason. The emphasis given to the comment can be explained, at least, by three intersecting orders of reason. The commentary is a content that helps to fill the information spaces, it is a competitive element in the dispute for audiences, and it is an instance that helps to think the world, constituting itself as a component in the democratic communicative process.

This context helps to explain why the comment has become a space of power in Portugal and a privileged place to analyze the relationship between the *media* and politics. The study carried out, then, allows us to conclude that the complexity of the Portuguese media landscape – which is based on a clientele tradition between politics and the *media*, and, simultaneously, an affirmation of the editorial autonomy of journalism – can explain the composition of the comment in the newscasts of *prime time*. In this way, *media* independence and political sponsorship are both factors that explain how prime-time commentary has evolved in Portugal.

The growing presence of journalists in the commentary on the news indicates that this space may be seen as one more element of journalistic interventionism, that is, as another media instance where journalists have the power to construct interpretive schemes about political activity. On the other hand, the results also indicate that politicians and parties take advantage of the mediatization for their purposes.

At a micro level of analysis, determined politicians use the comment as a strategic tool to build their political path and to stand out in the political-media landscape. At a meso level, commentary benefits commentators' political parties, contributing to legitimize their discourse in the public sphere, defining themes in the *media* and shaping public perception of political issues. From a macro perspective, it appears that the comment may be seen as a strategy of politicization of the media that has always characterized the way politics views the *media*. Thus, the division of the comment space between politicians and journalists, translating a model of association, demonstrates that the increasing mediatization of politics in western societies, and in Portugal, in particular, has not weakened the politicization of the *media*.

Thus, the research results allow us to support the theoretical debate around the concept of the mediatization of politics. Critics highlight the "mediacentric" nature of the construct, by placing the *media* at the center of social processes, and the conceptualization of the *media* as autonomous institutions and governed exclusively by their internal rules (DEACON; STANYER, 2014; 2015; HEPP et al., 2015; LUNT; LIVINGSTONE, 2016).

In line with these criticisms, the results of the empirical study suggest that the incorporation of media logics in political activity did not replace its original logic but has been integrated into it. We believe that the interest of politicians in commentary spaces is explained by what James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (2010) call *institutional layering*. The political mediatization may be described as the introduction of new (media) rules over or in addition to existing (political) precepts.

In turn, just as the unconditional surrender of politics to the media logics translates a reducing approach to the relationship between politics and the *media*, the discourse of full

*media* autonomy is also reducing, even in socio-political contexts where they operate within a democratic legal framework.

As the results of the study indicate, in the Portuguese political-economic macro context, the communication business is also built through a close relationship with the political field, the legislator and regulator of the *media* market. In this context, the comment space may also be seen as an instance of political and economic diplomacy.

This suggests that, like any other social field of power (BOURDIEU, 1989), the *media* are institutions whose power stems from their affirmation in face of other powers but also from the alliances they establish with those same powers. The power of the *media* builds through struggles and partnerships, based on the tension between professional, economic, technological, and political forces. Thus, the autonomy of the *media*, as a social field of power, is always relative. This conditional autonomy is also manifested in the media logics that are constituted by several others that include, in particular, rules and values in the political field.

To conclude, I would like to highlight that the research discussed here reveals that the commentary is a privileged space for analyzing the dynamics – between autonomy and dependence – that, in Portugal, structure the relationship between the *media* and politics. In other geographies, the tension relationship may manifest itself, preferentially, in other objects of analysis. Then, this is the time to continue to develop research that operationalizes the mediatization of politics and allows us to contribute to the development of these theories that are a relevant frame of work for the studies in mediatization.

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# Religions in the media polis: mediatization, Protestants and politics in Brazil

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**Abstract:** This study is dedicated to the phenomenon of the expansion of the occupation of space in national politics by Protestants, with emphasis on the place of the media in this process. Attention is focused on a particular phenomenon: the emergence of Protestant political activism. The goal is to demonstrate how the mediatization of religions, specifically the process involving the Protestant faith in Brazil, potentiates this phenomenon, provoking the emergence of a Protestant digital political activism. The study is developed in an interdisciplinary perspective based on theoretical approaches of communication (studies on social mediatization), of religious studies (Protestants in politics in Brazil) and on previous works by the author that relate media, religion, and politics. The results of this study show that digital Protestant political activism emerges from the processes of mediatization experienced by this religious segment in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Mediatization. Religion. Protestants. Politics.

## I – Introduction

It is no longer possible to ignore or deny the visibility that religions have achieved in public space at present. They are in evidence, whether in everyday life (cultivation of religiosity

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and its plurality of practices), in terms of access to media and media interaction (acquisition of spaces in traditional and digital media, production and consumption of content, the constitution of their celebrities, mediatization of language and religious practices), as an object of the cultural industry (themes of publications, movies, soap operas), as a segment of the market (consumption of goods, services, and entertainment), in the sphere of representation and institutionalized political participation or not (search for religious people and religious institutions by holding public office, political activism, and actions of extremist groups, with emphasis on Islam), or in debates related to civil rights (body, gender, sexuality, reproduction, biopolitics, freedom of belief).

The approaches of human and social sciences on the decline of religions due to the processes of secularization and modernization, introduced from the 18th century on, started to demand revisions (BERGER, 2001). Religions, which in the Enlightenment and humanist modernity ceased to be regulators of collective life and were relegated to the domain of the private, the individual, subjective, are now de-privatized.

For João Batista Libânio (2002), this does not mean a return to the time when religions were a fundamental reference of societies; on the contrary, the notion of socio-cultural emancipation of modernity remains. However, the subjectivization and individualization of religions came to be questioned by different religious groups, in the name of overcoming the “imprisonment” of religions “to the universe of the individual.” These different religious segments claim the critical social freedom of the faith, giving rise to political theologies (of liberation and prosperity, for example), which results in the occupation of public space in its different dimensions (SANTOS, 2013).

This de-privatizing context, of publicizing religions, gives more visibility to religious plurality and religions as components that constitute multiple and plural identities that mark contemporary societies. For this reason, it makes possible both the emergence of new forms of communication and dialogue and the reactions to manifestations of violence and intolerance.

Regarding Brazil, changes in the socio-cultural and political frameworks, especially in the transition from the 1990s to



the early 2000s, have intensified the attention of scholars and people interested in issues involving “religion” in Brazil.

We can identify in this transformation the articulation of six interconnected phenomena (CUNHA, 2017a):

1. the strengthening of the Pentecostal segment, with its extensive number of autonomous, autochthonous churches, which gave new contours to the Christianity scene and caused a significant growth of the evangelical population in the country, in numerical and geographic terms, highlighting the sharp drop in the number of Catholics<sup>2</sup>;
2. the intense occupation of spaces in the traditional media (radio and TV) by evangelical groups, mainly Pentecostals, on their programming and not, expanded by the extensive participation of the varied segments of this Christian group in digital media;
3. the growth of the religion market and the advancement of religious marketing, which consolidates Christians as a market segment, through the offer of products and services specially designed to meet their religious needs, whether they are consuming goods or leisure and entertainment;
4. greater use of space by evangelicals in institutional politics, with the consequent consolidation of the evangelical bench in the National Congress, articulated as the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE), and the expansion of efforts, on the part of some

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2 This work refers to evangelicals like all non-Catholic and unorthodox Christians in Brazil. There are a wide variety of typologies designed by scholars of religion. Here we opted for a synthesis based on studies in media and religion developed by Cunha, 2007: historical evangelicals, who arrived in the country through the performance of missionaries from the United States, in the 19th century (congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutherans), and through migratory processes (Anglicans and Lutherans); Pentecostals who arrived in Brazil through missionary work in the United States in the early 20th century (Assembly of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, Quadrangular Gospel) or who organized around divisions of missionary groups (Deus é Amor, Brasil para Cristo, Cristo Vive, Church of God) or that started churches based on the action of a charismatic leader and privilege more massive proposals and centered on media presence (Universal of the Kingdom of God, International of the Grace of God, Reborn in Christ, among many others).

churches and their leaders, for more presence and participation in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches;

5. the emergence of political activism among evangelicals, in addition to institutional politics, with the discussion and realization of campaigns related to political issues, calls for public actions, and intense activity in digital media;
6. the expansion of cases of religious intolerance, with a greater incidence against people and groups of religions of African-Brazilian origin, which causes a more intense presence of these groups in the public space with demands for the right to religious freedom.

This study dedicates to the phenomenon of the expansion of space occupation by evangelicals in national politics, with an emphasis on the place of the media in this process. Attention is directed to a phenomenon: the emergence of evangelical political activism. The aim is to demonstrate how the mediatization of religions, specifically the process that involves the evangelical faith in Brazil, is an enhancer of this phenomenon, causing the emergence of evangelical digital political activism.

The study is developed in an interdisciplinary perspective based on a bibliographic review of theoretical approaches to communication (studies on social mediatization and religions) and studies of religion (evangelicals in politics in Brazil), combined with the mapping and classification of the performance of individuals and evangelical groups that practice political activism on social media in Brazil at present, carried out by the author in post-doctoral research (CUNHA, 2017a).

It is important to note that this work is focused on the relationship between evangelicals, politics, and the media, interpreting it as a cultural phenomenon. Joanildo Burity (2016) draws attention to this when he recognizes that as culture is more than the way of life of a group, being a field of disputes over the horizon of an alternative order, religion has not only come to occupy a spot in public space but has built what we designate public religion. In this understanding, not only does re-

ligion project itself beyond the private limit, through personal and collective experience, informal and institutionalized religious practices, but it becomes a collective action, in the public space, as culture and as a discourse on values. Hence, it became a public religion.

In Brazil, in the second decade of the 2000s, evangelicals are de-privatized, having left the condition of an invisible minority to a publicized visibility through a close relationship with the media, and political participation with the execution of social projects in partnership with public authorities, with a voice in the debate of broad themes, and the mediation of social conflicts, with the professionalization of political action and the establishment of strategies. This new posture and image are located in the context of gospel culture (CUNHA, 2007), with the recreation of the evangelical religious identity, and the widening of the boundaries outlined in the past between sacred and profane based on a relationship around the music-consumption-entertainment triad, and political participation in interaction in the public space is a fundamental element in this process.

The concept of public space in this study relates to that of the *polis*, as recovered from Greek philosophy and reframed by Hanna Arendt. It is an understanding that transcends the geographical and territorial notion related to the public space of the city, the State and the Nation, and also to the vision that links it to the modern State, citizenship, democracy, mobilization, engagement, and participation in politics, discourse, and public opinion (HABERMAS, 1984). Arendt refers to the *polis* as a place of apparition and interaction, “no matter where [people] are”:

strictly speaking, the polis is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the community that results from acting and speaking together; and its true space is located among people who live together with such purpose, no matter where they are. ‘Wherever you go, you will be a polis’: these famous words not only became the password of Greek colonization but expressed the conviction that action and discourse create a space between the parties capable of adequately situate in any time and place. It is the space of ap-

pearance, in the broadest sense of the word, that is, the space in which I appear to others and others to me; where men assume an explicit appearance, instead of being content to exist merely as living or inanimate things (ARENDT, 2009, p. 211).

It is here that the place of media and society's process in mediatization stands out. We recognize that it is not possible to understand the de-privatization of Brazilian evangelicals and the construction of public religion by this Christian segment without considering the accelerated and diverse dynamics of interaction between different evangelical groups with each other and with others (religious and non-religious) through different media. To paraphrase José Luiz Braga (2012, p. 37), we see the mediatized interactional processes stimulating how evangelicals communicate, and, consequently, tentatively organize themselves in the public space, in a movement that takes them out of the seclusion of the temples dedicated to the visibility of the mediatized *polis*.

## II – Evangelicals in politics: from temples to polis

The close relationship between religions and politics is nothing new. It is enough to resume in history the Romanization of Catholicism and its constitution as a cultural and political power; or the cultural and political disputes involving Islam and Asian religions; and the emergence of contextual theologies that seek to respond to the demands of social identity movements (black theologies, feminist theologies, liberation theologies – Latin American, Dalit, Minjung, African, for example).

In the Brazilian case, besides being important to consider the power of Catholicism and the place of contextual theologies, it is necessary to recognize that there is a consolidated place of religions in the public space, which delineates forms of relationship between religion and politics in the country, and includes political party participation but goes far beyond it. We could list several elements that demonstrate this:

1. numerous social programs in partnership with public authorities, with NGOs and social movements and the presence of religious people on councils of rights, politics, and management of particular social policies;
2. actions by religious groups in networks and articulations of civil society; participation of religions in the economy not only with the internal trade of religious products but with the growth of offers of religious entertainment (tourism and leisure around religion);
3. intense presence in the media.

Joanildo Burity views this moment of the religion-political relationship as a redefinition of the concept and scope of democracy:

The discomfort and uncertainty caused by this “re-appearance” of religion were gradually being articulated with the redefinition of the concept and scope of democracy, as a political form of social inclusion and justice, through citizenship and recognition. On the one hand, part of multicultural policies aimed at incorporating religious identity into the list of legitimate ways of affirming cultural differences. On the other hand, an increasing number of religious activists have been settling accounts with democratic discourse and building their visibility spaces within democratizing struggles (BURITY, 2016, p. 27-28).

Therefore, in the contemporary demands around cultural policies, collective identities, affirmative actions, pluralism, consumption, social movements, networks of social articulation, party politics, there is an intense presence of religions that must be recognized, whether evaluated in a positive, critical or relativized way.

In addition to this “return” of religions to the public space, they are also spots for affirming identities and everyday practices that structure life, producing community, socially integrating, inculcating values. It is in this sense that religions are

culturally inscribed in the public space and (re)-legitimize their public function (BURITY, 2016). With this, the personal and collective, informal, and institutionalized experience of religious practices is no longer kept at the private edges but also projected through the public space as a collective action, as culture, and as a discourse about values, configuring itself as a public religion.

Public religion means taking religion beyond its institutional and symbolic borders, allowing the *other-religious* and the non-religious to interact in the religious experience. The religious go to the secular and the secular to the religious, in an exchange that sometimes leads to confrontations, sometimes to the formation of alliances previously unthinkable. This is an important characteristic of public religion – having pervious, traversable, fluid borders.

It is in this sense that we can affirm that the configuration of public religion among Brazilian evangelicals occurs in the context of the dynamics of the society in mediatization. Based on José Luiz Braga's studies (2006), by mediatization, we refer to the interactional (sociability) processes that "take place in quite different ways, in specific societies," and develop according to the logics of the media (BRAGA, 2006). The expression "in mediatization" refers to the phenomenon as an ongoing process, a dynamic, not an element consolidated or determined by a single form of structuring.

We also resort to Roger Silverstone in the understanding that mediatization is the fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalized media of communication are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life" (1999, apud SILVERSTONE, 2006, p. 168-169).

This notion is related to what Jesús Martín-Barbero explains when he refers to "communicational mediations in culture":

I invert my first map [the cultural mediations of communication] and propose the communicative mediations of culture, which are: 'technicality'; the growing 'institutionality' in the media as social institutions and not just apparatuses, institutions of economic, political, and cultural importance; 'soci-

ality' – how the social bond is changing for young people, how relationships between parents and children, and between couples are changing. [...] And, finally, the new 'rituals' that happen in connection to the new industrial formats made possible by 'technicality'. Somehow, at that moment I accept that the place from which I was looking changes. [...] It was necessary to assume not the priority of the media, but that 'the communicative is becoming a protagonist in a much stronger way' (2009, p. 151-152).

Concerning the mediatization of religions, Fausto Neto asserts these “new rituals” while recognizing that, in the context to which Martín-Barbero refers as new interactions via “technicality,” there is a “construction and publicization of new forms of religiosities” (2002, p. 152). For the researcher, these new forms constitute the dynamic in which religious groups “subordinate” their practices and actions to the production processes “that are taken as loans to the sphere of the media field.”

We identified, therefore, that new communicational flows – the circulation of meanings and values across porous religious boundaries – start to give new meaning to the experiences, practices, and the doctrines rooted in Brazilian evangelical religious traditions, as we will discuss next.

### **III – New meanings**

Regardless of the peculiarities of the distinct groups that form the evangelical segment, Brazilian evangelicals were classically identified, in studies of religion, according to Magali Cunha (2007):

1. for a predominant fundamentalist (literalist) reading of the Christian sacred text, the Bible;
2. the emphasis on personal piety in the pursuit of soul salvation (influence of Puritanism and the pietism of the missionary pioneers who came from the southern United States in the 19th century to Brazil);

3. because of the frequent rejection of the country's non-Christian cultural manifestations (the result of the same action by missionaries);
4. for isolation of social demands (resulting from the spiritualization of issues of individual and social existence), including political participation.

As previously described in this work, changes in the evangelical culture, in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, caused changes in this situation.

One of them is identified in the erasure of the maxim: "the believer is not from this world, so one does not engage in politics." This change occurred especially after the 1986 Constituent Congress when the first evangelical group was formed. From there, one can say that the isolation posture of this segment concerning political participation – until then interpreted as something "from the world," identified with earthly passions – started to live with other ideals, regarding participation and visibility in public life, which can be summarized in the formulation "brother votes in brother." After many ups and downs, resulting from cases of corruption and cronyism, the evangelical bench consolidated itself as a force, which resulted in the creation of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE) in 2003. Until 2010 these parliamentarians were not identified as conservatives from a socio-political and economic point of view. Their victories consisted of barring the advance of projects considered offensive to religious, sexual morality – decriminalization of abortion, and gay marriage especially. Their projects rarely interfered with the social order; they were converted into "squares of the Bible," with the creation of holidays to compete with Catholics', and benefits for temples. The parties profile to which most of these politicians affiliated reflected this, as well as recurrent cases of cronyism.

In research<sup>3</sup> on socio-political and cultural dynamics emphasized in the narratives of the main news and religious media about the participation of evangelicals in the electoral process, we can identify an increase in the power of the segment

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3 According to research developed for post-doctoral internship that resulted in the work CUNHA, 2017a.



in the public space. We identified the following elements that contributed to this:

1. A new approach between evangelical politicians and the federal government. It had already been strong during the Constituent Congress, it was weakened in the 1990s, despite all the electoral support given by leaders of the different churches to Fernando Collor and Fernando Henrique Cardoso in their candidacies, but it was renewed with the election of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency, in 2002. This situation was facilitated by the alliances made by PT with several parties, in which evangelical deputies were allocated, and the strategy of a campaign of approximation to evangelical leaders of the churches and political parties to overcome the demonization of Lula's figure as a communist, an opponent of the churches, with the government opening up to various initiatives and different evangelical leaders;
2. Two evangelical churches turn visible their plans for occupying the country's institutional politics: Assembleia de Deus (AD) and Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD). Both started to occupy, after 2003, spaces full of power in parties (respectively the Christian Social Party/PSC and the Brazilian Republican Party/PRB) and public positions, such as the appointments of the ministers of State of Dilma Rousseff's government – Marcelo Crivella (PRB, Fishing, IURD) and George Hilton (PRB, Sports, IURD), and in Michel Temer's government, Marcos Pereira (PRB, Industry, Foreign Trade, and Services, IURD) and Ronaldo Nogueira (PTB, Labor, AD). The General Convention of Assembleia de Deus in Brazil has been working to register its party, the Christian Republican Party (PRC). In the last two elections, the ADs were able to launch two candidates for the Presidency of the Republic, Marina Silva (2010 and 2014) and Minister Everaldo

(2014), and the IURD managed to elect the bishop and senator Marcelo Crivella as mayor of Rio de Janeiro, which sets the tone for the political strength achieved by these two evangelical denominations.

3. From 2010, the mainstream media started to emphasize the theme of LGBTI rights in the electoral campaign and the projects debated in the National Congress (National Plan for Human Rights-3). Along with this theme, the agenda for the legalization of abortion also came, with pressure on the then-candidate for the Presidency of the Republic by PT, Dilma Rousseff. There was a lot of mobilization of evangelical groups against Dilma Rousseff, whose campaign was an advocate of these themes. In 2013, the case of deputy Marco Feliciano (formerly PSC/SP, then PODE/SP) resumed these themes with force, with broad space in the media. It was the unusual appointment of the deputy as chairman of the Human Rights and Minorities Commission of the Chamber and scandals that were related to it. This process culminated in the reinvigoration of the political banners of the evangelical bench and leaders, with public visibility projects around the guarantee of sexual morality in terms of legislation, under the label “Defense of the Traditional Family” against feminist and LGBTI movements. In the wake of this trend, Partido Social Cristão (PSC) was strengthened in the 2014 elections, favoring the launch of its candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, Minister Everaldo, and projecting the candidacy of federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro (ex-PSC, now PSL) to the Presidency of the Republic in 2018.
4. The election of evangelical federal deputy Eduardo Cunha (MDB/RJ) as president of the Chamber of Deputies, in 2015, the year of his transfer from “Igreja Sara Nossa Terra” to Assembleia de Deus, contributed to a reconfiguration of the pres-

ence of evangelicals in national politics and for the strengthening of conservative agendas in the Congress. Eduardo Cunha acted intensely in articulating the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2015 and 2016. His fall was postponed but not avoided, with him being arrested in 2016, on corruption charges, by Lava-Jato Operation conducted by the Federal Police (PF). However, he continued to exercise his influence.

5. A series of guidelines guaranteeing Puritan religious morality, under the label “defense of the family,” gained space in the Chamber of Deputies as of 2015, especially under the leadership of Eduardo Cunha, in the form of bills and constitutional amendments projects, and more space was given to guidelines regarding privileges to the public performance of the churches.
6. Positions of evangelical parliamentarians gained space beyond religious agendas, through alliances with parliamentarians and conservative fronts, for the review of social issues such as the reduction of the legal age and the end of the Disarmament Statute. The articulation of the bench called BBB (Bullet/Security, Ox/Ruralist, and Bible/Evangelical) makes this process visible, as well as the support of evangelicals for the candidacy of deputy Jair Bolsonaro to the Presidency of the Republic in 2018.
7. The Federal Police “Lava-Jato Operation” with the task force from the Federal Public Ministry (MPF), which investigated crimes of corruption at PETROBRÁS, gained a messianic character with the leadership of the evangelical attorney Deltan Dallagnol.
8. The news media consolidated the figure of the minister Silas Malafaia, of Assembleia de Deus Vitória em Cristo, as a spokesman for evangelicals. He was accredited in the media as “the” voice capable of expressing opinions and evaluations about the evangelical-political relationship. He was accredi-

ed in the media as “the” voice capable of expressing opinions and evaluations about the evangelical-political relationship. He became a spokesperson for the conservative discourse of defense of the “traditional family,” of reaction against social advances, especially regarding women’s and sexual rights. It is possible to affirm that Malafaia’s conservative discourse reaches wide space in the mainstream media, as it responds to expectations with religion (imaginary and ideology) on the part of the news producers. The accreditation of Silas Malafaia as a great evangelical leader, acting as a spokesperson for the group, was also consolidated in far-reaching religious media.

