Dialectics of engagement: a critical contribution to the concept[a]

Dialética do engajamento: uma contribuição crítica ao conceito

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to contribute to a dialectical, critical and Marxian understanding of the concept of engagement, hereby addressed and conceived as part of the totality. Our argument, based on non-systematic bibliographic research, starts dialectically from the hegemonic conception of engagement, confronting it from the perspective of totality against a view to overcoming it. The understanding of engagement we have developed enables us to mediate between the contemporary epistemological debate in communication sciences, with a focus on discussions on mediatized interactions, and Marxian philosophical and political theory.

Keywords: Engagement, mediated interactions, hegemony

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo ensaístico é contribuir com uma compreensão dialética, crítica e marxiana do conceito de engajamento, aqui localizado e concebido como parte da totalidade. Nossa argumentação, baseada em pesquisa bibliográfica não sistemática, parte dialeticamente da concepção hegemônica sobre engajamento, confrontando-a na perspectiva da totalidade com vistas à sua superação. A compreensão que desenvolvemos nos possibilita fazer a mediação entre o debate epistemológico contemporâneo em ciências da comunicação, com foco nas discussões sobre interações midiatizadas, e a teoria filosófica e política marxiana.

Palavras-Chave: Engajamento, interações midiatizadas, hegemonia

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INTRODUCTION

THE NOTIONS ON engagement and its ethical and aesthetic implications, especially in the fields of science and the arts, sparked fruitful debates throughout the 20th century. In the historic moment of "resonance of effects of the Second World War in Europe", Jean-Paul Sartre developed "a radical text in a radical context" (Bylaardt, 2013, p. 85), in which he formulated his perspective of engagement in the field of the arts, with an emphasis on literature. Sartre (1948-2004) states that prose, unlike poetry, "is essentially utilitarian" (p. 18). Then he postulates that the writer chooses a certain mode of action that he calls "action for unveiling" (p. 20), which implies questions about what aspects of the world one wants to unveil and changes they want to bring to the world through this unveiling. "The 'engaged' writer knows that the word is action: they know that to unveil is to change and that you cannot unveil it unless you intend to change" (p. 20). For Adorno (quoted by Bylaardt, 2013), the law of art is in the dialectic between the outer and the inner, which embodies the transformation of internal elements of the work. In the meantime, what matters in art is not its advertising character nor the truth-message, "which is debated between what the artist conceived and the truth that one wants to assign objectively to the work" (Bylaardt, 2013, p. 87).

In an essay on engagement, Eric Hobsbawm (2013) addresses the positive value of engagement for the *scientific or erudite discipline*. For the Marxist historian, the most decisive aspect is that engaged intellectuals may be the only ones "willing to investigate problems or issues that (for ideological or other reasons) the rest of the intellectual community cannot address" (p. 188). Hobsbawm argues that engagement in the social sciences is inevitable and that, in addition, "social sciences are essentially 'applied sciences'" because they are designed to "transform the world and not just interpret it" (pp. 189-190), paraphrasing Karl Marx's well-known 11th thesis on Feuerbach. However, the author ponders that not all political engagements tend to "produce innovative effects in science and erudition", as much engaged erudition is scholastic, trivial and, when "linked to an orthodox doctrinal structure, committed to proving the predetermined truth of doctrine" (p. 191).

What we found in relation to the concept of engagement in several publications in the communication and information area is an empiricized and reified use of the concept. It is not stated here that the researchers, reviewers and editors of the analyzed publications lack seriousness, but that there is a gap in the epistemological reflection on the concept, especially under the critical perspective, which, in our view, is strategic to reveal the socio-technical actors, the political contradictions and class that make up the totality in which mediatized interactions are inserted. Engagement is conceived in the dominant narratives and practices (Williams, 2005)

as a deepening and frequency of reactions and interactions between institutions and Web users, mediated by social networking sites (SNS): notably Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. In this sense, engagement is synonymous with the performance of a page or post according to SNS metrics. The fact that the dominant meanings of engagement become "common sense", the most widespread conception shows the "historical effectiveness" of this dominant line of thought (Gramsci, 1968, p. 178).

It is worth highlighting the epistemological and theoretical contribution of Rafael Grohmann (2017) to understand engagement in the communication and information context. The author focuses on how the concept of engagement has been understood in our area, with an emphasis on reception studies. Based on a bibliographic survey, focusing on English researchers from the Department of Media and Communications of the London School of Economics, whose analyses fall on the relationships between subjects, media and society, problematizing fan studies and the "participation paradigm", Grohmann concludes that there is a "polysemy of the notion of engagement" (p. 11). The main focuses of the studies analyzed by the author are: media engagement, with a broader view of society and culture, engagement with works, based on the research of fans and anti-fans, and corporate engagement. Grohmann concludes that, in the midst of so many senses and the absence of methodological reflexivity, "the notion of engagement has an empty political sense" (p. 11). The communicologist points to the moment of this "discursive turning-point" (p. 4) about the sense of engagement between the 1990s and 2000s, in a broad process of reframing notions mainly related to the world of work, as a *collaborator*. This *resignation* displaces *social transformation and political struggle* from the concept to the *alignment* with some brand, which denotes, to the author, an alignment of the concept of engagement with the *new spirit of capitalism*, as defined by Boltanski and Chiapello (2009). Also, within the scope of pragmatic sociology, Laurent Thévenot develops the notion of "engagement regimes" in order, in general, to "model the different close relationships we establish with the environment, from familiarity to public distancing" (Corrêa & Dias, 2016, p. 86). In an argument similar to Grohmann's, with an emphasis on Marx and also based on Boltanski and Chiapello, Rute Andrade dos Santos (2019) postulates that, in order to perpetuate the cycle of capitalism, from the movement of commodity production and the creation of value through labor, the capitalist needs to engage the worker, which occurs through the dissemination of ideologies and symbolic representations that are internalized by the worker and justify capitalism.

