

Ethics and epistemology: warning against the "axiological neutrality" on contemporary communication research

Marco Schneider¹

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that a socialist ethics should be discussed within the epistemological thinking in general and in the field of communication, in particular. Intends to do so, bringing to the debate authors who point the deep linkage between the theoretical, methodological, historical and political elements of any conceivable epistemology. That does not mean neglecting the relatively autonomous development of scientific knowledge, but to emphasize precisely this relative character. Finally, careful not to blur the boundaries between these fields, the study aims to (re)open a dialogue between them.

Keywords: Ethics, epistemology, methodology, politics, history.

Bourdieu, in *The Profession of the Sociologist*, criticizes the fact that the debate on the axiological neutrality often covers up another discussion, in his opinion more important, on the methodological neutrality.² Mészáros says something very similar: “Nowhere the myth of ideological neutrality – the self-proclaimed *Wertfreiheit* or axiological neutrality of the so-called 'rigorous social science' – is stronger than in the field of methodology.” (2004, p 301).

The criticism is important, as it emphasizes a discussion usually left out, namely that research methods and even its techniques are not neutral, that is, they are necessarily articulated with theories, doesn't matter whether the researcher is or not aware. The epistemological vigilance must not ignore this fact.

But this does not delegitimize the debate about the axiological neutrality in general; on the contrary, it enriches this debate, especially when we know that the epistemological and theoretical frameworks, from which the research methods and techniques unfold, have a more or less intimate relation, though not always declared, with ethical and political positions, which, in turn, are derived, on the one hand, of one or other conception of the being, of the real, ie, of an ontology, and, on another, of the

¹ Researcher of Ibiict. Professor, Graduate Program in Information Science - PPGCI - Ibiict / UFRJ. Professor in the Department of Communication at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) and MA in Media and Everyday Life (PPGMC-IACS-UFF). Email: marco_schneider@ig.com.br

² Cf. THIOLENT, Michel J. M. *Crítica metodológica, investigação social e enquete operária*.

working conditions of the researcher.

In this light, when Martino (2003) proposes that discussions of an ethical nature, because they belong to the jurisdiction of the philosophy of science, should be excluded from the epistemological debate, which must stick to issues related to classification and relationship between the disciplines,³ the “examination of the language of science” (78) and “[...] to probe its ontological, methodological and logical principles” (78-9), may not perceive the smuggling, for the questioning, the examination etc. proposed above, of an epistemological orientation ethically committed to the belief in the possibility of ethical neutrality in disciplinary classifications and relationships between them, in the language of science and in its ontological, methodological and logical principles. This proposal is open for discussion.

That epistemology is a field of knowledge less comprehensive than philosophy of science, as Martino proposed, or a branch of science, inspired by philosophy, but relatively independent of its larger issues, is correct to the extent that it is up to philosophy of science to discuss, among other things, the very possibility of scientific knowledge, a problem that, if epistemology had to occupy itself with, it would be calling into question its very reason for being and, finally, losing time. Martino is thus right to claim that epistemology is only conceivable on the assumption that it is *possible* to produce knowledge *of a scientific kind*,⁴ and that the epistemological debate advance must establish, first of all, the very limits of what may be an epistemological debate. However, the demarcation line he draws between epistemology and philosophy of science (and theory of knowledge, sociology of knowledge⁵ etc.) takes a risky detour,

³ The disciplinary matter, in particular, should not be shared with the sociology of science or the history of science? The excellent *Para Abrir as ciências sociais*, signed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Commission for Restructuring the Social Sciences, chaired by Wallerstein, shows that the disciplining now is less the result of epistemological issues than political-academic.

⁴ "The epistemological discussion assumes [...] a certain position in relation to some philosophical background problems, just as the real and the objectivity." (MARTINO, op. Cit., pp. 70-1).

⁵ About the distinction that advocates Martino between epistemology and sociology of science, Lopes, on the trail of Foucault and Bourdieu, seems to think differently: "The production of science depends intrinsically on the conditions of its production. These are given by the discursive context that defines the epistemic conditions of knowledge production and the social context that defines the institutional and socio-political conditions of production. The relative autonomy of the 'logical time' of science in relation to the 'historical time' is that the sociology of science is an essential tool to 'give strength and shape the epistemological critique or criticism of knowledge, because it allows to reveal the unconscious assumptions and petitions of a theoretical tradition '(Bourdieu, 1975, p. 99). "(LOPES, 2003, p. 278-9). The last quotation, single quotation marks, for Bourdieu, refers to: Bourdieu, Pierre. El letter of sociologist. Mexico: Siglo XXI. (LOPES, 2003, pp. 278-9).

in our view, when it deletes from the former the ethical and, ultimately, political-ideological reflection. After all, do not confusing one thing with another, which is correct, does not allow us to forget the fact that they are interdependent, as we shall see.