9. The religious media started to give visibility, feed the thematic emphases and dynamics around agendas of sexual morality, conveyed in the mainstream media, especially around the “war” between evangelical politicians and activists of feminist and LGBTI movements. With this, these media provided the recreation of the “imaginary of the enemy” among evangelicals with approaches such as “saving the family” of LGBTI activists, feminists, and of the left-wing, whose major project was to implant communism in the country. These themes started to appear in campaign content for candidates for public office and are present in church leaders’ discourses. In this context, the religious media contributed to the recreation of the imaginary of the persecution of evangelicals in Brazil, present since the implantation of Protestantism in the 19th century, and the encouragement of a “spiritual war” as an answer.

These elements compose the framework that today puts evangelicals as the leading religious group in the political process underway in Brazil, which results in the intense visibility of the evangelical group in the National Congress, and also in the emergence of non-institutional political activist religious leaders, with a strong presence on digital social networks.

## IV – Evangelical-political relationship and the media

This agenda described above involves understanding the communicational processes that affect the wide occupation of traditional media spaces by evangelicals, in the last 30 years, through public concessions, a phenomenon called “evangelical electronic *coronelismo*”<sup>4</sup> (FIGUEIREDO FILHO, 2010). It also involves understanding the meanings surrounding the popularization of the presence of evangelicals in the mainstream media in news and entertainment spaces, as part of the “gospel culture” phenomenon (CUNHA, 2007). Likewise, it includes an assessment of the relationship between (new) evangelical political activism and the strong presence of individuals and institutions linked to this religious segment in digital media with numerous websites, blogs, and profiles in social media (CUNHA, 2017a).

It is a fact that the dimension of participation, and the transformation of receivers into emitters, through interaction processes made possible by digital media has significantly changed the picture of the church-media relationship, especially with the Internet. When reflecting on social media, a multitude of articulations and spaces is manifest. Churches and Christian groups move from media users – intending to present the Gospel and give visibility to it – to participants in a space beyond the boundaries of the sacred and the profane – the media polis, a space of media appearance (Silverstone, 2010), a reality that does not replace the lived experiences but intersects and represents them, a space in which individuals and groups appear to others and vice-versa. In this sense, churches and Christian groups can establish a community, articulate, promote sociality, expose positions in the face of social demands, and discuss them.

On the other hand, churches are no longer in control of the sacred and doctrine as they were before (HOOVER, 2014).

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4      Coronelismo was the system of machine politics in Brazil under the Old Republic (1889-1930). Known also as the “rule of the coronels”, the term referred to the classic boss system under which the control of patronage was centralized in the hands of a locally dominant oligarch known as a “coronel”, particularly under Brazil’s Old Republic, who would dispense favors in return for loyalty (retrieved from Wikipedia).

Digital media make it possible for anyone who expresses a faith, whether formally linked to a Christian institution or not, to express their ideas, reflections, and opinions freely. In this sense, it took control of the contents of the faith (doctrines, symbols, rituals, dogmas) from the hands of the leaders. A person who has a simple digital space, be it a blog or a social media account, which involves a very low cost of access and production, has a broad openness for free expression, which was not always possible face-to-face in the religious spaces. This process of the presence of religion in the digital universe gives rise to new religious authorities: the evangelical celebrities (media ministers and gospel singers) and the bloggers and gospel YouTubers. These new authorities become a reference for many evangelicals as to what to think and how to act (KARHAWI, 2017).

Venício Lima instigates an understanding of this phenomenon when he draws attention to the important role that the media play in socio-political dynamics: the long-term power they have in the construction of reality through the representation they do of the different aspects of human life and, particularly politicians and politics. “It is through the media – in its centrality – that politics is constructed symbolically, acquires meaning” (LIMA, 2009, p. 21). Thus, it can be said that the relationship between evangelicals and politics at present in Brazil is marked by the process of social mediatization.

Not failing in taking into account the positive and negative arguments regarding the place of the internet in promoting political participation in democratic societies (GOMES, 2005), it is necessary to recognize that the occupation of this space enabled some progress in the limited political visibility of these minority evangelical groups, with effects on traditional media, which instigates the analysis. It is an “arena of visibility” that forms the “sphere of public visibility” (GOMES, 2014) of evangelicals in Brazil.

In this sense, as indicated in all the elements described in the previous items of this study, evangelicals place themselves in the arena as an organically articulated block. They are no longer “the believers” or the closed groups of yore. Social separation, “from the world,” is no longer an evangelical value of the fundamentalist-Puritan tradition: today they are a group that develops

the culture of “normal life” combined with religion with a presence in the media, fashion, artists, and celebrities, with insertion in the market and entertainment world. Besides, this religious segment is strengthened as a social parcel that has its demands and can elect its representatives to the spaces of public power.

To these paradigmatic situations for the evangelical-political relationship is added a new and expressive element: the evangelical political activism, no longer restricted to election times, with the activity now focused on the selection of electoral links for candidates, in their respective churches. This activism took shape since 2010 with the involvement of religious and congregation leaders, both in electoral periods, predominantly (and interestingly) in opposition campaigns (so as not to vote for candidates fundamentally from the left), and in defense or opposition to issues like the support for minister Marco Feliciano in 2013, when he was president of the CDHM; the project to reduce the age of criminal responsibility, led by evangelical senator Magno Malta, in 2015, or the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2016 (CUNHA, 2017a).

This activism has taken place in the streets, as in the annual March for Jesus, a mass event held by “Igreja Renascer em Cristo,” on the Catholic holiday of Corpus Christi, in the city of São Paulo, with the presence of evangelical politicians or supported by evangelical churches; or in demonstrations specifically convoked by evangelical leaders, such as the March for the Traditional Family, held in Brasília, in 2013, convened by the National Council of Pastors of Brazil, at the time chaired by Pastor Silas Malafaia; or even in public acts in strategic locations, like those carried out by the Evangelical Front for the Rule of Law, created in 2016, to oppose Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment process. Activists are also mobilized remotely, through multiple demonstrations on the internet, especially written posts, audios, and videos on digital media (websites, blogs, and social media), mainly Twitter and Facebook, as shown in the mapping conducted by the author in 2016 (CUNHA, 2017a).

This process of expansion of evangelical political activism coincided with the period of strengthening of the evangelical bench between 2002 and 2004, and with the intense campaign of conservative groups, in 2010, against the election of

Dilma Rousseff to the Presidency of the Republic. Surprisingly, from then on, and even more after 2014, evangelicals of different denominations, identified with the discourse assumed by leaders of the evangelical bench and by celebrities from the religious scene, began to publicly identify themselves as “conservative” and “right-wing” (CUNHA, 2017a). The June 2013 protests and the conservative movements derived from it, the election of the most conservative National Congress since 1964 in the 2014 election (DIAP, 2014), and the inauguration of Eduardo Cunha as president of the Federal Chamber provided the enabling environment for groups identified with religious, theological, and political conservatism to revitalize themselves and start to expose more publicly.

It is possible to identify that it is in the space of the media polis that political life has developed with more intensity and passion, with the construction and reconstruction of world views (imaginary) and with discourses made public and calls for collective actions.

Here, we have what Fausto Neto (2010) calls “complex games of offer and recognition.” Through them, moral values are legitimized while others are delegitimized. In the world of religion, this is very intense; it is enough to observe the offer of the religious discourse of “salvation of the family that is at risk,” with the proposals and campaigns for sexual rights on the part of women and LGBTIs (CUNHA, 2017a). This offer promoted the identification and recognition of evangelicals and conservative Roman Catholics to the point, for example, of consolidating the term “gender ideology” as the boundary of a new identity frontier (CUNHA, 2017b).

In this sense, the logics of loyalty and “reading contracts” (FAUSTO NETO, 2010) are put in check. Evangelicals who historically condemn Catholics as idolaters and pagans break this frontier through the media and rupture the classic logic of hostility and anti-ecumenism, through the association of combating a common enemy.

Published research on the relationship between media, religion, and politics indicated a predominance of the conservative evangelical current in Brazil in traditional and digital religious media spaces (CUNHA, 2017a). It is a reflection of the



predominance they achieve in the political party space. In this context, the actions of the media promote the invisibility of other religious and even evangelical groups, of a progressive nature.

The mapping carried out in the research showed that the evangelical groups most in evidence in the traditional media in Brazil are Pentecostal in totality and have financial resources, achieved by religious practices based on the theology of prosperity, the one that reaffirms the logics of the market (the blessing of God manifests itself in material elements – health, happiness in the family and goods). This made possible the professionalization of its presence in the media and the establishment of a standard of media visibility. In this track, an evangelical media culture was created and turned possible for these groups and the individuals, and evangelical segments that are inspired by them to become entirely at ease in the world of digital media. As an example, we have the figure of Pastor Silas Malafaia, who, due to this visibility, was raised to the status of “spokesperson” for evangelicals, also through traditional non-religious media, becoming the target character of the collection of testimonies, opinions, and pronouncements in almost all major media (CUNHA, 2015).

Therefore, the mapping indicates that conservative evangelical activists are aware of the role of the media in conquering space and visibility in the public space and dominate the techniques and methods of reaching social media. These groups also have discourses with theology and language that respond to the strong fundamentalist imaginary of Brazilian evangelicals. They resort to the Bible as a literal rule of faith and as support for the ideas they propagate.

The privileged space for conservative evangelical groups in the programming of major traditional media can be understood by the fact that they are historically aligned with conservative values and policies, given the profile of their owners.

Progressive evangelical activism does not have the same level of reach as conservatives: there are no media celebrities in this group; its theology and language conflict with the conservative religious imaginary that characterizes Brazilian evangelicals; it does not have the sympathy of the mainstream media. As a minority, progressive evangelicals occupy digital

media and have this space as their most prominent possibility of expression and visibility at present. Digital media are their environment of counter-hegemonic action both in the political sphere and in the Brazilian evangelical scene and have the possibility of reach and visibility never achieved before.

As an example, Pastor Henrique Vieira (Igreja Batista do Caminho), a PSOL's leader in Rio de Janeiro, due to his presence in digital media and public events, has gained space in alternative news media as well as in major traditional<sup>5</sup> media. Likewise, the Evangelical Front for the Rule of Law founded in 2014, and the visibility achieved by its more illustrious leadership, the Baptist Pastor Ariovaldo Ramos, who has gained attention and space in alternative digital media, like the blog "Nocaute" and the "Mídia Ninja" collective. In this sense, overcoming the condition of invisibility of progressive evangelicals is a new element that must be observed and analyzed in new and updated research.

## **V – Concluding notes**

Evangelical digital political activism is a new component in the way Brazilian evangelicals culturally enroll themselves in the polis, as a de-privatized religious group, builder of public religion. This activism becomes a prominent element in the process of political participation of this religious group.

Evangelical digital political activism emerges from the mediatization processes experienced by the evangelical segment in Brazil, that is to say, from the circuits created and recreated through the mediation that enables interaction between evangelicals and of evangelicals with other religious and non-religious groups, interested in discussing topics, carrying out campaigns, and establishing actions around the country's political agendas.

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<sup>5</sup> From November 2017 until the writing of this text, in May 2018, Pastor Henrique Vieira had participated three times as a commentator of Programa Encontro, anchored by presenter Fátima Bernardes, in the mornings at Rede Globo TV.

From the political participation perspective, the presence of evangelicals in the media polis, while enhancing the visibility of this religious segment, amplifies the feeling of existence and belonging, re-signifies political/ideological identities and identifications, and redraws institutional and symbolic boundaries.

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# Mediatization, *polis*, and frontier events: analysis of the newsworthiness about the CUT BRA-PY-AR

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**Abstract:** The text presents reflections on the mediatization process and its implications for the newsworthiness of the Brazilian periphery. The study of the newsworthiness of peripheral spaces, notably the international frontier, when taken beyond the geopolitical aspect or the primacy of the State, allows bringing elements that aid in the understanding of the singularity and the interactions therein that are definitely affected by globalization. It aims to highlight the multiple interests and implications for the mediatization of the polis and the newsworthiness of the periphery when studying the so-called Trans-frontier Urban Complex (CUT), constituted by three distinct cities congregated in the same urban fabric, although belonging to three different nation-states, namely Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentine. The escalation of the media increment, observable by the pattern of events constructed as frontier events, enshrines the progression of the institutionalized media logic. It also allows questions about the mediatization of the polis and newsworthiness of the periphery in terms of its militarization.

**Keywords:** Mediatization. Newsworthiness. Periphery.

## I – Introduction

The text presents reflections about the process of mediatization and its implications to the newsworthiness in the Brazilian periphery. The study of the newsworthiness of peripheral

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spaces, notably the international frontier when taken beyond the geopolitical aspect or the primacy of the State, allows us to bring elements that aid in the understanding of the singularity and the interactions that exist there, genuinely affected by globalization. The aim is to highlight the multiple interests and implications of the mediatization of the polis and the newsworthiness in the periphery when studying the so-called Trans-frontier Urban Complexes (CUT). In the situation under study, emerging from a research project, I consider the CUT as constituted by the conurbation of three different cities, gathered in the same urban fabric, although members of three distinct nation-States, namely Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina – a strong populational density of nearly one million inhabitants and high intensity of human and economic flows<sup>2</sup>.

Considering the issue of what is mediatized in the communication process that the news activity promotes, this text considers four moments of reflection. Initially, I investigate the possibility of a mediatization approach in the analysis of the newsworthiness in the periphery. It is about verifying the present understanding of the mediatization approach to study how events that took place in peripheral spaces in Brazil, notably in its international borders, are likely to become news material and submitted to the logics of journalism as practiced in the reference parameters of the Brazilian commercial media. In a second section, I seek to advance on the repercussions of the news of the periphery when it is understood since its condition of mediatized polis, especially considering the globalized environment of a Brazilian international frontier. Such considerations advance to, in the end, debate the mediatization of the polis in the conditions in which the CUT BRA-PY-AR is understood and projected by the news action of the institutional journalism activity taken as an empirical object of reflection.

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2 This refers to the research project funded by a PQ scholarship by CNPq (2018-2020) entitled *Mediatization, social identity, and public security in Trans-frontier Urban Complexes*. The empirical notes registered in the text come from a set of research activities carried out by GruPesq CIFront, led by the author, and activities with undergraduate students (IC and TCC), master's and doctoral students, in addition to post-doctoral professionals (HARTMANN; SILVEIRA, 2018, 2019; SILVEIRA, 2007, 2012, 2016; SILVEIRA et al., 2017; SILVEIRA; GUI-MARÃES, 2016; SILVEIRA et al., 2017a).



## **II – Mediatization and newsworthiness of the periphery**

The mediatization approach considers a variety of perspectives. Luis Mauro Sá Martino (2019), intending to systematize its characteristics, proposes that the intertwining between media and social practices characterizes the mediatization process while facing a tension “between actions, uses, and meanings between social practices and the media environment” (MARTINO, 2019, p. 27). His interpretation refers to the scope of the articulation as proper to investigations in the mediatization, prominently in the perspective pointed out by Andreas Hepp (2014), given that media environment should be the place of technique, while the social practices should be objects more related to Social Sciences.

Therefore, it is on deepening the perspective of such articulation that I try to recognize, in the mediatization of the periphery, a particular practice that involves the notion of newsworthiness and the favorable conditions for the media environment to identify an innovative process, with radical consequences. These are aspects considered from what Niklas Luhmann (2000) pointed out about the condition in which, more and more, we know reality from notions arising from the news; the author inquiries about the consequences of such an attitude, especially when we know how they are produced.

In another way, I recall Luis Alberto de Carvalho and Gustavo Lage (2012) when they find, in the characteristic of reflexivity, a condition of mediatization, given that the first

allows us to understand the mediatization processes as articulated to new socio-technical potentialities, through the critical apprehension in circularity, in which the media read their audiences, deciphering them to better offer products and processes to them, but also negotiating meanings with them. At the same time, media products and processes are also read by these same audiences, which can modify some of their social interaction dynamics, articulating actions that cause changes in the media and in the ways of life in society (CARVALHO; LAGE, 2012, p. 264).

By questioning the performance of the global media, or a globally active media, as occurs with digital commercial platforms, if understood as shapers of a media polis, a common space for political and social communication, we understand that they would act by establishing the foundations of the social relations both within national communities and among neighboring and foreign societies, structuring the globalized circulation of information.

We highlight, in another aspect, the position of Roger Silverstone (2010) on media culture, in which mediatization is characterized as “the fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalized media of communication are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life” (SILVERSTONE, 2010, p. 168). The late British author pointed out the performative character of the media culture when he said:

[that] Media culture could be [...] defined as late modernity’s space of appearance, both in the sense of where the world appears, and in the sense of appearance as such constituting that world. (SILVERSTONE, 2010, p.51).<sup>3</sup>

Mediatization is taken here as a social process full of everyday life, affected by the material relationship that subjects have with technologies. Its conception recognizes what Brazilian communication researchers have accustomed to denominate media, that is, a set of devices of different origin and complexity. The social context, entwined in media culture, invests in semiotic perceptions that, according to the Eliseo Verón’s judgment (2014), produce the elements that characterize mediatization.

Continuing in the institutionalized perspective of mediatization through the study of professional media, especially the journalistic activity of producing news, I pursue the purpose of recognizing what is mediatized in a mediatization process that involves the so-called peripheries. For this, a digression is necessary.

3 In the original: “*Se podría definir la cultura de los medios [...] como el espacio de aparición en la modernidad tardía, no sólo en el sentido de lugar en el que el mundo aparece, sino también en el sentido de que la aparición (el hecho de aparecer) como tal constituye ese mundo*” (SILVERSTONE, 2010, p. 51).

The study of Brazilian newsworthiness of peripheral spaces, that is, the conditions that preside over systematic reporting in popularized parameters by the commercial media, allows us to infer that there is a determined treatment planned to be applied in the journalistic projection of events that took place or that refer to the peripheral spatiality. The social life of the periphery, those events that are not recognized as taking place at an alleged centrality, do not enjoy a status reputed as of an informative reference. Therefore, a profusion of contents is disregarded as being of secondary value to the daily activity of coverage in parameters conceived as journalistic.

I start from what has been stated in another text (HARTMANN; SILVEIRA, 2018, p. 202): “Despite being historically overshadowed, as the negative face of Brazilian society, the metropolitan periphery would gain, in the 21st century, an unexpected light”. I understand that we were used to, due to a formation in which class discrimination turned natural, a structure of a particular news pattern, an order of newsworthiness, in Foucault’s terms, marked by social exclusion.

In the newsworthiness in question, another noticeable procedure is from the exteriority, taken as a constitutive operation of a discursive policy reactivated in circulating discourses (FOUCAULT, 1997). It intends to guarantee the communicability proposed by the reference media. Because of it, we conceived a news pattern in which the visibility of the periphery arises from problems inflicted on the inhabitants of what is characterized as inherent to the urban centrality, and, traditionally, is located on the Brazilian coast. On the other hand, it is about the wide ideological dissemination of the primary definers in the journalistic activity, engaged in the reproduction of broad consensus, as analyzed in the public security newscasts (SILVEIRA; DALMOLIN; MASCARENHAS, 2017b).

In this way, I reaffirm the understanding that “the order of newsworthiness expresses the conditions for dealing with events; it is the result of social coexistence, religious and secular beliefs, the exercise of power and resistance. Newsworthiness results from the understanding of a news order which reproduces the perception of a given social order” (HARTMANN; SILVEIRA, 2018, p. 202).

One of the consequences known by the media coverage is that it works with the concept that there would be no civilized life on the frontiers, constituted as a space of chaos and abandonment of the State, therefore, an emptied polis. As an archaic substrate of the opposition between civilian and military life, boundaries would be a minor deposit of territorial disputes. However, globalization theories recognize frontier spaces as special anticipators of conditions later proved in metropolitan spaces, systematically managing precariousness and uncertainty. Globalization, therefore, provides new elements in the construction of newsworthiness, whose impact I seek to point out. I consider that tensioning the relationship between the mediatization of society and the emergence of a new journalistic discourse about the Brazilian periphery crosses a broader issue that concerns the “social production of meaning in times of mediatized society that has consumption as one of its primary definers” (HARTMANN; SILVEIRA, 2019, p. 49). This is a widespread challenge, given that the Brazilian population has a tradition of oral culture, and its consumption of newspapers and magazines historically has been restricted to cultural and economic elites. Thus, the set of lapses, absences, and other forms of non-representational circumscribe the challenges of journalism in times of convergence culture.

### **III – The newsworthiness of the CUT BR-PY-AR**

The amplitude of the impact of globalization in the CUT BRA-PY-AR allows to detect the fit of the studied phenomena articulated with what José Luiz Braga (2014, p. 25) has called three types of frontier events between:

- social and media fields;
- fields not directly taken as media; and
- fields and society.

Braga designates them as frontier events because “the activation, there, of interactional processes using media technologies, is not regulated by the most established practices, generating indefiniteness of all orders.” It is, therefore, with-

in a perspective of noted difficulty in approaching that I am proposing the study of CUT from a communicational-media perspective.

A CUT may be understood as a rich zone; characterized by digital practices and unexplored developments. A CUT may also be understood as a society articulated by communicative processes, whose institutional character is considered not only by professional media outlets but also by the activity of telecommunication companies, providers, servers of the most innovative processes in the computer industry. Some networks have historically connected populations of distinct nationalities whose coexistence has not been impeded by circumstantial nationalist limitations and which, to date, do not enter the informational dispute of professional media, with exceptions.

The conditions of the mediatization of the CUTs with a focus on newsworthiness shelter the goal of studying the community of communication constituted on the Brazilian borders based on the notion of proximity communication that is established in that enunciative landscape. I intend to continue with previous studies on the structure of media and newsworthiness on the Triple Frontiers between Brazil and neighboring nations. This text, having accumulated systematized knowledge about the aspects related to the media communication reality, seeks to advance the elements that constitute the progressive mediatization of its local space.

Mediatization in existing CUTs in Brazil has quite different conditions. In the newscasts of the Brazilian reference media, the CUT BRA-PY-AR is usually called as Triple Frontier. Although Brazil has eight other triple limit meetings with its South American neighbors, the meeting with Paraguay and Argentina is paradigmatic for Brazilian and international news.