In a text published on January 24, 2019, in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, on the eve of Facebook turning 15, its founder and owner Mark Zuckerberg tried

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to explain to the Brazilian public the business model of the website and sought to resolve the controversies of 2018 (Arcas, 2019), such as privacy violations and trade of user data, abuse of advertising practices, disclosure of false information, subtraction of personal data from 30 million accounts by hackers and serious technical flaws, such as instabilities that allowed the hacking of accounts. In the subtitle of the text, he starts stating that "selling people's data would be contrary to our interest" (Zuckerberg, 2019). Ahead, he explains that he believes that everyone should have a voice and connect to each other, and that the ads allow Facebook to offer free services. The word engagement is mentioned three times. In the first appearance, Zuckerberg defends himself in face of the possible "incentive" for the platform to expand "engagement" (para. 11), as there would be more space for advertisement. Then, he explains that, from the business point of view, it is important for people to be satisfied during their time spent on Facebook, even for them to use it in the long run, so he says that "bad content or click-hunting"[1] generates engagement in short term, but it would be unwise to encourage this practice, since it is not the people's desire (para. 12). And finally, he says that he does not keep harmful content on the platform because it would generate engagement, after all it is not what people want to see. As it can be seen in the text of its founder, *engagement*, as conceived by Facebook, is the *business soul* of the platform's business. The greater the number of interactions between people, companies, brands, institutions, the more time they dedicate to the platform, the more their virtual footprints feed a gigantic database, which informs the algorithms so that the visualized content, advertising or not, keeps the person connected and continuously feeding *big data*.

Etymologically, engagement comes from the medieval French *engagier*, from *en gage*, "under commitment, under promise", from *en*, "doing", plus *gager*, "commitment, guarantee" (https://origemdapalavra.com.br/?s=engajar). Thus, engagement evokes commitment to something. Although historically we have been prominent in the use of engagement as the political *commitment* of subjects and practices that aim at social transformation – engaged scholar, engaged teacher, engaged art – more recently, the corporate and advertising use of the term stands out. Meanwhile, the concept of engagement is used hegemonically in the world of work and in digital communication as the ideological alignment between institutions (mainly companies), their brands and their audiences. The *Annual Online Customer Engagement Report 2010* "defines engagement as frequent interactions that strengthen emotional, psychological or physical relationships between the consumer and the brand" (Toaldo & Rodrigues, 2015, p. 5). Raquel Recuero (2013) understands engagement as "a result of people's involvement with each other and with the brand as a persona. It is

[1] The definition of what is a low quality content or a hunt-click title is articulated in data, research and tests, which seek to support statements like the following: "80% of the time, people prefer titles that help them to decide whether they want to read all the text before clicking on the post" (El-Arini & Tang, 2014, quoted by Araujo, 2018, p. 13).

the construction of stronger bonds, of social capital in that space and in that network" (para. 3).

The main purpose of this essay-based article is to contribute to a dialectical, critical and Marxian understanding of the concept of engagement, hereby addressed and conceived as part of the totality. We start from the assumption that it is an epistemological and political mistake to conceive engagement exclusively limited to the online environment. Our critical theoretical argument, based on non-systematic bibliographic research, is developed in four moments/movements that start from the hegemonic conception of engagement, confronting it from the perspective of totality against a view to overcoming it. Although we affirm that it is an epistemological and political mistake to circumscribe engagement to the online environment, in order to overcome this notion, we carry out critical reflection on the pillar concepts of this dominant view, namely, the perspective of interaction, the bond with a certain content and/or institution and the mediation carried out by the SNS in establishing this bond. In a first moment/movement, we are part of an epistemological debate about the object of communication, in which different approaches to interaction, social interaction and mediatized interactions are developed. In the second inflection, we present a Marxian perspective on interaction and engagement. Then, we demonstrate how private devices of hegemony are organized on the Web, discussing their materiality from the main socio-technical actors involved in mediatized interactions. And finally, we address the algorithmic mediation of engagement. The architecture of algorithms draws the user's navigation itinerary from their digital footprints, recorded in their daily interactions with private devices of mediatized hegemony, which promote the subject's connection through values, preferences, desires, ideology. In the critical understanding developed in this article, in an ultimate analysis, the architecture of algorithms is defined by the capitalist ideology, which reflects a determined moment of the hegemony, of the class struggle and of the political struggles of society. The engagement understanding proposal that we developed enables us to mediate between the contemporary epistemological debate in communication sciences, with a focus on discussions on mediatized interactions, and Marxian philosophical and political theory. We want to contribute to the reappropriation of the political character of engagement based on epistemological reflection with a critical theoretical basis.

Raymond Williams (2005) argues that the perspective of totality in Marxist cultural theory emerges as an alternative proposition to the common use of basis and superstructure. Usually associated with Lukács, the emphasis on a totality of social practices is opposed to the "basic static notion and a consequent superstructure" (p. 215). However, the author considers that the notion of

totality can easily be emptied of the essential content of the original Marxist proposition, especially if it does not consider the processes of determination. Thus, for Williams, the key question to be asked in any notion of totality in Marxist cultural theory is the notion of intention. For the Welsh theorist, every society has a specific organization and structure, and the principles of that organization are related to social intentions, which condition our definition of society according to the domain of a certain class. Williams (2005, p. 216) further argues that, for the notion of totality to be correctly used, we need to combine it with the concept of hegemony, something in which the conscience of a given society is deeply immersed, and which emphasizes the fact of domination.

From the understanding formulated by Lukács, that ideology constitutes the *medium* that allows political praxis to overcome the immediate interest of class and to reach the socially universal moment, Carlos Nelson Coutinho (1992) attests that, in Gramscian terms, "this means saying that ideology is the *medium* of hegemony" (p. 66). The process that we understand as engagement is constituted in the subject's social, affective and taste connection with a certain ideology, therefore it is configured as a communicative and sensitive dimension active in the engendering of hegemony. In general terms, social bonding is established in everyday sociability, in sociocultural practices and processes that mediate the construction of meanings. In the meantime, we can say that there is feedback between the filter bubbles (Pariser, 2012), constituted by the system of algorithms, and the bubbles constituted in the day-by-day sociability, in the social interactions between individuals in spaces, groups and institutions such as company, school, family, friends, church, neighborhood, unions, political parties, social movements etc. As proposed by Agnes Heller (2004), the *immediate assimilation* of means of social communication or exchange occurs through "groups", which *mediate* between "the individual and the customs, rules and ethics of other major integrations" (p. 19). The affective and taste connection is the dimension of the subject's objective and subjective involvement with a certain ideology, it involves the aesthetic and sensitive dimension that denotes the concreteness of a certain ideology in praxis. If the individual likes a certain organization and the content developed by it, it is assumed that certain previous knowledge for the formation of this taste, the existence of economic, social and cultural determinations, the bond with a certain ideology, increasingly mediatized. Muniz Sodré (2002) understands the bond between subjects, in the struggle for political and economic hegemony or in the ethical commitment to rebalance community tensions, as the theoretical nucleus of communication. For Sodré, bonding is "the radicality of differentiation and approximation between human beings" (p. 223). Our perspective is that engagement is built on the friction

between human being and social and political consciousness through daily social interactions mediated and mediatized by private devices of hegemony. In the dialectics of engagement, we have the hypostasized sense of the concept in its relationship with infotelecommunications[2] (ITCs) (Moraes, 2000) and we have the critical and consciously political possibility of building engagement through critical education and political practices.

