

# History of struggle: pioneering studies on social class in communication studies<sup>1</sup>

## *Trajetória de luta: estudos pioneiros sobre classe social no campo da comunicação*

RAFAEL GROHMANN<sup>a</sup>

Universidade de São Paulo, Department of Communication and Arts, São Paulo – SP, Brazil

### ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the concept of social class was studied in communication research between the 1970s and 1980s, highlighting a trajectory of the concept from pioneering studies, with a focus on Brazilian research and on understanding their theoretical and epistemological meanings and considering positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, there are works close to the political economy of communication, Marxism and popular communication. On the other, there is the emergence of cultural and reception studies, which emphasize symbolic issues and the relation of the subjects of different classes with the media. In addition, there are studies focusing on journalism and public relations. Thus, this article shows the relevance of studying classes and class struggles in communication.

**Keywords:** Social class, communication studies, epistemology, communication research, class struggles

### RESUMO

O artigo discute como o conceito de classe social foi trabalhado na pesquisa em comunicação nas décadas de 1970 e 1980, buscando evidenciar uma trajetória do conceito a partir de estudos considerados pioneiros. O foco esteve na pesquisa brasileira, procurando observar sentidos teóricos e epistemológicos e suas potencialidades e limites. Em geral, as pesquisas eram próximas à economia política da comunicação, ao marxismo e à comunicação popular. Há também outras mais ligadas aos estudos culturais e de recepção, que ressaltam questões simbólicas e relações de sujeitos de diferentes classes com as mídias. Além dessas, também foram encontradas pesquisas enfocando jornalismo e relações públicas. Ao traçar essa trajetória, mostramos a pertinência de estudar as classes e suas lutas na comunicação.

**Palavras-chave:** Classe social, campo da comunicação, epistemologia, pesquisa em comunicação, luta de classes

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<sup>a</sup>Professor at the School of Communication and Arts of Universidade de São Paulo (ECA-USP). He is currently a PhD intern at ECO-UFRJ. Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1063-8668>. E-mail: [rafael-ng@uol.com.br](mailto:rafael-ng@uol.com.br)

## INTRODUCTION

CONCEPTS ARE NOT meant to be *used* instrumentally – as Martino and Marques (2017) remind us from the classic question “which author should I use?”. Concepts respond to research questions; therefore, they must be linked to the whole research development, which is methodological (Lopes, 2005). Above all, concepts have trajectories – or historicity – in research fields (and subfields). The history of a concept in the field helps us to understand epistemological, theoretical and methodological perspectives and parameters so we can observe scopes and limits, including those related to the current stage of research in a given field.

In this article, we discuss a part of the trajectory of a specific concept in the field of communication – social class. This concept was discussed in a doctoral thesis (Grohmann, 2016)<sup>2</sup> that sought to understand its theoretical and epistemological meanings in the field, both from research in articles, theses and dissertations published between 2010 and 2014, and from its very history in social sciences and communication studies. More specifically, here we seek to analyze studies that involved social class in the area of communication – both Brazilian (with emphasis on these) and from the rest of the world – in the 1970s and 1980s, which we call pioneers in the area<sup>3</sup>.

Our interest is to observe how the concept was handled in these works and how it intertwines with communication<sup>4</sup>, seeking to understand how the epistemological perspectives function as bases – sometimes also crystallizing and stereotyping – of meanings of the social classes in the field. The milestone marking the end of the pioneering studies is the publication of the work *Communication, Culture and Hegemony* by Jesús Martín-Barbero (1995), which caused theoretical and methodological impacts on subsequent studies on social classes in communication, as was shown in Grohmann (2016). Thus, the works discussed here are from a pre-Martín-Barbero era and show, in one way or the other, a portrait of the research at the time.

The concept of social class is not born in communication, but in the social sciences, having several theoretical aspects. Authors like Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, Edward P. Thompson, Adam Przeworski, Erik Olin Wright, Max Weber, Pierre Bourdieu etc. were some who discussed the concept, which also presents a specific trajectory in Brazilian social sciences (Grohmann, 2016). Each conception of class leads to specific methodological choices – theory cannot be separated from methodology –, leading to different research designs; thus, requiring reflections about the very research process. For example, a Weberian perspective is more interested in issues of stratification, income and occupation, whereas a Marxist point of view is more attentive to conflict, exploitation and

<sup>2</sup>We have already discussed other specific points of this research (Grohmann; Figaro, 2014; Grohmann, 2017), especially regarding reception studies. In this article, we will approach the field of communication as a whole, without, however, repeating what we have already said in other articles. For example, this justifies the absence of the analysis of other pioneering works such as Bosi (1978), Leal (1985), Silva (1985), and Lopes (1988), who have already been analyzed in another study (Grohmann; Figaro, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>Temporal and bibliographic contours were established based on the research of works and articles that circulated in the area of communication, considering the context of the field in Brazil. For such, some international authors were selected for panoramic purposes, seeking to show how some theoretical frameworks – namely, the political economy of communication and the cultural and reception studies – used the notion of class. Subsequently, we emphasize the trajectory of the concept of social class in the field in Brazil, considering the temporal contour cited above.