Studying the newsworthiness built on media around the CUTs, promoting knowledge about local agendas of national interest in aspects concerning public security has become urgent in the face of the shading with national security themes (SILVEIRA, 2012; 2016). To paraphrase Stig Hjarvard's example (2012), in which he considers the Gulf War as a recognized antecedent, I understand that the knowledge that Brazilians

have of the country's continentality, and the relationships that are sustained, are both deeply influenced by the mediatized construction of reality<sup>4</sup>.

The CUT BRA-PY-AR has three characteristic urban environments, a conurbation inserted in the so-called Arco Sul of the Brazilian frontier<sup>5</sup>. The cities of Foz do Iguaçu (Brazil), Ciudad del Este (Paraguay), and Puerto Iguazú (Argentina) constitute a transnational metropolitan space, bounded by the Paraná and Iguaçu rivers. The tri-national consortium of green tourism, gastronomy, and shopping is part of the set of attractions known worldwide.

Considered the third Brazilian tourist pole, the mediatization of such a space is established by unequal exchange, while an influential media structure endures there. Such a media structure is oriented vertically by national oligopolies. However, the local level of the referred CUT also proves the influence of provincially located agents, while they interact with other agents, beyond the international frontier. Rather than as a limit, the notions of *platina trans-frontier* and the understanding of frontiers as contact and openness stand out.

The conflictual relationship supported by the War of Paraguay (1864-1870), which historians treated as the central precedent in defining Brazilian national identity, was evident when the nationals of several Brazilian regions met in person. The conflict, however, cannot erase the precedence of exile and subordination of the original populations, whose references persist in the *Guarani* language and toponyms, found as denominators of rivers, and geographical points. Besides, the historicity of the conflict and its profound developments in the relations of the *platina environment* retain marks of militarization and police control in the current media-communication system, as I comment below.

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4 Hjarvard (2012, p. 62) states: "Thus, the media-orchestrated Gulf War was not a war as we once knew war to be because our perception of the war was steered by the images and symbols the media presented to us."

5 The CUT is in what is characterized as Arco Sul (South Arch), unlike Arco Central (Central Arch) and Arco Norte (North Arch) on the Brazilian borders. Despite its intraregional differences, Arco Sul is characterized by its occupational density, the presence of the European socio-economic and cultural legacy, and its cross-border dynamics (BRASIL, 2005, p. 61).

In a previous study (SILVEIRA, 2007), I pointed out the existence of the local-international communication network, by connecting different spaces, which is one of the characteristics of the articulation proper to mediatization. In CUT BRA-PY-AR there is a Babel of languages, alphabets, and religions that interact daily:

- Chinese characters and Sino-Tibetan language speakers;
- Arabic alphabet with Arabic speakers from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and other countries;
- Latin alphabet and *Guarani*, Spanish, Portuguese and English speakers.

In the same text (SILVEIRA, 2007), I pointed out that Brazilian frontiers, when communicationally constituting the local-international network, become examples of spaces where the dimensions of crossings of horizontality and verticality are emphasized. Its particularity stems from the connection to the international dimension, where contacts between different (vertical) nation-States predominate, practiced by the local interest of municipalities that, foreign among themselves, in their diverse nationalities, affect each other in a set of common and interdependent (horizontal) problems. Furthermore, it highlights the flow inherent to economic globalization, putting the values of horizontality in check, subordinating them to transnational flows.

Therefore, we stress that, from a communicational perspective, its particularity is produced as a result of characteristics, specificities, and contingencies, expressed in the several languages and alphabets already mentioned. The communicational practices affected by the culture of digital convergence align local activities (horizontal) to the precedence (or not) of messages from large communication groups present in the respective nation-States, as well as from metropolises on other continents (vertical).

Following this perspective, I understand that it is relevant to consider the scheme of Hjarvard (2012), pertinent to the understanding of mediatization, and the forces that compete with it (Figure 1):

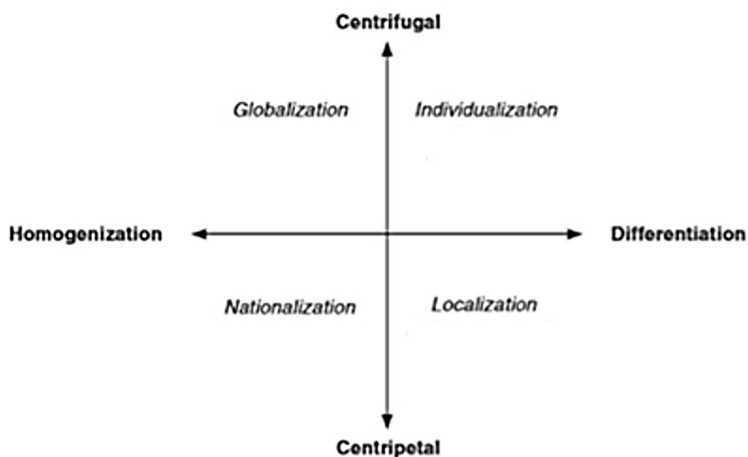


Figure 1. Media facilitate and structure virtual spaces for communication and action  
Source: Hjarvard (2012, p. 86).

I understand that the strain between a centrifugal force and another centripetal accounts for a heteronomous tendency which subordinates the inherent autonomy at the local level to orders that are superior to it and that come from the (inter) national centralities of the bordering nation-States. The heteronomous force also comes from globalized flows that affect free zones and port spaces of expression like the one we are considering here.

The homogenizing trend, typical of the reference media, in turn, acts by inhibiting the differentiation coming from the local level, acting as a reducing force of its idiosyncrasy, limiting the expression and the communicative load of the local level in favor of an understanding favorable to the perspective of dominant political and cultural spheres at the national level. The perspective of local journalism, thus, submits to the frameworks produced by the reference media.

The colonization of the border has peculiar aggregations that are mobilized according to the heteronomous order implanted in different nation-States, articulated in conurbations and CUTs, understood as old and new ways of sharing a common destiny at a distance from political and economic centers.



Understanding the *polis* in its current condition as a network society includes assuming the contradictions that exist in it. Furthermore, in a globalized context such as the frontier, in which mobile technologies run over the most diverse conditions for the production of media narratives, the distinction operated by Manuel Castells (2012, p. 82) between space of flows (global) and space of places (local) is convincing.

I think it is pertinent to recall analysis of the entry of CUT BRA-PY-AR in the international agenda since September 11, 2001, carried out by Montenegro and Giménez (2010, p. 63): "At the same time, the articles in the Military Review, as well as the report on the Triple Frontier, prepared by the Federal Research Division, cited the media as a source in the feedback that homogenized the vision of this space." The authors pointed out that the coverage of the region made it possible to place distant events relating to local circumstances, an external perspective that shaped in a matrix of homogeneous and recurring discourses that began to be challenged by arguments from other international or regional media.

Coverage on the periphery of Brazilian international frontiers comprises two types of activity that contribute to the mediatization of the *polis*, although they are subject to different logics. A factual coverage would act within the scope of news practices and implies precepts such as correction of limits, imputation of deviation (the illegal practice of misappropriation), condemnation of injunction, moral prescriptions for those involved, and the validity of the heteronomous order overlapping individuals. The institutional activity of the professional media is responsible for the CUT being known for high homicide rates, illegal activities, as well as suspicions of association with the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and other illicit goods. The media promoted characteristics feed the due attribution of a relationship with terrorism by security agencies.

The fictional or entertainment activity, on the other hand, would act in the audiovisual production of television series and cinematography, as well as in the coverage of football

and sports in general, and implies a project articulated with the forces of globalization and the autonomy of individuals (SILVEIRA, 2016).

In this sense, it is possible to postulate the mediatization as a meta-process because it has no beginning or end, as proposed by Friedrich Krotz (2007; 2014). Its implications are comparable to other meta-processes that, in the present perspective, are quite important, such as the opposition between globalization and individualization, among other phenomena pointed out by Hjarvard.

We observed how the transboundary environment in question supposes profound asymmetries. As previously highlighted (SILVEIRA et al., 2017a), the comparison of the distances that the cities of the CUT BRA-PY-AR keep from their respective national capitals supposes an uneven balance. Ciudad del Este is about 330 kilometers away from the Paraguayan capital, the city of Asunción, while Puerto Iguazú is about three times more distant from Buenos Aires, and Foz do Iguazú is at least five times more distant to the Brazilian capital than the first.

The media structure of the CUT BRA-PY-AR also brings together significant discrepancies, as shown in Table 1 (2015 data). It allows us to invoke the existence of a “media logic” whose performance will have great potential soon and, thus, qualify as a reference for institutional media activity on Brazilian frontiers. It operates mainly in an orientation that supports the Brazilian State’s sub-imperialist attitudes towards its neighbors (SILVEIRA et al., 2016). The CUT BRA-PY-AR acts as a free port based on customs agreements, distributor of products that promote the broad assimilation of the consumption of home appliances, smartphones, games, and electronics in general, in addition to armaments, comparable to the greater planetary ports of Miami and Hong Kong. It is an example of a hybrid reality between horizontality and verticality of flows, even though its media projection consecrates them as a path of misdirection. Its infrastructure is in a privileged condition of permanent technological updating, which allows its prompt alignment with the “moulding forces” typical of economic globalization (HEPP, 2014).

Table 1 summarizes the structure of newspapers and broadcasting of the cities mentioned and also presents infor-

mation that shows differences and similarities within the CUT. The coverage of telephone and internet services is perhaps one of the reasons why Foz do Iguacu has nine newspapers – most of them online. Other media-communication initiatives also express the primacy of the Brazilian city in the CUT, despite the economic vulnerability of media companies. While Puerto Iguazú in Argentina has one newspaper, 16 radios, and a signal from a television station, Ciudad del Este in Paraguay features four newspapers, 21 radios, and signal from six television stations, approaching the number of communication vehicles found on the Brazilian side. The Argentinian city of Puerto Iguazú has a public radio, a rare example in the tri-national context, Radio Cataratas, recovered in 1992 and part of a network of public broadcasters (SILVEIRA, 2011). The potential of the media scene in the CUT is perceptibly powerful and requires attention to investigate the status of newsworthiness, which is constantly updated there.

City Country	Newspapers, Blogs, and Sites	Radio Stations	TV Broadcasting
<b>Foz do Iguaçu Brasil</b>	<p>Gazeta do Iguaçu (diário)            Jornal do Iguaçu (diário)            Primeira Linha (semanal e online)            O Iguassu del Paraná (online)            Click Foz (online)            H2Foz (online)            Foz Notícia (online)            Portal Iguaçu (online)            Tribuna Popular (semanal e online)  <a href="http://www.foz.portaldacidade.com/">http://www.foz.portaldacidade.com/</a>  <a href="http://www.primeiralinha.com.br/">http://www.primeiralinha.com.br/</a>  <a href="http://www.frenteirafm.com">http://www.frenteirafm.com</a>  <a href="http://pr.ricmis.com.br/cidade/foz-do-iguacu/">http://pr.ricmis.com.br/cidade/foz-do-iguacu/</a>  <a href="http://www.jtribunapopular.com.br/">http://www.jtribunapopular.com.br/</a>  <a href="http://www.independenciaam.com.br">http://www.independenciaam.com.br</a>  <a href="http://www.cbnfoz.com.br/foz">http://www.cbnfoz.com.br/foz</a>  <a href="http://www.oiguassu.com/jornal.php">http://www.oiguassu.com/jornal.php</a></p>	<p>Rádio CBN (AM)            Band Foz (FM)            Fronteira (FM)            Harmonia Mercosul (FM)            Transamérica Foz (FM)            Rádio Cultura (FM)            Rádio Cultura Filadélfia (AM)            Catedral (FM)            Gospel (FM)            Jovem Pan 2 Mercosul (FM)            Melodia Gospel (FM)            Radio Cidade (FM)            Radio Cultura (AM)            Radio 97,7 (FM)            Radio Aleluia (FM)            Manancial Iguassu (FM)</p>	<p>Canção Nova            GNT            Paraná Educativa            RIC TV (Record)            Rede Mercosul            Rede Vida            RPCTV (Globo)            TV Naipi (SBT)            TV Taroba (Band)</p>
<b>Puerto Iguazú Argentina</b>	<p>Iguazú Noticias (online e diário)</p>	<p>Activa (FM)            Cataratas (FM)  <a href="http://www.radiocataratas.com">http://www.radiocataratas.com</a>            Classic Pan Mercosul (FM)            Del Plata (FM)            Estación Primera (FM)            FM Visión (FM)            Fronteira (FM)            Horizonte (FM)            Radio Gospel (FM)            Radio Nacional (FM)            Radio Sol (FM)            Red Iguazú Misiones (FM)            Studio 90,7 (FM)            89,9 News (FM)            90,3 (FM)            Río Paraná (FM)</p>	<p>Canal 12</p>
<b>Ciudad del Este Paraguai</b>	<p>Diario CDE (online)            Diario Vanguardia (diário)            Diario La Jornada (diário e online)            Diario TN Press (diário e online)  <a href="http://www.diariocde.com.py">http://www.diariocde.com.py</a>  <a href="http://www.diariovanguardia.com.py">http://www.diariovanguardia.com.py</a>  <a href="http://diariolajornada.com.py/v6/">http://diariolajornada.com.py/v6/</a>  <a href="http://www.cbnfoz.com.br/mercosul/pais/paraguai">http://www.cbnfoz.com.br/mercosul/pais/paraguai</a>  <a href="http://www.vanguardia.com.py/v1/index.php">http://www.vanguardia.com.py/v1/index.php</a></p>	<p>Adoración (FM)            Ciudad del Este (FM)            Club FM (FM) e Corpus (FM)            Democráticamente (FM)            Educación (FM)            Encuentro (FM)            FM Del Este (FM)            Integración FM (FM)            Itapiru (FM) e Mundial FM (FM)            Parque FM (FM)            Pentagama (FM) e Play FM (FM)            Radio Revelación 87.9 (FM)            Rede La Estación (FM)            Tierra (FM) e Universo (FM)            Rádio T (FM) e La Voz (AM)</p>	<p>El Trece            Latele            Paravision            Red Guarani            Televisora del Este            Telefuturo</p>

Table 1- Structure of CUT BRA-PY-AR newspapers (printed and online) and radio broadcasting. Retrieved from SILVEIRA et. AL, 2017.a

## IV – The mediatized *polis*

A note that has repercussions on the newsworthiness of the mediatized *polis* consists of the distance from the national capitals of the CUT BRA-PY-AR. It is likewise a long distance from the South Atlantic Ocean coast, a harbor with broad connections with the Northern Hemisphere. While the criminalization of the CUT is frequent, illegal activities on the South Atlantic Ocean beaches usually are ignored by the Brazilian reference media's agenda. As I highlighted in another analysis, the contradiction goes beyond:

A Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI), established by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro, exhaustively studied the news between 2000 and 2010 and produced a report, presenting a summary of the sample of 529 journalistic reports on the trafficking of guns, ammunition, and explosives publicized in the media of that city. From this sample, 105 reports were extracted and undergone a qualitative analysis with the addition of 102 reports from 2011 (SILVEIRA; GUIMARÃES, 2016, p. 11).

ALERJ's analysis points to the factual look of the media coverage and the focus on the construction of the external enemy in collusion with State agents: "According to the sample analyzed on this issue, weapons that belonged to the State and were deviated to the criminals, often with the participation of public agents, represent the absolute majority of reported cases." (ALERJ, 2011, p. 225-228). This stance shows full conformity with the colonial glaze historically disseminated by international news agencies.

CUTs have been studied especially by Geography. According to Dilla A. (2012), they are cross-border urban patches; a product of flows of capital, goods, and people; cross-border corridors, and regions; demography, economics, politics, and social relations; having an uneven exchange dynamics.

In the Brazilian case, its newsworthiness awaits an approach that recognizes the precedence that about 27% of the

national territory is located there and that, in addition to the extraordinary character of its continental expressiveness, it occurs in a situation of confluence and conurbation. The strong presence of connecting cities and trans-frontier agglomerations with ten other South American nation-States (BRASIL, 2005) configure relations that collaborate for the complexity of the so-called frontier regime. There, the media system present constitutes itself an irreducible node to political-military logics and requires its particular dimension of analysis<sup>6</sup>.

So, when it comes to coverage of the CUT BRA-PY-AR, I understand that it is possible to observe, schematically, four moments. Initially, it is possible to conceive a localized coverage, acting with parameters proper of the proximity media, which gradually gains connotations that frame the events with the drama of the globalized impact. From the recontextualization performed by the local media logic, the mediatization process is on route to decontextualization (Figure 2).

A Moment 1 in which the local media, or proximity (Date 1), deals with daily life based on values from the local cultural and public sphere and which, as a rule, are hierarchically subordinated to the values of the reference media aligned with the national political and cultural sphere (SILVEIRA, 2012). It is a moment in which the operation of discursive exteriority acts smoothly.

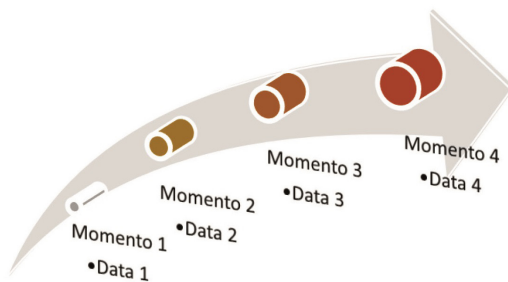


Figure 2 – The moments of coverage and the increase of mediatization  
Source: The author

6 I understand that the theme has evolved since Steiman and Machado (2002) identified the lack of studies on frontiers. However, the media approach present in the referred studies (BRASIL, 2005) seems to stiffen a conflicting reading of the relations resulting from the intensification of globalized flows.

A Moment 2 in which the national coverage carried out with a focus on the nation's sores comes from events occurring on land frontiers (which are mostly fluvial or coastal) in its 16 thousand kilometers (Date 2). These records have already been analyzed in a wide variety of media and their resulting supports by the research group Communication, Identities, and Frontiers. It has found that journalistic programs that are willing to develop newsworthiness based on local values still exercise notions of very traditional trans-frontier interactions. It would be necessary to deepen the recognition of references from cultural hybridity. Or, in Dilla's terms (2015, p. 35), advance in the optimization of costs and benefits of any trans-frontier relationship, hitherto oscillating between latent hostility and rhetorical fraternity (SILVEIRA et al., 2017a).

A Moment 3, in which the awareness of a Brazilian sub-imperialist attitude emerges from media organizations, and, consequently, the news positioning of Organizações Globo, broadcast on G1 Portal and Fantástico (open TV program), on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016, when they considered that land frontiers are problematic, but that Brazil had begun to export criminal organizations (Date 3). It was the coverage of the conflict that occurred in the frontier area between Brazilian and Paraguayan traffickers, involving the PCC (First Command of the Capital)<sup>7</sup> – an occurrence that would confirm the exportation of Brazilian-standard criminality to Paraguay. Given that the problems come from the metropolises, the procedure of discursive exteriority was incorporated favoring trans-frontier society.

A Moment 4 took place with the dawn of April 24, 2017, when a millionaire robbery occurred at the headquarters of the conveyor Prosegur in Ciudad del Este (Date 4). Dozens of burglars armed with explosives, rifles, and large-caliber automatic weapons used grenades and gas pumps to set cars on fire, distract the police, and break into the private company's safe. The American coverage has classified the event as a war operation<sup>8</sup>.

7 The report was broadcast by the TV program *Fantástico* and may be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aW1Rb2H17w>. Access on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

8 The coverage of the event had a broad range in the news agencies and media vehicles from Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Chile. The robbery was initially estimated at \$ 40 million to ultimately settle at \$ 12 million. Up-to-date information

Moment 4 has used the power of the procedure of discursive exteriority to integrate the broad industrial scale of the reference media, consecrating the event in all its media potential and incorporating the well-known denomination of “Robbery of the century.”

The escalation of media rise, observable by the pattern of events constructed as qualified circumstances (Dates 1, 2, 3, and 4), allows us to, systematically, enshrine the progression of the institutionalized media logic. Does this escalation point out to a militarized polis in the CUT BRA-PY-AR? In the face of uneven exchange, news coverage of the mentioned CUT stands out when media coverage ignores much larger robberies, conflicts with militias in Brazilian metropolises, and above all the nearly absolute silence about daily life in the harbors of the South Atlantic Ocean, a scenery that opens the chronicle of the European colonization in America.

The progressive incorporation of heteronomous parameters in the observed coverage allows us to assess its impact for news and the institutional tradition of mediatization studies that would have “[...] until recently mainly been interested in traditional mass media, whose influence is described as a ‘media logic’[...]” (HEPP, 2014, p. 46).

The progression of the escalation also points out to the frontier events highlighted by Braga (2014), given that the order of newsworthiness refers to the articulations between social fields and those of the media. We have noticed a genuinely unregulated journalistic landscape, and, at the same time, a hostage of practices established by external professional contexts, generating the colonization of subordinate practices along with the indefiniteness of all sorts for the local population.

## V – Final considerations

Returning to the question initially raised about what is mediatized in the communication process that the news activity

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showed that it would have been remuneration for an organized criminal group (attributed as the PCC, based in São Paulo), on account of debts. It is essential to evoke the rumors about links associating the president of Paraguay, Horacio Carpes, with organized crime.



on the periphery promotes, or what aspect of mediatization is taken into account here, I recall the primacy of the articulating condition of mediatization and its methodological consequences, according to the considerations of Martino (2019). Newsworthiness is understood as a device that combines a set of conditions that addresses social reality in the context of an open mediatization. I understand that, despite the purpose of the protagonists of the events, proximity communication in CUTs often converts local news into national or international interest. However, the progressive escalation of the four commented moments allows us to point out that the opposite also occurs: local news is built up from the perspective of the prevailing gaze in the national or global centrality, as advocates the progression from a media logic to a mediatization logic.

It is known, through a set of empirical research here referred to, that the notions linked to the territorial State and the expression of its sovereignty are responsible for stigmatizing newsworthiness. Considering that the action of mediatized communication not only projects but also adapts to the shared experience, it should be acknowledged that it expresses distinct aspects and common characteristics of existence that the hegemonic media systems define as peripheral. The media narratives on Brazilian international frontiers are hierarchized by canons from the national reference media, which, in turn, observe, to a greater or lesser extent, the claims of international news flows and their main definers. To know the reality of such experiences, the study of the treatment granted, by the media, to one of the most expressive triple frontiers of the American continent, located in the city of Foz do Iguacu, on the border with Paraguay (Ciudad del Este) and Argentina (Puerto Iguazú), represents a great example of the media confluences proposed by the globalizing order and its impact on the mediatization of the *polis*. Therefore, I believe having pointed out some of the conditions of the mediatized *polis* of CUT BRA-PY-AR that contribute to the news treatment of the professional media to configure it in militarized terms.

