Mass communication and structural violence

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Abstract: This paper connects two dimensions of violence present in the Peace Research Studies. From Galtung's known classification, in this essay we connect two types of violence: the structural (exclusion, inequality) and the cultural (or legitimization of the violence). From the overlapping of three spheres of communicative exclusion with three models which approach the inequality in communication, we obtain the lines of investigation we propose for the study of the inequality in the communicative area. It is a theoretical reflection that pays attention to the different methodologies used in the study of the communicative phenomenon and their usefulness for the study of inequality in the cultural area.

Key words: inequality, mass communication, cultural violence, structural violence, development.

Resumen: Este trabajo conecta dos dimensiones de la violencia que están presentes en los estudios sobre Investigación para la Paz. A partir de la conocida clasificación de Galtung, en este ensayo abordamos dos tipos de violencia: la estructural (exclusión, desigualdad) y la cultural (o legitimación de la violencia). Del cruce entre tres ámbitos de exclusión comunicativa y los tres modelos que abordan la desigualdad en la comunicación, se obtienen las líneas de investigación que se proponen para el estudio de la desigualdad en el ámbito comunicativo. Es una reflexión teórica que atiende a las diferentes metodologías empleadas en el estudio del fenómeno comunicativo y que pueden ser productivas para el estudio de la desigualdad en el ámbito cultural.

Palabras clave: desigualdad, comunicación de masas, violencia cultural, violencia estructural, desarrollo.

Introduction: communication, cultural violence and structural violence[1]

Through a review of the elaborations which the theory of mass communication has developed, this works attempts to study the relation between structural and cultural violence, so as to show research lines and methodological approaches to study inequality in the communication sphere.

Structural violence was conceptually established by Galtung (1985) in order to approach the least visible forms of violence such as: social injustice, inequality and exclusion; with the purpose of offering a more complete panorama of the main object of study of *Peace Research* which is precisely, peace understood as the absence of violence. Differently from direct violence, related to physical or moral aggression —where the agent of violence can be identified —in structural violence, even though its consequences are visible (poverty, exclusion), that clear identification is not possible. In any case, the "agent" would be linked to the social structure, in the sense that situations of domination and social inequality limit the development of the capacities of a part of society. And those structural limitations are considered as violence.

Cultural violence is that set of symbolical aspects of culture (its "non-material" forms, such as language and communication) which influence on the justification of violent situations, either they have a direct or structural character. The three types of violence are related in the sense that direct violence can work as an indicator of the degree of structural and cultural violence in a society. On the other side, pointing toward this article's objective, mass media (as spreading instances of values, regulations and lifestyles) legitimate direct or structural violence when, by means of the contents provoke rejection, discrimination or aggression to certain collectives, individuals, nations, genders, etc.

Another form of provoking violence in the media is disinformation

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[1] The authors thank Professor José María Tortosa because of his comments that, expressed after the attentive reading to this work's first draft, have contributed to enrich this current essay.

(Penalva, 2002). A highly uninformed society is a society with a high degree of violence. Following the definition of violence by Galtung (1995), in this sphere, the breach of potential realizations (high technology level and the professionalization of communication to offer information on the occurrences) and the effective realizations (disinformation by means of censorship, manipulation of the facts, de-contextualization, etc) can be considerable, and had multiple negative consequences upon other spheres: prevision, instruction and education, opinion and criticism on public issues, political institutions' control, etc., all in all, upon the development of capacities, rights, freedom and autonomy of the individuals; besides, the existence in a social system of a collective, class, or uninformed group supposes difficulties which affect social mobility and the continuance of social inequalities.

Locating inequality as central element in this essay, we understand it as those differences[2] between human beings which are considered unfair and avoidable (Whitehead, 1990; Therborn, 2006); and we also start from a very close concept such as that of exclusion, which refers to the lack of participation in social relations where social goods necessary to satisfy human necessities are produced (Paugam, 1996). Altogether with exploitation, hierarchization and differentiation, exclusion is one of the main motors of inequality (and also of poverty, in terms of privation of the satisfaction of the basic needs).

Three forms of informative exclusion

The relation between exclusion and the cultural sphere (more specifically mass media) can be studied from three perspectives, corresponding to three elements of the communication process: *from the perspective of the production, from the perspective of the reception and from the perspective of content.* The first leads

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[2] The differences which are considered unjust and avoidable have varied along time. Yet it is difficult to justify everywhere and all the time the differences in terms of welfare, freedom, identity, and security, nevertheless, other differences are justifiable indeed and even positive: for instance, when the difference is the result of a non-conditioned free election, when it is an unavoidable situation such as those derived from biological diversity, or when it is a temporary advantage.

us to observe the degree of concentration of property of the different structures of communication. The second to the different access (passive or active; easy or difficult) to information , according to the social structure, where the economic (having monetary resources in order to access information) and cultural (having a "background" as for the participation in the code and technique, it is, to know how to use the medium as a tool) dimensions are important. The third one refers to the message and the way of representation. Following the classical definition of the elements of communication by Laswell (1985), we refer to the elements of *who* (is able to communicate) says *what* (*what* on inequality is said and which inequality is produced through the selection of the media contents), whom (the message is addressed, who is able to receive it and how it is decoded and interpreted). We call these three aspects: *production* (capacity to emit), *content* (capacity to be part of the message) and *reception* (capacity to access the media contents), respectively.

Inequality in production; Diffusion of political, artistic ideas; the capacity of expression depends on the access to the mass media as active subjects (emitters). It is important, since societies in general and the different groups existing in their core must have the faculty to be able to express on their own, as producers of the messages, and not by means of the elaborations of a quite large group, rather professionalized. The degree of communication's development, property concentration, and sort of property can become, once made operative, indicators of unevenness in communication.