COMMUNICATION, INTERACTION AND MEDIATIZATION

The centrality of social interactions and their symbolic processes in the understanding and construction of communicational object permeates the history of communication theories. We are aware of the historical range of almost a century of development of productive forces, of infotelecommunications, which separates the first contributions of the field from the current debates on social interaction and communication. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify epistemological implications of the studies developed at the Chicago School in the most recent debates in communication sciences, although these early studies are not always recalled. There is no consensus on the Chicago School being considered a school of communication[3]. Marked by theoretical and methodological eclecticism, with significant contributions to formation of the disciplines of Sociology, Anthropology and social psychology, it was at the Chicago School that the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was developed. The philosopher George Herbert Mead is the precursor of this trend, generally associated with Social Psychology, whose main interest is the relation between mind, self and society. However, it was Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, who coined the name symbolic interactionism and structured its main assumptions.

Howard Becker (1996, p. 183), who belonged to the Chicago School, warns of the fact that Mead's main book, *Mind, self and society*, published in 1934, is practically unreadable. That i's because it was composed of classes taught by Mead, as his students came to the conclusion that he would not write the book. The sociologist also points out that the notion of symbolic interaction has different nuances and understandings, one of the predominant ideas being the opposition to the notions of social organization and social structure. Howard Becker understands that the basic unit of study for understanding any social organization is social interaction: "people who get together to do things in common" (p. 186). Herbert Blumer (1980) points out that symbolic interactionism is ultimately based on three premises. "The first establishes that human beings act in relation to the world based on the meanings it offers them" (p. 119). These meanings come from all the elements that can be observed in our universe:

[2] This concept, coined by Dénis de Moraes (2000), brings together three converging sectors (information technology, telecommunications and communication) to designate the gathering of strategic powers in multimedia conglomerates, which accumulate wealth and unprecedented profits. We opted for this concept after reading the discussions on dialectics of taste, in the work of Marco Schneider (2015).

[3] Two of the main books that make up the literature in the area, *Teorias da comunicação*, by Mauro Wolf (2006), and *História das teorias da comunicação*, by Armand Mattelart and Michèle Mattelart (2006), adopt different understandings. While in the first book the Chicago School is not mentioned, in the second it is presented as the first school of communication.

physical objects, people, institutions, in addition to everyday situations. The second premise establishes that the meanings of these elements are built on social interaction with other people. The third premise consists of the interpretative process that conditions the production of meaning in relation to elements that come into contact. While we can perceive the emphasis given to the individual's interpretative role, the first premise highlights the universe materiality and its determination to understand reality.

In order to explore modalities of interactive situations caused by the use of media, the American sociologist John B. Thompson (2002) initially distinguishes three types of interaction: "face-to-face interaction", "mediated interaction", and mediated "quasi-interaction" (p. 78). The main idea of Thompson's theoretical proposal (2018), of interactive media theory, is that, in order to analyze media and their impacts, we have to assess the types of action and interaction caused by these media. With the growth of the Internet and other forms of network communication – a process that Thompson (2018) and others understand as "digital revolution", but we prefer the term *digital mutation*[4] –, the author proposes a fourth type of interaction, the "mediated online interaction", which is computer-mediated communication, regardless of the technical support characteristic, and highlights the SNS as the "perfect scenario" for this type of interaction (p. 20). Like other forms of mediated interaction, mediated online interaction leads to the extension of social relations in time and space and reduces the possibilities of symbolic cues. Comparing with mediated quasi-interaction, Thompson highlights the dialogical character of this most recent possibility of mediatized interaction. Although, later on, Thompson problematizes this statement by attesting that this dialogical character of online mediated interaction "at least potentially" occurs (p. 21), this is a critical aspect to tension the concept of engagement as a corollary of mediatized interactions. These arguments will be further developed in the next topics, but it is important at this point to problematize the dialogic, communicative potential of mediated online interaction. If we understand dialogue in the Freirean perspective, in which there can be no encounter between "irreconcilable", nor "dialogical cultural invasion" (Freire, 1977, p. 43), nor dialogical achievement, because they are excluding terms, there are many economic, social limitations, policies and technology to dialogue in mediated online interaction. At some points, Thompson (2018) deals more specifically with the issues of power that structure mediated and mediatized interactions, especially when mentioning that not all people and organizations have the same power to make a text, image or video visible, which depends on resources, and stating that these new platforms also act as *gatekeepers*.

[4] In the meantime, we agree with Sodré (2002) when he states that "even from a strictly material point of view, technological mutation seems to be a more adequate expression than 'revolution', since it is not exactly linearly innovative discoveries, but maturation of technological advancement, which results in hybridization and routinization of work processes and technical resources that have occurred in other forms (telephony, television, computing) some time ago" (p. 13).

The perspective of social interaction as the foundation of communication, of the production of meaning between subjects, can also be identified, with different theoretical nuances, in the epistemological debates developed in this century in Brazil. In an article that presents preliminary results of the meta-research *The construction of the theoretical capital on the processes of mediatized interaction in scientific articles presented at the national meeting of Compós during the 2000's*, Maria Ângela Mattos and Ricardo Costa Villaça (2012) propose to "enrich the discussion of the theoretical-conceptual perspectives of mediatized interaction based on contributions of reference authors in the communicational field" (p. 23). The authors attest that, although this concept came into play at the beginning of the past decade, there is still a diversity of uses, appropriations, dispersion and lack of conceptual clarity. Vera França proposes what the author calls the relational (or interactional) paradigm of communication, in which the communicational phenomenon is understood as the process of symbolic sharing and not as transmission of messages. Under this perspective, França places the interaction matter as an object of communication, as a theoretical paradigm (Mattos & Villaça, 2012). In line with this view, Lucrécia Ferrara's article "Epistemologia da comunicação: além do sujeito e aquém do objeto", published in the book *Epistemologia da comunicação* (2003), also highlights the concept of interaction for the epistemological debate in the field of communication. Ferrara proposes "an epistemology of communicative relations, instead of an epistemology of communication. In other words, the author proposes an epistemology of communicative exchanges, overcoming the nature of the media and supports as thematic nuclei" (Mattos & Villaça, 2012, p. 27), questioning the processuality of media in communicative relations.