The proposal to establish a critique on newsworthiness built by media around Brazilian international frontiers must promote knowledge about local agendas of national interest in

aspects concerning social identity, with an aim on the combat of stereotypes and stigmatizations. I think that one should yet try to assess the level of self-referentiality of the local journalistic coverage at international frontiers, aiming to estimate the quality of proximity communication in favor of intercultural dialogue, peace, and solidarity promotion among peoples. Finally, a responsible critique must seek to overcome the agenda-setting focused only on giving visibility to criminality, corroborating with social authoritarianism.

I understand that the relevance of the theme stems from the importance that frontiers have, which requires considering the technical unification and political partitioning of territories. In the conditions of news activity entrenched in nationalisms, the mediatization of the polis keeps away otherwise friendly populations. It is a conception of *the polis* that ignores a postulation by Dilla A. (2015), that of organizing the cooperative management of trans-frontier spaces. Thus, the condition of the CUT BRA-PY-AR has, against it, experiences and bibliography on frontiers expressed in English and studied from the social reality of the North Atlantic, for which the wall between the United States and Mexico is the big media paradigm.

And, finally, I register the warning from a graffiti on the walls of Brazilian custom, expressed in three official languages, in Foz do Iguaçu: “We were born to many mothers, but here there are only siblings.” It makes it possible to inquire whether the impact of globalization on news activity would have affected our societies and the current news, concerned with the criminalization of trans-frontier life, would no longer have captured it, establishing militarized parameters of communicative-media relations.

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# When the eyes do not blink nor stop: from the operation- image to the rise to the flow

*Ana Paula da Rosa<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** This work seeks to investigate the process of circulation of images. Thus, we adopt, as our starting point, two central aspects: 1) the changes in the conditions of circulation and circularity of social discourses from the access allowed by the web; and 2) the complexification of the communicational process per se, since the social actors rise to the media, also interfering in their logics, particularly the journalistic ones. To comprehend how the strategies of fixing images take place, this article analyses the episode of the circulation of audiovisual materials about a bombing that decimated hundreds of people in Syria. The attack occurred in 2018, near the Syrian capital, Damascus. Images of the rescue of children among the debris went worldwide and were broadly inserted in national and international journalistic dispositifs. This article proposes to discuss the following question: what images are in dispute? And if this is a dispute of meaning, which logics are perceptible in the actions of these actors? As an initial proposition, we identified images at stake that we opted to consider, in this work, as operation images.

**Keywords:** Mediatization. Image. Circulation. Syria

Understanding the communicational process today passes, inevitably, through the notion of circulation. It is not a

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question of disregarding the classic elements such as production and reception but understanding that we no longer can focus on the medium or the message. This means that circulation leads us to another place – that of the dispute for meaning. The place of circulation is the ‘between,’ that of indetermination, expansion of times and spaces, of logics that escape us. The communication analyst, a role that we assume in this text, is responsible for trying, even though aware of the incompleteness, to reconstruct operations and paths to try to capture what moves in flows.

Thus, we adopt two central aspects as a departure point: 1) the profound changes in the conditions of circulation and circularity of social discourses from the access made possible by the web, and 2) the complexities of the communication process per se once the social actors ascend to media interfering in their logics likewise – especially the journalistic ones. To think about these two points, we turn to images. Within this mediated landscape, where the access to dispositifs is increasingly amplified, we perceive an irruption of imagery productions coming from the most different places, both journalistic and from non-media institutions and, very often, from social actors. Such productions make explicit that there are logics at play, once videos, pictures, memes, and real-time transmissions are not only conceived for visibility or as a democratization of perspectives but are images produced and designed for circulation. So, there are evident marks of fixating strategies and valuing operations that prolong the circulation of particular images.

To understand circulation in its dynamics, we proposed ourselves to build a case of analysis marked by a field of observation that cannot be cut out over time, particularly, but which breaks it down into relationships. As Fausto Neto (2013) well observes, mediatization takes place as a bundle of relationships, but they are naturally unequal when we start to attribute the strength of the communicational process, no longer to isolated elements, but the circulation of meaning. It is in this aspect that we structure our text: firstly, the strain between access and excess; secondly, the problem of the media and mediatization logics that cross image production. Finally, we dedicate ourselves to the case of this research, which emerges from the circulation, and, at the same time, is only configured



due to the strategies adopted by its *participants*. We refer to the recent episode of the circulation of audiovisual materials about a bombing that killed hundreds of people in Syria. The attack took place between February 19 and 20, 2018, in eastern Ghouta, a rebel enclave in the surroundings of the Syrian capital, Damascus. Images of rescuing children from the wreckage of the city traveled the world and were widely inserted in national and international journalistic dispositifs. They highlighted childhood and the imminence of its extinction. However, in addition to the social discussions emanating from the photographs, this article aims to strain the images that circulate. What images are in dispute? And when it comes to a struggle for meanings, what logics are perceptible in the performance of these actors? As an initial proposal, we identified three types of images at play that we chose to consider in this work as operation images; that is, they are images that do something, no longer contemplative, neither windows nor folding screens (FLUSSER, 2002). They are synthesis-images, residue-images, and circuit-images. The operation-images will be deepened throughout this work from the articulation with the empiric.

## I – Strains between access and excess

Today, when we think about the images that surround us, the first sensation awakened is that of polyphony; that is, we have multiple voices that reverberate in various images from increasingly diverse sources. When we stop to blink, effectively, and in that fraction of a second in which our eyes move and close, we can perceive that there is an intensification of monophony. This is directly linked to the fact that access does not result in polyphony. Fausto Neto highlights that, in the current stage of mediatization, the issue of access must be seen more profoundly. According to him, the analytical perspective argues that

[...] the question of access does, indeed, have profound implications on the forms of contact that the social fabric begins to develop, but it also understands that this dimension does not address the issue of meaning production. One thing concerns

the conditions of production of access and circulation of messages, and another, entirely different – and, therefore, not covered by convergence – relates to the requirements of the production of meanings (FAUSTO NETO, 2016, p. 56).

It implies that the wish that more access to dispositifs would increase the social access to discourse and, therefore, to the meaning is illusory. Such a statement is appropriate when we consider that access does not translate itself into more voices, but in more people making use of different technologies, especially photographic ones powered by mobile devices such as cell phones. There are many images around us, but are there many perspectives? Or do such images only lead us to non-vision? Provocations are important when media convergence and the proliferation of dispositifs are considered revolutionary. Undoubtedly, we are facing new forms of contact made possible by the offer, but they are not necessarily effective appropriations<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, Verón (1997, p. 14-15) already highlighted that “the conditions of access to messages and the conditions of access to meaning are two entirely different problems. The first refers to the operation of explicit economic rules [...] The second corresponds to an analysis in recognition.”

The author reinforces it is not enough to understand media production, but that it is also necessary to pay attention to the way of dealing and, therefore, recognizing what individuals do with what they produce. Transposing it to our discussion of images, this means that we can no longer understand access to cameras and cell phones as a unique path between production, anchored in market logics, and the multiplicity of viewing angles on an issue or fact. Nor do we think that the individual does not develop tactics that escape the logics of production since one also produces as one ascends to the media. Mario Carlón (2012) has precisely studied this process of ascent and descent of social actors to the media, along with their amateur logics.

2 We understand appropriation based on Proulx [2014] “as the act that subverts the logics of the apparatus. Such doing goes beyond the use of the technical object. This becomes an input for other actions that are much more complex, and imply literacy regarding the logics of media, the apparatus itself, and the understanding of communication.”

In our view, the insufficiency of access as a solution to social asymmetries lies, exactly, in the fact that the meanings are not in technology; they are the result of human production, their mental process, the activation of their imaginary. Thus, all the access results in differences, as pointed out by Fausto Neto (2016), who warned of “a structural asymmetry.” However, this asymmetry is of the order of meaning but not necessarily of access, since currently media institutions and social actors are in contact and hybridize in their discursive practices. Such contacts are evidenced in the production of videos, photos, and all kinds of images that are produced to circulate, often being consumed by media institutions, in what we call *media and social phagia* (ROSA, 2016a).

Given this landscape, there is excess – too many disconnected utterances, opinions, images that take to a shuffling effect. Latour (2008) deals with the cascade of images to refer to those which overlay in everyday life. Likewise, Baitelo Junior refers to “*serial imagery*.”

The new society no longer lives on people, made up of bodies and bonds, it is based on the pillars of an infinite ‘*serial imagery*,’ an endless sequence of images, always identical. The admirable and desirable is no longer the difference, but the absolute similarity. The creative and adaptive capacity is no longer what stands out, but the need for belonging. To be accepted, to be adept, to be adapted (BAITELO JUNIOR, 2005, p. 51).

That is, in this ambiance, here called mediatization, producing and being transformed into an image is a condition, as there is no space for “*non-images*.” To a certain extent, due to excess, it means that there is a reduction of space to the body once it enters, through access, but is gulped by the flow and rarefied in the circulation.

## II – Circulation and the emphasis on value

Circulation, mentioned here, does not translate as what is spread or propagated. Even though it is not a new expression,

it presents an expansion of its importance in the communicational phenomenon, especially through the advent of networks and the web. This is because the logics or grammars of production and recognition (VERÓN, 2004) intersect, having ascent and descent orders, what we did not see so intensely until the mid-90's<sup>3</sup>. With it, the space (temporal and of action) between production and recognition, named for many years as a kind of interval or hiatus, becomes an operating instance of communication, since meaning is effectively produced not by one or another link in the process, but in dispute, in contact.

When we express circulation as space, we do not refer to the media, although circulation has precisely its visible tip on the media dispositifs. But to recover circulation, it is necessary to go deeper than simply identifying what emerges; it is necessary to recover the traces. In this regard, the notion of circulation used here is focused on this invisible moment, which can be reconstituted by the traces of materiality and which allows us to understand the dynamics of meaning. In terms of images, this demands to observe their insertions and absences in multiple dispositifs, from multiple "actors." We understand that images, in the context of mediatization, are produced and designed for circulation; that is, there is no such thing as being run over, a social action, an attack that would not be transformed into a media event, and an image. We have reached the point of having terrorist attacks being broadcast on Facebook or robberies filmed by the injured victims themselves, which indicates that the image is not a record, but it is the condensation of the world, the visual metaphor of what we are unable to translate. Nonetheless, the images that are put into circulation, produced to give visibility and to be visible, are not always the ones produced by those who put them in the flow (BRAGA, 2012); quite often, on the contrary, they are the result of appropriations, reworkings, and reinterpretations. Such movements imply new meanings in progress or the maintenance of

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3 It is important to say that circulation is an intrinsic part of the communicational process. However, when we demarcate its intensification from the 90s, we are reiterating the place of access to the digital ambiance, which Verón (2013) highlighted as an intensification of the complexity of the process of producing meaning and its derived clashes.

shadows that are coupled with the circulation process and, inevitably, circularity<sup>4</sup>.

Circulation is the result of an intense interaction game that takes place departing from the notion of contacts and hybridizations. Fausto Neto (2013) highlights that technology enables to shorten distances since the production-reception poles can no longer be of contact. Each contact or coupling demands an effort to produce meaning; that is, the image of the record of the attacks in Syria published in the canonical media, which is linked to the publications and actions initiated on Facebook, is coupled with new productions by cartoonists and social actors on their devices. That is, there is a chain of productions, co-productions, appropriations, a reframing that takes the meaning forward through circuits, putting into practice the movements of *phagia*. For Braga (2012),

the rhythms of circulation are modulated by several possible articulations between the tactics of instantaneity that seek to reduce the time of access and circulation; and collection tactics, aimed at permanence and recovery. The fact that developing circuits have a marked tendency to 'cross' established social fields, even when the point of origin of a circuit is one of these fields – such as, for example, the educational – leads to a sort of 'recontextualization.' The usual references are displaced or complemented by less usual recommendations – causing the developing reports themselves to elaborate and explain the contexts required to assign meanings to the products and discourses that circulate (BRAGA, 2012, p. 49).

It is worth mentioning that, in mediatization, the creation, and continuous co-creation, of circuits is a hallmark – be these circuits developed in the media sphere or outside it – as

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4 There is an important difference between circulation and circularity. Circulation is focused on the interactional procedures, which implies new layers of meaning and interactions. In circularity, we have objects that are effectively repeated, appear, reappear, and settle. Circularity involves the process of looking, as already indicated by Flusser (2002) about scanning. In our analysis cases, we have a circularity of time and images over time.

a reverberation of their themes. In this sense, it is interesting to think that circulation is not restricted to products that circulate or develop the potential for circularity (back and forth), but manifests in the struggle for the production of meaning which takes place within the scope of the media *dispositifs*. The images that make up our field of observation can be understood as agents of interactional circuits since, with each new publication, there are repercussions, reworkings, different interpretations that result in strains, ratifications, or erasures of the image's strength. Thus, we support the theoretical hypothesis that circulation is constituted as a relation of attribution of value (ROSA, 2016b; 2017). It is verifiable in the creation of circuits because only the images perceived and grasped as the relevant ones tend to remain in circulation, which demonstrates that, with every new insertion, those pictures are enhanced, potentialized. In part, this explains why some images disappear, although they are available for access. This disappearance can result in one of the types of operation-images that we will see ahead: the residue.

In our view, the force of adherence of determined images allows them to develop the power to fixate, each time they are re-inserted in circulation. Though, what about images that are no longer inserted and are still present? In this case, we must turn our attention to the idea of circulation and not to the material product – that is, a photograph or video. If we recover the notion of circulation as work in this space of time for the production of meaning, we will notice that material images are no longer inserted<sup>5</sup> when the immaterial ones gain strength and acquire the condition to circulate as decals or emblems, when images integrate the imaginary, and, thus, become autonomous. When we talk about the attacks or the war in Syria, we have already filled our view with photographs and videos of children, all a little alike Aylan Kurdi, all a little like the child we were, all a kind of appeal, usually without the proper historical-political context in depth. The image invades us, and, in this case, the eyes do not blink, but they also do not stop.

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5 Often, they only stop being inserted after a continuous process of presentation, replication and rework.

In this way, we identify that there is a path between the appearance, valuing in interactions, the process of reiteration, disappearance, and reappearance of specific images. In this path, there is the autonomy of image concerning the event since the references made are more directed to the imagistic force than to the fact itself. Let us return to Aylan Kurdi: we no longer need his image to see him as an adherent figure, a summary-image of the crisis in Syria. However, in recent years hundreds of other children's faces have appeared. That is, it is not a question of the crisis itself, but of transforming images valued in circulation as decals or totem-images (ROSA, 2012).

The concept of totem-images, anchored in the formulations of Cassirer and Durkheim, refers to images that summon a deep social bond, thus activating a collective imaginary. However, the central difference of the totem-image is that it implies restrictions on the access of new images or different images and on the interpretation itself since the first images become a kind of barrier that prevents their exclusion or questioning. It is important to say that, in the case under analysis, the restrictive images are exactly those produced in a possibly free form by institutions and social actors based on mediatization logics.

José Luiz Braga (2012) points out that there are differences between media logics and mediatization logics. The first one accounts for the crossing of business processes, anchored in the cultural industry, in the daily life of the citizen, and the uses of media technologies and their materiality. However, mediatization logics are more complex and refers to the interactive process of mediatization. In other words, it is not about the influence or impact of the media on social action, but what society does with the media and their dispositifs. In addition to crossing fields, this means that the logics of mediatization raise experimental strategies and tactics on the part of social actors. Surely, many of them echo the marks of media logics, but they are not restricted to the reproduction, being far from that. For Braga, the mediatization logics are

something that we should call, more accurately, logical attempts or experimental processes, tending to generate, by development and selection, fu-

ture interactional logics available to society. There we find experimental uses, rather than anchored practices. These are processes under development. If we give preponderant attention to the institutionalized logics – to the media logics – it becomes easy not to notice these tentative processes, explained too quickly by the influence of what is already engraved in anchored practices (BRAGA, 2012, p. 29).

From this distinction of logics, we proceed to enter our observation case. It contains both media and mediatization logics, but we understand that the former is didactic and, when appropriated, start to stimulate the mediatization logics, based on complex circuits, in the perception of circulation as a value space, and in a tentative interactive game that feeds of previous images. In this sense, circulating images, whether referential, such as the journalistic ones, imaginary ones, or the evocation of childhood ideas, is to mobilize operations of experiences. It is no longer, in the scope of mediatization, contemplative images or registration, they are operation-images that go beyond the universe of canonical media, but that nevertheless fail to inhabit or contain it.

### **III – The case of the Syrian crisis: image operations in the face of incompleteness**

Between February 19 and 20, 2018, another episode involving the political and social crisis in Syria has emerged, gaining prominence in newspapers around the world. Understood as the “21st-century massacre”, the bombings commanded by the Bashar al-Assad regime’s forces resulted, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights<sup>6</sup>, in more than 250 people killed, including dozens of children. The attack in eastern Ghouta did not have a live broadcast by the media, but the victims’ rescues gained wide repercussions, especially those produced by the so-called White Helmets or members of the Syrian Civil

6 Data available at <https://observador.pt/2018/02/21/siria-mais-de-250-mortos-no-massacre-do-seculo-xxi/>; access on April 08, 2018.



Defense. The videos and photographs produced by the non-media institution, and made available via Twitter<sup>7</sup>, were brought to the canonical media system when a child's rescue was followed minute by minute (Figure 1).

Figure 01 – Image of White Helmet removing a child from the wreckage.



Source: White Helmets Twitter Post.

In this seemingly amateur production, we can observe mediatization logics marked by media logics, which imply new operations. This is what we understand, clearly, by operations: a) White Helmets chose to record the events themselves, trying to manage the meaning of what was published. b) a volunteer is designated to be not the rescue agent, but the image capture agent. To this “integrated professional” is given the right not to intervene in the scene, but to register it, having clear domains of framing and camera movements. c) The images were made for Twitter, therefore, for their circulation. It was not a record of the performance of the civil defense, but of the image production of the massacre, which was consolidated in the articulation with other previous images. d) When made available on the web,

7 <https://twitter.com/SyriaCivilDef>. White Helmets mobilization page.

the image activates circuits and initiates journalistic and social actors' flows that not only reverberate the image but also give visibility to the conflicts established more than seven years ago; take, for example, the number of followers, more than 120 thousand. e) White Helmets cease to be producers and become, in a *phagia* way, sources for media institutions, managing the circulation, which can be seen in Figures 02, 03, and 04.

Figure 02 – Screenprint of Band newscast where the rescue act stands out



Source: TV Bandeirantes from White Helmets

Figure 03 – Image of the World section at Portal G1 at the time of the rescue from the BBC



Source: BBC Network from the White Helmets for G1

Figure 04 – BBC Brazil report that uses the same image as above showing a video clip



Source: Image extracted from a video produced by the White Helmets and made available to the BBC

These elements allow us to realize that the first empirical object in our field of observation has many nuances; it is at the border of the logics, between the media and the media-tization ones. Nevertheless, the images generated are not only registers but images that produce something, circuit-images, since they are a kind of igniter for new circulations and strains in multiple media and *dispositifs*. The circuit-image operation highlights the power of the web as access, but also the need for a tactical elaboration of the use of the medium as an interactive *dispositif*. It is not Twitter alone, but Twitter as a space for contact and affecting both journalistic institutions and social actors.

The other component of our analysis, linked to the fact of the attack on eastern Ghouta in 2018, is a 15-year-old teenager. Muhammad Najem makes use of social networks to share videos and selfies, especially on Twitter<sup>8</sup>. What sounds like an ordinary action changes figure when we realize that the teenager reports the bombings that hit the city where he lives, as well as the imminence of death that mixes in his daily life. Like other boys, from other closed regimes, Najem (Figure 05) makes use of media knowledge constituted through the cultural industry (entertainment and journalism), therefore media logics, to produce what Castells (2016) calls an auto-broadcast<sup>9</sup>.

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8 [https://twitter.com/muhammadnajem20/status/961666477853151232/photo/1?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tvi24.iol.pt%2Finternacional%2Fmuhammad-najem%2Fmuhammad-o-jovem-de-15-anos-que-nos-mostra-a-guerra-na-siria-nas-redes-sociais](https://twitter.com/muhammadnajem20/status/961666477853151232/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.tvi24.iol.pt%2Finternacional%2Fmuhammad-najem%2Fmuhammad-o-jovem-de-15-anos-que-nos-mostra-a-guerra-na-siria-nas-redes-sociais).

9 Mass self-communication is, for Castells, the communication that follows the standards and rules of the mass media but is produced by an individual actor in his/her space with a focus on wide visibility.

Figure 05 – Young Syrian posts on journalistic standards



Source: Muhammad Najem's Twitter

There are some operations there: a) the boy produces audiovisuals from a cell phone camera, which reveals access to technology and the media space; b) his images allow him to ascend to the traditional media when he turns himself into a journalistic agenda, not only because of the content he shows, but because he uses the interactive space that is Twitter to make an inaccessible reality visible; c) Najem's imagery productions follow the precepts of journalism, insofar as they bring the background, the passage, and the enunciation in action, presented by the markers "what you are seeing now is another bombardment", but at the same time, there is hybridization with the amateur discourse since he places himself

not as someone who distantly observes but as someone who is immersed, and, therefore, authorized to transform into image what cannot be seen; d) his posts create a space for interactions, but they are the result of the difference in meaning, since there are comments that support the pain and others that question the misuse of Photoshop, therefore, the technical point of view; and e) the adolescent becomes an issue for communication vehicles such as CNN and The New York Times, among others, that reach the teenager through the replications of his written and narrated posts in English, that is, not made for Syrians, but to catapult the images into circulation. Thus, the adolescent also schedules the circulation.