The recognition of the historical character of epistemology and its requirements

An author who demonstrates the irrevocably historical and ideological character of epistemology, and therefore its ethical-political dimension, is Ilyenkov, in his critical description of the genesis and trajectory of the very term “epistemology”:

[...]the isolation of a number of old philosophical problems in a special philosophical science⁶ (it is all the same whether we recognise it then as the sole form of scientific philosophy or as only of the many divisions of philosophy) is a fact of recent origin. The term itself came into currency only in the latter half of the nineteenth century as the designation of a special science, of a special field of investigation that had not been sharply distinguished in any way in the classical philosophical systems, and had not constituted either a special science or even a special division, although it would be an error, of course, to affirm that knowledge in general and scientific knowledge in particular had only become the subject of specially close attention with the development of ‘epistemology’.

The setting up of epistemology as a special science was associated historically and essentially with the broad spread of Neokantianism, which became, during the last third of the nineteenth century, the most influential trend in the bourgeois philosophical thought of Europe, and was converted into the officially recognised school of professorial, university philosophy [...]⁷

Thus, the mere possibility, historically justified, of understanding epistemology, or rather, its dissemination and academic legitimacy, as a result of the “most influential trend of bourgeois philosophical thought”, if not invalidates it as a part or subfield

⁶Ilyenkov employs the expressions *theory of knowledge* and *epistemology* interchangeably. In this case, the attention of Martino concerning their differences, highlighting the greater amplitude of the former, is a relevant distinction.

⁷ILYENKOV, **Dialectical Logic**. Documento eletrônico: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/essays/essay9.htm>. Acesso em: jul. 2011.

worthy of attention of the philosophy of science – and, indeed, this should not occur – it makes the very notion of axiological neutrality – the exclusion of the ethical-political element of the epistemological and methodological debate – a position not only logically untenable but also liable to the charge of, willfully or not, smuggle into the scientific field an attitude, the end of the day, politically conservative or reactionary, in the guise of the most demanding scientific rigor.

This warning is particularly important for the present time because, for example, as Zizek says, “[...] the moment one seriously questions the existing liberal consensus, one is accused of abandoning scientific objectivity for outdated ideological positions.”⁸ On the contrary, is not this accusation by itself, more than its target, an outdated ideological position? After all, as the same author points out, “This is the point on which one cannot and should not concede: today, the actual freedom of thought means the freedom to question the predominant liberal-democratic 'post-ideological' consensus - or it means nothing.”⁹

That is, today is not only logically mandatory, but politically necessary, that the inevitably ideological nature of science should not be naive or deliberately concealed in the name of an ideal non-ideological scientific objectivity, as can be inferred from the following reflection of Mészáros:

Naturally, nobody wants to deny that the “logic” of scientific development has a *relatively autonomous* aspect as an important *moment* of the overall complex of dialectical determinations. However, this recognition can not be pushed to the point of turning absolute the immanent logic of scientific development, with the elimination, ideologically biased, of the important and often problematic socio-historical determinations. To defend the absolute immanence of scientific advancement and its impact on social developments can only serve the purposes of social apology. (2004, p. 254)¹⁰

⁸ZIZEK, Slavoj. Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist manifesto for the Twenty-First Century? In: **Rethinking Marxism**, no. 3/4, 2001. Documento eletrônico: <http://lacan.com/zizek-empire.htm>. Acesso em: jul. 2011.

⁹ ZIZEK, Slavoj. **Repeating Lenin**. Eletronic document. <http://www.lacan.com/replenin.htm>. Access: jul. 2011.

¹⁰Mészáros (1993, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2011) develops these issues extensively throughout much of his work.