José Luiz Braga defends the perspective that communication studies can be defined by the object of *social interaction processes*. The author proposes a third system, in addition to producing and receiving messages, the response system, the circulation of meanings, the social interaction on the media. Unlike other authors, Braga's perspective of social interaction (2006a) adopts the centrality of mediatization processes in the configuration of social interaction. This process of social interaction on the media is a "deferred and diffused circulation system" (p. 27). The senses circulate between people, groups and institutions that make up culture. José Luiz Braga has a great contribution to our discussion on the concept of online engagement as a volume of interactions mediated by the Internet and SNS, by arguing that the "responses" of mediated interactions on the Internet are also deferred and diffuse. Therefore, it becomes an epistemological and political mistake to conceive how to engage the volume of mediatized interactions without checking the circulation and production of

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meaning beyond the online environment, without investigating how bonding with narratives and/or institutions takes place in everyday social interactions.

> Internet, in fact, makes feasible and/or speeds up and amplifies what we mark as "diffuse interactivity": "responses" are not typically of punctual direct feedback ("conversational" interactivity) – they are rather repercussions – redirections – circulation of reactions to deferred and diffused areas. In this circulation, it is clear that the emitting pole also ends up entering the circuit (and it does so even in its own tuning interest). But, of course, there, it receives the answers in a completely different way from what would be associated with a point-to-point return. It is now a matter of receiving something that has become "social" (available in a deferred and diffused way). That is – the responses developed by the media interactional system, even with the development of digital technologies point-to-point, are potentially different and diffused responses. The "impression" of conversationality is rather a logic of the system to make the insertion of "individual type" feasible. (Braga, 2006b, p. 22)

[5] Expanding and deepening the epistemological debate on mediatization is not our main objective here, but dialoguing with some authors from a Marxian perspective. A good overview of the main trends in approaches to mediation and mediatization can be found in Mattos, Janotti and Jacks (2012).

The concept of mediatization[5] has been playing a prominent role in communication studies since the beginning of this millennium, in different countries and with different nuances, notably in the production of European and Latin American authors. In a specific social context, the word mediatization can be understood as a process in which different social instances – politics, entertainment, education – operate according to the *logic of the media*. At the macro level, we can talk about the mediatization of society itself, a perspective that has been highlighted in the reflections of the communicational area (Braga, 2006b). Stig Hjarvard (2014) understands mediatization as a double-sided process, in which the media has become a semi-independent institution and to which other institutions need to adapt. In addition, the media, both through interactive media and mass media, has already integrated into the daily lives of other institutions such as politics, family, work and religion. Fausto Neto (2008) attests that it is not only a question of recognizing the centrality of the media in the interactional processes between social fields, but also of verifying that the very functioning of society, its practices, logics and codes are crossed and permeated by the logic of "culture of the media" (p. 92). Braga (2006b) affirms that the "mediatization" is underway to become what he defines as an "interactive reference process" (p. 11). In the author's argument, this does not mean that written culture as an interactional process would be annulled, but that "media culture" constitutes procedures that start functioning as "main organizer of society". In the debates, it is noteworthy the concern to understand how mediatization implies new patterns of interaction between individual and

collective subjects, and between them with reality and the world, constituting a new "interactional ambience" (Fausto Neto, 2008, p. 95).

Dialoguing with the perspective of Braga (2006a, 2006b), we argue that the construction of engagement requires the construction of social, affective and taste bonds, which requires the investigation of how social interactions are articulated in people's daily lives, in their social practices, from its immersion in this "interactional ambience". Engagement is not only achieved through *technointeraction*, a process characterized by the *medium*, which Muniz Sodré (2002) defines as follows:

> it is a historically emergent cultural device in which the communication process is technically and industrially redefined by information, that is, by a regime almost exclusively at the service of structural law of value, capital, and which constitutes a new societal technology (and not a neutral "intelligence technology") committed to another type of ethical-political hegemony. (pp. 21-22)

We can understand mediatization as the expansion of the logic of ITCs in the mediation and organization of reality, in the relationship between subjects and the world, which certainly raises new patterns of interactionand also implies new ways of inserting and apprehending reality, i.e., there are implications and overlaps of mediatization in the ideological arrangement by which we conceive reality. Muniz Sodré (2014) uses Marx's *Grundrisse*, more precisely the process of capital dialectical formation, in an argument in which he defends communication "as the main organizational form" (p. 14). In *Grundrisse*, Marx (2011) distinguishes general capital from categories such as labor, value, money, to highlight the need of "fixing the determined form" in which capital is placed at "a certain point" (Sodré, 2014, p. 14). When bringing the discussion to the field of communication, at this "certain point", according to Sodré, signs, discourses and technical devices "are assumptions of the process of forming a new way of socializing, a new existential ecosystem in which communication is equivalent to a general mode of organization" (p. 14).

INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT FROM A MARXIAN PERSPECTIVE

The centrality of understanding interaction in a Marxian perspective lies in the ontology of the social being: in the view of interaction as praxis and as a mediation for political and class unity. Marx and Engels (2012) argue that the history of mankind must be studied and elaborated in connection with material history and social interactions. An historical and ontological aspect is the fact

that the production of history and material life involves a social relationship: "from the beginning, therefore, a material dependence of men between them is manifested, conditioned by the needs and the mode of production" (p. 56). Marx and Engels conclude that the man also has "conscience", but "real, practical conscience", which is language. In other words, from a dialectical materialist perspective, while work enables material exchange with nature, development of productive forces and creation of value, language meets the need for exchange, communication between men, and constitutes them.

Another way of conceiving social interaction, also according to materialist ontology, is in the relationship between interaction and politics. Lukács dialectically surpassed Marx's theory of interaction by showing that, in the more evolved forms of social, work praxis, "action on other men" (Coutinho, 1992, p. 63) also stands out in the sense of adopting certain teleological positions. Coutinho will name this ontological development of interaction of *interactive praxis*, the political dimension of social praxis. The Brazilian political philosopher highlights the dimension of convincing, rules and values inherent to interactive praxis, in acting on the action of another. In this sense, as it involves rules and values, knowledge involved in interactive praxis is not only effective as a science, as a reproduction of reality. According to Coutinho, Gramsci refers to this knowledge of interactive praxis as ideology. "Therefore, for Gramsci, ideology – as a conception of world articulated with a corresponding ethics – is something that transcends knowledge and is directly linked to action aimed at influencing men's behavior" (p. 65). Also, according to Coutinho, the recognition that mobilized consciousness is of axiological type in interactive praxis is "an essential contribution to the ontological understanding of political praxis, which is a decisive sphere of overall social interaction" (p. 65).