The growing concentration of the media is evident., as well as the fusion of large international corporations in the communicative technological infrastructures. Herman and McChesnay (1999) demonstrate it for the current time, and pinpoint how this fusion (via commercial alliances or take-overs) and the deregulation of the States in respect to communicational policy affects large communication subsectors. The concentration is produced longitudinally and transversally. This fusion in technology (*hardware* and *software*), having as link publicity and the large oligopolies of transnational capital, puts in risk, the thus-far free and participative, internet for the strategy seeks to transform the internet into a conventional media and generate two or more levels according to the economic capacity: greater quality in contents

and band width by means of payment; and slower connections and conventional contents for free accesses.

Inequality in reception; here there are two different sub-dimensions: the access, which implies the economic factor (having monetary resources in order to access the technical media of information reception), and others which have to do with the different degree of code knowledge —comprehension—, and diverse possibilities of technical instruction. Inequalities at planetary level are as large as in other dimensions used in social studies. A recent event that exemplifies the limitations of the developing countries was the absence of media to warn —with scandalous margins (counted by hours) for an "international society of real-time communication"— the inhabitants of the pacific coasts in the Indic Ocean the presence of a Tsunami in 2005, and which provoked hundred of thousands of casualties and millions of affected people.

Inequality in contents; we here refer to the possibility to be part of the message and in which manner. We can be attentive to the presence and absence of people, groups and nations, not leaving aside their representation forms: it is not the same to talk about the differences between groups, nations, gender, manifesting in a rather explicit manner social injustice, as talking placing "each one on their place", and justifying said position. In this chapter there are also, the contents relative to the very inequality, an aspect that can not be overlooked: the media can also talk about poverty, violence, exclusion, as well as their causes and consequences. The mass media in their role of maintaining society informed on itself, have to introduce in the messages —we know they do not do it to the desirable extent— one of the gravest problems in its core: inequality and its consequences.

Explanatory models

While the three aforementioned categories expressed three empirical modes of communicative inequality, the three following models explain and approach in a different manner (Stevenson, 1998) the influence from the media on the organization and social forms, centering on technology, in the fabrication of consensus and in the audience's activity, respectively.[3]

The *technologic* paradigm is a form of technologic determinism. For instance, it indicates that the most transformations which have occurred in contemporary modern societies have occurred because of the decisive role of the media. In the change from stone to papyrus, the beginning of the large empires of the classic epoch and the regime of bureaucracy commence. From papyrus to print we achieve the diffusion of culture and knowledge. The change from print to radio and television represents post-industrial society, monopolist capitalism and the corporative forms of political power (Welfare State, fascism, communism). And with them the "end of the ideologies" which Bell spoke about, since these media were able to definitely unify and vertebrate societies and generate large consensuses as for the basic forms of political organization. Not only does the introduction of technology produce transformations in social life's organization, production and social relations, but also new ways to perceive the world. That is why the media are the "extensions of men" (McLuhan, 1989).

Nonetheless, the very same technology makes mass media be asymmetric, as they are unidirectional. Baudrillard (1981) stated that the media are "ambivalent" (something similar to the aphorism by McLuhan: "the means is the message"), since in this asymmetric relation it is indifferent the content from that which is transmitted. With this supposition Baudrillard denies the possibility of "alternative media": even the protests of the French situationism were perfectly integrated into the system once they were reproduced by the media.

To analyze the change from the television era to that of the chip and network connection, some paradoxical forms of fragmentation and globalization are glimpsed: greater connectivity through electronic media from the

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[3] There are other models, as that of "prevailing paradigm" as Gitlin (1978) called it. The reason why it is not considered here is because it does not directly approach inequality. It is because this paradigm, of stressed functionalist and positivist character, assumes that the means of communication have an integrating role in a liberal society, which the citizens have similar access to. From this perspective the media are the instrument that enables the existence of an information channel between demands (and control) of civil society and public policies.

isolated individual; yet, differently from the previous phase, with a greater active participation.

Critic; the critical perspective induces values. Media information and communication are not neutral, in the sense they cannot be severed from a community's form of social organization. Cultural products, besides being produced from a commercial logic —where techno-structure and economy follow the same patterns as the rest of the productive sectors—, fulfill a legitimizing role of the de-egalitarian social order. Cultural products, despite their symbolical condition systematically establish and support relations of domination. According to some authors[4] of this model, in the society of mass consumption, the media are the link between production and reproduction (consumption), being more difficult by the moment to establish a division line between both spheres of a social formation: the productive structure and the superstructure.

Audience; the so-called paradigm of the "audience" or interpretative is not to be found in the means and its technical characteristics, but in the message. For this paradigm, very heterogeneous as for their technical orientations and methodologies, what is really important to understand the influence from the media and their role in the social order is not the codification of the messages from the producer, but the de-codification the receptor makes (Hall, 1980). By means of the cultural diversity and social inequality it cannot be affirmed that the signs have a single meaning. And it is not so because the meaning is negotiated, and it is interpreted according to the socio-cultural conditions which surround the reception. One must explore, therefore, not only into the different social forms to access the media, but also the social manners of using the media. The implications of this schema lead to consider the audience not only as active, but also as a factor to be

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[4] A very heterogeneous set with varied methodological approaches and perspectives, which to a large extent share some of the Marxism concepts (social class, domination, mode of production, ideology). Nevertheless, here we try to emphasize that which we consider as a characteristic and fundamental element in this paradigm (not exclusive to Marxism), which is the inclusion of values; with this, the consideration of scientific activity as an activity of social transformation.

considered in the configuration of the contents and the forms of the media. The forms of "appropriation", as the scholars of this model[5] say, are the main object of study; so, to a certain extent, the meanings the emitter wants to give and those the semiotic interpretation gives are put aside. Nevertheless, even though the real importance is recognized, in the order of transmission of ideology and in the order of cultural criticism, respectively, the decoding and the construction of meaning the audience performs provides the most valuable information in the study of mass communication. If the messages are "produced" in the moment of reception (Willis, 1990) their effects will have to be verified by means of ethnographic techniques, which enable a direct access to the natural environment where social action is developed.