<sup>4</sup>As a methodological protocol, we try to observe: a) what works deal with when they approach the question of social classes – object and perspective; b) what are the theoretical-epistemological foundations of the notion of social class; c) how the theme of social classes relates to communication.

struggles, considering the classes from the social subjects and their relations, especially production<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, like many others, class is *foreign* concept in communication and this impacts on how this notion is used in the field.

The institutionalization of the field of communication in Brazil occurs more systematically from the 1960s and 1970s. The first masters programs in the area were created in 1972, at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), and 1973, at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)<sup>6</sup>. This is a context marked by the Cold War when considering the whole world, and by military dictatorships when considering Brazil and Latin America. Therefore, communication studies that involve social classes produced during this period must be understood within this context.

<sup>5</sup>It is not our interest here to discuss the different perspectives on the notion of class. For this end, refer to Milner (1999), Murdock (2009) and Grohmann (2016).

<sup>6</sup>This further justifies the temporal contour of this research.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDIES: BETWEEN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Considering an international perspective, Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau (1979) organized two volumes of a book called *Communication and class struggle*, with excerpts from authors such as Marx, Lenin, Althusser, Gramsci, and Bourdieu. In addition to the original excerpts, the editors make comments on the relations between communication and social classes from a perspective linked to imperialism and relations between the Northern and Southern hemispheres, with special regard to ideological issues. Therefore, for these authors, to discuss communication and social classes was to consider class struggles from imperialist relationships in communication. Moreover, communication itself was considered as the articulation of social relations. According to Siegelau (1979), class struggles are the foundation upon which the communication process is built.

In the context of the Cold War, class struggles had to be understood from such *political chess* that had a globalized international look. Therefore, the issue is not restricted to the Brazilian proletariat's struggle against Brazilian capitalists, but of a struggle against the ideological imposition of the so-called core countries from their own ethnocentric views.

During the 1970s, classes are considered in terms of "mass culture" by Mattelart. In *How to read Donald Duck* (Dorfman; Mattelart, 1972), written in partnership with Ariel Dorfman, Disney's comic books, especially those of Donald Duck, are viewed in terms of class struggle and colonialism, considering that "children's imagination are the political utopia of a class"<sup>7</sup> (Ibid.: 77, our translation). One of the criticisms refers to how "underdeveloped" countries are represented in the stories. "Our countries are transformed into garbage cans that

<sup>7</sup>In the original: "Lo imaginario infantil es la utopía política de una clase".



<sup>8</sup> In the original: “Nuestros países se transforman en tarros de basura que se remozan eternamente para el deleite impotente y orgiástico de los países del centro”.

eternally rejuvenate themselves for the impotent and orgiastic delight of core countries”<sup>8</sup> (Ibid.: 70, our translation). The authors argue that with this type of representation of those who are oppressed, this very image begins to appear in “our mirrors”: we come to believe in these frameworks.

However, not only the underdeveloped or Southern countries are analyzed, but also the representations of the proletarians. Dorfman and Mattelart (Ibid.) cite the classic Marxian phrase about ruling classes and ideas and claim that the working class is stereotyped in Disney stories, its attributes are transformed into fetishes and laughingstock. In other words, classes are represented in the media according to the view of the ruling classes. Workers are always seen as *others*, *otherness*, or *the mass*.

However, according to Siegelau (1979), class representations are not made only by the media because they are not isolated institutions. We must observe how this representation occurs in the movement of the senses of society, and the academic field itself is not outside of it. In 1979, Siegelau stated that:

The result is that the academic production of communication theory often tends to be lopsided in that it almost exclusively focuses on the communication life of the dominant forces and what they are doing ideologically, etc., without examining this life in its real relation to the life of the oppressed classes, in communication and elsewhere (Siegelau, 1979: 17)

From this idea, Mattelart (1979) reinforces the importance of communication researchers being professionals committed to the social reality. For example, he believes that a communication science must “listen to a group of printing workers struggling against industrial concentration and its model of a computerized press” (Ibid.: 24). It must provide space and visibility to class struggles in communication. And these struggles will not be well understood if there is no reflection on the relations of hegemony on a macro plane.

Therefore, Mattelart believes that constructing new means of production for communication can only be produced if there are global changes in these class relationships. Therefore, he sees the need for social consciousness of the subjects who composed the so-called audiences. For such, Mattelart states that the public needs to produce their own meanings.

Mattelart’s work, in this regard, is important because it gathers some elements such as: a) the predominance of the theme of class struggle in communication; b) the importance of studies on class representations in communication or how is the media discourse about classes; c) the political economy of communication, not forgetting the issues of power and hegemony in the relations of communication

companies, for example; and d) the assertion that subjects need to create their own meanings for what they see in the media, flirting with what was and is constructed in reception studies.

We can note that although Mattelart starts from a Marxist dimension related to social transformation, his perspective is more similar to that of the Frankfurt School at times – especially in *How to read Donald Duck*, in which the authors nullify the subject in the face of an alleged *ideological slavery*. And criticism of Disney’s stories is followed by criticism of US imperialism. Ortiz (1988) and Bolaño (2000) place Mattelart’s works in the context of theories of dependency and cultural imperialism and, despite extolling their political impact in the Cold War scenario, criticize them for theoretical frailty.