The most extensive sense of ideology, according to Marx and Engels (2012), is inversion of reality: "in all ideologies, humanity and its relations appear upside down" (p. 51). But Marx demonstrated in other passages the importance of understanding ideology in its concreteness, in the real existence of men. We highlight here the well-known excerpt in which the author states that it is through ideological forms – legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophical – that men obtain conscience and it is necessary to "explain conscience through contradiction of material life, due to the conflict that exists between productive forces and relations of production" (Marx, 2008, p. 48). Thus, we need to understand the concrete relationship between awareness, representation and reality. Authors such as Lenin, Gramsci, Lukács and Mészáros carried out the theoretical responsibility of understanding ideology in its concreteness, as a set of ideas that support and mobilize social praxis, as an appropriate worldview for ethics. By the dialectical

method, even though it is a "false conscience", as Engels mentions in a letter to Mehring, this shall be concretely studied according to the stage and historical totality which it belongs to (Lukács, 1974, p. 63). In the same work, Lukács further states that ideological moments not only cover up or distort economic interests, they are not just "flags and slogans", but "an integral part and elements of the real struggle" (p. 73).

Based on Jorge Larraín's postulate that there are two general lines of the ideology term in Marxist literature, one negative, associated with Marx's original meaning, and other neutral, Marco Schneider (2015), in agreement with Larraín, defends the complementarity of both ideological approaches in the analysis of a political or cultural phenomenon, which enriches the dialectical study, according to the author. It is worth retrieving here the problem and central argument of Schneider's work, which is fruitful to guide our understanding of engagement. When proposing a dialectical study of taste, the author starts from the central problem of "capturing taste for capital" (p. 36). Taste is dialectically understood as "expression and measurement of the use value of goods, materials and symbols", and also as "sensitive substrate of ideologies". This way, argues Schneider, if mediatized information is primarily responsible for shaping tastes in contemporary society, it has a deeper aesthetic and ethical-political dimension than what was initially thought. When taking the reflection to the neutral and negative understandings of ideology, the author postulates that, according to the neutral meaning, judgment of taste contains ideological elements in narratives that give meaning to the subjects' taste practices; and, according to the negative meaning, the same taste practices, based on subordination and exploration relationships between subjects, are masked and distorted by discursive articulations. We can dialectically understand taste as a trigger for engagement, for linking the subject to a certain ideology; and the understanding of historical and social processes of formation of this taste, considering the role of the ITCs, of private devices of hegemony and imperatives of production, as a way for critical engagement. According to Mészáros (1993), "conscience can be placed at the service of alienated life, in the same way that it can visualize the overthrow of alienation" (p. 79).

Karel Kosik's (1976) argument, based on Marx's concept of fetishization of merchandise, allows us to think about the concreteness of reified engagement and to aim our understanding of critical engagement. The Czech Marxist philosopher begins and concludes his best-known book, *Dialética do concreto*, stating that dialectics deals with the thing itself, which does not immediately manifest itself to man. The "thing itself" is the man and his place in the universe, it is the totality of the world revealed by man in history and the man who exists

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in the totality of the world (p. 250). Kosik calls utilitarian praxis and fetishized praxis the fragmentary way in which men are inserted in the division of labor, how they conceive their representation of the world from the phenomenal forms of reality, without, however, entering into the essence of the phenomena. The author develops his understanding of engagement as a subject's state of *concern*, of his insertion in everyday utilitarian praxis, in his social relations, in determined praxis. According to Kosik, objective relations determine the subject, who behaves as an individual oriented by "concern" (p. 73). Concern is the insertion of the individual in the system of social relations, under their *engagement* and *utilitarian praxis*; it is the action of this individual as solicitude and concern; in short, it is also the subject that manifests itself in their action as undifferentiation and anonymity. "The individual moves in a system *made up of devices and equipment* that he himself determined and by which he is determined, but he has long since lost consciousness that this world is the creation of man" (p. 74).

From this perspective of engagement, which comprises the subject's insertion into the phenomenal reality, which appears from the material totality and whose appearance is impregnated with ideology, we propose the following as a dialectical overcoming: the critical and reflexive construction of engagement. In this understanding, engagement is built on the epistemological and political process of overcoming everyday life, pseudo-concreteness, through critical education and political praxis. To overcome the individuals' everyday and phenomenal relationship with each other and the world through the mediation of socio-technical networks, in a reified way, the development of critical information literacy[6] (CIL), media criticism and technoliteracy can be useful methods for political education and the construction of critical and reflective engagement. In general, CIL criticizes the instrumental view of information competence and proposes "greater articulation between critical thinking and studies and practices related to information competence" (Schneider, 2019, p. 103). The development of the CIL requires seven fundamental skills or levels. First, in dialogue with Agnes Heller's propositions, Schneider (2019) proposes the *suspension of everyday life*, that is, "concentrating on a single problem or set of problems" (p. 104). The second level refers to the instrumental domain, the skills required for the use of informational devices: equipment, codes, search systems etc. The third level involves reflecting on informational needs and tastes: the "*need to question the very notion of informational need, on the part of mediators and users of information*" (p. 104). The fourth level is the questioning attitude towards information: the "*need to question the relevance of statements, as well as the socio-technical mechanisms and criteria for assigning relevance*

[6] It is not our objective here to go deeper into this concept. For more information, see Bezerra, Schneider, Pimenta and Saldanha (2019).

to statements, data and metadata" (p. 106). The fifth level is the questioning attitude towards sources of information. Sixth is the study of information ethics, in the epistemological, political and aesthetic or existential dimensions. And the seventh level involves knowledge of critical social theories and critical theories of information. Questioning literacy as something static, Kellner and Kahn (2015) argue that literacy is constantly changing and evolving in response to "social and cultural transformations, as well as the interests of the elites that control hegemonic institutions. In addition, it is a crucial part of the literacy process that people understand dominant codes as hegemonic codes" (p. 61).