Forms of communicative inequality

Even in risk of simplifying the complex and/or excessively divide the efforts the theory of mass communication has been carrying out in order to explain processes and relations between the different forms of communicative inequality, we here introduce the main problems which are approached from the three perspectives in the three spheres of informative inequality. From the cross between the two perspectives, one theoretical and the other empirical we obtain eight manners to access the study of communicative inequality (table 1).

Concentration and dependency

The concentration of property in the media prevents pluralism, and this is one of the main requirements of an informed society. On the other side, the alien property of the communication infrastructures produces in the international sphere economic and cultural dependency (Mattelart, 1993: 175-216; 1998). The processes of concentration and deregulation are explained

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[5] The *Cultural Studies*, of British origin —Stuart Hall—, the studies on audience Fiske (1987), and the North American works (Lull, 1995) and the Latin American ones on mediation (Martín Barbero, 1996; Orozco, 1996, 2000).

in the already cited work by Herman and McChesnay (1999) and in Mohammadi (1997). Amín (1999) pinpoints as one of the five monopolies of contemporary global capitalism, that of the mass media, altogether with the technological one, the world's financial markets, the monopolist access to natural resources and the weapons of mass destruction. In the set of the multiple economic-political connections among said monopolies, the role of the media in the ideological sphere is clear: "said monopoly does not only lead to cultural uniformity, but also opens the door for new means of political manipulation; the expansion of the modern market of the mass media already constitutes one of the main components of the erosion of democratic practices in the very Occident" (Amín, 1999: 18).

In Latin America four media groups turn out to be paradigmatic in the process we are hereby pinpointing: O Globo (Brazil), Televisa (Mexico), Cisneros (Venezuela) and Clarín (Argentina). These are the groups that, by means of other productive sectors and large global multinational communication groups, are extended upon different countries in the zone, and cover large part of the communicative spaces and all of the diversity of cultural industries of four large Latin American countries. By means of different processes of enterprising integration, in a structure of articulation networks in three levels, theses groups belong to the third "dominant companies and groups of domestic markets or sub-regions" (table 2).

It is an instance of economic and cultural penetration; one of the processes which fits here as inequality producer has been that of transmission of ideologies of development and modernization, in the sense of direction from the North of the "progress" of the South. The North, after decolonialization, has achieved penetrating into the Southern countries from technology, culture and proper policies. The theory of dependency, and other theories,[6] has explained how this multidimensional process works in the communicative sphere: the South has imported contents, information, culture

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[6] The structural theory of imperialism and that of the world-systems (see Tortosa, 1992, 1997 and 2001).

and technology for the media (for the infrastructure and propaganda).[7] Hence, in accordance with economy and politics, cultural dependency in its symbolic wing has supposed the introduction of cosmologies, ideologies, values, lifestyles, trends and language (English mainly); in its industrial wing, the importation of music, literature and films (via their respective multinationals of cultural goods); and in its informative wing, informative unbalance, as a few firms have the monopoly of production and distribution of news (and neither publicity escapes from the transnational model).

Rogers (1976) already saw the deficiencies of the developing paradigm that boosted all this process and which observes information technology as the only measure and motor of development.[8] Ever since, different alternative paradigms have been put forward to study inequality and development. McPhail (2002) and Thussu (2000) perform an approximation to the global communicational sphere from different perspectives (world-system and critical, respectively).

Simulacrum and coverage

The capacity of technology to represent reality is greater by the day. Generally, we can distinguish, clearly through the genre, the difference between reality and fiction (for instance between news programs and films). None-

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[7] Infrastructure has supposed the introduction of hard technology (train, roads) in order to achieve an intensification of social relations, a national internal market, and a Nation-State (economic and ideological). And the propaganda, by means of soft technology (radio, television) worked for transmitting ideas, values and regulations favorable to modernity. With this, the media would work as accelerators of social change and diffusers of the feeling of national identity against subdivisions (equivalent to tradition).

[8] To sum up, the following deficiencies: ethnocentric, which promotes foreign products, unaware of the mere presence of the media does not point toward development, forget the structural factors (cultural, social), too centered on the local elites and not on the whole of population, nor does it have the need of the population's self-confidence, which considers inseparable literacy, media and urbanization, an ideology of order and progress; and finally, it has supposed a political domination, since the media have also been used for counterinsurgency.

theless, the criterion does not discriminates sufficiently, for in the news programs a great deal of fiction can be found. Likewise, technology's development has lead us to live "history live"[9] with the image as an exact description, as a representation of the instant when the occurrence has taken place, with denotation before the chronicle ("tinged by the author's perspective"); the image has also been able to lead the audience to deceit. This capability has led some to describe modern (or post-modern) world as the world of simulacrum, as the border between reality and fiction blurs.[10] And contrary reactions to those of the retransmission by radio of the work by H.G. Wells *The War of Worlds* (Cantril, 1985) are produced: just as the fictitious can seem real, what is real can be seen as unreal. The familiarity with which the contemporary audience lives the spectacular through the omnipresence of the media image, made a lot of people see and live as unreal the attack on the Twin Towers in New York.[11]

However, returning to technology's manipulative capacity, inequality can be produced among those who use it —and those who possess it—, as well as among those who receive and process their products. An interesting line for social science, and also for the journalist profession, is to research on the

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[9] Ramonet (1992) tells how the newscaster when narrating the occurrences transmitted live at the fall of the Berlin Wall. The phrase "history live" made him be silent, unfulfilling the mission of the journalist of explaining —antecedents, roots, consequences— the audience what the ongoing events were.