Given the discussion above, we can consider the political economy of communication as one of the perspectives to bring the concept of social class to the field. Similarly, cultural studies aid in discussions about class issues. The founding fathers of Birmingham’s cultural studies placed the concept of class at the center of the analyses of popular culture, sociability, and media relations, with Thompson (1987) and Hoggart (1973), understanding the concept from the *culture being lived*. Culture is not a thing, but something that occurs in concrete, material and everyday life (Thompson; 1981; 1987)<sup>9</sup>. When Hoggart asked himself “who integrates the ‘working class?’”, in *The Uses of Literacy* (1973), he drafted a definition from the everyday life experience of subjects, from their own life experience and from his own research question, without worrying about embracing the entire working class. Thus, the observation of cultural studies for communication and social classes considers the communication and social processes from the everyday life and from the concrete and material reality of the subjects, constructed within their own experiences of class. However, this work can be criticized due to some romanticization of workers’ struggles.

Stuart Hall et al. (1978) also provide clues about the relationships between communication – in this study, media specifically – and social classes when considering cultural studies. From citations by Marx and Engels (2007) on ruling classes and ideas, and from the Weberian Frank Parkin (1971), Hall et al. (1978) do not conceive media as direct transmitters of the ideology of ruling classes, but as a reproducer of structured relations. The sources of the power of these relations would be in the bases of consent/consensus between the ruling and popular classes through signification processes (maps of signification). In another work, Hall & Jefferson (2014) reaffirm their dialogue with a Weberian perspective – especially from Parkin and Goldthorpe – but also with Marx, Althusser, and Poulantzas, to the point of stating that “the class struggle over material and social life always takes the form of a continuous struggle around

<sup>9</sup>“Currently, there is a generalized attempt to assume that class is a thing. [...] ‘It’, the working class, is taken as having a real existence, capable of being defined almost mathematically – a number of men who are in a given proportion to the means of production” (Thompson, 1987: 10)



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<sup>10</sup>In the original: “la lucha entre clases sobre la vida material y social siempre asume las formas de una lucha continua sobre la distribución del ‘poder cultural’”.

the distribution of ‘cultural power’<sup>10</sup> (Ibid.: 65, our translation). In that sense, they speak of *class cultures*.

Being closer to the field of communication and from reception studies, David Morley (1980) tested Hall’s (2003) encoding/decoding model, considering some centrality of the concept of class in reception studies. In *Nationwide audience* (Morley, 1980), he proposes a break with approaches derived from functionalism and uses and gratifications, becoming closer to an *ethnography of audiences* (flirting with anthropological approaches) by seeking real subject-receiver over mere textual readings. He seeks to show

<sup>11</sup>An expression dear to Basil Bernstein (1960), linguist and sociologist of education. For Morley, according to an interview with Ana Carolina Escosteguy (2001), it is an “English version” of Pierre Bourdieu.

how members of different groups and classes, sharing different ‘cultural codes’<sup>11</sup>, will interpret a given message differently, not just at the personal, idiosyncratic level, but in a way systematically related to their socioeconomic position (Morley, 1992: 49)

Thus, the concept of class is fundamental for Morley. But this does not mean that he believes that everything is explained directly from social class because we cannot consider classes in a deterministic way; in the way individuals decode the messages they receive from media. Morley (1980) accuses Bernstein (1960) of applying the concept of class in this way in relation to reality. He thus conceives the notion of class as central, but also seeks to observe other identities.

But what is the concept of class used by Morley? If Mattelart’s class approach is related to a Marxist view, Morley (1992) is based on Frank Parkin’s (1979) Weberian-inspired class conception, which considers class and status as distinct concepts and conceives occupations as class indicators. From this proposal, he conducted his study with four groups: managers, trade unionists, apprentices and students. The author is also Weberian when operating the research from the methodological individualism.

In the following decades, cultural studies decentralized the issue of class and/or lost their critical potential from issues such as: a) the romantization of receptor’s struggles by only emphasizing aspects such as creativity; b) the proliferation of multiple identities, thinking only of questions of differences, not of inequalities; etc. In case b, identities are completely decentralized, removing social class out of focus and relegating it to the role of a *last identity*, at the end of<sup>12</sup> the quartet race, gender, ethnicity and class. According to Mattelart & Néveu (2004: 15),

<sup>12</sup>According to Eagleton (2012: 148), “convinced that the class is as dead as the Cold War, they now turn to culture, identity, ethnicity, and sexuality. In today’s world, however, these things are as entwined with social class as they have always been”.

derived from Marxism, its theoretical inspiration must face the devaluation of this approach, confronting the rise of new ideologies and theories with the effects of social changes: revaluation of the subject, rehabilitation of pleasures related

to media consumption, rise of neoliberal ideas, acceleration of the circulation of cultural goods.

North American cultural studies, such as the ones by Grossberg (1995, 2012), have a share of responsibility in this change, by *softening* themes related to power and inequality.