We further add that the development of political awareness which, according to Gramsci (1966), is the awareness of being part of a certain hegemonic force, and interactive praxis in popular devices of hegemony (Bastos, 2015) are also fundamental for critical engagement. We propose the concept of popular devices of hegemony to designate organizations and institutions, whose processes of political formation and symbolic production contribute to the construction of a project of popular power. For Gramsci, this role is ultimately up to the party. In the meantime, Guido Liguori (2007) proposes that there is in *Cadernos do cárcere* "a 'materialist' theory of ideology", because the ideological struggle is not limited to the "battle of ideas", since these ideas have a material basis, "articulate itself on appliances" (pp. 90-91). In this sense, the self-conscious subject, thanks to ideology, conceived as a place for the construction of subjectivity, capable of fighting against opposing hegemony for another hegemony, must adopt the "hegemonic or ideological devices".

INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORK SITES AS SUPPORT FOR PRIVATE HEGEMONY DEVICES

In Gramsci's conception of an expanded state[7], political society, corresponding to the coercive and educational forces of the state, joins civil society, which has in its institutions, or private devices of hegemony – press, unions, churches, social movements, political parties, class entities and diverse organizations –, the spaces par excellence of political and ideological formation, questioning or strengthening the established historical block. To the total balance of power between base and superstructure, material and ideological forces, Gramsci (1966) gives the name "historical block" (p. 52). According to Moraes (2010), the private devices of hegemony function as "sounding boards of positions present in ideological-cultural struggles" (p. 59).

Coutinho (1992) points out that the novelty in Gramsci's formulation is not only in relation to the concept of hegemony, initially developed by Lenin, but in

[7] Gramsci's original concept is integral state; the term expanded theory of the State was coined by Christine Buci-Glucksmann in 1975, in her book Gramsci and the State (Buci-Glucksmann, 1975/1980), based on Gramsci's reflections.

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showing that hegemony, as a "social figure" (p. 77), it has its own material basis, autonomous and specific space of manifestation. This materiality of hegemony is objectified by the private apparatus, by civil society. It is noteworthy that Marx and Engels (2012) had already highlighted civil society as a "stage of history", which encompasses "any material exchange of individuals within a determined phase of development for productive forces" (p. 63). With the development for the productive forces, especially the ITCs, we believe it is relevant for our purpose here to understand some characteristics of Web and SNS functioning as technological supports for private devices of hegemony. It is important to highlight this aspect: the private devices of hegemony act by mediating the engagement of the subjects, in an articulated way, inside and outside the networks.

In a critical intellectual effort to update the Gramscian idea of private devices of hegemony in contemporary civil society, Murilo César Ramos (2010) proposes the following hierarchy, according to the institutions' power projection capacity:

> the Company, that is, the ideological set of precepts that make up what we also call the market; communication institutions, or, as we most commonly treat them, the media; the Group, a set of personal associations that most influence our behaviors; the family; the Churches; the school; the Union or Association of workers or companies; and the so-called Third Sector. (p. 6)

Continuing with his argument, Ramos (2010) confirms that *company* and *media* are the most powerful private devices of hegemony, with media institutions being a unique form of company. The power and uniqueness of the media, according to Ramos, are in its capacity to produce and disseminate journalistic, informational and entertainment content "embedded in its virtual totality of the absolute logic of consumption, which is the main ideologically reproducing force of capitalism" (p. 6). We can approach the formulation of Schneider (2015), when he states that

> if the main vector that guides ITC information flows is the expanded reproduction of capital and the maintenance of the political hegemony of certain sectors of dominant class, this is necessarily what we have to swallow in the form of spectacle. (p. 133)

We can consider the hierarchy proposed by Ramos (2010), especially if we consider Williams' (2005) proposition that educational institutions are the main agents of transmission and incorporation of the dominant culture, but there is no way to disagree with Ramos' assessment (2010) on the intrinsic relation between company, media and capital.

Internet and SNS function as technological support for private devices of hegemony in a diverse, complex and contradictory way, reflecting social and political struggles of society. The insertion of civil society institutions as a socio-technical actor on the web takes place according to the rules, metrics and discursive patterns of mediatized information functioning, whose online circulation is largely mediated by the giant Web companies. This aspect leads us to reflect on the materiality of these socio-technical actors. Now, if what characterizes the private devices of hegemony is their own materiality, when acting on the Internet and SNS, the other institutions are hosted on a material basis that does not belong to them.

The main private devices of hegemony that, due to their material basis, ultimately determine the "rules of the game" are the big Web companies, especially Google and Facebook. What will make a difference for institutions to act in this virtual field will be economic, political, intelligence and technical capacity to operate according to the imperatives of capital and the algorithmic logic submitted to them. We will highlight the aspect of the ITCs material production, which makes up a totality, and then we will discuss the specificities of the socio-technical actors, with a focus on companies and on algorithmic logic. Marx (2011) points out that there is no general production and no universal production; production is always "a particular branch of production" or a totality, and cites agriculture, livestock or manufacturing as examples. Nevertheless, production is not only private production, it is always "a certain social body, a social subject active in a greater or lesser totality of branches of production" (pp. 57-58). Under the Marxian dialectic, production, distribution, exchange and consumption constitute a totality, the "differences within a unit" (pp. 75-76). However, for Marx, the production overlaps other moments, the process always starts over from it.

In the 19th century, when thinking about the way in which the means of transport and communication on manufacturing period soon turned into obstacles for modern industry, Marx (2010) highlights that, in addition to the radical changes in the way of construction of sailing ships, "the transport and communications system was progressively adapted to the mode of production of large industry with the introduction of river steamships, railways, ocean liners and the telegraph" (p. 440). Taking this reflection to the 20th century, the crisis on economic development models of both capitalism and statism, which motivated its restructuring during the 1970s, originates in the conflict between the rigidity of the so-called Fordism, the mass production mode, and the increasing needs of Economy for administrative flexibility and capital globalization (Castells, 1999; Harvey, 1993). ITCs play a central role in constituting the new, flexible and rejuvenated form of capitalism. Some characteristics of this new form of

capitalism are: "globalization of the main economic activities, organizational flexibility and greater power for employers in their relations with workers" (Castells, 1999, p. 411).

The years 1984-1985 represent transition and expansion of the telecommunications deregulation, that is, privatizations, free competition and facilitation of the free market based on technological changes: digitalization, high performance networks, optoelectronics, increased memory capacity and decreased costs (Mattelart, 2001). With the efforts of the great powers, North Americans, Europeans and large global companies, as well as information and communication technologies, become the basis for a geo-economic rearrangement of the world around market democracy. Or, according to Quiroga (2019), in dialogue with Sodré, we have "the centrality of mediatization as one of the spaces par excellence for constituting the contemporary economy" (p. 82). In this sense, the process of expanding communicative possibilities generated by development of the productive forces is limited by the hegemonic process of capital.