[10] An excess, an exercise of postmodern "over-interpretation" made Baudrillard (1991) utter that *the Gulf War has not taken place*. Despite he does not lack arguments to utter such statements, for there was video manipulation —later delivered to the light— (de-contextualized cormorant, use of film sets to "shoot" the Kuwaiti resistance) and informational manipulation (bombardments similar to "war simulators", interviews to a fake nurse which narrated how Iraqis plundered a hospital taking the incubators with them); the Gulf War with their hundreds of thousands of victims, in its consequences on the Iraqi society and environment has indeed taken place (see the criticism by Norris, 1997).

[11] A lived catastrophe would be seen in many a cases as its representation, as Susan Sontag (2003: 31) describes it: "the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001 was frequently qualified as *unreal, surreal, as a film*, in the first chronicles of those who have escaped or had seen it from the surroundings".

truth, bring hidden information out to the light, and put to use the "Dracula strategy" proposed by Susan George (2002).

Less complicated, and easier to be empirically detected, is the coverage of human disasters caused by armed conflicts. From the irruption of the autonomous teams which send the signals by satellites and those of the specialized companies specialized in immediateness, there has been an increment in inequality in coverage. This is the so-called "CNN-effect", according to which there are items of news where there is technology to register and lead the audience. This has a series of socio-political implications associated, since they cause commotion public opinion, and, at the time, this claims from public authorities determinate governmental actions. Nevertheless, the hidden, yet real CNN-effects have been witnessed (Aguirre, 1999), they point toward inequality.[12]

Informational gap

Not everyone has access to the informational contents. This generates a social differentiation on the communication that ends with the liberal idea of a homogeneous and instructed society which makes up public opinion. Similarly as there are great differences in economic resources, inequality in the access to cultural resources is, as we see, humongous. *The Knowledge Gap Hypothesis* points directly at this process,[13] and obviously, supposes a way of exclusion of the political and social processes. Nowadays, there is an elevated interest in pinpointing how this process works with the means which better illustrates it —and contributes— to globalization: internet and the digital

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[12] Jakobsen (2000) summarizes them as: generate rapid and more expensive interventions, with no planning; produce distortions in the perception of the conflicts of the public; channel the funds toward fast actions against those destined to prevention; also channel NOG's actions; create efforts from the parts in conflict in order to increase propaganda; disregard the pre and post conflicts, and leave other areas of conflict uncovered.

[13] The knowledge gap hypothesis affirms that when there is an increment in information circulation in a social system the segment of population with a high socio-economic status tends to acquire and assimilate better the information than the lower socio-economic segments. Consequently, the increment of information, instead of reducing the distancing, contributes to increase it.

breach (Bouza, 2003). On the other side, its role as inequality index is recognized in the Reports on Human Development of the UN Development Programme (PNUD, 1999) and poverty reduction (PNUD, 2003).

Further in the text what this breach is like at worldwide level is graphically represented. The punctuations of diverse parts of the world for the Index of Digital Access is comparatively shown, being observable the enormous breach between the wealthy North and the poor South. This index, designed by the International Union of Communication, is elaborated from different indicators related to quality, infrastructure, knowledge and feasibility of the access to digital information (Graph 1).

Cultural industry

Once the technological perspective is approached, we enter into the criticism. It has to be made explicit, that large part of the Marxist critical studies have pointed to the so-called "political economy of communication", which, relegating communicative contents to the sphere of the superstructures, has given more importance to the links between the property of the production means and other productive sectors (Garnham, 1985).[14] Although the exclusive attention to this aspect of communication has been overcome, it does not cease to be productive, as it can be seen in the works by Schiller (1976, 1984, 1996) and some by other authors.[15] The interest here, in this section is, nonetheless, including the so-called "cultural industry", for the processes of production, circulation and consumption of cultural goods have changed into the form of merchandise (items of news, television programs and even artistic works: literature, music, et cetera). These cultural products are pro-

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[14] An analysis on the role and location of the studies on the communication's political economy can be found in Mosco (1996).

[15] A wide repertory of works could be included here, after the trail left by Mills in the elite of power, where he observed how the media reflect society and its political and economic reality according to the needs of the elite of power, and that in the very elite there are individuals who domain the property of large communication means, as well as individuals devoted to shape public opinion. Kellner (1992) explains, among other reasons, why the cross interests of the military and media industries allowed the media to support altogether

duced in mass, with stereotyped contents which annihilate the critical capacity and which convert the audience into a passive and conformist one[16] ("industry of conscience" the one the Critical Theory talks about). The case is that the relation between structure and superstructure is somehow inverted, as the infrastructure becomes ideology (the unquestionable value of the technological, which overrates the means over the ends); and the super-structural (the culture as merchandise) acts as economic infrastructure (the goods of cultural consumption —directly or through publicity— make a sector of the transnational capitalism of great economic weight). Definitely, the world of reproduction inserts the individuals, more tightly than the world of production, in an irrational and de-egalitarian system, where leisure time (to consume) is complementary to that of work.

Mystification

Difficult to isolate, as we have seen, from the sphere of production, is the topic of the contents of cultural industry. By "mystification" it is understood the process of falsification of reality, by means of which a hiding —a hoax— of the real topics that affect social relations is produced. All in all, mystification is the effect of the ideology, from which, what seems coherent, fair, rational (beliefs for instance) is, in reality, a resource of political use utilized to hide the reasons that cause bad social organization (inequality and domination). Generally speaking, mass media are observed as producers of

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the Gulf War. Other elaborations (Altschull quoted by Shoemaker and Mayfield, 1989) indicate how the property of the media configures the ideology of the contents. For instance, a medium of public funding will tend to represent the government's ideology, whereas funding from certain groups of interest will tend to have the ideology of the social forces these groups represent or that of the sponsors and their audiences, respectively. In Spain: Bustamante and Zallo (1992).

[16] Such is the mass-media power which leaves the sphere of the superstructure in order to have an infrastructural nature, as it grasps so tightly the individuals by means of the messages that introduces them into the productive apparatus not only accepting domination in laboring territory, but also inserting them into the dynamics of consumerism making them purchase useless products, through the artificial needs publicity creates.

ideology. An ideology which helps to preserve the status quo, which tends to diffuse values favorable for competitiveness and the maintenance of inequality, irrational consumption, and distracts the attention toward less important issues.