At this point, the epistemological debate touches the political-ideological, and there is no way to be otherwise. This approach, however, requires the following caveat: to see it does not allow us to confuse the two debates, which would be detrimental to both, since each has its own specificities. On the other hand, even made the reservation, one can still question whether the position we advocate is not contrary to basic epistemological requirement of “objectivity” of science. The answer is no, if we think dialectically, as indeed does Martino in the following passage:

Hybrid of science and philosophy, epistemology holds an important feature of the latter: no overview of philosophy, no attempt to raise and discuss the traditions of thought that form around certain founding problems can handle this task without immediately enter in that picture. In other words, an insight into the whole philosophy can not be achieved from the externality of the philosophical tradition, for there is no view of philosophy that is not itself philosophical, then part of that tradition and a current of thought. *All discussion and philosophical view of the field means a position in relation to other currents that make up the philosophical tradition.*¹¹ So that every doctrine is both part and whole of philosophical reflection. It is part because it is not, nor can it be, the only possible position, it is part because it can only insert itself in a partial way (taking sides with certain basic principles and truths, selecting their problems, their options for certain procedures for the resolution of problems etc.). But none of them may actually be positioned without producing a knowledge of the whole, so that philosophy only exists as placement and the whole of philosophy can only come from one of its parts, namely from one of its currents. (2003, p.72-3)

It is here not to confuse *objectivity* with *impartiality*, a relevant distinction not only in the epistemological field but also in the ethical debate in communication, especially in the case of journalism, in that all objectivity is inevitably partial, because it always says about the cognitive process that involves a subject. This, in turn, inevitably occupies a given position (in time and space, in the class struggle). Thus, knowledge is more or less objective depending on the method by which this subject approaches a given object, not as an exact mirror of the real in the form of an objective speech.

¹¹Emphasis added.

Therefore, no epistemological (or communicative) positioning can be (axio)logically neutral or apolitical, although its evaluative dimension remains more or less latent in the speech or in the consciousness of the scientist (and of the communicator).

The historical character of knowledge as an end in itself and its vicissitudes

Morin (1982) historicizes and recognizes the importance that the *ethos* of objective knowledge as an end in itself exerted for the evolution of science and its liberation from the tutelage of theology; at the same time, clearly identifies the risks that such an *ethos* has generated from the time when the science becomes subordinated to the politics and the economy.¹² However, his proposal for an ethical reflection by scientists as a way to overcome such risks, remains impotent to the extent that this “politics” and this “economy” are not given the appropriate name: market economy and State capitalist politics. It is not just a secondary terminological problem, but a need for conceptual precision, for their profound implications for the proper understanding of the true causes of the subordination of scientific practice to the economy and politics as well as for developing strategies that can enable overcoming this situation.

In fact, the central problem here is not exactly the subordination of science, as an objectively rigorous and logically reasoned knowledge, to the economy “in itself” and to politics “itself”, understood in abstract terms. If we take the term “politics” in the sense that Aristotle (2007) assigns in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as the art of managing the polis for the general good, what's wrong with the subordination of science to the general good? As for the “economy”, understood as the optimal use of available resources to meet human needs, as opposed to waste, what's wrong with science submit to the economy? The problem is their subordination to the wasteful logic of capital, which submits the range of human activities (not only science, but the arts, customs, including politics and the economy itself, in theory and practice) to its self-expansion blind imperative, which has led to extremely destructive consequences, two of them known as 1st and 2nd World Wars, not to mention the violent growth of the military-industrial complex in the richest nations (and not only them) in the post-war, a complex

¹² Another author that deepens the debate is Mészáros (2009).

that, indeed, finances the majority of academic research in the U.S. and England,¹³ and much of Hollywood movies.¹⁴

Einstein, reminds Mészáros (2004), identified more clearly those risks, which main causes he had accurately located, not in the “unconsciousness” of scientists (although it has repeatedly appealed to his conscience), but in the anarchy of the market. However, it is Mészáros who, in our view, offers a more refined guidance for reflection on this relationship between science and economy, what includes a central point of this study, the subordination of use value to exchange value, or, in a somewhat simplified formulation, of consume to the market:¹⁵

There is [...] nothing in the nature of science and technology where we can derive the structural subordination of use value to exchange value, with all its destructive consequences, ultimately, inevitable. In contrast, the historical articulation of science and technology, how they shape our lives today, is *totally unintelligible* without the recognition of its profound socio-economic integration in the determinations of capital, both in timescale and in relation to the dominant contemporary structures. Without denying the dialectic of reciprocal interactions and the inevitable feedback, the fact is that the relationship between science and technology on the one hand, and socioeconomic factors – with the structurally dominant role of exchange value – on the other hand, the *übergreifendes Moment*¹⁶ are these latter. (2004, p 269).¹⁷

To better understand the relationship between science, market economy and the issue of axiological neutrality, taking a step forward in relation to the historicity of the problem pointed by Morin, as well as the identification of Einstein of the destructive

¹³Cf. Mészáros (2004, p. 243-300).