However, considering the established time period for this article and without intending to exhaust the international bibliography of the period on the subject, we can consider that: a) Mattelart's (1979) approach, strongly marked by a context of imperialism and Cold War, presents an emphasis on class struggle and highlighting the understanding of the political economy of communication and media discourse about the classes; b) the pioneering research on cultural studies on class and everyday life provide clues to the understanding of social classes in communication, although they only materialize in the field afterward; c) Stuart Hall, although his works only present some hints about the topic, is also one of the authors who helps to decentralize the notion of social class; d) Morley (1980; 1992) is marked by a Weberian idea of class and by Bernstein's cultural codes, in addition to presenting a certain structuralist vision of Hall's encoding/decoding model (2003), but he advances the concept of social classes when considering that he uses it from actual subjects in reception studies.

These pioneering studies contribute by introducing the notion of social class into research focused on communication. But it is Mattelart & Siegelau's (1979) work that mainly advances towards conceiving the class struggle in the communicational process itself, in a dynamic manner that reflected properly on the very theory of communication.

### **SUBALTERN CLASSES, POPULAR COMMUNICATION AND WORKING CLASS PRESS**

At the end of the 1970s, Brazil was under the motto of the slow, gradual and safe distension proposed by Ernesto Geisel during the military dictatorship, a period also marked by the Cold War, by exiles, by struggles in universities. And as already stated, the field of communication was growing in the country during that period. From this context, we can understand the event named "Comunicação e classes subalternas" (Communication and subaltern classes), organized by José Marques de Melo in 1979, the year in which he was amnestied and retook his position as a professor at USP. This event is significant for the struggles of Brazilian universities in relation to the dictatorship. Marques de Melo's role in the Brazilian communication field must be emphasized, as a



political actor and in organizing the central field, scheduling the most important academic debates at the time. Thus, he (1980) affirms that a *double blindness* exists in communication studies in relation to social classes:

First, by identifying in *mass media*, as instruments of communication maintained and controlled by ruling classes, the exclusive vehicles of introjection of their ideology in society. Secondly, by adopting a position of disdain for the media of subaltern classes, which are considered as mere reactionary manifestations and therefore worthy of interest only by those “official” (folklorist) researchers who seek to catalog the “picturesque” and “unusual” expressions of our culture. (Ibid.: 11)

From the *first blindness*, researchers had to attempt to deepen the debate towards what Hall et al. (1978) had already pointed to – not making a cause-effect relationship between the media and the bourgeoisie, because, although they strongly exist, they are not a totalizing mirror. Dominant values circulate through media but also through society; thus, we could not place media as the exclusive means of introjection. The very word introjection resembles the metaphor of the *hypodermic needle*, as if media had such virtually totalizing power.

From the second blindness, we can better comprehend that popular does not mean something inferior, nor should it be merely seen as exotic. Therefore, popular culture has to be understood from the concrete activities of the social subjects, thinking dialectically, and not simply ascribe their representations as reactionary, for example.

We must also note, still in the 1979 event, the use of the word subalterns as an adjective for the classes. The meaning of the word is tied to domination, to people placed as *inferior* and silenced by ruling classes; thus, opening the possibility of emancipation and giving voice to these subjects.

Moreover, the event organized by Marques de Melo (1980) brought several short articles by authors such as Albino Rubim, Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva and Ismar de Oliveira Soares. The themes vary greatly, showing the elasticity of the concept of subaltern in communication. For example, the practice of cinema in a favela, communication between bosses and employees, Brazilian country music and popular classes, cordel literature, Catholic communication at the service of the marginalized and communication in homosexual communities.

Diversity also appears in terms of theoretical references, from Bateson and Weber to Gramsci. However, although interesting, the themes are not theoretically developed very well. The book, whose character is more focused on divulging the lectures, ends up falling into shallow descriptions, which, in a



way, is typical of the field of communication in Brazil at the time, still crawling in the late 1970s.

However, when analyzing this work, the concern with popular communication becomes evident, which is the focus of many of the studies conducted in Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s, in the context of the country's re-democratization, with studies related to alternative media and popular movements. Another similar example, already in the 1980s, is a book organized by Regina Festa & Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva (1986), called *Comunicação popular e alternativa no Brasil* (Popular and alternative communication in Brazil).

The context is similar to that of its predecessor, involving media and hegemony, but the book presents more clarity about the role of class struggle in society and communication, considering it something dynamic and not stagnant. "Industrialized culture clearly reveals the hegemony that a set of classes or fractions of classes hold over society as a whole" (Silva, 1986: 31). In other words, there is a correlation of forces towards communication production, as Silva (Ibid.) states: "the content of media changes insofar as the panorama of class struggle changes in society and in its own interior". Although the book also presents some descriptive traits in its analyses, thinking about the classes in movement with their conflicts and in relation to communication processes is important.

Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, we can observe a concern with class struggles and the search for a more righteous Brazilian society through communication. Maria Nazareth Ferreira (1988) is another example. She presents a history of the press made by factory workers in Brazil starting from newspapers and – how alternatives to the journalistic hegemony can be created – of media at the service of the working class. For her, the workers' press is not only that produced by factory workers, but all types of press that "target this public, and that approach working class themes and, in one way or another, express their demands" (Ibid.: 5).