This has been studied in the sphere of the news programs. There is some talk about the absent dimensions in the treatment of news programs, as they disregard the historic context and the structural issues of the conflict. There is a tendency to present strikes, for instance, as a deviated behavior of the workers, pinpointing the effects (disturbances, riots, damages to citizens) and not showing the circumstances that cause it (Golding, 1981; Glasgow University Media Group, 1977, 1980). The scholars from the school of Frankfurt[17] have been interested in the functioning of the ideology through the study of the contemporary cultural forms of mystification: the media idols, astrology, consumption with an irrational component comparable to that which religion represented before the birth of illustrated reason. For them, the interiorization of these non-rational explanations of life and the exaltation of hierarchical forms, besides favoring a greater implication of the individual in the techno-structural gears, make the individual victim of prejudice: produces authoritarian personality and, with it, xenophobic racism. In this section we can also include the works by Van Dijk (1997) and those by Chomsky (1996, 2000, 2002); the former through the discourse analysis, and the latter through an exhaustive and rigorous documentation work.

Alternative communication

Even if the previous models indicated the impossibility (or at least a great difficulty) of an active audience to participate in the production of messages, due to the same nature of the media (as Baudrillard indicated) or because of the structure of property and its connections with other sectors

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[17] A numerous and heterogeneous group; distinguishable in the "first generation" are: Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamín, Fromm; and in the "second generation": Habermas, Offe, Schmidt. See Jay (1986).

(criticism), the model of the audience indeed stops to think and act[18] on the composition of a really participative media. It has been seen on the *internet* a possible way to generate an alternative communication after the relative failure of the 1970's and 1980's decades on other media (Vidal- Beneyto, 1979): free radio stations, fanzines, and closer in time, local television stations. Internet enables the existence of a place for diffusion of ideas and information exchange, connected both to the local and global environment, where independent associations can relate in a decentralized network.[19] Any network of relations characterized by horizontality is democratic in terms of freedom and equality. This place for the expression of popular culture and free thinking is not exempt from attempts to control it for political and commercial benefit, as it is by means of the adaptation strategies toward conventional media and the segmentation of audiences. Nonetheless, the essence of the network has resisted, for the public continues moving toward free contents with a quality similar to those with a fee. And that was one of the reasons of the failure relative to the "new economy", reflected on the fall of the NASDAQ index early in this decade. The technological architecture proper to the medium, the subcultures generated (Castells, 2001), the new production, expression, and participation ways on the internet (*blogger, hackers, wikies*); the questioning of intellectual property (free *software*[20] and *copyleft*); and the difficult juridical regulation have turned out in the partial triumph of the alternative over the monopolist offensives.

In the international sphere, the proposal of an alternative model must take into account self-development (horizontal communication inside and

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[18] From practices as socio-analysis or Participative Action Research.

[19] Some portals where links to alternative media from different zones of the world are found:
<http://www.geocities.com/mediosbolivarianos/latinoamericanos1.html> [October 10th, 2006]<http://www.urbared.ungs.edu.ar/recursos_vinculos_difusion.htm> [October 10th, 2006]<http://www.zmag.org/altmediawatch.htm> [October 10th, 2006]<http://www.papertiger.org/index.php?name=links> [October 10th, 2006]<http://www.users.bigpond.net.au/trt/> [October 10th, 2006]

[20] See Stephenson (2003).

between local groups) has to be configured reducing the effects of the communicative gap, and must attend social usage and the incorporation of new technologies. By the end of the 1970's, MacBride Commission (1978) performed a series of proposals so as to achieve a more balanced information exchange between the North and the South.[21] An update of this democratic and free conception of global information and communication, and its contribution to development, can be seen in Galtung and Vincent (1995); more recently, in the World Summit on the Information Society[22], whose first phase was held in Geneva in December 2003, and the second in Tunis in November 2005.

Disinformation and public opinion

It is about defining and analyzing what is available for audience. The theory of *Agenda-setting* explains the important role the media have on diffusion and selection of informational contents. According to the creators of this model, McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media, because of the mere fact of paying more attention to some topics and silencing other, channel the audience's attention and influence public opinion's "climate". The importance of this

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[21]Mattelart pinpoints how the proposals from this commission revealed the existence of two social communication models: the liberal one, of marked commercial nature and oriented to entertainment, represented by the Northern countries which accused the Southern countries of maintaining information control systems; and the public one, maintained by the South, and oriented to education and which defended the no intervention from the North in the internal affairs of their countries (Mattelart, 1993).

[22] Differently from MacBride Commission (in a different historical context —Cold War—, developed by UNESCO and mainly attended by States), this international summit has been directed by a transnational corporation which defends commercial interests (International Telecommunication Union) and in the context of a World Trade Organization whose agreements head toward the State's subtraction of their capacity to control their cultural and media spaces. Its results have been, to a large extent, disheartening. More information can be found in Raboy (2004) and in the article by Guillermo Mastrini and Diego de Charras (<http://catedras.fsoc.uba.ar/mastrini/investigaciones.htm> [November 20th, 2007]). Also, 25 years after the writing of the report, the journal *Quaderns del Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya* (VV.AA., 2005) edits a monograph which reflects on the advancement thus far (<http://www.audiovisualcat.net/publicaciones/Q21cas.html> [October 10th, 2006]).

process of selection lays on the capacity of the media to indicate the audience, not how to think of determinate topics, but which topics are the most relevant. The case is that content selection can make the situation of a certain social collective or nation "invisible" (something similar to what we previously explained about the CNN effect).