¹⁴ Cf. quotation of *Mass Communications and american empire*, from Schiller, in Mattelart and Mattelart (2008, p. 116-17). See also Kellner, 2001.

¹⁵ It is only produced what can contribute to the reproduction of capital and only those who can pay consume, and, as is well known, this same process produces billions of people that can not pay. This issue will be discussed later on.

¹⁶ “*übergreifendes Moment*” – moment of fundamental, decisive importance.

¹⁷Ricardo Antunes, referring to a criticism of Mészáros on Habermas idea according to which science has become the most important productive force *at the expense of work*, develops the opposition of the Hungarian author (*technologization of science*) to the Habermasian notion of *scientification of technology*. Cf. ANTUNES, Ricardo. *Os Sentidos do trabalho. Ensaio sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho*, pp. 135-165.

potential of science with the anarchy of the market, both correct but still somewhat abstract, they should be raised to their concreteness,¹⁸ from the understanding of the historical process of *alienation* and *division of labor*, that makes the illusion of neutrality of science a *necessary illusion*. Meszaros takes this step, arguing:

[...] The illusion of “non-ideological” self-determination and corresponding “neutrality” of science is itself the result of the historical process of alienation and capitalist division of labor. It is not an “error” or a “confusion” that can be eliminated by “philosophical enlightenment”, as intend the logical positivists and analytic philosophers. Rather, it is a *necessary* illusion, with its roots firmly planted in the soil of the social production of goods and that is constantly reproduced on that basis, within the structural framework of the alienated “second order mediations”. As a result of the social division of labor, science is actually alienated (and deprived) from the social determination of the goals of his own practice, which it gets “ready”, in the shape of objective and materials dictates of the production, of the reified organ of control of the social metabolism as a whole, ie, capital. (2004, p. 270)¹⁹

Socialist ethics and science

In short, it is *strictly illogical* to think epistemology in axiological “neutral” or “apolitical” terms, if we adopt a conception of science that perceives its deep ties with society and history in the broadest sense, and therefore it argues that science should not be limited to “understand” whatever it is as an activity that has its end in itself, but must be committed with an axiological bias that is critique to the present and generous towards the future. Such a perspective seems necessary in our time. But what are the possible ethical ramifications of this position?

Usually scientific practice is done to better understand the real, which is not

¹⁸The notion of concreteness, in Kosik (2002), concerns the totality of reality as a dialectical articulation of empiricism - the phenomenal, the existing - with the dynamical laws that govern it - the "essence". This concreteness, despite its complexity, is knowable through the active mediation of human praxis, which means, however, that is never immediate, full and final in a finished form.

¹⁹This reflection is important because it reminds us once again that to solve the serious problems mentioned, we need more than Enlightenment, but a profound transformation in the relations of production. This point will be taken forward.

limited to appearances. Such understanding, however, can not be an end in itself, can no longer be purely contemplative, nor subject to market or to any reasons of State as an end in itself, at the risk of destroying its own conditions for future achievements, starting with the very life on Earth; urges, so, that science becomes deliberate and foremost emancipatory praxis.

We also know that knowledge is a social production, a heritage of humanity – for its development were not needed only the “creative geniuses”, but generations of anonymous subjects that allowed the work of these “geniuses”. Must therefore serve all, becoming an instrument of liberation and improving the lives of all. This is the rationale and historical axiological bias defended here. Also, if Bourdieu is correct in asserting that even the technical level of scientific practice is impregnated, consciously or unconsciously, by the theories in which it is based, and these, in turn, are logical consequences, consciously or unconsciously developed, from a concept of history and society contained in the epistemic or paradigmatic field of which they unfold, how the axiological neutrality can be effectively neutral, in an entire research, as proposed in other words by positivism, or only in its development, according to the solution of Weber? In the words of Meszaros: “The ideological dimension involves both the formulation of the problem itself and the development of specific solutions for them [...]” (1993, 52).