In the meantime, there is a structural, economic reason for limiting political potential and critical engagement with the mediation of the Internet and SNS. As with the technological development and use of the radio, which had technical potential at the beginning for critical and emancipatory communication, to be more than a commercial information distribution device (Brecht, 2007), the interactive and revolutionary potential of internet clashes with production relations; the latter, with their legal aspect, which are property relations (Marx, 2008) and restrict the technological potential of Internet for interactive communication, incorporating technology as another piece of the capital gear. On the other hand, there is a control of interactive processes by capital, which enhances the commercial use of information, its hegemonic use as a commodity form, and limits are placed on interactive processes with potentially transforming potentials.

It is important to mention that the most valuable companies and brands in the world make up the ITC segment. In *Forbes*' annual list ranking, Apple ranks as the world's most valuable brand for the ninth time, valued at USD 205.5 B. Google is in second place, with USD 167.7 B, up 23% (Badenhausen, 2019). Google is the absolute leader in the search engine market, with a 92% share in the last 12 months, according to StatCounter (Bing has 2.6% and Yahoo 1.9%). Microsoft (USD 123.5 B) and Amazon (USD 97 B) complete the Top 4; both increased more than 20% in market value. Facebook ranks fifth in the ranking, totaling USD 88.9 B, 6% less compared to 2018, being the only company in the Top 10 to suffer devaluation. Advertising corresponds to the highest revenue from Facebook's revenue, representing 92%, which adds up to USD 13.5 B

(up 33% in 2018) (Selmi, 2018). Although the main focus of Astrid Mager's (2012) research is Google, we can also use her analysis for Facebook. According to the author, these companies correspond to a new way of exploiting capitalism which, according to the meaning of Boltanksi and Chiapello (2009), operates in a form of exploitation that develops in the *connectionist world*, where profit is realized through economic operations in networks.

ALGORITHMIC MEDIATION OF ENGAGEMENT

The fact that the *facebookian* way of conceiving engagement is reflected in research in the area of communication and information reminds us about the beginning of communication sciences in the United States, and the astonishment caused to the German philosopher Theodor Adorno (1995) when he came across the scientific method of communication practiced on North American territory. Lazarsfeld and Stanton had perfected the so-called *program analyzer* or *profile machine*, dubbed the *Lazarsfeld-Stanton analyzer*, for the studies of the *Princeton Radio Research Project*. The machine was in charge of recording the listener's reactions in terms of approval, aversion or indifference, from, respectively, a green button on the right, a red button on the left, or neither of them (Mattelart & Mattelart, 2006). Adorno (1995) reports this impact as follows, after hearing reports on "Likes and dislikes study", something that barely represented something to him:

> But I understood enough to realize that it was about data collection, the steps of planning in the field of mass media, for the benefit of both the industry immediately, and the cultural advisers and similar associations. For the first time, I saw "*administrative research*" before me: today I no longer remember whether it was Lazarsfeld who coined this concept, or me in my amazement at a type of science oriented towards the practical point of view, something unusual for me. (p. 144)

We may not be as critic as Adorno does, but we are also astonished to treat engagement from interactions mediated by SNS tools, such as reaction buttons. Adorno (1995) brings another relevant reflection to criticize this perspective of engagement and, at this moment, to understand the role of ideology of algorithms in formatting the subjects' taste and their engagement with a certain ideology: the thesis that musical taste is subject to manipulation. We could expand the reflection to other areas of mediatized information: cultural, political or even scientific taste. We need to stick to the "already mediatized character of the apparently immediate" (p. 158). Tiago Quiroga (2019) also contributes to our

A critical reflection on the adoption of the Facebook perspective in research in our area, when he argues that one of the results of mediatization process as "structural materiality" of contemporary capitalism is the "export of organizational discourse to different institutions, one of its most expressive consequences being its discursive uniformity" (p. 83).

What particularly draws our attention about the algorithms is what Tarleton Gillespie (2018) calls algorithms of public relevance, which, through mathematical procedures, produce and certify knowledge. According to Gillespie, it has specific implications when selecting what is relevant from "traces of our activities, preferences and expressions" (p. 97). This algorithmic evaluation has a particular *knowledge logic* to define knowledge and identify its most relevant aspects. "The fact that we are using algorithms to identify what we need to know is as striking as having resorted to accredited specialists, the scientific method, common sense or the word of God" (p. 97). Gillespie states that, in a sociological analysis, it is necessary to investigate the human and institutional choices behind mechanisms. In the meantime, it is worth highlighting the ethical-political dimension of this almost omnipresent and omniscient surveillance process, under the management of economic and state institutions, in which the algorithms inadvertently feed on the users' data with the ultimate goal of accumulating capital. Christian Fuchs (2011) points out that surveillance is a social relationship that involves disciplinary power and differentiates what he calls surveillance technologies (the productive forces of surveillance) and the social/societal structures of surveillance (which correspond to the production relations of surveillance). The author warns that reducing surveillance to the level of technologies is "a form of techno-deterministic reductionism and fetishism that reifies surveillance and thereby destroys the critical potential of the concept" (p. 122).

The introduction of the Facebook news feed in 2006, which provides content personalization, as indicated by the platform's institutional communication, marks the transformation in the logic of visibility and exposure of users, being adopted by other web platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest (Araujo, 2018). Araujo argues that the news feed mechanism is defined by relational, negotiation processes, and highlights that the user's perception of functionality is a fundamental part of the process. The author will formulate the concept of an *algorithmic rule*, a punitive logic based on lesser or greater visibility, which defines the relationship between content producers and the news feed classification system, discriminating content and behaviors as being legitimate or not. Araujo lists two main characteristics of this logic: based on data, statistics, behaviors, interviews etc., there are several "evaluative definitions about contents and behaviors that should be banned" (p. 14); and, secondly,

they condition visibility according to the rules established and updated in the service. Araujo concludes that what is considered normal within this logic is what generates, according to the author, *genuine engagement*: that content that makes users interact, without explicitly asking them to like or share. Based on the arguments of Taina Bucher, Jurno and DalBen (2018) address patterns of behavior that emerge with the algorithms: by rewarding a certain type of behavior, users and organizations tend to format their publications in order to generate greater visibility and *engagement*, which deploys material realities in shaping social life, according to the authors. As it can be seen, in both researches mentioned there is no doubt about the notion of engagement.