Another example is censorship. Rather explicit, in the case of the countries with democratic deficit as political system, and the representative democracies are not excluded; rather latent, which acts from determinate organizational coactions upon journalists and become what we might call "self-censorship". The most brutal sort of censorship is that of violence against the professional of communication. According to the last report from the International News Safety Institute, in the last ten years more than a thousand journalists around the world died in the exercise of their profession; from them two thirds were assassinated. This report distinguishes, on the other side, the impunity with which these deeds are committed: only in one out of eight casualties the assassin has been identified (International News Safety Institute, 2007: 2-3).

Separately, nowadays there is a lot of talk in social policy on the visibility degree of certain collectives, referring to the media world. And this notion of visibility fits very well in what we want to deal with. An "invisible" collective has greater difficulties to obtain help from society.[23] Outside from the media coverage, determinate collectives or nations can be isolated (aside from the national or international public opinion), being clearly excluded from the political and social participation. Evaluate this exclusion, in methodological terms, is very simple: counting the presences and absences of certain objects (nations or collectives) the inequality index can be calculated (Penalva, 1999). In the international sphere, the flow of items of news and contents is determined, in a globalized market economy, by intermediate instances: the news agencies (Boyd-Barret, 1998).

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[23] In Spain, the increment of visibility of violence against women due to the media coverage has been one of the causes that has provoked demands from the society to public power for integral political actions (social, legislative and juridical).

Hegemony and popular culture

Hegemony is a concept owned to Gramsci. For him hegemony is the set of representations and ideas prevailing in a society, and which produce the assumption of a political and cultural direction from that very society. Even though it comes from —and serves as an instrument to— the dominant strata, enables the formation of consensuses and the attenuation of the coercive force of the State. This supposes that for the resistance of the popular strata the political objective is not the State, but civil society, by means of an *alternative hegemony*. Therefore, for some Marxist scholars mass media[24], and in general, culture, is another battlefield (not only the political and the economic ones) in the class struggle, as it is assumed —in similarity to that detected by the Critical Theory—, that the symbolic, ideological world has certain autonomy in respect to the economic infrastructure and the State. Obviously, this has supposed that the interest toward the expression of popular culture becomes primordial, where the working class is not merely seen as the passive and uncritical being of the media messages.

The analysis of hegemony, thus, becomes a cultural analysis. And if the cultural is, from the structural point of view, the realm of signification, the receptors must be given attention in order to observe which meaning they provide to the media contents. Because of that two categories have been united (the crossing of the critical model and that of the audience, with the sphere of reception) to approach this section. Hence, the relation between inequality and diversity becomes compatible; the former is understood as negative (cultural difference as for cultural capital causes the constant feedback of media usage inequality), and the latter can be differently valued as for its effects on the exclusion and participation processes. Diversity can be considered positive —as well as unavoidable—, for it indicates plurality (the

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[24] For Althusser there is a set of institutions specialized in the construction of fetishes and psychological and cultural idols. The *Ideological Apparatuses of the State* (Church, education, family, sport and mass media) are the institutions the super-structural sphere of society uses to preserve social consensuses, beyond the repression apparatuses (administration, tribunals, prisons, police).

different interpretations of the message are due to the multi-significant character of the sign, and these interpretations due to the diverse socio-cultural contexts).[25]

Opposed to the simple and naïve explanation that taste is impossible to be made objective and likes, uses and preferences of the audience are the proof of its sovereignty, is to deepen into the analysis of the functioning of the "ideological octopus" by Lewis (1991), the effects of the media are not always aforethought and direct (in the like of the theory of the "hypodermic needle"), for the audiences builds the meaning. What takes place is that even in "ambiguous" messages there is manipulation. This is because the factors that influence on interpretation depend on the individuals' social conditions; and in all of the social contexts ideology acts.[26]

Well now, the "trend" of the cultural studies was devoted to the analysis of culture as an action field for the class struggle. Its origins are in the 1960's with Williams and Thompson, who commence to study in a descriptive manner the British working class culture as a resistance to mass culture. With the conceptual developments by Althusser and the disappearance of the working class culture before the omnipresent mass culture, Hall (1997) and the Birmingham School start to state researches where it can be seen how, in this new context, the working class values, expectations and behaviors are, com-

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[25] The multi-sememe condition of the sign implies different forms of reception and interpretation. The media are other objects of cultural appropriation: neither do they reinforce nor decrease it, there are only differences of usage (according to different social and cultural contexts). In the socio-cultural sphere the point is not binary (having or not economic means or not, instruction or not —cultural capital), but multy-dimensional: the messages are not interpreted or stopped being interpreted, but they are differently interpreted depending on the individual, cultural, familial, laboring, other experiences and social strata.

[26] In a similar line is to be found the work by Bourdieu (1991) on the aesthetic preferences of the social groups. Taste is a social practice which is used for giving the individual a perception of their place in the social order. It is used for unifying those with similar preferences and differencing them from those with other tastes. Changes in cultural goods lead to alterations in tastes, however, changes in them also lead to cultural transformations. Therefore, they are useful as indicators of the class struggle, yet this struggle is not reduced to economic issues.

pletely entering into ethnographic issues. It is, therefore, the study of the decoding (paying attention to the contexts of interpretation) of the messages of mass communication.

Conclusions

This theoretical review exercise has made us reflect on the structure of mass communication and its contribution to the maintenance and development of social inequalities, considering its different analysis levels and theoretical perspectives. This diversity of approaches, from the point of view of empirical research, contributes with an important methodological richness from the analysis of contents and discourse to the use of ethnographic techniques, going through the use of secondary data. Therefore, the studies on communication can approach the research of the media treatment of some forms of inequality from the methodological triangulation.

Separately, this work has been useful to study mass communication as an instrument of transmission of a legitimizing ideology of structural violence: at the societal level as instrument of maintenance of the class differences (*mystification*), and at the international level as penetration instrument into the dominated countries and cultures (*concentration and dependency*). They are perspectives that helps to make this diagnosis in a global context of contribution from the mass communication to the increment of those social inequalities and the contemporary world's irrationality. From this evaluation of the media, it is seen how they spread and consolidate an organizational model which points toward disintegration by the denial of the satisfiers of basic human needs in terms of subsistence, identity, sociability and balance with the environment.