In this complex situation, we realize that the empirical object that constitutes our field of observation involves media logics and mediatization logics. However, it is within the scope of mediatization that the adolescent occupies a place of discourse since he makes use of media strategies (the reproduction of the seen in journalism, the frames of videos, the choice of the lines that refer to a previous script) to create a tentative space for social affecting and visibility. The teenager himself assumes, in an interview with CNN, that his main motivation for reporting daily life is the fact that: "People have to know everything that is happening in Syria. *I want to study and be a journalist when I grow up.*" At the same time, in one of the published videos, he highlights the trivialization of the image of conflicts: "*Our hunger, our cold, our escapes have become a common vision. Save our people in Ghouta.*" The rhetoric, although open to question when economic and political interests are at stake, adheres to the images produced and which are transformed into new circulations. The operation-image, in this case, at first, could be considered the residue-image or garbage (Figure 06). The one that evidently would not be able to reach the media, because it is submerged in the middle of thousands of images posted and published daily. However, the residue-image can be raised to circuit-image when valued in circulation. The teenager's Twitter has 25,000 followers and videos with over 200,000 views. Thus, like the White Helmets, Najem ceases to be an amateur and is raised, hankering, to the category of source and agenda.

Figure 06 – Image of family and friends raised from residue to operation



Source: Muhammad Najem's Twitter

These two materials have common and divergent points: on the one hand, using networks for something else. It is not just about access to the space of the media *dispositif*, but the rise to circulation. What they produce, whether as a non-media institution or as a social actor, is socially valued, implying both consumptions by other social actors, as well as by the canonical media. The media logics permeate both actions, since they are crossed by the knowledge that does not belong to them *a priori*, because the framework, the script, the flagrant record are the specialists' actions, but which, widely didactic, are subsumed. But what about the images at stake? If it is not the images as products that circulate, but which, according to Braga (2012), find an environment to circulate, the ones produced by both the Civil Defense and the 15-year-old boy coincide in the theme of an endangered childhood, and, therefore, consolidate the image

of the attacked child as a synthesis-image of the conflict, so, an operation-image.

The synthesis-image<sup>10</sup>, understood as the operation-image, is not simply the image that represents, configures, shapes the media event, but it is the image that surpasses the residue-images. Such images are those struggling, trying to show alternatives, bringing other angles. However, the consolidated synthesis-image does not allow the residue to overlay. They exist, they circulate through invisible ducts, because they do not conquer space in the media nor are valued by social actors, unlike the circuit-image which surrounds us and is produced specifically to end in cascade.

In this respect, we bring up the synthesis-image of the Syrian crisis. Aylan Kurdi's body, found at Bodrum beach, does not need to appear, not even to be mentioned. It is not that child, but its imagistic capacity for shading. The photograph of the child drowned on the beach, as a phantasmagoria, reappears in the productions of the White Helmets, of the 15-year-old youngster, and the operation-/circuit- and residue-images do not go beyond the consolidation of the synthesis-image, because they do not deny it, but carry it.

#### **IV – The “rescue” operator who rescues synthesis-images**

When looking at the materiality that makes up our case of research, we see the more than frequent use of the word “rescue” as an operator of meanings. Whether it is on the news headline of the White Helmets video: “The moment when children are rescued from wreckage after the bombing in Syria” (G1, 02/20/2018), or in the text produced by the Syrian teenager who pledges for a rescue of dignity and visibility, appeals that use this “rescue” operator are evident. The rescue is what saves, recovers, but also frees. How many rescues are up for grasp in

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10 The term synthesis-image has appeared in the author's studies since 2012 and has been constantly updated. A more recent text about the approach can be seen at [http://www.compos.org.br/data/arquivos\\_2018/trabalhos\\_arquivo\\_XDFB3D0719DNXSGSYMFL\\_27\\_6543\\_22\\_02\\_2018\\_07\\_01\\_08.pdf](http://www.compos.org.br/data/arquivos_2018/trabalhos_arquivo_XDFB3D0719DNXSGSYMFL_27_6543_22_02_2018_07_01_08.pdf).



the Syrian case? We are faced with the rescue of the wounded, the children, the White Helmets, and consequently of the organization itself, the rescue of life and visibility, by the Syrian boy. But, eventually, the redemption of an earlier image: childhood, the angel, then the synthesis and totemic image. However, we can ask ourselves: what does the term rescue imply? Who to rescue, and for what? To some extent, we are faced with a semantic operator that is a metaphor of emptiness; there is a rescue of a body, of an organization, but, above all, the practical action of the promoted rescue is that of visibility. It implies it is much more about removing the layers of rubble and symbolic soot than the physical ones, removing the layers of socio-historical erasures to put people, faces, looks in the flow of mediatization, which although not even representing, end up to figurative something that until then did not seem to exist.

In other words, the operator '*rescue*', which is often seen in headlines produced by both traditional journalism and by the White Helmets, in their new way of doing things (arranging circulation), is not just a strong word, but a word that '*rescues*' synthesis-images. When thinking about the conflicts in Syria, which last for decades, and the resulting immigration crisis, some images relate and merge in '*rescues*' produced in our memory, understanding it here not like a chest of things seen, but as a process alive and in constant mobilization.

In this sense, rescuing synthesis-images implies resuming the images in dispute. Throughout this text, we identified four types of images in play as operation-images. Such images are operations because they do not exemplify or show something but '*do*' something. Within this perspective, the images of the White Helmets make circuits, produce insertions, and organize visibility movements, be it conflicts or the organization itself. Even their amateur-professional practice allows the "21<sup>st</sup>-century massacre" to have a face, a body, and, above all, heroes. The operation-image produced by the teenager Najem, on the other hand, is twofold: it transforms residue-images (without force, appeal, those that are available by the thousands on the web, the result of amateur production) into circuit-images when it assumes mediatized contact logics as the expressions of the western journalism, the technical resource, and the narration

in English. Another type of operation-image strongly identified throughout the text is the synthesis-image, which is marked by its ability to make remember even when not present. The mere mention of elements of the image or its symbology already gives it its contours, and, in this sense, the synthesis-image acts as a restriction on the entrance of new images, even when they are accessible. Finally, the fourth and last type of operation-image, as evidenced in this article, is the rescue-image that aims to rescue synthesis-images. The rescue-image operation is also linked to the semantic operator itself, but it is hybridized with the synthesis-image because it involves complex relations with the collective and social imaginary.

In the case under analysis, we have the potency of the web as access and also the need for a tactical elaboration of the use of the device such as Twitter. It is evident, even though the operations of the Civil Defense and the Syrian adolescent reinforce the first image, not only the one elected by the media but the one established in the social imaginary that places the child as “the image” of the conflicts, erasing, to some extent, the other possible images of the tragedy that they report and determining their non-existence. It leads us to think about the way images that become value operations work so that they prolong the circulation of particular images and turn others opaque. Now, what about how false images (like Figure 07) appear? Or when photo-montages seem so fictional to be considered fake?

Figure 07 – Images of pieces of children’s bodies in ditches are discovered, but taken as photomontages



Source: Maara Media Center

The posed doubt makes productions (Figure 08) that recover images already strongly introjected into our iconographic repertoire and with force, even sacred, to be reiterated.

Figure 08 – Photomontage from the collage of the image of the work Pietá, and White Helmets’ publications



Source: Prepared by the author based on images from the web

The image above shows a manner of attempt to prevent our eyes from deviating. They are not allowed to blink nor stop, only to follow the flow. Even if, for viewing so much, some tactics become gradually imperceptible.

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# Between the power of enunciators and the power of discourses. The hypermedia circulation of contemporary images

*Mario Carlón*

**Abstract:** We don't understand contemporary society yet. As regard images, one of the main reasons is that we have not yet constituted the conceptual and analytical tools necessary to account for their new statutes, which must be considered in relation to the new mediatization and circulation of meaning. In this text we propose some hypotheses. In relation with mediatization, it is necessary to take distance from generalist discourses. What characterizes our era is the emergence of a set of specific images such as selfies, gifts, memes, vlogs, and so on. But what should be the analytical approach that should be applied to their study? It is necessary to privilege circulation. But our time is also characterized by the survival of speeches that contain images in which they have left traces of devices and languages generated in the deep history of mediatization. That is why there is an increase in complexity. With regard to circulation, we will distinguish two macro-processes: the new semiological *guerrillas* and the overflowing circulation. And we will delve into two logics: the power of enunciators and the power of speeches. We differentiate the current life from modern, post-modern and contemporary media images emerging in their new and complex interaction.

**Keywords:** Circulation. Mediatization. Images. Contemporary power.

## I – Introduction

We are far from characterizing contemporary society. One can argue that this is because it is difficult to conceptualize an object that is only beginning to unfold over time, and it certainly is. But there are other reasons as well.

About images, one of them is that we have not yet established the conceptual and analytical dispositifs necessary to account for their new statutes, which must be thought in relation to the new mediatization and circulation of meaning, phenomena that are intimately linked.

In this text, we propose to contribute to the study of contemporary images by establishing some hypotheses. Regarding mediatization, we sustain that, regardless of the contributions made, it is necessary to distance ourselves from the generalist discourses that do not fully account for the basic system that enables the new conditions of circulation. What characterizes our time is the emergence of a set of specific images such as selfies, gifs, memes, vlogs, etc. But what should be the analytical approach applied to their study? Our thesis: it is necessary to abandon immanentist and production analyzes, favoring circulation. However, our time is also characterized by the survival of discourses that contain images that have left traces in dispositifs and languages generated in the deep history of mediatization have. It is to these phenomena that we refer when we speak of an increase in complexity.

About circulation, we will distinguish two macro-processes: the new *semiological guerilla* and the *overflowing circulation*. And we will stop at two logics: *the power of enunciators and the power of discourses*. It will be within these developments that we will differentiate current life from modern, post-modern, and contemporary emerging media images in their new and complex interaction.



## II – The case: the “zócalos” of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (CFK)<sup>1</sup>

We start from the analysis of an example in which images have a significant place, and in which, as we hope to demonstrate, the issues we want to address are, specifically, put into play. It took place in April 2017 during the government of President Macri, who succeeded CFK, who held power for two consecutive terms (2007-2011 and 2011-2015). Before CFK, her husband, Néstor Kirchner, was the President of the Nation (2003-2007).

April 24, 2017:

- *Facebook*: Former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (CFK) publishes on her account the following image with the title “*Cadena nacional (de la mentira)*”



1 In Argentina, the expression *zócalo* is used mainly in the television environment to refer to the space that usually goes below on the screen with a text written with videography (subtitles). These texts usually title the news to be presented at the beginning and then comment on the development of the content (in an interview, for example, they highlight the main phrases that are said).

The image illustrates how the four programs, from two of the principal open television channels in Argentina, compare the situation in the province of Santa Cruz with that of Venezuela. The province of Santa Cruz was, for years, governed by Néstor Kirchner, then deceased, and is, at that time, governed by his sister, Alicia Kirchner. It takes place in the context of conflict over late payment of wages and the start of classes that led to a confrontation between protesters and the police at dawn on April 22. Two of the four programs that appear in the image are *Los Leuco*, by the journalist Alfredo Leuco (top right) and his son Diego, and *Diario de Mariana*, by Mariana Fabiani (bottom right), broadcast on Channel 13, owned by Grupo Clarín, with whom Kirchnerism maintained a fierce dispute since 2008. The other two are *Animales sueltos*, led by Alejandro Fantino (bottom left), and *Intratables*, by Santiago del Moro (top left), broadcast on Channel 2 (America). The reference to a “national chain” is due to an accusation made against CFK, who, in the last years of her mandate, frequently used this mode of transmission to communicate. Historically, national broadcasting occurs primarily when the President speaks. In these cases, all the channels abandon their usual programming and retransmit the official broadcast. From the critical, non-official, and anti-Kirchnerist media, this use of the national network was considered authoritarian and abusive. The fact that the former President wrote that the image show a “national chain (of lies)” can be read as a response to the criticism she received. One can interpret that, for her, the private media, self-considered independent, also constitute a *chain* because they spread homogeneously and simultaneously an anti-Kirchnerist point of view. The scenario in which the publication of this discourse occurs is one of a polarization between Kirchnerists and anti-Kirchnerists that characterizes Argentine society since 2008.

- Twitter: On the same day, Santiago del Moro, host of *Intratables*, publishes a tweet in which he says: “I ask you for respect: do not call me a liar.”<sup>2</sup>

2 According to Pedro Perucca’s reconstruction, which we will comment on later, Del Moro warns that the image was apocryphal. Due to the messages he receives, he admits indignation and expresses: “I respectfully inform you that the *Intratables* graph x which Mrs. Kirchner has accused us of lying about is FALSE, it is

- Television: the evening edition of the program dedicated a significant part of its time to this issue. Del Moro said that "denouncing the chain of lies, the one who was lying was her." In this context, one of the panelists, known for his Kirchnerist militancy, Diego Brancatelli, expressed "*Cristina pifió* (she was wrong), it is not right to publish something without checking."<sup>3</sup>
- Television: That same day, in the night edition of *Animales sueltos*, Alejandro Fantino answered to CFK. In his discourse, he stated that "someone told CFK that they had (the programs) the same *zócalo*." "I checked with the production and that *zócalo* we never put it on." For Fantino, "whoever edited that *zócalo* forgot (to delete) the text above." He ended by saying: "work with more professional people."

April 26:

- Television: Mariana Fabiani, in her afternoon program *Diario de Mariana*, shows that the image of her crying inconsolably with the *zócalo* *Pain and Sadness* did not refer to Venezuela; it was previous and due to the death of a friend and his mother. In her statement, Fabiani questions CFK saying: "I am honest and righteous. Can you say the same?"
- Television: at night, Diego Leuco hosts *Los Leuco* and shows that the *zócalo* that CFK published with the image of his father was from an old edition and that the articulation between text and image did not correspond to what was broadcast: the *zócalo*, at that moment, was another, referring to the Attor-

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fake, it never existed". The second says: "I say this after the production checked all the programs, the same happened to the colleagues! #Verdadvsmentira".

3 That same day the news channel TN, from Clarín, published on its website: "How was the route of the zocatruchos"; In it, it performs a reconstruction of the events, but who was the creator of the image shared by Aníbal Fernández and CFK has not yet been revealed. And the journalist Fernando González, from the Clarín newspaper, publishes the note "Cristina, TV *zócalos* and the post-truth boomerang", discussing the event within the framework of the period debates on post-truth.

ney General of the Nation. Diego Leuco says: “Cristina, enough of lying”.

- Blog: with the title “#Falsoenlasredes: the *zócalos* on Santa Cruz that CFK spread never existed”, the data journalism site Chequeado.com, of the La Nación newspaper, publishes an investigation that corroborates what was expressed by the media that denied the CFK's post.

### III – A reconstruction

To begin to find an answer about what happened, we must leave the mass media – the main actors involved, and what was published by the data journalism site Chequeado.com. On April 28, a little-known blog, “Notes of popular journalism” published a note, signed by Pedro Perucca<sup>4</sup>, entitled: “Santos Vargas, *zocalogate*, and the power of memes” in which, for the first time, began to reveal what happened.

Perucca reconstructs the main media events of the week and reveals that the image had not been created by the un-professional communication teams that Fantino imagined, but that the creator was Santos Vargas, who, two days previously to the CFK release, on the 22 April, posted the following image also on his Facebook account:

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4 Perucca is a suspicious name because it is a nomination by which Peronists are usually referred to and the blog is advertised as a space for “popular journalism”, which is why it may be a fake. Although we have not been able to confirm it, we believe that Pedro Perucca is the same person who publishes in the @PedroP71 account on Twitter. That account has a picture of Spider-Man, and claims to be “A journalist particularly interested in cultural issues. Literature, theater, cinema, series and various *ñoñadas*. Socialist”. Although he calls himself a socialist, it is his love for popular culture that makes us think he is the same. <https://notasperiodismopopular.com.ar/2017/04/28/santos-vargas-zocalogate-poder-memes/>



It was, then, tweeted by her former Chief of Staff Anibal Fernández:



As can be seen, it is the same image that CFK later shared. It is an altered image: the top part, in which Leon-O, a character from the Thundercats with the text “SantaCruz-

ela<sup>5</sup>” appears, was removed. Perucca’s thesis is that “at some point someone removed Leon-O and the image circulated until it reached Aníbal and Cristina.” Which is, perhaps, a lot to assume: because he doesn’t verify who edited it, it perfectly could have been Aníbal Fernández, who loves to generate controversy. Apart from this fact, it is evident that Aníbal Fernández and CFK shared a fragment of the image generated by Santos Vargas.

In this context, showing knowledge of the subject, Perucca says that Santos Vargas “deeply loves Cristina<sup>6</sup>” and qualifies the image as a meme, although it is much complex than most memes. Next, we will dwell on the mediatization and circulation that characterize this case, but before presenting our analysis, we will make some general considerations about the images and the approach that we consider necessary to apply.

## IV – Images and contemporary mediatization

Our object of analysis, the succession of discourses containing images that we have just discussed, places us in a particular situation: we need to analyze different images. To move forward and set our reflection, we must make certain clarifications.

### A. There is no general theory of images

The first one is as follows: besides much being written on this theme throughout history, is there a general theory of image that we can appeal to accounting for all of them, regardless of their mediatization conditions? Our answer, at this level, is no, because, similarly to what happened in the era of mass media with modern and post-modern images, there cannot be a study that disregards mediatization, and the receptive and discursive social practices that, by making contact with them, are put into practice. And while it is true that in recent years there

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5 A condensation of the province of Santa Cruz and Venezuela, expressed in the language of the Batman of the sixties.

6 According to Perucca, Vargas has stated on his accounts “Khalessi, I am your Durán Barba.” The statement deserves an explanation. The reference to Khalessi is because CFK once expressed her sympathy for that Game of Thrones character. Durán Barba is the communications advisor to President Mauricio Macri.

were contributions to the study of the new mediatization, what characterizes our time is that, as we have just illustrated with the example we have chosen, a large part of the discourses published on social media networks take up images from the mass media and vice-versa. And in that coming and going, contemporary images, that is, those specific to our time, coexist with others that become contemporary, but in which the languages and devices of the mass media have left their traces.

The inexistence of a general theory of image that may apply to the study of discourses that contain images generated by different dispositifs, languages, and media was noticed already in the era of mass media and, as we will see shortly, it is an observation that is still valid, even in the age of digitization. Let us remember what Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1990 [1987]) expresses in her remarkable book *The Precarious Image* (of the photographic dispositif):

[...] If we want to understand what distinguishes the photographic image from other images, we must abandon the idea that there is an image 'in itself' that only undergoes minor changes depending on the dispositifs that produce it. Christian Metz observed as early as 1970 that studying the image does not necessarily consist in looking for the 'image system, the unique and total system.' Its relevance is always *de rigueur* (p.11-12).

For this reason, the way to study the photographic image, for Schaeffer, was to know the *specific dispositif that generates<sup>7</sup> it and the lateral knowledge* that the subjects mobilize for each one. In this case, the dispositif is iconic-indexical, and the lateral knowledge is about the world, that is, about the entities (for example, a strawberry) and the *arché* (that is, about the technique: to recognize that an image is photographic implies an understanding that between the adhering and the adherer there is an existential, indicative relationship, guaranteed by the dispositif that has captured a luminous situation through a pho-

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Inversion of priorities, then: the image will not be the original data of the description, but must be detached from its technical assumptions" (SCHAEFFER, 1990 [1987], p. 12)

tosensitive plate). In other words, images cannot be studied in themselves, but they must be framed in a study of mediatization and circulation<sup>8</sup>.

## B. New media system, interface, and digitization

Now, how to address the study of contemporary images, the ones that the new mediatization produces and appropriates with all their complexity? The main novelty that contemporaneity has brought is the emergence of a new media system based on telephone networks and the Internet. This system has been conceptualized mainly through concepts such as interface and digitization. The theories of interfaces have made substantial contributions to the understanding of the central phenomenon of this era that differentiates our experience with the historical media, languages, and *dispositifs* of the mass media era: interaction (SCOLARI, 2018). The system of social media networks is interactive, while historical television, the cinema, and the newspaper, for example, are not. Digitization, in turn, has affected the life of images on two key-levels, as demonstrated in the debates on the “end” of mass media (CARLÓN; SCOLARI, 2009): discursiveness, either by the generation of digital images or the digitization of canonical images and circulation, preventing institutions from controlling and monetizing, as they did before, all the stages in which contact with them can be made in the social life (CARLÓN, 2016).

However, while we consider it essential to add these conceptualizations, we understand that it is necessary to take a certain distance from the generalist developments of these theories: especially when they tend to *reduce analytical tools by building a flat scenario of mediatization*, in which, for example, the specificity of the iconic-indexical images of the modern and post-modern era that still circulate in post-modernity tends to disappear with the argument that they can be digitized or that

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8 Remember here that, for Jean-Marie Schaeffer, the photographic image is a reception sign. She says: “[...] I affirm that it is impossible to fully understand it within the framework of a semiology that defines the sign from the point of view of its emission” (1990 [1987], p. 7-8). This perspective has points of contact with the formulations on the difference between production and recognition by Eliseo Verón, for whom the subject in production is a passage point of meaning.



we all access them through an interface. As Manovich (2006 [2001]) says:

The interface shapes the way the user conceives the computer itself. And it also determines how he/she thinks about any media object that he/she accesses through the computer. By stripping the different media of their original differences, the interface imposes its logic on them (p. 113).<sup>9</sup>

Our position at this point is:

- a) that the previous mass media system, with its languages and *dispositifs*, has been transformed in many aspects, but *has not disappeared*,
- b) that indexicality has become weak, even as lateral knowledge, and its spectator subject has lost *innocence* (CARLÓN, 2016) *but it persists, and its activity is so important to understand contemporary discourses like knowing about the digital*<sup>10</sup>,
- c) that it is necessary to investigate contemporary images within the framework of a conceptualization that contemplates the simultaneous operation of two systems, that is, a more complex scenario.

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9 This is the problem of generalist approaches. As with digitization, the importance of interfaces should not reduce analytical tooling, because we need them to account for complexity. In our era, the mass media continue to work, in many aspects, based on phenomena that were conceptualized with categories such as *dispositifs*, languages, media, and so on. Although the cameras are digital, live television remains strongly iconic-indexical. Neither it is an interface: its spectator subject is basically the historical one, a media witness of the events (CARLÓN, 2004). Cinema in theaters, which is in crisis but has not disappeared, is not either: films that rely on recent transmedia narratives such as *Toy Story 4*, for example, heavily rely on a set of long-standing montage operations in their discursiveness tradition, like the sequence, and although its spectator subject is not that of old Disney films, many aspects persist: identification with the camera, non-interactive texts for more than two hours, spectator subject whose position is defined by the text, etc. Ultimately, it is about not simplifying, because one of the reasons why the increase in complexity dominates in the history of mediatization is because the devices for the production of meaning accumulate rather than disappear.