In other words, science should be conceived and practiced as a permanent emancipatory process of unveiling the oppressive contradictions of the real-natural, the real-historical and the real-logical. The need for such an unveiling, today, refers to the very survival of the species and even of the biosphere – and communications, for reasons too obvious to require an explanation here, has an important practical task to play in this.

This emancipatory character that we claim is not the result of some abstract ethical imperative, but (apart from the question of survival) of the following reasoning: if man is fully human only being the conscious subject of his own destiny, of his life, and if he needs to work to live, that is, to produce and reproduce, from concrete situations, needs and projects, his conditions - material and spiritual - of existence, man only becomes fully human, therefore, being the conscious subject of his work. Supposed

that the humanization of man, as explained above, is not only an ethically defensible goal, but a priority ethical goal, we must consider that, with the complexity of the division of labor, technical development and the emergence of new needs, beyond those strictly natural, the satisfaction of needs (old and new) of each depends increasingly on the work of others. From a given stage, nobody is able to supply even a small part of their individual needs, directly through his own work: meeting the needs of each depends, therefore, of social work. As man can only live in society, mankind only becomes fully human when all men become conscious subjects of the social work, that is, plan and execute it according to their own decisions, conscious and common. Thus, to deny a single individual the possibility to exercise fully his humanity as a conscious subject, in collaboration with other conscious subjects, depriving him the power to consciously participate in the definition of form and goals of social work, is to deny the humanity that he is potentially possessed, turning him from a subject into an object of a *strange* and *oppressive* mechanism, although superficially very seductive, which currently serves the euphemism “market”.

Some say there is no alternative to market society, and there are no few of them. It is true that there is no alternative whose success can be guaranteed in advance. But it is equally certain that the collaboration between people is a mark at least as strong in history as competition and conflict. And the ethical requirement of solidarity and egalitarianism, ie, the socialist ethics, when introduced into the debate on the epistemological and scientific practice, necessarily will interfere in the formulation of the objects, in the methodological guidelines etc.. As Ilyenkov correctly remembers: “The solution of the problem corresponds to its formulation.”²⁰

The ethical requirement of an egalitarian solidarity, moreover, is realistic, being cultivated by the individualism reigning under the regime of the market, even if it happens in a contradictory and masked way. This may seem paradoxical, but the paradox is only in appearance, because, since the individual does not want to have its individuality diminished or destroyed, the overwhelming majority is bound to conclude, if they stop to think about it, that solidarity is the culmination of rational individualism, its radical achievement, while selfishness is the infantile stage of individuality – is

²⁰Cf. ILYENKOV. **Dialectical Logic**. Eletronic document: <http://marx.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/essays/index.htm>. Access: jul. 2011.

ignorance, resentment or cowardice. Because even if there was a supra-historical and essentially selfish “human nature”, according to the ruling position, which is an ordinary and questionable²¹ generalization, the imperative of life in society and the current state of development of science and technology (in positive terms), and the risks of entropy that the current economic system produces in an ever-increasing scale (in negative terms), make the egalitarian solidarity as an ethical principle a rational and even necessary perspective, not only to greater economic rationality in general, but also to increase the satisfaction of individual pleasures and ambitions, of radically realistic individuals that had succeed to surpass the childish, resentful and cowardly selfish of spontaneous consciousness.

A radical individualism, based on an intelligent and ambitious selfishness, must be, however paradoxical it may seem, solidary, because the greatest pleasures are always with others (or without the disturbance of others), not against the other, unless in a resentful or reactive way (revenge), or in the obvious case of sadism, a perversion probably derived from resentment. Anyway, the more satisfied people are, the less resentful and frustrated, the less they tend to disrupt, threaten, they can be more enjoyable – especially in a universe in which ethical-legal exploitation, exclusion, human objectification are considered abominations and not mere accidents or fatalities. Besides, as Amartya Sen says, “[...] it is arguable that the conduct based on solidarity is selfish, in an important sense, because the subject is satisfied with the pleasures of others and suffer with their pain and thus the search for their own convenience can be aided by the solidary action.” (quoted in Eagleton, 2010, p 44).

If this is correct, or at least has some chance of being so, we are not advocating an ethics that has nothing to do with reality, with facts, with practice, with “human nature” or science, but its defense on the basis of the recognition that we are living a decisive historical crossroads whose positive and negative potentials are so immense, especially negative ones, that science can no longer afford to disregard it seriously (neither science nor anyone else).