Although these perspectives connect in their researches' facts and theories, the inclusion of the values (altogether with facts and theories, it is the third element Galtung includes in research for peace [Galtung, 1993]) becomes indispensable to establish resistance strategies to the prevailing communication model. Some models developed in this work, grouped within the perspective called ''critical'', also contribute to perform this diagnosis; locating the structure of communication in the core of the system, and examin-

ing the mutual influences between cultural industry and the rest of the productive structure, as well as the permutation of roles as for the structure and superstructure. The world of communication cannot be severed from the historical period and the economic, social and cultural system which surrounds it. The proposals of these models, related to the unveiling of the structures and forces that regulate the world of communication are very productive in terms of the comprehension of the system.

Separately, mass communication has been seen as a "mediating" instance; in a great deal of the social relations has been observed substantive part of the quotidian life, constructors of the very reality. Juan Luis Pintos, from the systemic perspective of the "social imaginaries" exactly states, the importance of the media in the construction of reality. According to Pintos, following some concepts from Luhman, social imaginaries "are schemas, socially constructed, which allow us to perceive something as real, explain it and operatively invert that which is considered as reality in each social system" (Pintos, 2000a); and the sphere where they act allow differencing the relevance from opacity, and inclusion from exclusion. Before other historical systems of reality production, the current system of "reality production" is characterized by the commercialization of information from the enterprises located at the cultural industry. However, Pintos (2000b) connects the increasing loss of credibility of these enterprises' production with the recent tendency to social attention to the local and close, as main sources of reference on the real, in terms of trust and credibility.

Indubitably in the very structure of the media, in their definition and technological nature (unidirectional emission from a single point), and from the point of view of the multiple connections with the productive structure, hardly makes them egalitarian and liberators. In any case, the possibility to select the media as for reception is something that few can try to enjoy. In the developed world a considerable distancing from some media (as much as possible given their presence) is a practice of the privileged, in the sense that in the wealthy countries there are other information means less dependent on technology at reach (*simulacrums and coverage*) and the effects of the *agenda-setting* are less intense because of the broader diversity of media in terms of

plurality and as for technology. Nevertheless, for societies in less developed countries, the non-reception of them, in terms of access, constitutes a good measure of exclusion at every level, as it was approached in the section which deals with the *informative gap*. The advantages of the use of different perspectives allow us to notice this ambivalence of the media.

Similarly as the communicative sphere cannot be disconnected from the social one, neither can the deep implications of the mass communication model with system of values largely shared by a large part of societies be considered, where the mass media are socialization agents as well as establishers of regulations and values. This process has not been produced in short time, but it is the result of the exposition to its contents and forms of successive generations. In the same manner, from the knowledge that the change of attitudes cannot be carried out from one day to the next, the resistance strategies the alternative model propose have to propose the formation of a substratum more solid by the day, wherefrom construct new forms of social relation. The idea is to find a model not so defined of alternative communication compatible with more rational ways to coexist with the media and their users, where they are no longer the main object of the model. Not as passive receivers, but as active individuals, contributing to their contents and forms.

One never starts afresh; besides the existence of historical examples (the role of instruction in the working class press of the late XIX century and the early XX), reality is the coexistence of conventional and alternative models. One must recognize that in recent years movements of resistance to the prevailing model at worldwide scale, and manifested through the different world forums, have managed to have their reclaims heard precisely in the conventional media. Even, despite the considerable effort the mass media make to disavow these movements, by means of the incorporation of stereotypes related to violence, distortion or silencing of their concrete proposals.

These decentralized and scarcely bureaucratic movements have achieved cohesion from alternative communication ways which appear and develop upon the base of the communal, with rather autonomous and self-managed

media, not linked to the commercial sphere and indeed with information and formation. Media that assume the premise of serving also as a connection between communities in order to share experiences and coordinate strategies; a medium which has not been possible to discard is the internet: a cheap and decentralized network, independent from space and time. With its limitations, as the access is not universal at all and there is the real risk of controlling the information that is in its core. The extreme was observed in the last World Summit on Information Societies, where it was seen how the United States denies handing over the control of the system of net domains, relying this task to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, which depends from the Department of Commerce. We once again witness the constant need to perform jumps in geographic terms that imply theoretical jumps: from the local to the global, and vice versa. The demand of free flow of information, such as demanded in the New World Information and Communication Order of MacBride by the end of the 1970's and the global transparency demanded by Galtung in the 1990's are perfectly compatible with the denounce of schematism and false neutrality of the conventional media, and with the practice of the practice of the communal media at local level.

Linking the previously mentioned in this work when the sections of *Alternative communication* and *Hegemony and popular culture* were dealt with, communal media made by and for their communities would be a form of expressing the popular. In this sense, the quotidian of the media would be defined by the continuity between the two spheres (social and media) until they become one; a much more useful and liberalizing conception than that of understanding the popular as mere object of study. The popular, from this perspective, must be considered as the sphere of the struggle of the social movements. From this primordial sphere, through cultural practices, new ways of coexistence and resistance can manifest; a non-frontal and unidimensional resistance, as it would be done under a political direction, but from all the facets of life (labor, consumption, education, leisure, housing, health, etc), where the communal media express and reproduce quotidian life from the suppositions of instruction, spontaneity and creativity. Hence, the communal connects the conceptions of development that point toward

an economic model of self-centered development (endogenous) and disconnected (from the centers, which the dynamics of the peripheries depend on) as Amin (2003a: 337-340) states, in the context of a multi-polar world, which must present a local dominion of workforce, surplus centralization, natural resources, market and technologies, and which places social efficacy above competitiveness. Disconnection from the center, according to this model has to be completed with the connection of the peripheries in formulas of regional integration.