From this, Ferreira classifies the workers' press in anarcho-syndicalist, trade unionist-partisan or trade unionist, based on the history of Brazil from the 19th century until the struggles for re-democratization by the end of the military dictatorship. Ferreira also elaborates a list of newspapers and magazines published by the working class press<sup>13</sup> from 1847 to 1986. As a positive characteristic, we can highlight the political discussion about the working class in its relationship with the media and the importance of the working class creating alternatives to it. However, one of the problematic aspects of her works is being solely focused on the working class: the author criticizes the substitution of the word *operário*, which in Portuguese has a factory worker connotation by *trabalhador*, which

<sup>13</sup>From a survey conducted in the Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth, of Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp).



simply implies worker. We can thus perceive a certain disregard of the author in relation to partisan organizations made by the working class and to the trade-union organization of *operários* as *trabalhadores*.

One of the issues raised by Ferreira is that the trade union press, different from the others (anarcho-syndicalist and trade unionist-party), is not produced by a “factory worker or an intellectual directly related to the factory environment” (Ibid.: 54), but by a professional and paid journalist. Thus, she believes that “the idea of the working class journalist, from his own class, tends to disappear at this stage of the working class press” (Ibid.). By reducing the working class to factory workers, Ferreira (1988) ends up hiding the fact that the journalists is also an integral part of the working class, possibly having a working class origin and life trajectory (and family). We can thus note that there is a reductionist conception of the so-called trade unionist press.

What these studies, such as the ones by Marques de Melo (1980), Festa & Silva (1986) and Ferreira (1988), have in common is precisely the fact of thinking of political alternatives from terms such as subaltern classes, popular communication and working class press, although with some descriptivism in their theoretical-methodological construction.

### **SYMBOLIC ASPECTS AND THE SURFACING OF RECEPTION STUDIES**

Concomitantly, we can notice another movement in Brazilian research, which sought to analyze hegemonic media – mainly from what they call symbolic aspects – and its reception, although still considered in an incipient way. One of these is Sérgio Miceli’s (1972) *A noite da madrinha* (The Godmother’s night), which can be considered a precursor of communication studies in the country.

The book proposes an analysis of Hebe Camargo’s television program, seeking to unite sociological explanations with semiological description<sup>14</sup>, using the theoretical perspective of the Argentinean Eliseo Verón. The work analyzes the message from her TV shows between 1970 and 1971, as well as audience ratings, pieces published on magazines, fan letters and reviews. Through these mechanisms the work also seeks to observe Hebe’s relationship with the audience, with the mechanisms of projection and identification with the presenter, as well as to think the *ethé*<sup>15</sup> of mother, daughter, wife and housewife, in addition to circulation of these aspects through Brazilian society. However, this audience is always considered from the traces of the message; thus, not being a proper reception study.

One of the crucial issues for Miceli is the creation and consolidation of a cultural industry in the country. To discuss such question, he comprehends

<sup>14</sup>It is interesting to note how Miceli (1972) puts the terms attached to each area of knowledge: “sociology explains” and “semiology describes”.

<sup>15</sup>Plural of *ethos*.

capitalist society from the structure of antagonistic classes, having Pierre Bourdieu<sup>16</sup> as the author who influenced the whole work. From the Bourdieusian influence, Miceli emphasizes the symbolic and ideological processes that transfigure class relations, with two ways: relations of force and relations of meaning. He then considers that his research focuses on the relations of meaning in Hebe Camargo's program involving social classes.

The author also makes a distinction between *material* and *symbolic*, as does Bourdieu: "it is necessary to establish a demarcation line between the system of relations of production, circulation and consumption of material goods, and the system of relations of production, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods" (Ibid.: 37). We can observe that: 1) although timidly theorizing, the author considers the circulation of goods, involving production and consumption; and (2) the author disregards the materiality of symbolic goods, analogously to Bourdieu, as if material goods had nothing symbolic and vice versa.

The guiding hypothesis of the research is the linking of Hebe Camargo with the middle strata of the Brazilian population, seeking to create links with a class that has already been established, from a noble language that would make the program – as the very slang announces – a *gem*, using the author's terms. According to Miceli (Ibid.: 77), "the intention of this language is to offer everyone an appropriate repertoire to the expression of the tone of sociability that characterizes the lifestyle of a social group". He then considers that Hebe's program presents a conservative discretion regarding the values and customs pervaded in her speech.

At the same time, Miceli's complementary hypothesis is related to auditorium programs such as those presented by Sílvio Santos and Chacrinha. For him, those are directed "towards the lowest income brackets (classes 'D' and 'C')"<sup>17</sup> (Ibid.: 44). For the author, these programs

seek to compensate, on the symbolic level, the total social "exclusion" that characterize the contingents that integrate these strata. They offer a vicarious entry to the consumer market to those who are "excluded" from the system, and by talking to the audience using the catchphrase "my coworkers", these programs end up granting them resources for a social identity. (Ibid.: 250)

In other words, the distinction between the material – considered only as income – and the symbolic – appears yet again from the universe of the cultural industry. However, it is interesting to note how, by calling the audience "*coworkers*", the programs articulate work and consumption issues that involve

<sup>16</sup>We consider Bourdieu's original contribution to class theory from Durkheimian, Weberian and Marxist points of view. For further details, cf. Grohmann, 2016.