²¹ “If the isolated individual in the crowd abandon their uniqueness and let the others suggest, it does so because there is a need to agree with them, rather than to be in opposition [...]” Freud, apud Mattelart, Armand and Michèle. *História das Teorias da Comunicação*, p. 26.

Conclusion

It is time, therefore, to face the following challenge proposed by Emir Sader few years ago:

It is, to the intellectual work, to decipher the puzzle of the contemporary world from a technological capability that allows people to do things more awesome and a great mass of humanity that can not even have access to basic goods for their livelihood. The riddle of the potential for changes in the world that science and technology put at the disposal of humanity and the feeling of total helplessness that people feel.²²

Communications could contribute positively to reverse this sense of powerlessness, or at least to accelerate this necessary reversal, for a profound transformation of society is unthinkable without the mobilization of the masses, if they take no “taste” for that possibility. But the masses can only be mobilized by economic particularly dramatic crises, *or* if it can be shown – rationally and emotionally – that such a change is desirable and feasible, but it is only, indeed, feasible, as Gramsci knew very well (1968 and 1978), if it becomes desired by the masses, if they intellectually and emotionally appreciate for the idea, which happens from time to time and, moreover, have occurred recently in the Middle East and southern Europe. It is being aware of this and because he was intimate and actively committed to the prospect of such a transformation that Gramsci posed the following question: “[...] you need [...] to explain how the ‘passion’ can become moral ‘duty’, not a political moral duty, but an ethical one.” (Gramsci, 1968b, p 14)

However, such a question has scientific validity or not? Rather, does it have adherence to the epistemic field of communication? We hope to have demonstrated that the answer to both questions is yes; anyway, regardless of the merit of our demonstration, it is clear that the very formulation of such an issue is only possible from an epistemological perspective that does not exclude the ethical (and political) reflection of its horizon.

²²SADER, Emir. Intelectuais na globalização. **Jornal do Brasil**. Sábado, 19/02/2005.

The universe of the dominant discourse in the big commercial media, however, not only disregards this perspective, but also the risk of sociometabolic entropy that market feeds, limited to dramatize, when it does, only one of its aspects, the ecological, and even well without going deeply into its causes: the ecological problem can only be solved in conjunction with the social problem, ie, the economic main problem, the subordination of labor to capital and its blind imperative of expanding reproduction.

You need to let people know this and feel this urgency, we must learn that there are technical, material and logistical (ie, economic) devices to solve most of the ills that afflict humanity and life on the planet in general and to end it. You need to deactivate the destructive potential unleashed by the current stage of development of productive forces and the current configuration of the relations of production, accompanied by a redirection of these forces in a positive direction, which requires a profound change in the existing relations of production.

On this point, let us remember Benjamin and his amazing actuality to think about the content of much of contemporary journalism, advertising and cinematography. But let's remember one Benjamin little commented among ourselves, in communication studies, although we speak to much about him: the Communist Benjamin:

All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system. This is the political formula for the situation. The technological formula may be stated as follows: Only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today's technical resources while maintaining the property system. [...] the aesthetics of today's war appears as follows: If the natural utilization of productive forces is impeded by the property system, the increase in technical devices, in speed, and in the sources of energy will press for an unnatural utilization, and this is found in war. The destructiveness of war furnishes proof that society has not been mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ, that technology has not been sufficiently developed to cope with the elemental forces of society. The horrible features of imperialistic warfare are attributable to the discrepancy between the tremendous means of production and their inadequate utilization in the process of production – in other words, to unemployment and the lack of markets. Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology which collects, in

the form of “human material,” the claims to which society has denied its natural material. Instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities [...] in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.²³

We could also, to paraphrase Benjamin, politicize epistemology, in particular the epistemological debate in communication? After all, all the necessary social changes, whose technical, materials and logistics conditions of effectiveness are already given, can only be triggered by a deep and comprehensive ethical-cultural transformation of the masses. The current reality in itself, contributes negatively to that urgency is felt, as it becomes increasingly obvious the unbearable impossibility of the current model. This truism, however, is not only obliterated by the dominant discourse of the mainstream media, but also by the alluring spectacle of material and symbolic goods that it produces itself and put into circulation, and by those it does not, but for the movement of which it contributes decisively: it is through this seduction that takes place not only the economic and ideological, but also the moral and emotional integration of the subjects, in an economic system that subject them to the condition of objects, of means employed for alienated and hostile purposes, under the guise of free choice of occupations and consumption in the market sphere.