10 A quick example: selfies. They are digital photographs, which circulate through interfaces, but it is impossible to understand them if we do not understand the importance of the iconic-indexical dimension in them.

### C. Modern, post-modern, and contemporary images

From what we said, I freely return here to previously formulated proposals regarding modern and post-modern images, based on an analysis of the functioning of the media and circulation systems. Within the case we are analyzing, the interest of this distinction is that it is useful to determine the specificity of the images that circulated.

Images that we consider modern are those that the media system installed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and thus differentiated from the pre-media through the installation of iconic-indexical *dispositifs*: the photographic, the cinematographic, and the direct television. They circulated with a big difference between production and recognition and were characterized by their autonomy.

Those ones we considered post-modern were born on the margins of the media discourses of modernity, mainly in the field of avant-garde artistic experimentation, and developed a series of specific operations: appropriation, montage, intervention, inter-discursiveness, etc. These images expanded in the field of art in post-modern photography, and then into the mass media, becoming one of its most important developments. The big difference between production and recognition is maintained.

Contemporary images arise right after the emergence of the Internet; they are digital and accessed mainly through interfaces. Thanks to the interfaces and interaction, the distance between production/recognition processes (not their conceptual difference) decreases and acquires a dynamic rhythm. Contemporary circulation has specific characteristics: it is intra-systemic (in a media system) or inter-systemic (establishes between two media systems, that of the mass media and that of social media networks), and in both cases, they circulate images with modern, post-modern, and contemporary components (modern and post-modern ones with weak indexicality), and their pace can be frenetic. We now will return to the analysis of the case “*Los zócalos de CFK*.”

## D. Persistence and reconfiguration of modern images in the case of CFK's *zócalos*

We will try to demonstrate what we have just pointed out with the analysis of the example we are considering. We will begin by answering to the CFK post, which unfolded the action of the mass media and, ultimately, made the example so interesting to us. Regardless of the polarization that frames the exchanges between Kirchnerists and anti-Kirchnerists, to which we will return, what was the focus of the resumption and discussion of her posting by the four television programs? The falsity of the articulation between text and image. The four programs turned to their archives and determined that the discourses posted by CFK were based on images taken from their television broadcast, which is predominantly iconic-indicial (CARLÓN, 2004; 2006), but that the specific articulation between text and image never happened.

Now, what is the statute of the images that generated so much controversy? They were taken by Santos Vargas from effective audiovisual transmissions, and, *when processed, their specificity becomes digital<sup>11</sup>, but also iconic-indexical* (in their current statute of weak indexicality, as we pointed out above). What we discuss is that, at no time during these transmissions, from which those images were taken and processed, appeared this videography that also relocated them in the context of another event on Saturday, July 22 – the conflict in the province of Santa Cruz. But its statute is not in dispute.

Why so much offense and interest in denying, only because the articulation has never occurred? It is the main motive, but not the only one: iconic-indexical images are highly plausible; through the iconic dimension, they identify who appears represented and feels challenged, and, through the persistence of the indexical dimension, they activate the presupposition that what is seen, happened, much more than others. This indexicality does not have the same power in a shared image on the networks as in transmission, that is why we mean that, in contemporaneity, there is still *weak* indexicality since the spectator

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11 According to Perucca, Santos Vargas makes his memes with Windows 95.

subject *has lost his/her innocence* but that does not mean that it has disappeared.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, it is relevant not to leave aside that this type of discussion was not born in the contemporary era, nor by the action of Facebook or any other social network: it is set, with its specificity, on characteristic debates of the era of massive media. In other words, the fear of these programs lies in the fact that they know that although the posting took place in a social network whose logic is the digitization and we have access to it via an interface, that image needs to be denied because it has a great capacity to influence others, not only the Kirchnerists but anyone who comes into contact with it. Perhaps now it is better understood what we mean when we say that we distance ourselves from certain general developments in digitization theory: in particular, those that dissolve or “flatten” the differences between distinct images.

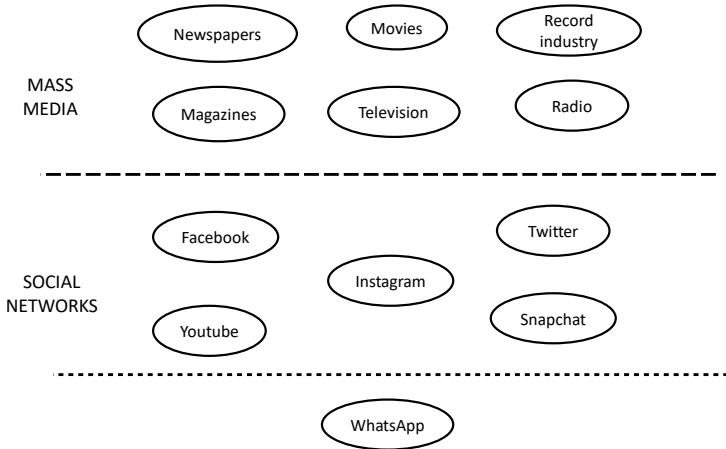
### **E. Contemporary mediatization**

Let us move on to the concept of the new mediatization<sup>13</sup> since we have established our position on the theory of interfaces and digitization. The following graph, which places the mass media system at the top and the social media networks at the bottom, shows the articulation between media systems that enables the new circulation. In the contemporary scenario, both are dominated by digitization, but that does not imply that digitization is all-powerful: Santos Vargas’ image, as we saw, is not only digital.

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12 A reflection on the symbolic, iconic, indexical and digital can be found in Carlón (2012).

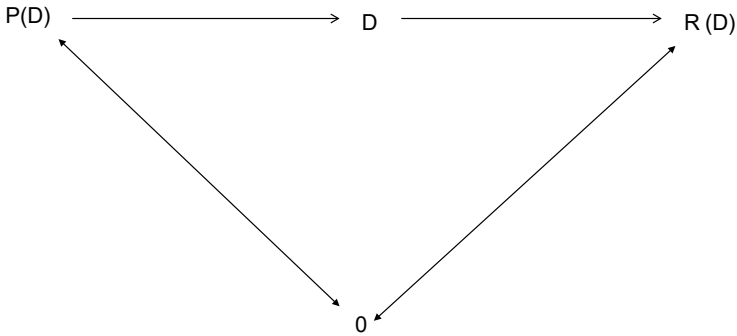
13 The analysis presented here on mediatization and circulation has multiple contact points with those developed by authors such as Antonio Fausto Neto, José Luiz Braga, Jairo Ferreira, and Pedro Gilberto Gomes in dialogues between Argentina-Brazil. We redirect here to Carlón (2019).



## V – Contemporary circulation

We will now present a new graphic, which illustrates how Santos Vargas' meme specifically circulated and what re-takes were made by the mass media according to the story told by Pedro Perucca, and the reconstruction that we were able to carry out.

But before doing so, we dedicate a few words to the epistemological foundations and the graphic language used. The graph that we are going to present, based on the *minimal unit model from the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce* that Eliséo Verón presented in *The meaning as discursive production* (1987), a key text in *La semiosis Social: Fragmentos de una teoría de la discursividad*. As it is impossible to briefly present here what Verón exposes in a chapter within a broader exposition, we refer anyone interested in delving into this subject to Verón's text. The schema is:

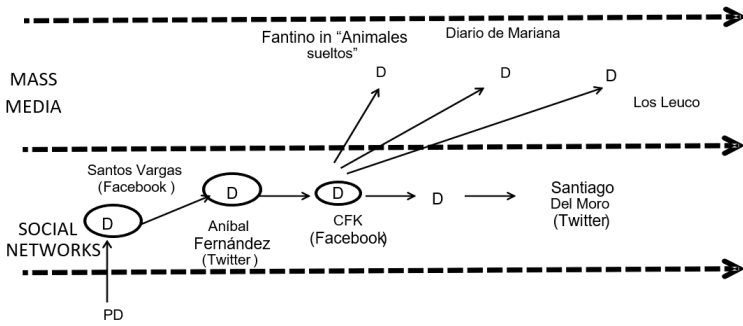


For our purposes here, it is enough to express that, in the graph, two instances are open, production and recognition. A discourse (D) has production conditions (PD) and recognition conditions (RD). Circulation is, for Verón, the difference between production and recognition, and, therefore, it is not linear. Thus, it is not possible to know the effects of discourse in recognition, only from an analysis in production. The analysis in recognition is accomplished on new discourses that must necessarily be enunciated in a later instance. The graph that we present in the next item is based on Verón's, but also on the one of contemporary mediatization that we previously saw. As there are two media systems, circulation can be downward ("top-down"), upward ("bottom-up"), or horizontal (peer-to-peer in the mass media or social media system).

## VI – Circulation: hypermedia 'semiotic *guerilla*' and overflowing circulation

I now return to the case we are analyzing. Given its complexity, which generated intense activity for a week on social networks and in the mass media, and the fact that more than two years have passed since it happened, which makes it hard to reconstruct circulation entirely, the graph presented below offers an approximation. It is a "minimal graph" since we know that many other processes happened: we focus, first of all, on the direct responses of the programs alluded to in the CFK's post

indicated by Perucca. But it is enough for what we propose to show: the specificity of the new hypermedia circulation and a path towards its analysis<sup>14</sup>.



Circulation starts in an upward direction because it begins at the bottom: Santos Vargas makes his publication on Facebook. Then, Aníbal Fernández shares the bottom part of Santos Vargas's montage, and then CFK does the same. Santiago del Moro answers the former President from his Twitter account. From here, an intense hypermedia activity begins between social networks and the mass media, of which we account only partially. We privileged the retake of the referenced television programs. Then there is the rise of the cut image to the mass media: Alejandro Fantino comments on it in *Animales sueltos*; Mariana Fabiani in *Diario de Mariana*; Santiago del Moro and his panel debate *Intratables*; and Diego Leuco in *Los Leuco*.

Let us now move from descriptive to interpretive analysis. The circulation of meaning is framed by the polarization between Kirchnerists and anti-Kirchnerists that exists in the Argentinian culture. In this case, both parties and many others dispute an intra and inter-systemic semiotic *guerilla* for meaning to impose themselves on circulation<sup>15</sup>. But this is not the only logic involved; there is another, silence and specific to contemporaneity, to which we want to draw attention.

14 The graph was prepared based on the model of "minimum unit" by Eliseo Verón from 1987.

15 The hypermedia semiotic *guerilla* notion is based on Umberto Eco's (1987 [1967]) semiologic *guerrilla*. The major difference is that now it is deployed between the mass media and the new media system.

It is what defines the specificity of the case: the meanings that were given to the images, the misunderstandings they unfolded. Within the framework of a non-linear perspective of communication, it is significant to note that not only did CFK post an image whose origin she probably did not know, nor did she know that it had been generated by Santos Vargas, or either that it had been adulterated. However, it is also interesting to note that none of the participants in the debate, who treated her as a liar and showed that the images were apocryphal, knew who generated the image to which they referred. That is, they accused her of being a liar but ignoring their ignorance, a situation that does not seem to be an ideal condition for the construction of knowledge or to point out a fault to the other. It is this phenomenon that we call *overflowing circulation*, considering it particular of our contemporaneity: we, subjects, are immersed in a complex magma in which we are always about to meet the same situation of CFK or the ones who challenged her.

In this context, two enunciators stand out: Santos Vargas and Perucca. In a particular dimension, Santos Vargas predicts the reaction of the media that he challenges. It is what can be said of the statement “Sword of the basic subscription: let me see beyond Monday<sup>16</sup>.” Sword of the basic subscription, as we anticipated, refers to Clarín: it is a medium that, more than practicing journalism, is a sword<sup>17</sup>. What he predicts is that not only the programs of Channel 13 but also those of Channel 2 will critically compare Santa Cruz with Venezuela from the events that occurred on the 22nd. But, in the best of cases, it is a partial prediction because he never could have foreseen, for example, that his image was going to be shared by the President, and everything that this circulation was going to generate, including this article.

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16 There is a double reference to Clarín in Santos Vargas’ composition. On the one hand, the logo of the newspaper is embedded in the upper part. On the other hand, the reference to the basic subscription also refers to the group since, although the newspaper is the emblem from which the holding company was built, the newspaper is part of a multimedia whose main business is the cable television service that charges a “basic subscription”.

17 One of the main journalists of the newspaper stated in a note published in September 2018 that during the Kirchner years they practiced “war journalism”. <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/medios/julio-black-periodismo-de-guerra-clarin-kirchnerismo-cambiamos-ideas.phtml>.



On the other hand, Perucca is the one who occupies a key role within the networks since he reveals that the thread originated from a post by Santos Vargas. But his discourse is not retaken, it does not reach the mass media; it is ignored, and does not generate a specific circulation.

## VII – The power of enunciators and the power of discourses

We now return to another distinction made by Eliseo Verón for the study of circulation. In the chapter “The network of distances,” Verón (1987) establishes a difference. He says that the ideological is the “system of relations of a discourse (or of a type of discourse) with its conditions of production when they put into play basic mechanisms of the functioning of society” (p. 134). In its turn, power is “the system of relations of discourse with its effects, when the conditions of recognition do concern the basic mechanisms of the functioning of society” (p. 134). In other words, the ideological is a bond with the conditions of production and, therefore, its traces can be studied while there are no traces of power, they can only come from a study in recognition that focuses on circulation.

In our case, we can circumscribe the presence of these two dimensions and analyze them within hypermedia circulation processes. Santos Vargas was not a powerful enunciator before his post; it is for most an unknown, as is proven by the fact that, until Perucca identified him, no media knew that he had produced the image. However, one of his posts was shared by one of the most powerful and well-known enunciators in Argentina: CFK. To what was it due? Our thesis is that it happened because it brought into play another power: *the semiotic logic that resides in the power of discourses*. A sizeable power that not only made his discourse to be shared by CFK but also made it reach the mass media. However, many discourses that CFK publishes on her social media network accounts are not retaken to the mass media. Santos Vargas’ discourse power is also limited because it would not have reached the mass media unless what occurred happened: that CFK shared it. That is, the power of the enunciator intervenes, too. It is how

images live in our contemporaneity: between semiotic *guerrillas* and overflowing circulation, between the power of enunciators and the power of discourses.

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# Digital social networks and relation systems

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**Abstract:** The article proposes that research on digital social networks requires both attention to diversity of experiences and the study of broad processes. This implies an analysis referring to singular cases, seeking, however, dimensions of variation to link them to diversity. It suggests putting more emphasis on the social relations systems developed through networks than on the materiality of technologies. It considers that the difficulty in grasping the logics of networks is due, rather than to the diversity of experiences, to the fact that they have not yet developed stabilized standards – having no defined rules as a whole. It proposes an investigation into the urgencies that stimulate social experimentation and current strategies that seek potential logics for the future.

**Keywords:** Digital networks; Interaction systems; Codes and Inferences; Mediatization.

## I – The question

The question that arises for our reflection, in this text, is to propose research angles on the object “digital social networks” that can keep the attention on the diversity of experiences, processes, problems and logics of operation, avoiding, however, that this necessary analysis of cases and episodes leads to dispersion of knowledge or descriptive empiricism. In the

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meantime, it is essential to develop comprehensive perspectives about the diversity, but without risking the undue generalization of a few singular characteristics just because they are showier, more visible in terms of materials (for instance, technology), or generate reverberating events, which do not efficiently express general patterns or stabilized arrangements.

The context in which we enter our reflection on digital social networks is the growing social mediatization. This is not restricted to a relationship between society and its media – as if they were external to one another. The “institutional tradition” (HEPP, 2014, p. 47) explains mediatization as the influence of *media logic* on other social sectors that only undergo changes. This does not seem to be enough.

Acknowledging the use of media as a process of society, we noticed that social initiatives and experiments, in all sectors of activity and reflection, turn mediatization into an “interactional process of reference” (BRAGA, 2007). If we are to observe the circulation of the media speech, it is not because we consider the media as guiding the social behavior patterns, but to understand, in this circulation, how the social sectors act in activating this interactional mode.

One of the characteristics of new technologies is precisely to offer a sharing space for very differentiated interactions. They are not specialized. In a sense, they are partly empty codes – that is, they can be filled with a particularly wide variety of content, actions, strategies, and may serve to different objectives, challenges, confrontations, and urgencies.

The interplay between the modes of interaction and the handling of all social issues is so intense that mediatization processes and experiences can be approached as symptoms to probe and apprehend society. In parallel, a perception about the social issues, in different aspects, informs us about the meanings and forwarding given in circulations activated using new technologies.

Based on these propositions, we understand that the study of digital social networks requires an analysis of the *relationship systems* developed there, rather than an observation restricted to technologies.

## II – Diversity

Concerning mediatization and the presence, there, of digital social networks, we noticed an extensive diversification of processes, marked by characteristics such as these:

- The appearance of various social media and, especially, media devices – *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, WhatsApp, Spotify, et cetera.*
- Increased observation of various social networks that arise or solely become noticeable in a digitized environment.
- The perception that digital networks traverse all social instances.
- The occurrence of various procedural changes in social networks that already existed before the digital technologies, through the development of experiences of technological activation seeking to improve their tactics and objectives.
- Increase on demands and proposals that never had manifested before in a network and see a possibility of expression and existence before the public gaze.
- Diversity, also, in the quality results of such experiments, presented in the context of a digital culture – ranging from stimulating to disastrous, passing through utterly inoperative.

In every sector of society, the perception of untapped technological resources encourages inventive and inferential competencies of the human species in the direction of “trying to do something with it” in favor of their interests. As a result, the political sector, industry, education at all levels, commercial activities, intellectual and artistic production, entertainment, journalism, and the usual professions of communication – all institutions, all social fields face unusual occurrences for which they have no established practical regulations.

These processes (given the technological characteristics set in motion and the social inexperience with such tentative

strategies) make social networks of any kind, previous or new, go beyond their intended boundaries — whether intentional or not. Even when intended — or precisely motivated by this pursuit of range extension — there is no effective control over the actual range or how this overtaking is accomplished.

### III – Analytics vs. General Explanations

The academic interest develops, and the explanatory theories multiply, seeking to, theoretically, grasp the cacophony resulting from the profusion of objectives and tactics, correlated with the processes in society. With this, networks are studied from several angles:

- According to the social field of its occurrence – political, cultural, economic, organizational, entertainment, from the most diverse professional sectors, and individual initiatives. There, specific knowledge about the fields of occurrence is activated, and their usual practices become a reference for the perception of displacements.
- According to the disciplines of knowledge in the human and social sciences – sociology, linguistics, anthropology, education, political science, etc. – which address the communicational issues involved in their disciplinary concerns.

So, we cannot assert each common pattern of explanations about the frame of mediatization, and, in this, we do not have adequately in-depth conceptions to grasp the digital social networks and their processes yet. The attempt to find a technological explanation – to attribute to the technological development the guidance of society – immediately collides with the variety of occurrences and experiments that activate the same technical feasibilities offered to do different things.

Assuredly, it is pertinent to observe and make interpretations about the functionalities of each media apparatus and its technologies – which allows researching its specific incidences in singular networks. But this approach also generates analytics



as diverse as the variety of apparatuses and operations made by society. Moreover, today we can consider that the diversity of hardware, software, and applications derives from demands socially expressed or intuited by developers.

In this situation, we cannot renounce diversified analytics, either by the practical processes of society and the concerned social fields or by the disciplines and theoretical lines involved in this quest for understanding. Rather than proposing macro-explanatory theories about the set, our approach should be to understand the diversity of occurrences and situations.

However, this does not imply accepting an infinite diversification of episodic descriptions limited to the empiricist and dispersed case by case. These analytics cannot be restricted to an empirical descriptiveness that only highlights, describes, surprises, or draws very general conclusions directly from episodes; that is, the research should not be limited to the case nor intended any typicality in the characteristics there perceived.

Parallel to the analytics, we also see the importance of cross-sectional views, which make it possible to articulate the discoveries and knowledge there obtained and to generate learning from the mutual tension between different interpretative proposals. To reflect reflexively on that diversity, one must also note the common elements, as they can provide the dimensions upon which variations will be found.

What will allow a work of continuity of theoretical elaboration is the possibility of investigating, in each case, determined characteristics that may present themselves as dimensions of variety – to multiply, in the set of case studies, these perceived dimensions and the variations found in each one.

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At one of the discussion tables of the II International Seminar on Mediatization, Professor Muniz Sodré referred to the hoarding of contemporary life by economics and technology. I would add, in Brazil: and by (bad) politics. Indeed, the debates to which the interest of most digital networks turns, as well as the scope of the interactional experiments made, suffer, from the perspective of the social participant, from one or more of these angles.

Correlatively, in the academic approach, there is a tendency to emphasize these same perspectives in studies that claim to be comprehensive. However, we need to add a fourth angle of transversal relevance: the communicational dimension. My research gives prevalence to the communicational processes that are evident in all the referred diversity – even though they are shaped by the different social fields of its occurrence and the diverse theoretical ambits activated in the investigation. These modalizations – economic, technological, political, cultural... – should not be forgotten or considered secondary in our communicational perspective. But what I want to observe is *how*, in these diverse structures, *communication takes place*. Better yet, to reflect on the communicational issue that may be related to this particular situation of diversity and dispersion. This corresponds to saying that one of our theoretical concerns is to understand the general logics that underlie diversification. And, here, we believe that a strictly communicational perspective may offer good hints.

It is not a matter of proposing a communicational explanation that opposes the others or aims to surpass them. It is rather to understand, in articulation with those social dynamics, some directly communicative processes in action. And based on that, to pose some general questions that favor analytical input. To do so, we need to draw attention to some preliminary features of the processes that lead to interactional arrangements and that may suggest some dimensions of variation (or “lines of variation,” as Deleuze [1989, p. 193] would say).

#### **IV – System of relations**

Social networks have always existed, ensuring their interactional processes according to the availability of the historical moment. Society is an overlay of interactional networks at distinct levels, with different powers and ranges.

Networks cannot be defined by the simple fact that different people and groups can express themselves or produce broadcasts aiming at all other participants. Before, they get characterized by the systems of relations which develop among these

participants, and in the activation of all the material or symbolic components that are relevant to the processes in action. Here, we can use Michel Foucault's concept of what he calls "dispositif":

What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The dispositif itself is the system of relations<sup>2</sup> that can be established between these elements. (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 299).

Systems of relations (explicitly formulated or not) become a pattern for the interactions carried out. If now we have a reticular interactional process, using social media, it is because *society develops such systems of relations*.