<sup>17</sup>We can note that, although the author uses a properly Bourdieusian-like vocabulary when talking about classes, such as the symbolic field, he also works with the issues of income and the division by socioeconomic strata, as we can see in this quotation.



social classes on the discursive level, although the attention of the author is centered on the plan of symbolic relations. Then, Miceli concludes that

the symbolic field is organized as a mixed system of relations of production, distribution and consumption of symbolic goods, obliging certain “spaces” to reproduce the cultural competence of the classes and class sectors that have already been integrated to the labor and consumption markets – factory workers, middle sectors working in tertiary services etc. – and, at the same time, obliged to respond to the symbolic demands exerted by the ‘excluded’ strata. These are the reasons that explain the existence of innumerable heterogeneous products, which can be read separately, divulged by the cultural industry (Ibid.: 179).

Miceli’s work presents a theorization from the *reproduction* and the *distinctions* between the classes from mechanisms structured by the cultural industry about these classes, as games of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, we can consider the book *A noite da madrinha* as: a) a precursor not only of the studies between communication and classes (although considered from a department of sociology), but also introductory of Pierre Bourdieu’s perspective in Brazil, who was used as the basis for some later works in the area; b) a research that tries to go further than the descriptivism that was present in, for example, Marques de Melo (1980); and c) a work that also tries to move away from the Frankfurtian hegemony that dominated the studies on the cultural industry in Brazil during the 1970s, not considering Hebe Camargo’s program as a mere form of manipulation by the system. Thus being an initial step for reception studies in Brazil.

Regarding studies that are properly considered as pioneers in reception studies we can highlight Bosi (1978), Leal (1985), Silva (1985) and Lopes (1988) – these have already been analyzed in Grohmann & Fígaro (2014) – as well as Viá (1977) and Tilburg (1990), which will present below, although they do not call themselves researches of this school.

In *Televisão e consciência de classe* (Television and class consciousness), Chucid da Viá (1977) presents the issue of trade-unionism in Brazil and intends to show how the concepts of social class and class consciousness are diluted from a study conducted among textile workers in 1959 and 1972, seeking to understand to what extent the media can be held responsible for such dilution.

Her vision approaches functionalism, even when discussing social classes. It discusses class struggle and trade unions but applies authors such as Paul Lazarsfeld – which is not surprising, since the author attributes new meanings to class elements from a positivist reading of the world, not to

say elitist. First, social class is not really studied in the sense of its struggles and the concrete practices of social subjects, but from the point of view of its dilution, resembling Durkheim (2004), being concerned with changes in society, in the shift from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity and the loss of social ties.

In addition, subjects are not seen as such, but as the mere mass manipulated by television and other media, as *passive* beings who are subjected to the effects of media. An example of what Chucid da Viá states (1977: 124): “The influence of radio is great and is due, partially, to the lack of schooling of workers. Given this situation, listening becomes easier than reading”. In other words, she treats receivers as inferior subjects because they are not schooled, considering social classes from the point of view of those who are dominant. When researching the cultural consumption of workers, for example, Viá uses the results that they do not read newspapers, but watch auditorium programs. Thus, she reinforces the stigma that she created about the workers, treating social subjects in a lower and non-dialectical way.

Tilburg’s book, *Televisão e o mundo do trabalho* (Television and world of labor), was published in 1990, but his research was being developed since 1974. The central objective of the author is to know what would take millions of Brazilians to become regular viewers, especially of Rede Globo, after a full day of work. Considering this intention, he shows that the cyclical character of television programming – or the very idea of a programming grid – strengthens the idea of a routine. Such idea of programming would fit into the daily life of low-income strata, in the author’s own words, both horizontally (from Monday to Friday) and vertically (from morning to night).

Although he does not use this terminology, what we have here is an examination, albeit superficial, of the routine of the working classes in the 1980s and their relationship with television. The author separates time into working time and time not working, pointing the importance of the time card for demarcation of this routine. Another important aspect that converges with Silva’s (1985) research, for example, is what Tilburg (1990) calls the bargaining power of the viewer, a way of saying that the subject-receiver’s point of view must be considered and not be the target to be achieved: “Participation is not synonymous with market research [...]. The bargaining power of the audience deserves further study” (Ibid.: 25).

However, the methodological weaknesses of Tilburg are also evident in his descriptivism, as already indicated in relation to other works. There is no explicit or methodological explanation: there are tables and data, but there is no information on how the author performed the research. There is no



systematization about how he analyzed the narrative of the soap opera, and there is also no information about how he collected the statements of the receivers (there are only observations such as “a low-income worker commented to me”). Similarly, he does not discuss the concept of class and naturalizes the term low income, simplifying the classes.