In the struggle for these changes, Communications have at least two important tasks to be performed: 1) contribute to the ethical and cultural transformation of the masses, taking into account its non-negligible role (current and potential) in the formation of subjectivities, 2) contribute for political (direct democracy) and economic (horizontal management) control of the masses on all the productive and reproductive activities, ethically oriented toward what we call egalitarian solidarity or socialist ethics; such control was logistically made possible by new communication technologies such

²³ BENJAMIN, Walter. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Eletronic document: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>. Access: jun. 2012.

as Internet.²⁴

For these reasons we advocate an – careful – approach between the epistemological debate (in general and communication), and the ethical and political ones.

REFERENCES

ANTUNES, Ricardo. *Os Sentidos do trabalho*. Ensaio sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2006.

ARISTÓTELES. *Ética a Nicômaco*. São Paulo: Martin Claret, 2007.

BENJAMIN, Walter. A Obra de arte na era de sua reprodutibilidade técnica. In: *Magia e técnica, arte e política*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1996, p. 165-196.

BENJAMIN, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Electronic document: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>. Access: jun. 2012.

BOURDIEU, Pierre et. al. *A Profissão de Sociólogo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1999.

COMISSÃO CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN. *Para Abrir as ciências sociais*. Portugal: Publicações Europa-América, 1996.

EAGLETON, Terry. *O Problema dos desconhecidos*. Um estudo da ética. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2010.

GRAMSCI, Antônio. *Literatura e vida nacional*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1968a.

GRAMSCI, Antônio. *Maquiavel*. A Política e o Estado moderno. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1968b.

²⁴ About this second point, see (2010).

<http://marx.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/essays/index.htm>. Access: nov. 2011.

KELLNER, Douglas. *A Cultura da Mídia – estudos culturais: identidade e política entre o moderno e o pós-moderno*. Bauru: Edusc, 2001.

KOSIK, Karel. *Dialética do concreto*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2002.

LOPES, Maria Immacolata V. Sobre o Estatuto disciplinar do campo da comunicação. In: LOPES, Maria Immacolata V. (org.) *Epistemologia da Comunicação*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2003.

MARTINO, Luiz C. As Epistemologias Contemporâneas e o Lugar da Comunicação. In: LOPES, Maria Immacolata V. (org.) *Epistemologia da Comunicação*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2003, pp. 69-101.

MATTELART, Armad. MATTELART, Michèle. *História das teorias da comunicação*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2008.

MÉSZÁROS, Istvan. *Estrutura social e formas de consciência I. A Determinação social do método*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2009.

MÉSZÁROS, Istvan. *Estrutura social e formas de consciência II. A Dialética da estrutura e da história*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2011.

MÉSZÁROS, Istvan. *Filosofia, ideologia e ciência social. Ensaio de negação e afirmação*. São Paulo: Editora Ensaio, 1993.

MÉSZÁROS, Istvan. *O Poder da Ideologia*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004.

MORIN, Edgar. *Ciência com consciência*. Lisboa: Europa/América, 1982.

SADER, Emir. Intelectuais na globalização. **Jornal do Brasil**. Sábado, 19 / 02 / 2005. Eletronic document: <http://jbonline.terra.com.br>. Access: fev. 2005.

SCHNEIDER, Marco. Lenin e a microsoft. In: *Revista Z Cultural*. Eletronic document: revistazcultural.pacc.ufrj.br/lenin-e-a-microsoft-de-marco-schneider/. Access: nov 2011.

THIOLLENT, Michel J. M. *Crítica metodológica, investigação social e enquete operária*. São Paulo: Polis, 1980.

ZIZEK, Slavoj. Have Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri Rewritten the Communist manifesto for the Twenty-First Century? In: *Rethinking Marxism*, no. 3/4, 2001. Eletronic document: <http://lacan.com/zizek-empire.htm>. Access: nov 2011.

ZIZEK, Slavoj. *Repeating Lenin*. Eletronic document: <http://www.lacan.com/replenin.htm>. Access: nov 2011.

This text was received at 12 February and accepted at 2 June 2012.