It is the socially developed system of relations, not technology, that characterizes a network. Thus, different relationships established with distinct objectives, to face differently addressed problems, will be differentiated networks, even if they activate the same technologies. Surely, these technologies are part of the heterogeneous elements activated – engraving themselves with their characteristics and focusing on the systems, but providing diverse interactions, from situation to situation.

Another aspect that must be added is that the systems of relations from the digital social networks do not only present that marked diversity, also they show themselves, quite frequently and with intensity, as incomplete, tentative, indefinite systems under construction. Perhaps, more than variation, this is what characterizes them today – the fact that they are a space for open experimentation.

For this reason, it is consistent to examine them mainly from this situation of incompleteness and experimentalism. It

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2 It is interesting to note that the expression used by Foucault to deal with systems of relations is the word "reseau" (network) – used in pre-digital times in a more focused meaning than the current one: to indicate complex relationships that form a system.

is not just a diversity of occurrences, but also an experimental diversity, of trial and error.

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It is common to think of a system as a ready and regulated structure, which determines the events in the space to which the system reaches. The system per se is seen as code. This perception must be made more complex.

I consider “code” every process, material element (natural or produced), gesture, symbol, simple or complex, that is objectively available and somehow shared (even if partially) between participants in an interaction. Such shared elements serve as mediation for common action among the participants, whatever is that intended action. Thus, they provide the basis for interaction, for the communicational process – which concerns more the joint action than the simple passing of messages from one to another (although this may be part of that action).

I see the systems of relations – of interaction – as structures, socially elaborated, with the following minimal characteristics (differently realized):

- Not just a code – corresponding to the system itself, but a diversity of confluent codes also competing with one another.
- In parallel, the necessary codes are always insufficient, they should be complemented by the strategic realization processes required to adjust the codes among themselves, and theirs with the unique occurrences of reality. This strategic scope implies a constant tentative work, of interactional arrangements, to make such adjustments feasible.
- With this, the participants of all social processes, although arousing cultural, political, institutional, professional rules, inevitably *improvise* their daily lives. An inferential competence, correlatively, enables our built-in patterns to fit the particular circumstance.
- In addition, although we always find, in culture, already established patterns, these patterns were

previously generated, by the very attempted exercise of communication, whenever social urgencies (that is: problems that do not have canonical solutions) generate ad hoc arrangements for coping.

In summary: social codes make communication development possible within its scope but, due to their tentative arrangements, it is the communicational process that generates social codes. The given codes (in fact, previously generated) are constantly modified not only by possible changes in context but also by their use.

What is happening now is that we locate ourselves in a historic moment when the established codes see their relevance reduced, and the situations under experimentation have not yet generated new codes sufficiently stable or reliable in their predictability.

## V – What annoys us

“Traditional” social networks – the systems of relations that are very established in social practices that we may consider consolidated in culture and performed in politics, in educational systems, in several professional fields, in the institutions of private life – are so diverse (among each other and the internal processes of each one) as the current digital networks and their processes are differentiated.

Why does a range of diversities not bother us, and the recent space is intriguing? Probably because we discover, in the second situation, a degree of instability, of existence not consolidated nor “pacified” by the repetitive practice and the discourse of normality.

In the systems of very established relations, we have “true codes” that indicate this normality and make up the reference, both for the service and for the strategies of eventual detachment from the pattern<sup>3</sup>.

What annoys us, in what is not yet established, seems to be this almost code absence, this experimental opening that

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3 See, in this aspect, “From the rules to the strategies” (BOURDIEU, 2004).

leads to the unpredictable, this indistinction between the possible and the necessary, this knowledge instability.

A long-established network has a somewhat clear perception of its justifications for action, as well as of strategies for coping with its objectives. In this space, communication can be limited almost to a spontaneous adoption of usual practices. The urgencies, although less foreseen, have a collection of indications for strategic adjustments to the changing circumstance.

When, however, there is an intense transformation of circumstances in a larger quantity of sectors, skilled fields, institutions, public and private worlds, society can no longer maintain the comfort of the “already shared” to ensure its interactions. We then enter a phase that may be somehow long, with the need for substantial adjustments, less controlled experimentation, expanded evidence of social invention.

Precisely, this is what occurs in the current phase of social mediatization. The offer of potentialities at the individual level, not previously available, for interactive actions very diverse from those already established as well as their access to a large number of interactional agents, opens up this space (and need) for experimentation.

First, socially faced problems with more usual solutions and strategies start to bring more effective solutions with new resources. Then, the experimental strategies per se generate new urgencies. This corresponds to what Foucault described as a “perpetual strategic fulfillment” (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 299).

In other words: more than the material characteristics of new technologies, we observe the impact, on “previous” social networks and social communication in general, of this sudden and expanded possibility of doing what was already done, now in very different ways, and of doing things that we could not due to the lack of circulation lines, absence of concrete flow conditions.

## **VI – The challenges**

It is necessary, then, to observe the social urgencies that appear in the form of redirecting the usual problems of so-

ciety for which the systems of relation in digital networks are constituted (or experimented).

Some of these urgencies arise directly, from previous objectives and challenges, when faced with the possibility (or need, for interaction with the environment) of their confrontation by activating new resources. The previous problem itself changes its profile: due to the new objectives of reach, circulation, participants' profile, how they "enter the network" or can be urged to enter. Not infrequently, we directly have new problems, already deriving from this pseudo imposition of expanded circulation, or need for access, the possibility of inventing other interactions, scopes, and actions made viably, but previously unthought.

What happens then is a slide in what is already foreseen – as a source of opportunities, but also as the absence of defined paths. Technologies appear, of course, with their offerings. These offerings, that are differently experienced for the exercise or constitution of systems of relations, produce stimulating, adverse or paradoxical challenges:

- Access to individual initiative actions is expanded in not previously imagined variety and proportions.
- Diversified connections appear between the spaces of private life and the public space, given the expansion of possible circuits in the network.
- These traditionally distinguished areas, consequently, see their design, scope, articulations (internal and between the two spaces) modified.
- Confounding factors derived from interceptions between the public sphere and private worlds, from individual and institutional actions, from specialized and amateur sectors, from the porosity of borders between social fields, open the possibility for socially rich experiences, but also give rise to misunderstandings and uncontrollable risks.
- The spread of possible actions and the origins of initiative, which produces an expansion of freedoms, is accompanied, on the other hand, by forms

of control and regulation that previously did not exist or were unnecessary – exacerbated surveillance potentials, expansion of the instant statistics of individual actions and the most diversified social, generation of data on a scale not directly accessible to the average citizen – which, then, start to be interpreted as stimulated and directed based on such information.

- The possibility of becoming an information generator also expands – directly gaining the freedom to participate in the social circulation without depending on having its expression selected by the news producing and systematizing sectors.
- Already as a problem resulting from this access and widespread initiatives, and in the absence of curator systems established at that level, a generation of fake news radically different (in processes, scope, origins, and objectives) from the traditional rumor; marginal experiments; manipulation processes (social or personal) with possible twisting to the law and even to the rule of law.
- These actions, when assumed as a tactic of political or economic power, can pose risks to the democratic process.
- The easiness to network people not related by multiple patterns (which would allow for multiple balancing of differences, ease tensions, and enabling flexible co-operation) favours the generation of monochord systems of relations, around one or few focus of common identity among participants, who become interaction centralizers, despising other aspects relevant however to a less conflictive social interaction.
- Such focal points of identification, precisely because they are exclusively articulators of participants, tend to generate excessively vehement polarizations, causing them to stand out from funda-



mentalist refusals, in contrast to identifications by a composite line that embraces differential aspects among participants.

## VII – The proposal

The preceding propositions, apparently apocalyptical<sup>4</sup> in tone, only brings together some generalized perceptions, in common sense and the academy, on problems happening in the society in mediatization with the expansion of digital networks. We do not intend to “explain” the networks based on this list, just illustrate the challenges. In opposite, we want to relate this framework to analytical perspectives and reflected knowledge production.

The challenges indicate, facing the interactive dynamics of digital mediatization, that we find ourselves in a situation of lack of stabilized operational patterns to deal with its potentialities. There are no previous interactional arrangements or attested modes of use in such dynamics. Strictly speaking although, realizing the potentialities, we don’t know very well what to do with it, *how* to do it.

The stabilized arrangements, which appear as more or less established interactional devices, socially shared, culturally available, instituted, do not offer answers or are directly shaken by those potentialities – of technological resources and of *the social experiments made with them*.

The macro social problem that manifests, therefore, is this: society does not have articulated arrangements in historical interactions, in the game of negotiations between social participants, of agreements, of existing power relations, to direct its interactional processes with minimal precision of any order, in the circumstances resulting from mediatization.

This is a core communicational concern for digital contemporaneity. Its first aspect is that, at the game of re-articulations, the more established systems of relations do not handle the urgencies as they did in preceding situations.

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4 It is no longer a matter of the twin notions suggested by Umberto Eco’s work – dualism, in which the author warns us about in the introduction of the work that sustains this title (ECO, 1984, p. 11). Rather, digital networks involve a complex issue of challenges – potentialities and tangled risks.

Strategies for interaction, in society, work in counterpoint to challenges and objectives. In parallel, social experiments are developed only partially guided by the established logics – social institutions, themselves, maintaining and seeking to adjust their more anchored rules, are also the field and source of experimentation. That is why the institutional views on mediatization do not allow grasping the complete frame – the emphasis on the institution creates a blind spot for the non-instituted.

The codes that, in contemporary mediatization, are at the basis of social interaction and human communication are evidenced, above all, by one of two characteristics: they are codes incorporated in culture, but they no longer work as well in the diversity of circumstances, or they are codes in construction and have not yet stabilized their procedures and effectiveness, their own logics. They have not yet elaborated on the discourse that expresses and justifies its truth to the point that it can be activated as if it were its origin (for this relation between practical logics and justifying discourse, see BRAGA, 2018, p. 6).

In this situation, the communicational issue is not limited to the activation of codes, and the daily inferential work of adjusting them to the singularity of the episodes. It extends to the insistent process of experimental code construction that takes place through the tentative exercise per se, as work in progress. This means that social communication – and here we must focus on mediatization, especially on digital social networks – emphatically requires inferential work, social invention, the experimental production of *interactive arrangements* (BRAGA, 2018) based on social practice.

Unlike other historical moments, in which specialized fields (or in an accelerated process of specialization) generated their codes of interaction within their spheres of sectorized systems of relations, there seems to be a dispersive generalization of the inventive process. Assuredly, with a diversity that fosters creativity, expansion, and diversification of origins for initiatives, but also with an apparently uncontrollable dispersion.

Then, this seems to be the central issue under study – not the logics of social networks, their most visible code element (as are the material logics of the technologies put in place) – but the experimentations undertaken in society. Moreover, it is from

this angle that technologies are better investigated, not as determinants of processes, but as a sector undergoing experimentation in the face of what is, tentatively, defined as “urgency.”

To articulate this communicational macro issue with an analysis of specific digital networks, it seems interesting to turn not to logics (specific or transversal) which explain the functioning of networks and define their most relevant patterns (as if they were fully established codes), but rather to highlight the problems and challenges that social experimentation is working with.

## VIII – Conclusion

From a theoretical point of view, what can ensure an articulating work between the results of an analysis of diversity is the search for dimensions of variation that allow overcoming the simple dispersion. The variation dimensions found enable us to relate the varied elements to the aspects according to which they vary.

It is not a question, then, of aligning theoretical logics that decide the characterizing elements, but of observing what the social participants themselves are trying to achieve with their ongoing experiences.

Some general questions may serve as horizon issues for the proposed analytics. What urgencies are evident in the system of relations in which they try to develop? How do these urgencies appear in syntony and/or displacement with more common problems or of the same social environment? What main goals are present for the participants, and how do these goals harmonize or conflict with each other? How are the objectives and interests of the participants presented and distinguished, and what can be considered as an objective of the social process (established, changing, under construction, or imagined)? What do the participants (and the process), in the search for articulating arrangements, put as expectations related to the technological resources used? How are these resources exercised, strained, what derivations and articulations are sought in the diversity of resources? What occurrences are manifested in the experimentation, as predictable, unpredictable, favoring objectives, redi-

recting them, generating new problems, asking for continued “strategic fulfillment”? What proto logics are attempted, with what degree of success, what possibility of generalization and validity for other situations?

Of course, questions of this kind are generic. In research, it is always necessary to specify – according to the object, the case, the situation under study. But as a set, we believe they indicate the reflection developed in the present text: to analyze and interpret systems of relations under construction via digital networks, rather than trying immediately to state their logics, it is about perceiving strategies that manifest as a tentative interaction process to generate arrangements and forwarding that may have some operative communicational meaning. It is not about studying the already established but investigating the process of social invention in which the conditions for social interaction are being created.

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# Mediatization, communication, and algorithms: a theoretical-methodological proposal for investigating elective affinities<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The general objective of this article is to contribute to the research line in mediatization and social processes, with a set of concepts, hypotheses, and theoretical explanations about algorithmic means when they interpose in interactions in digital networks, including production and reception of content, schedules, and indexing of offers. The hypothesis that guides this formulation is built on the interfaces between mediatized interactions and media interposition. The suggested matrix was created from references between the logics of production, reception, and media, in which each of the poles is transformed and transforms the others. This general hypothesis is theoretically based, on several levels, presented in sections of the article (media, signs, and technology; media and *dispositifs*; algorithmic logic managing content, programming, indexing, and interactions). These interfaces

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1 My thanks to the group of EPISTEMOS students, with whom I elaborated the explanatory inferences presented here, when we looked at empirical issues, real problems in social interactions. In particular, I am grateful to Dinis Ferreira Cortes (whose work demanded an approximation with Palo Alto's theory), Leticia Gedrat (who, in her work on autism, calls me to think about authorized voices), and Guilherme Batista (whose dissertation on algorithms invites us to think about elective affinities). In particular, the Quilombo Epistemological study group (Deivison Campos, Angelo Neckel, William Martins, and Thanise Melo), in which reflections on *places of discourse* have instigated us to seek more precise theoretical answers to the question of the polis in media processes.

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and hypotheses are a reference for investigations of singular research cases, informed as a method and methodology, including specific questions to be constructed according to the observables.

**Keywords:** Mediatization; interaction; communication; algorithms; elective affinities.

## I – Theoretical interfaces in the construction of the object

We consider here the hypothesis that the problem of circulation and media communication started with the Palo Alto School (WATZLAWICK, 1967). Interesting that this school resumes, surpassing, at the same time, the first works of the Chicago School (communication as a sharing of experience and as a process of creating social bonds between participants in a democratic community), and the epistemological inflections derived from research programs institutionalized during the Second World War (information theory, cybernetics, and behaviorism), present in the first five doctorates in the field created in the USA between 1943 and 1952 (PROULX, 2014). Palo Alto also makes an inflection concerning content analysis and quantitative methodologies that it does not adopt as a reference (administrative and functionalist research). It allows us to infer that mediatization research is different from administrative and functionalist research.

Assuredly, the fact that Eliseo Verón – as is clear from his article (VERÓN, 2005) – has carried out investigations in Palo Alto explains, in part, the presence of this heritage. But that link is just one of them. It also does not mean the absence of Europe's thinking. Concepts such as *dispositifs*, social fields, and public space are elaborated more precisely on the European stage<sup>3</sup>. These concepts also belong to the referential interfaces of the suggested object.

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3 To this are added interfaces with concepts that are dear to French semiology and discourse analysis, reflections on the status of the image, and the imaginary (research by Professor Ana Paula da Rosa, also from the Research Line). These interfaces, however, are not discussed in this article.



The guiding thread is the concept of mediatization as a bundle of relationships suggested by epistemological interfaces activated in the construction of the object. This concept differs from two others operative in the 'north': a) an approach that we consider ascending – from social constructions of the media, and another, descending – from media to culture that tends to see mediatization as derived from the interaction and accommodation of different fields to the logics of the media. We call the first one ascending because it considers mediatization as a derivative and not a specific process, the foundation of a social displacement that overlaps the propensities of social constructions of meaning made possible by the social uses of the media; the second one overestimates the media and their logics, organized or institutionalized, and does not problematize the context in which the media are also immersed in a process that, not only due to social uses, overlaps them, downstream.

Between the downward and upward movements, we emphasize the transformation of the media interaction matrix, which will be specified in the interfaces activated here. In these, the concept of circulation (like a bundle of relations between production and reception) is central, including the processes of upward and downward circulation, but also what occurs within the circuits configured by mediatized interactions.

### **Mediatized interaction and interposition of media**

In one of the chapters of a work published in Brazil, Verón (2005) addresses the issue of the double bond. It is an article written with Carlos Sluzki, in which the authors address the strain between dependence and independence, the distinction between self and non-self, differentiating the symptoms (pathogenesis) into hysterical, phobic, and obsessive. It is also known that Verón's relationship with the Palo Alto School continues, even when he approaches circulation as relationships between systems.

It is necessary to situate this interface with the Palo Alto School, which we consider productive. For that, we mobilized Watzlawick et alii (1972). First, we ponder that the circular relations between the sender and the receiver problematized by

Watzlawick et alii (1972) as a reference for media communication must be questioned, in our perspective, by the interpositions of material means. There is something here to be deciphered. The authors say:

We want, therefore, to accentuate less the relations of the sender (and the receiver) and the sign, and more the relation that unites the sender and receiver, when it is mediatized by communication (WATZLAWICK et alii, 1972, p. 17).

We know that this union (“that unites”), in the authors’ perspective, is not reified. Their investigation of pathogenesis through the observation of interactions (in languages they call analog and digital) does not allow us to say that, in their perspectives, communication would be an idyllic whole. But there is a problem here that calls us to the contradictory. When considering that the sign, whether analog or digital, allows access to pathogenesis, there is a risk of reducing the sign to a transparent and passive place in the interaction. An interaction, therefore, seen without considering the semiosis that is visited by the theories of the sign. Thus, we propose that the interposition of the sign transform interactions, just as the coronavirus, a material sign of nature, enters in synergy with nature and culture and transforms itself (mutations of the sign nature named corona).

### **Media, signs, and technology**

When we talk about media, we are referring to social signs. We can consider that the cosmos, nature, and other living species (such as the corona sign), and animals are sign builders (by adaptive processes). However, we are specifically interested in the signs constructed by the species we call human. It is not our object, in this article, to differentiate this various semiosis (of cosmos, nature, and other species), but rather to specify the medium in its interposition between the sender and the receiver.

In our perspective, what culture calls technologies are, above all, signs. It is a concept that we have developed for over a decade (FERREIRA, 2006). Only techno-ideology reduces media to technology. In the next section, when we formulate

the interface on the algorithms, this proposition will become well-defined.

Having made this consideration, we can manifest our convergence with Verón's hypothesis (2014) that one of the central processes of mediatization is the materialization of mental experience. Therefore, it characterizes the anthropological genesis of the species due to the uniqueness of this adaptive process. It is not even a matter of saying that this adaptation is superior or inferior to the semiosis of nature and other living species and animals. It is just a peculiar adaptation.

This formulation allows us to think of an ontological cut line that is also epistemological: the shift from nature to social semiosis. This displacement is founded by the species, by its bio-psycho-cognitive characteristics. The primary differentiation that is based there is the inferential capacity that is unique over other species, which have already developed and evolve the ability to materialize mental experience (ants, bees, etc.). Mediatized semiosis refers to this process in which the materialization of mental experience in objects is, immediately, the basis for new individual and social inferences, a reference for interactions, fostering the interpretation of evidence and imagery. Thinking about the genealogy of mediatization in this perspective is much complex.

It is not to say that the whole mental experience can be objectified<sup>4</sup>. The formulation is quantum: if in our cosmos-planet and social, not everything is matter, there is a lot of non-materialized energy. Therefore, mediatization is a restricted universe, even when we talk about mediatized semiosis. There is an energetic universe that, like a halo, drives us. This is difficult to access, also because it is not materialized. In addition, there is an (immense) universe of senses that are imaginary and symbolic, conscious, subconscious, and unconscious, that do not manifest materially.

The fact that the reflexive (epistemological) maturation of the species has only become aware of this relationship in the contemporary, from the achievements in media such as books,

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4 Here, it is relevant to highlight the reflections of João Damásio, a doctoral student, presented in a thesis seminar of the line of research on Mediatization and Social Processes at PPGCC-UNISINOS.

newspapers, radio, television, and on the networks, shows a maxim of Marx: *the anatomy of man is the key to the ape's anatomy*. In other words, the algorithm can reveal the secret of the media to update the reflection on the relations between the media, social and communication processes.

However, empirical research in the lineage does not cover all forms of materializing mental experience. Its object is cut: only what is or breaks out in the public space, by actions of individuals or actors located in the private space or the sphere of the specialist fields, is the object of the empirical investigation of the mediatization in the perspective that we propose here. An immense universe of material signs constructed by the species is restricted to the private universe or specialized fields, which differ and define access rules. They are potential objects. They are kept in social and psychological safes of different levels, relatively sealed. Before the eruption (seal rupture) in the public space, mediatized semiosis is potential.

Therefore, in any of the cases (materials of the private space, of the specialist, and imaginary and symbolic fields not manifested), something may break out in the public space. In this process, the media directed to the public space are central to the understanding of media processes, and, as a way of looking to mediatization. The specific strength of these media of publication (books, newspapers, radio, television, *etcetera*) is to accelerate – to expand time and space – the processes of circulation of sign materializations, and, therefore, of the mental experiences of the species. It is not a question of semiotics as logic, but of logics that are in processes, based on accesses, usage, practices, and social appropriations.

As the mental experience materializes in new media, new interactions and relations between production and reception are constituted. Thus, the printed matter (from the book and almanac to the newspaper), radio, television, and cinema, *etcetera*, constitute new relations between production and reception and configure new audiences. The circulation perspective suggests that this relationship between production and reception systems be deciphered as relations and not in isolation.

Thus, the materialization of mental experience is not constituted directly and automatically in social terms. It is a process, which occurs at different levels, if thought from the perspective of mediatization: in the accesses, uses, practices, and social appropriations of these material media; in the circuits engendered in these uses and social practices. The circuits<sup>5</sup> established between producers and consumers are retroactive, without considering the domain of production systems overconsumption or vice-versa. These circular, retroactive, as well as informational, processes are semiotic and transform social fields (social space of specialists, in culture, economics, and politics), private spaces, and the public space itself.

In this context, our empirical object is digital media in networks, particularly when they are managed by algorithms, which can cover digital media of content, programming (radio and television), indexing (from the library to the network search tools), and interaction (*Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etcetera*).