Considering the reception studies of this period, as we have already stated in Grohmann & Fígaro (2014), the work of Leal (1985) – influenced by Pierre Bourdieu and anthropology – is the most theoretically and conceptually refined, in addition to providing clues for further research, as done by Lopes, Borelli & Resende (2002). In addition to the descriptivism of the period, we can emphasize the focus on the symbolic issues found in these works, without, however, relating them in a more fruitful way to the communicational processes. Furthermore, there are different perspectives for the reality of the different classes – whose concept is not theoretically and epistemologically discussed –, from the elitism of Chucid da Viá (1977) to a certain romanticizing of popular classes and of the *other*, found in Leal (1985) and Tilburg (1990) – this criticism was also made by Lopes, Borelli & Resende (2002) – and the theoretical contribution of Miceli (1972).

### **CLASS STRUGGLES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS AND JOURNALISM**

In the 1980s, the issue of social classes in the field of communication appears not only in reception studies and research on popular communication, but also in the fields of journalism and public relations, with studies such as *Relações públicas no modo de produção capitalista* (Public Relations in the capitalist mode of production) by Cícilia Peruzzo (1986) and *O segredo da pirâmide: para uma teoria marxista do jornalismo* (The Pyramid's secret: for a Marxist theory of journalism) by Adelmo Genro Filho (1987). Both take Marxism as their theoretical reference, something that was ignored in their works at times, as shown by Pontes (2015) regarding Genro Filho. Moreover, these are pioneers like the ones previously analyzed, having impact not only in studies in the area, but on professional training.

Peruzzo (1986) starts from the conception of class found in Lenin as a place in production to theorize about public relations and social classes, also addressing issues of surplus value and alienation. According to the author, the profession arises “in circumstances where class struggles become stronger in bourgeois democracies” (Ibid.: 33), and seeks, with a semblance of social harmony or class conciliation, “to converge the interests of all society to the interests of capital” (Ibid.).

Despite the appearance of being above class interests, there is no neutrality in public relations, mainly serving as a mechanism to control workers; thus, being “one of the instruments used to involve workers and their families to guarantee the production and reproduction of the labor force” (Ibid.: 89). Meaning that public relations acts on the class struggle<sup>18</sup>. Peruzzo establishes a contrapoint between public relations activities when these are being used by ruling classes – as an act devoid of critical positions – and when they are used by dominated classes, from a *liberating* conception of education – based on the precepts of Paulo Freire (1970). Class struggles are thus placed at the core of the author’s perspective from the public relations activity, including the search for alternatives to it, such as community public relations that dialogue with the previously stated perspectives related to popular communication.

Seeking to theorize journalism as a form of knowledge, heavily based on Lukács, Adelmo Genro Filho (1987) uses Marxism as “a way of considering the historical-social reality that comprehends subjective determinations as something real and active” (Ibid.: 25). He takes *praxis* as a central concept and through it, thinks of journalism not only as manipulation or control.

Although there is no theorization – as in other pioneering works – of the notion of class, Genro Filho also places class struggles as a central theme to journalism, as well as any other activity conducted in a “class society”, according to him. However, he does not believe that journalism can be reduced to the interests or to the ideology of the ruling class in a direct and unmediated relationship<sup>19</sup>.

As in the previous example, Genro Filho criticizes other authors or theoretical frameworks because, in his view, they do not understand class struggles in journalism (or in the media in general). We can summarize his criticism in the following aspects: a) to functionalism, by distancing the class struggle of considerations directed to the media, failing to consider that communication functions have a character of class; b) to journalist Clovis Rossi, for believing in the possibility of “an ‘impartial’ journalism in relation to key issues of class struggle, as long as subjectivity (individual) was kept confined within certain parameters” (Ibid.: 48); c) to Cremilda Medina, for her theoretical eclecticism (from Frankfurtian premisses to functionalism) and the absence of theoretical confrontation of class struggle in relation to journalism; and d) to Marshall McLuhan, for, in his view, approving “the decision to remove all the problems of the economic base, and the idealistic aim of minimizing class struggles in the azure idea of vague humanism” (Ibid.: 64). Thus, what Genro Filho shows us is the theoretical insufficiency of the research and practice of journalism to comprehend class struggles in the scope of journalistic activity.

<sup>18</sup> As Claudia Rebechi (2014) also shows regarding the role of the Instituto de Organização Racional do Trabalho (Institute of Rational Organization of Labor – IDORT) during the period of the development of public relations in Brazil, between the 1930s and 1960s.

<sup>19</sup> This is the criticism made by Genro Filho (1987) to Ciro Marcondes Filho.



For the Lukácsian author, to consider journalism – and also conflicts and struggles – from the concept of *praxis* is to conceive that the scope of journalism, for example, is not separated from class struggles. Therefore, in journalism “the more or less conscious participation in the class struggle enables the identification of the interests at stake, as well as the origin of discourses and the different approaches to reality” (Ibid.: 215).