Separately, one must pay attention to the new hybrid ways of expression in a multi-cultural context of the social forms marked by interaction, not only by the informational opulence that global society allows, but also by the forms of coexistence of the different cultures in the same social space with multiple connections with the global. From this point of view, communicative phenomena marked by globalization indicate strategies of adaptation and increment of communicative competence in local communities.

Let us return to the schema by Galtung (1993) without disregard for the set of perspectives this article has approached in terms of empiricism and criticism, for the study of the media, it is necessary, from constructivism, a model where social researcher must be supported upon other methodologies, close to socio-analysis or the Participative Action Research in order to approach to the natural stages where reality is displayed. Thus, the researcher, attentive to the spaces wherefrom alternatives emerge, becomes involved with the object to understand the meaning the subjects give their actions and the ways they are used and how the means for social transformation are appropriated. Participative action of local media promotion, diffusion and study of alternatives (from journalism, preventive or peace journalism, to the construction of alternative news agencies) can be an effective way to develop a model that questions the too often infertile radical separation between academy and society.

Here are useful the models of development. A good exercise which overcomes this article's aspirations would be to observe how the media can become human needs' satisfiers. In their current configuration, inside his theory of human needs, Max-Neef (1994) points out censorship, commercial tele-

vision and publicity, respectively, as a violating satisfier (applied with the excuse of satisfying a determinate necessity, do not only annihilate the possibility to satisfy in the mid term or immediately, but also make the adequate satisfaction of other necessities impossible), inhibiting satisfier (over-satisfies a necessity but seriously compromises the satisfaction of other necessities), or pseudo-satisfier (stimulates a false satisfaction of a determinate necessity).

Conversely, alternative media can indeed be good instruments if they are considered and used as expression of freedom. From the convincement that freedom is the means and end of development (Sen, 2000), and that development is self-development and applicable to any society, as it is understood by the concept of mis-development (by excess and by defect), a new world can be constructed. It is convenient to notice that the term communication means make common, and it has the same root as community. Its use and structure thus considered, valuing it in terms of means and end on its own, should prevent falling into the same disastrous trends as mass communication: the manipulation for the achievement of certain objectives; an alternative communication is not exempt from that risk.

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Table 1
Forms of inequality in communication

Explanatory paradigms			
	Technologic	*Critical*	*Audience*
Production	1. Concentration and dependency	4. Cultural industry	6. alternative communication
Content	2. Simulacrum and technologic coverage	5. Mystification	7. Disinformation and public opinion
Reception	3. Informative gap	8. Hegemony y popular culture	

NB: this classification is obtained from the cross of the two dimensions, however it is not exhaustive, in the sense there could be more categories (inequality spheres) and more theoretical perspectives. On the other side, certain difficulty at the moment of application at each level of analysis is recognized: individual, group (class, ethnic group, gender, generation), nation, state, et cetera.

Table 2.

Global communicational commercial system in Latin America

Large companies and transnational groups	General Electric, AT&T, Disney, Time Warner, Sony, News Corp., Viacom, Seagram and Bertelsmann.
Companies and dominant groups or regional markets	Dow Jones, Comcast, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Hearst, McGraw Hill, CBS, Times-Mirror, Reader´s Digest, Pearson, Kirch, Havas, Mediaset, Hachette, Canal +, Prisa and Reuter.
Companies and dominant groups of domestic markets or sub-regions	Televisa, Cisneros, Globo, Clarín.

Source: Becerra and Mastrini (2001).

Graph 1

Digital index Access (DAI), 2003

High (0.7-1.0)
Upper (0.5-0.69)
Medium (0.3-0.49)
Low (0-0.29)
No data
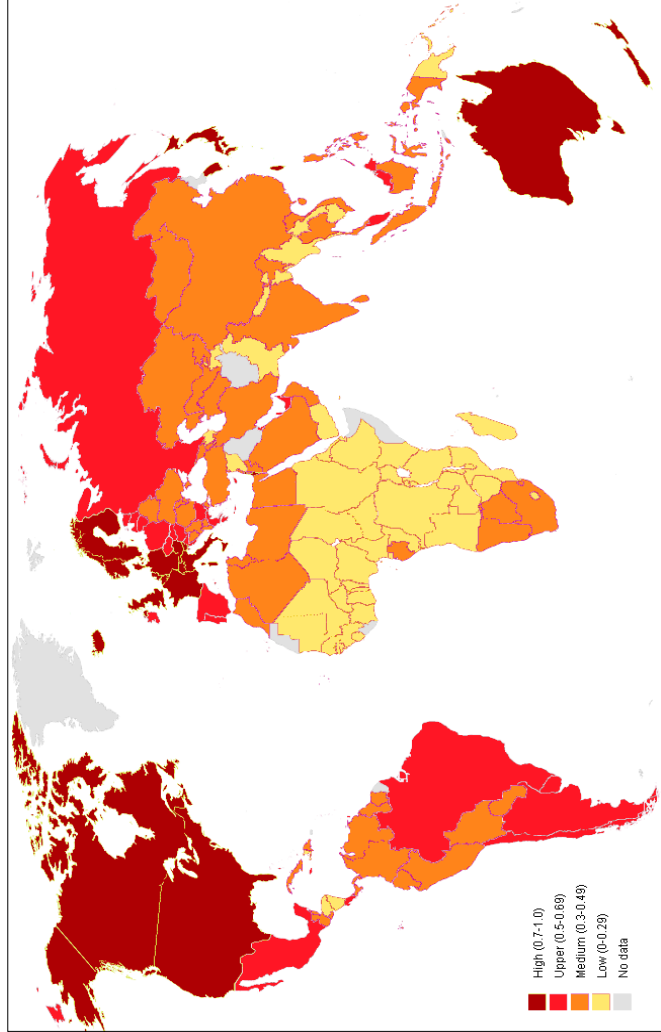
Source: Unión Internacional de Telecomunicaciones, <Http://www.itu.int> [October 10th, 2006].

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