### **Media and dispositifs**

In this section, I return to the issue of media considering the following questions: What is the relationship between media and *dispositifs*? When are the means and the *dispositifs* media? Do all material media refer to mediatization? Our perspective under elaboration suggests that it does not:

1. Only the media that influence interactions in the public visibility space refer to mediatization. This insertion is not steady, considering each media. In this sense, WhatsApp interests as an object of mediatization when interactions are public, which is not set, as interactions that occur there may "leak."
2. It is necessary to consider ubiquity: the means becomes media when they are deferred, in time and space. Here, also, there is no fixed design, but it seems clear that the mobility of material, technical and technological signs, in time and space, is accelerated by algorithms (exponentially).

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5 We will return to the circuit semantics in the development of the proposal.

3. Inversely, the semiotic/technical/social media of occupation of territories are from another order of media (although they are means of communication: a house, a car, clothing, *etcetera*), which is not the object of this investigation.

The formulation that material means are semiotic/technical/social means that it is not just about material techniques and technologies. Even considering the media in this triadic perspective, we agree with the proposition that there is no linearity and determination between media and uses. Uses are a field of possibilities and impossibilities.

Access, usage, practices, and social appropriations condition the configuration of media *dispositifs*. In this sense, the concept of semiotic/technical/social *dispositifs* refers to the media consolidated in social practices and appropriations. Many stand in the way, as we have said. Others become practices and appropriations and then are abandoned (the case of public land-line phones, which had their uses scrapped with the advent of cell phones). Why are some media consolidated in terms of social practices and others not? This question, in our perception, is related to the innovation cycle. The answers do not refer to the potential features and operations, but especially to the cycle of imagery and achievements.

In this process, there is a detail that is the transition from practices to appropriations. There is also a *dégradé* here. The appropriations that we consider to be the most intense are those that take place in specialized production systems. Networks, for example, have been appropriated by several specialist systems (which manifests in the form of brands: *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *etcetera*). But there are other, less intense, intermediate appropriations that use specialist systems and their brands to customize specific uses for other brands (a page on *Face* at service of another brand, for example). From the perspective of the classic discussion, it is these specialist systems named as brands that constitute the new *dispositifs*, overcoming (integrating, denying, and renewing) the hegemonic *dispositifs* in the last century (print, radio, cinema, and television). The *dispositif*, when nominated, is a candidate for the media institution and starts to

occupy a special place in the relationships between other institutions, actors, and uses of the available *dispositifs*, also because they allow the differentiation of accesses, usages, practices, and potential appropriations, specifying the *dispositifs* available. In this sense, we consider that there is a *dispositif* when there is a consolidated matrix, historically, of social uses of the media, a configurator of social practices, which goes beyond institutional places and actors, specifically media or not. That is, the *dispositif* is not the available form: it must be inhabited by actors and institutions so that, in usages and practices, it exists. When this occurs, it is named, thus, gaining an anthropological demarcation.

### **Algorithmic logic managing content, schedule, indexing, and agency interactions**

The algorithm is, first, a sign – which articulates inferential rules and operations that organize content, schedules, interactions, and indexing (FERREIRA, 2020). The algorithms, in the contemporary, become the means of the media – managing the media of content, programming, indexing, and interaction (FERREIRA, 2019). The technical dimensions (specifically computational languages, for example) and technological dimensions are subordinate to these inferential rules and operations – which are appropriations of the algorithms of culture and nature.

Like other linguistic signs appropriated by the field of communication, the algorithm comes to us as a metaphor for an infinity of meanings summoned by a semantic field. In this broad universe of meanings, it is valid for the execution of a culinary recipe or diagnoses about the climate, including city management, politics, *etcetera*.

But this proposition has a difficulty, which is to consider algorithm only what is material. We suggest another starting point: the algorithm is, above all, a mental experience. Without this, life would be impossible. It refers to the system of possibilities and alternative decisions, sequenced in the execution of operations to be carried out. Whenever there is an algorithm, life seems to get simple. If we are going to travel, we have a set of operations to be sequenced (preparing clothes and accesso-

ries in the suitcase; necessary documents; tickets or car review; transfers; accommodation; housing security during our absence; *etcetera*). The lack of an algorithm that organizes this set of operations, including specific ones, in its details, can produce comic, dramatic, or tragic situations.

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But if the algorithm has this positivity in the construction of culture, why are we perplexed by its existence? The hypothesis we developed is that perplexity, in communication, manifests itself when the algorithms start to manage the means of interaction, content, and programming in networks. We exemplify how these rules and operations are sequenced in algorithms:

### **1. Syllogism as the basis of the algorithm**

If the tattoo is of a fish and the scales of the fish are pink. [...] So, the origin of the tattoo is from China [...] If the tattoo is of a snake and the color of the snake's scales is blue [...] Then, the origin of the tattoo will be Hong Kong [...] If the tattoo is of a dragon and the color of the dragon's scales is red [...] Then, the origin of the tattoo will be Beijing (Harmon; King, 1988, p. 49).

### **2. Simple syllogism in a game**

If there is a bone nearby and the dog is hungry, it will eat it; If the dog is hungry, but there is no bone nearby, he looks for one; If the dog is not hungry, but is sleepy, he will sleep; If the dog is not hungry and is not sleepy, the dog will walk and bark (Kishimoto, 2004, p. 6).

### **3. How Netflix's Recommendations System Works<sup>6</sup>**

Our business is a subscription service model that offers personalized recommendations, to help you find shows and movies of interest to you. To do this we have created a proprietary, complex recommendations system. This article provides a high level description of our recommendations system in plain language.

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6 <https://help.netflix.com/en/node/100639>.



## The basics

Whenever you access the Netflix service, our recommendations system strives to help you find a show or movie to enjoy with minimal effort. We estimate the likelihood that you will watch a particular title in our catalog based on a number of factors including:

- your interactions with our service (such as your viewing history and how you rated other titles),
- other members with similar tastes and preferences on our service, and information about the titles, such as their genre, categories, actors, release year, etc.
- In addition to knowing what you have watched on Netflix, to best personalize the recommendations we also look at things like:
  - the time of day you watch,
  - the devices you are watching Netflix on, and how long you watch.

All of these pieces of data are used as inputs that we process in our algorithms. (An algorithm is a process or set of rules followed in a problem solving operation.) The recommendations system does not include demographic information (such as age or gender) as part of the decision making process.

If you're not seeing something you want to watch, you can always search the entire catalog available in your country. We try to make searching as easy and quick as possible. When you enter a search query, the top results we return are based on the actions of other members who have entered the same or similar queries.

Below is a description of how the system works over time, and how these pieces of information influence what we present to you.

### **“Jump starting” the recommendations system**

When you create your Netflix account, or add a new profile in your account, we ask you to choose

a few titles that you like. We use these titles to “jump start” your recommendations. Choosing a few titles you like is optional. If you choose to forego this step then we will start you off with a diverse and popular set of titles to get you going.

Once you start watching titles on the service, this will “supercede” any initial preferences you provided us, and as you continue to watch over time, the titles you watched more recently will outweigh titles you watched in the past in terms of driving our recommendations system.

### **Rows, rankings and title representation**

In addition to choosing which titles to include in the rows on your Netflix homepage, our system also ranks each title within the row, and then ranks the rows themselves, using algorithms and complex systems to provide a personalized experience. To put this another way, when you look at your Netflix homepage, our systems have ranked titles in a way that is designed to present the best possible ordering of titles that you may enjoy.

In each row there are three layers of personalization:

- the choice of row (e.g. Continue Watching, Trending Now, Award-Winning Comedies, etc.)
- which titles appear in the row, and
- the ranking of those titles.

The most strongly recommended rows go to the top. The most strongly recommended titles start on the left of each row and go right -- unless you have selected Arabic or Hebrew as your language in our systems, in which case these will go right to left.

### **How we improve our recommendations system**

We take feedback from every visit to the Netflix service and continually re-train our algorithms with those signals to improve the accuracy of their prediction of what you’re most likely to watch. Our data, algorithms, and computation systems continue to

feed into each other to produce fresh recommendations to provide you with a product that brings you joy.

#### **4. FACEBOOK ALGORITHM**

How EdgeRank works<sup>7</sup>

The Facebook algorithm takes into account 3 major factors: affinity, relevance and time.

Affinity

Have you noticed that the news of some friends and pages appears much more than others? This happens through affinity.

Through how much the two sides interact (visiting the profile / page, leaving messages on the wall, viewing photos, liking, commenting or sharing), Facebook determines a degree of affinity that has great weight in publications.

Relevance

As soon as a new publication is made, only those who have more affinity view it. According to the receptivity of these people (how much they click, like, comment or share), the message will be displayed to more and more people.

In addition, different types of publication have different relevance. According to tests, photos and videos are more relevant than texts and links, for example. Publications through the Facebook page are also more relevant than publications through third-party applications.

Time

This item is hardly a surprise. Newer messages have priority and are displayed in front of older messages. In the beginning, Instagram worked chronologically, that is, posts were displayed to users according to the order of posting.

That changed when Instagram developed its algorithm in mid-2016. The goal was for the posts most relevant to each user's experience to appear in their feeds.

Despite numerous complaints at the time, the network has been seeing increasing numbers, both of users and of posts and levels of engagement. **Incidentally, Instagram is the network that most engages today.**

## 5. THE INSTAGRAM ALGORITHM<sup>8</sup>

The Instagram algorithm has a clear objective: that the user find what he wants most in the first place.

And how does this work in practice? Well, the algorithm is based on three basic principles:

### 1. Temporality

Although Instagram abandoned the chronological order of posts, that doesn't mean that temporality doesn't matter anymore. The network takes into account that users want to see new and recent content each time they use the app.

Therefore, the posts do not appear in a chronological order anymore, but still follow a temporal logic, being one of the criteria of the algorithm.

### 2. Engagement

The engagement a post receives indicates its potential to engage more people on the network. Therefore, the chance of posts with many likes and, mainly, comments to be displayed to more users is greater; mainly posts that receive a lot of engagement in the first moments of your post.

### 3. Relationships

You may have noticed that posts from close friends or your favorite brands always appear as soon as you open the app, right?

This has a reason: Instagram analyzes the profiles you relate to the most to understand the relevance of the posts made to your experience.

How is this analysis done? Through the comments you make, who you look for in the app and even the posts and Stories you share with other users.

These examples show that the algorithms are syllogistic constructs, operating with what Peirce designated as deduction (from expert decision-making systems) and induction (algorithms that “learn” according to probabilistic occurrences). It is no longer a question of the algorithms of culture, artisanal or manufactured, but of those materialized in means appropriate to capital – in a path that passes through advanced manufacturing and industry as appropriations of work in general, but especially the cultural industry, and it comes, with artificial intelligence and expert systems, to the appropriation of knowledge of modern technical-scientific knowledge.

The irritation of the communication field, however, comes to the fore, as it becomes aware of the long and essential process of alienation, with the configurations suggested by the new media, which retroact on all previous processes of appropriation by capitalist formats. Thus, mediatization, a universal process, is particularized as power relations (economic, political, and cultural) derived from appropriations.

## II – Method and methodology

In terms of observation, the investigation of media processes suggested here does not aim at the interaction of two people in clinics. It is the object observed in Watzlawick et alii (1972). In media processes, we are always open to the investigation of a multiplicity of actors, located in different institutional positions, using various means. This broader focus removes the object of the clinical analysis proposed by psychology, without this signifying adherence to a sociological analysis (since it is not a question of reflecting on social demographics according to the epistemologies of positivist sociology).

This perspective comes close to ethnography – where the object is the behavior of collectives, even when they are not institutionally pre-designed or are constructed in interactions and can only be “seen” by *ad hoc* analysis, related to the interactions of the present. The object, therefore, refers to the interactions of actors with a given medium (resulting from a production system to also be analyzed, according to the algorithms, interac-

tions, indexing, programming, and content) and, through this mediation, among themselves (between actors located in different institutional positions). This perspective is present, for example, in *Ethnographie de l'exposition* (VERÓN and LEVASSEUR, 1989), which we analyzed in a recent article (FERREIRA, 2020).

The second postulate, in this conceptual-methodological proposal, is the communication paradox: individuals cannot, in the position of social actors, not communicate; but, when communicating, they face the challenges of the symptom that manifests in the interactions. Our proposal here adopts this perspective, but with a shift. It is not a matter of analyzing the pathology analyzed by Palo Alto's social psychology (hysteria, phobia, and obsession – VERÓN, 2005), but the double interactional bond that can be indicated in the interactions.

The interactions can be analyzed, therefore, as potentially revealing the paradox on several levels: the impossibility of not communicating with the use of digital networked means and the challenge of manifesting the symptom in the public space; the exercise of power and demand for autonomy from the other; what unites also hierarchizes and generates power relations (BOURDIEU, 1989); authorized and unauthorized voices; *etcetera*. This diversity of singular objects is not pre-defined, but it is a discovery according to research cases under construction.

The complex of this analysis of interactions in groups and collectives interposed by different means, with actors located in different institutional positions, is that it is not about stimuli, responses, and reinforcements of A and B, mutually conditioning. Because, firstly, we consider that the behavioral theory, in its various versions based on the stimulus-response-reinforcement triad, is insufficient to account for the behavior of the species. The contribution of the Palo Alto School (analyzing this triad in interactions, as a way to capture the impulses of the unconscious – as problematized by the unconscious, in the form of hysterias, obsessions, phobias, and schizophrenic situations) is also not enough.

In our perspective, it is necessary to aggregate the process of building the social beyond what we have inherited (the unconscious, the imaginary, and the symbolic order) and what

we do in the present (interactions here and now, with stimuli, responses, and reinforcements). It is necessary, to do so, to think of interactions as a work of possibilities for social cooperation – in the sense of ego psychology, constructivist (which, in our approach, is referred to in Piaget). In other words, we consider that individual epistemes can be updated in interactions, through the cognitive work of individuals, who can thus change their behaviors, as actors.

### ***Corpora construction***

The methodological exercise refers to identifying, in a clipping of means in a constellation, on which we may observe interactions, feedback processes, a chain of interactional events, negative or positive, that feed, conserve, produce stability, qualitative or quantitative imbalances, fed by reintroductions in the “cut system” of the new “information” in the interaction circuit, in a circularity process in flow, which captures and maintains actors in interaction, in various institutional positions. It is evident that an extensive ethnography, even in a reduced circuit, is much complex (including the diversity of sign-forms present – images, audios, texts, bodies – in interactions, with all their polyphony). But this cut is the first movement to articulate the empirical. The object, therefore, here focuses on circuit design, as relationships between actors and institutional places.

It is a question of designing the “models”: a) of the production system according to the mean(s) under study; b) the social uses of actors and institutions.

The expanded analysis of these production and reception systems may require investigation with producers and recipients, with an interview script already punctuated with the sequence of indications, in chained interactions, that consider actors present in the circuit defined by the small constellation of means. This script would also question the roles of the actors in the analyzed circuit, according to behaviors – acceptable or not by the interactants (including relations between

institutional ‘leaders,’ autonomy, etcetera), also in the form of conflicts (as in: who are you to communicate like this?).

In this sense, the materialized production system, presented in the form of models (diagrams), should identify, if they occur, algorithms for content management, programming, indexing, and interactions. With these limits arising from the object to be visited (the means in a small constellation), the issue of horizontal relations, minimization of differences, reduction of rivalry, search for interactional symmetries, *etcetera*, can also be addressed by the actors involved when in production and/or reception circuits.

This circuit, when in digital networks, is observed in interactions and communication paradoxes (it is not possible not to communicate, but communicating reveals paradoxes), fed back by individual actions, but they occur under the mantle of performing, which allows us to speak in a dynamic system, driven by continuous interactions, subject to analysis, which manifest, or not, bonds built, stimulated, reinforced, in their conflicts and symptoms.

### **Elective affinities amor fati and odium fati**

The algorithms that agency the interaction means have indications that the targeting may be interpreted in Bourdieu’s perspective.

The limiting case forces one to question the appearances of the direct effect of demand on supply or of supply on demand, and to consider in a new light all the encounters between the logic of goods production and the logic of taste production through which the universe of appropriate, appropriating things – objects, people, knowledge, memories etc. – is constituted. The limit of these coincidences of homologous structures and sequences which bring about the concordance between a socially classified person and the socially classified things or person’s which ‘suit’ hi mis represented by all acts of co-option in fellow-feeling, friend-



ship or love which lead to lasting relations, socially sanctioned or not. The social sense is guided by the system of mutually reinforcing and infinitely redundant signs of which each body is the bearer – clothing, pronunciation, bearing, posture, manners – and which, **unconsciously** registered, **are the basis of ‘antipathies’ or ‘sympathies’**; the seemingly most immediate ‘elective affinities’ are always partly based on the unconscious deciphering of expressive features, each of which only takes on its meaning and value within the system of its class variations (one only has to think of the way of laughing or smiling noted by ordinary language). Taste is what **brings together** things and people **that go together**. (BORDIEU, 1991, p. 238).

This spontaneous decoding of one habitus by another is the basis of the immediate affinities which orient social encounters, discouraging socially discordant relationships, encouraging well-matched relationships, without these operations ever having to be formulated other than in the socially innocent language of likes and dislikes. The extreme improbability of the particular encounter between particular people, which masks the probability of interchangeable chance events, induces couples to experience their mutual election as a happy accident, a coincidence which mimics transcendent design (‘made for each other’) and intensifies the sense of the miraculous. (BOURDIEU, 1991, p. 240).

These two fragments invite us to infer that the agency of algorithm means exponentially activate elective affinities. So, there stir up two seemingly polar possibilities, paradoxes: *Amor fati* and *odium fati*. Albeit not contemplated within the scope of this article, our final inferences are that this process may be specified in the media processes according to the categories below<sup>9</sup>:

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9 Part of these characteristics were emphasized in Andreas Hepp’s conference in the III International Seminar on Research on Mediatization and Social Processes. A scale enlargement is a dimension always accentuated by Verón.

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### **Innovation, prophecies, and frustrations**

Micro-constellations are born of promises (utopian or not), but their accomplishments are references to frustrations regarding prophecies. This interface was built as a project of Escola de Altos Estudos, completed in the previous three years, in interlocution with perspectives of Bernard Miège and Patrice Flichy (MIEGE, FERREIRA, FAUSTO NETO, 2016; FLYCHY, FERREIRA, AMARAL, 2016).

Aphorism: a promise of *amor fati*, by the management of elective affinities, can be transformed into *odium fati*.

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### **Adaptation, regulation, rhythms, and breakthroughs**

Adaptive processes can be observed in interactions, stimuli, responses, reinforcements, pathologies of power (perversions), manifesting or dissimulating social, psychological, and anthropological schizophrenia, with socio-cognitive directions that can be exceeded by limits including regulation and rhythms of micro-constellation. Not only eventually, psycho-socio-anthropological irruptions can emerge in the constellation. Or, casually, the adaptive capacity equates new solutions within the circuit. This category refers to the interface between mediatization and socio-cognitive processes (referenced in Piaget, particularly in his work “Sociological Studies”). It is consolidated in empirical investigations with graduate students (KAEFER, 2017; BEHS E FERREIRA, 2020; CORTES, 2019).

Aphorism: An adaptation to *bubbles of affection* does not reach co-operative and operative regulations, which produces an environment conducive to irruptions (ruptures of circuits).

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### **Recognition processes in communicational and social perspectives, of actors and institutions involved in interactions**

This category results from investigations carried out in the last three years of our investigation, still in finalization

process. In this research, the central interface lies between the propositions of Eliseo Verón on production logics and recognition logics and those suggested by other scientific fields, especially Bourdieu's critical sociology (FERREIRA, 2017, 2018). Here is placed the question of classes and classifications, the social conflict, objective and subjective, updated with ongoing interactions.

Aphorism: A promise of affinity is also of a fusional reconstitution, without roundups, what enters in strain as inverse forces of individual habitus, resulting from incorporated paths, which direct the interactions for an intense process of dispersion.

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### **Connectivity, ubiquity, and omnipresence**

Connected, immersed individuals, we pass through circuits to live omnipresence, objective and subjective, strained by the paradoxes of communication, including the paradox of being impossible not to communicate and, while facing acts and communicating, manifest psycho-socio-anthropological symptoms related to the double bond that is revealed in interactions. It is a relatively stabilized category in the field of communication. It is a new call for us in interactional processes.

Aphorisms: The symptoms are not only constituted in manifestations of psychological pathogenesis but result from promises that interaction and communication will solve social impasses, especially those anchored in affinities. But here, connectivity is not a promise. It affects the impossibility of not connecting. And, connected, the game of paradoxes will be integrated.

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### **Village, expansion of scale, and reformulation of territories**

The settlement in devices configured by media in constellations produces territories within the territory and changes of scales of interactions, allowing escape points concerning

physical territories. Therefore, there is a continuous retake of the previous surroundings. This category is central to the processes of mediatization, articulating with its reconstruction of time and space – subjacently, as individuals, as actors, we passed to live the unknown dislocation.

Aphorism: A possibility of leaving the physical territories, composed by a multiplicity of habitus, typical of classes and social classifications, and navigating in affinity villages, only points of scape relatively to territorial *dispositifs*. One navigates in the “cosmo” of networks, in other times and spaces, of promised affinities.

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### **Integration and differentiation**

The production systems materialized in individual integrated dispositifs, which are presented as actors, a circuit (micro-construction), which is fed by interactions. In this process, we have a differentiation process between these actors. This category refers to observations addressed to interactions in the network, in which new groups around thematic questions, at the same time, are grouped, differentiated, integrated, and disintegrated.

Aphorism: The circuits are configured by affinities. One arrives at them with all the elective hopes that have been denied or repressed. The celebration, however, seems to be of short duration. In an irreversible process, the inter-agents discover the differences.

The elective affinities nourish from *amor fati* and *odium fati*. The love between the electives; despise or hate for the different. One avoids interaction with the different as a point of escape from paradoxes, that is, from pathogenic manifestations. However, as homophilic networks are not absolute, the contact with the other is required in other territories. There, the species continues to confront itself with paradoxes, whether by silence or inability to communicate, just as it is possible via symptoms.

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“This book faces an impressive challenge in taking on the subject of mediatization. The task makes sense since the Unisinos' Communication area, which brought together the participants of the symposium that gave rise to this collection, is recognized by studies on mediatization, as a phenomenon or concept, and concentrates a large part of the production in the area.[...] The proposal is, however, a considerable challenge, as the reader of this work will quickly realize. [...]” (Wilson Gomes – UFBA)

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