As we can see, the pioneering (and Marxist) approaches to journalism and public relations in Brazil understand the classes as something moving in history and in professional communication activities, rather than as strata or targets; thus, complementing the other previously analyzed approaches, such as popular communication and trade unionist press.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Understanding the trajectory of social classes as research objects/subjects in communication from pioneering studies is not only a task of surfacing the history of the field, but also an epistemological activity. It allows us to access what we have failed to study from certain perspectives and the meanings that social classes have taken in communication research, either through the attribution of new meanings or making them invisible, as we have shown in Grohmann (2016). Currently, terms such as social class, ideology, and Marxism are considered outdated and *smelling of mold*, as if they were confined to a particular historical period (Eagleton, 2012; Murdock, 2009).

We can note two main theoretical frameworks in the studies presented here. One is related to the political economy of communication, to Marxism and to popular communication, recovering an eminently political notion of class struggles, sometimes with a greater imbrication to communication processes, as in Mattelart and Siegelau (1979); others only as observations from the *Zeitgeist* of the 1970s and 1980s, without properly conceptual discussions, which is found in Brazilian studies of the period. This perspective of classes from popular communication and from workers’ press disappears of the research in communication in Brazil, as shown in Grohmann (2016) from the analysis of 48 articles and 42 theses and dissertations published between 2010 and 2014. Such perspective conceives class struggles in movement within the different communication processes and also includes Marxist studies on journalism and public relations, such as those by Peruzzo (1986) and Genro Filho (1987).

Another perspective is related to cultural studies and reception studies, emphasizing symbolic issues and subjects who belong to the different classes in contact with the media. From Birmingham’s pioneering works on cultural



studies, which consider class from the concrete and everyday life, Stuart Hall and other researchers approach class cultures, using Weberian authors and Louis Althusser, as well as theorizing the coding/decoding model (Hall, 2003), which represents a turning point for David Morley's application with centrality of the notion of class. The reception of Morley's work in Brazil occurs in a later context, related to the very reception of Stuart Hall in the country, mainly between the 1990s and 2000s (cf. Jacks; Wottrich, 2016). Thus, Brazilian studies lack theoretical and epistemological foundations in the communication perspective – in addition to presenting functionalist traits at times – and can be considered as embryos of reception studies, which were theoretically strengthened later on by the perspective of mediations of Jesus Martín-Barbero. Miceli's (1972) is also pioneering by introducing Pierre Bourdieu to the field.

Between these two perspectives there are some studies involving the analysis of media speech, such as Dorfman & Mattelart (1972) and Miceli (1972), in addition to the lack of discussions about the concept of social class. In addition, this mapping shows that, despite their different dimensions, the dispute between the political economy of communication and cultural studies was false (Garham, 1995; Grossberg, 1995)<sup>20</sup>. We consider – as Williams (1979, 2016) – these approaches to be complementary views for communication research involving social classes, since communication encompasses both economy and culture, as well as their interrelationships.

Despite the criticisms presented in this article, we record the pioneering aspect of the works listed here in paving the importance of social class for communication research, understanding it as a place of struggle. We can thus observe communication from a critical perspective, considering its interfaces with concrete and material life. These works show the commitment of the research and of the subject-researcher to the persistent unequal reality of Brazil.

This pathway of (class) struggle, somehow, was lost in communication research from the 1990s. As Jacks, Menezes and Piedras (2008) show, starting from the reception studies, studies began to focus primarily on *cultural identities* in relation to communication processes. Plural and contradictory identities are celebrated, such as regional identity, and the concept of social class is relegated to the background. It is as if they have fallen alongside the Berlin Wall (Murdock, 2009), even though they are still empirically evident in the concrete and material life of social and communicational subjects.

Somehow, analyzing the specific trajectory of a concept in the field helps us to understand the paths and meanings of communication research itself on a macro-structural plane over time. We can thus understand that social class has a pathway of struggles – internal and external to the field –, of legitimation, of

<sup>20</sup>Grossberg's (1995) argument lies in the classic problem of economic determinism that political economy would ignore the everyday life and consumer issues. For Garham (1995), cultural studies – at least as they have been reappropriated over time – would prioritize cultural practices and ignore the capitalist mode of production, similarly to the critique of economic reductionism that becomes exactly its "reverse defect" (Cevasco, 2003: 87).



framing and classification (Bourdieu, 1990), just as the very notion expresses conflicts and struggles. Social classes and their struggles have not ceased to exist, but there are ways of seeing not to see, such as regimes of visibility (or a difficult and unwillingly swallowed visibility) that conceive classes as something *démodé*, or only as a stratum, as if they were not inscribed in communication processes. By taking social class as a foreign object/subject to the communication field we fail to see the role of communication in class struggles yesterday and today.

A renewed agenda for social classes and class struggles in communication processes and relations represents learning them in their different dimensions: consumption, reception, languages, speeches, mediation, mediatization (and class inequalities), circulation (and as well as the movement of struggles, as pointed by Dyer-Witthford, 2015), financialization (Sodré, 2014), the world of labor (Huws, 2014; Fuchs, 2017), digital labor (and its materialities) or labor and technology (with the implications of algorithms for class inequality, for example, as indicated by Eubanks, 2018), among others. On the one hand, one cannot forget the interweaving with the classic themes analyzed here, and on the other, the perspective of communication research in the Global South and its persistent inequality. Paraphrasing Bourdieu (*A sociologia...*, 2002), communication is a martial art. ■

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