A central discussion about the algorithm system and its logic is the relationship between relevance and popularity, theme of the article by Seth Finkelstein (2008). The author confirms that the page classification activity is a process full of values and serious social implications. Seth Finkelstein explores three propositions in his article. First, page search is not a democratic activity. Second, searching for words in a search engine raises the following question: when searching, do we want to see a picture of society or what should we be like? Third, the fact that the search system is based on popularity is not an appropriate model for civil society. Gillespie (2018) also thinks that "relevant" is a "fluid and meaningful" judgment (pp. 103-104). Mager (2012) considers that "search engines are negotiated in a network of actors, interests and practices within contemporary frames of meaning, the capitalist ideology in particular" (p. 773). The author identifies as the main socio-technical actors in the configuration of search engines: networks of engineers, website providers and users and, in a broader context, competitors, mass media, policies and legal structures. Another aspect to be highlighted, according to the author's analysis, is that the "capitalist spirit gets embedded in search algorithms by way of social practices" (p. 779). She believes that neither providers nor users should be seen as victims of search engines, but as stabilizing agents of technology with their marketing, search and consumption practices, whether aware or unaware.

Seth Finkelstein (2008) develops fundamental arguments for our discussion by reasoning that the *votes* that generate relevance to a page are like *votes of shareholders*, not of an ordinary citizen, because their power varies according to blocks, factions and interest groups. Thus, "the results of the algorithmic calculation by a search engine come to reflect political struggles in society" (p. 107). We can add, paraphrasing Marx (2009), that it is also a social struggle, because there is no political struggle that is not also a social struggle. As Seth Finkelstein (2008) shows us, hyperlinks (and associated popularity algorithms) are more likely to reflect and reinforce existing hierarchies. And the truth of

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this fact has a logic, as the author argues: if the search for information returned with disturbing or subversive results, there would be strong pressure for the system to be changed. We add that the interaction mediated by SNS can be understood as *specular interaction*, as we defined earlier (Bastos, 2018), a mode of mediated interaction that reflects user's identity, treated eminently as a certain target audience profile for advertisement. Bubbles created by Facebook filters, for example, by the EdgeRank algorithm system, result in a "personalization process that inhibits access to divergent content" (Bittencourt, 2015, p. 127). Thus, unless you look for ways to circumvent the algorithms - like start liking pages whose content differs from your interests, so that you can follow the discussions, or even enter eventually to try to interact with this audience – the specular interaction will prevail.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

> All of our ideology-forming institutions consider that their main task is to keep the role of ideology unreasonable, in line with a concept of culture, according to which cultural formation would already be complete and culture would not require any continued creative effort. It is not appropriate to investigate here because the interests of these institutions are inconsequential; but if a technical invention, endowed with such a natural aptitude for decisive social functions, such a desperate effort is proposed to remain *inconsequential*, involved in the most harmless entertainment, then the question of the possibility of facing the disconnection forces through the organization of the disconnected arises inescapably. (Brecht, 2007, p. 229)

From the historical debates on engagement in the fields of art and science, through the discursive turning-point in which the political character of the concept is expropriated to give way to the corporate and technical sense of the term, which becomes dominant, a conceptual pair remains inextricably linked to the engagement: ideology. Terry Eagleton (1997) sarcastically states that ideology is like "bad breath" (p. 16), something that someone else has. As we affirm that it is a conceptual pair, therefore, they mean each other, we could say the same about engagement. Eric Hobsbawm (2013) argues that engagement "implies an opponent" (p. 178), a fact that can be seen in scientific and political clashes. In our presentation, we prioritized the class character of the phenomenon, that is, adopting Hobsbawm's premise, we deal mainly with the criticism of economic and political use of the practice and the concept of engagement for accumulation of capital. To this end, our theoretical path sought to unveil and

compare the conceptual pillars of the dominant sense of engagement with critical epistemological reflection, based on communication sciences and Marxian philosophical and political theory. In contemporary capitalism, with the overlap between media and financial capital, mediatization operates as a structuring and totalizing logic. The way in which the dominant sense of engagement insidiously enters research and the everyday language of communication and information denotes "discursive uniformity" (Quiroga, 2019, p. 83) leveled by economic and organizational logic. The dispute of meaning about the concepts of engagement is even more fierce in the area of communication because it deals more directly with the way different professional activities, such as marketing, advertising, journalism and public relations, as well as creating, triggering and publicizing professional and corporate codes, contributing to sustain its dominant meaning.

When defining engagement as the subject's social, affective and taste connection with a certain ideology, we emphasize that it is the communicational and sensitive dimension that plays a role in the engendering of hegemony. As Terry Eagleton's (1997) anecdote translates, this is sometimes an unconscious process for the subject, who can see ideology-engagement in the other, but not in oneself, a reality that can be overcome with the development of political awareness, critical education and critical engagement. When dealing with the evolution of the concept of ideology in Marx's thought, Eagleton affirms that ideology becomes less a matter of inversion of reality in the mind than "the mind reflects a real inversion" (p. 83). Thus, it is not primarily about awareness, but the anchoring ideology "in the daily economic operations of the capitalist system" (p. 83), characterized, in an ultimate analysis, by the fetishism of merchandise, which is close to the Gramsci's materialist conception of ideology, in which the devices of hegemony are spaces par excellence for production and ideological reproduction.

Brecht's quote, inserted in the heading of this section, is almost a hundred years old and remains very present. The organization of disconnected people, which Brecht refers to, can be understood more superficially and specifically as the organization of subjects excluded from access to the technical-communicational device, radio or Internet, or more deeply and comprehensively, it means the political alliance of the popular, disconnected, exploited and expropriated classes, which requires engagement with a certain ideology, with the ethics of a project of popular power. As Celso Frederico (2007) noted well,

Brecht had no illusions regarding the system's capacity for neutralization and co-optation, having observed as a Marxist, long before Adorno, the primacy of

production over the *consumption* of symbolic goods when he stated that "it is the gear that makes the product for consumption". (p. 217)

In addition, he noted the revolutionary force in bringing together the theoretical knowledge of epic theater and the technological potential of nascent radio broadcasting. Both walked together to realize the "imperative of interactivity" (p. 217). Nor do we have illusions about how the transformative potential of interactive praxis and the development of productive forces is co-opted by capital, but we understand that the Marxian reflection hereby developed contributes to a more critical look at engagement, its limits and theoretical and political potentials. ◼

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