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Journalism 2009 10: 109

DOI: 10.1177/1464884908098323

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Journalism in the age of the information society, technological convergence, and editorial segmentation

Preliminary observations

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ABSTRACT

The present work discusses some theoretical, technical, and ethical issues that relate to journalism in the process of technological and digital convergence, and in the new setting of journalism within the information and knowledge society, in which professional routines are modified and in which journalistic information competes in wider markets and in shorter and shorter periods of time with other kinds of information. This work also situates contemporary transformations in the process of emission and reception of messages and data of journalistic value, changes which substantially modify the activity and double the need to reinforce and consolidate a professional culture in the area. In addition, this work involves studies on both information abundance and deficiency, which are simultaneous phenomena, and the international tendency of editorial segmentation when facing contemporary social rhythm and the great volume of facts and interpretations that spreads over the world.

KEY WORDS ■ editorial segmentation ■ information ■ journalism ■ knowledge ■ technological convergence

Within the so-called *technological convergence*, the World Wide Web (internet) has been able to incorporate all other means of communication up until now – the newspaper, magazine, radio, television, cinema, photographic image, and dynamic image. The generalized mediation is becoming even more generalized. However, can professional identity, historical references, and journalistic legitimacy, anchored in the social right for information interposed with democratic and newsworthy criteria, substantially change, at first sight, in accordance with technological convergence and the so-called information society?

According to Wolton (2006: 39):

... the rising circulation of information requires the preservation of *references* so that citizens can maintain an intellectual and cultural geography that allows them to situate themselves in an open world. Distinguishing who talks, with *whom s/he talks, with what authenticity, to accomplish what.*

He adds:

Effectively, in an open society, everything is visible, everything circulates, all the arguments, all the views of the world are possible, but the citizen, the individual, must understand and know *the place from which some talk*, based on what authority and what views of the world. (2006: 41)

It is certain that, for such a thing to occur, the individual must dedicate a reasonable amount of time of his/her daily routine to that specific purpose; but it is also reasonable to believe that someone, whether doing something else for a living or not, is unlikely to do so. The idea becomes even less attainable if we require them to have criteria of selectivity, hierarchies, and data ordering, by making use of newsworthy criteria already consolidated and, usually, of a clear and concise language, including narrative synthesis and accuracy of data. The professionals double their responsibility while working in a mediated world that questions the truth, sources, interests, and the real separation between advertising and journalism.

It would be interesting if we considered a scenario in which everybody could send and receive messages all the time, during each and every second up until the end of life and of times. But would that be possible? What would happen with the development of events and their immediate interpretation in the last 24 hours, supposing that we were, at the same time, reconstituting the previous 24 hours? Would we neglect the new facts that emerge at every moment if we needed to contextualize the events and their interpretations and establish public controversy? Would we relax the direct reporting of the surrounding facts and the present that we live at each second so that we could contextualize and investigate in depth the period immediately before such present? Certainly, we can conclude that the more we investigate the present in depth in our reports, relating it to distinct geographic locations and using varied sources and interpretations, the more we submit such a variety of facts, events, data, and analyses to a smaller amount of space and to a more excluding selection. In order to make sense of and contextualize every event and fact, we would require more time to develop their consequences and to detect new and varied facts and interpretations originating from them. Human time, contemporary social rhythm, and technological aid provide infinite access to other temporalities and rhythms, facts and interpretations that do not fit our social daily rhythm. Billions of people, from varied sectors, government

agencies, civil societies, companies and locations, produce recognizable events that are subject to an interpretation that encompasses much more than the capacity of any human to follow such events with complete and detailed knowledge. That allows the reporting and treatment of information in the journalistic domain to be quite different from the treatment of information by other areas.

The speed of transmission of data, facts, and interpretations is provided by technology that is more and more accessible, at least for a segment of society. The contemporary social rhythm – which accelerates and involves itself in the process of globalization – also produces more relevant facts than it did some time ago, especially if we consider, for instance, the interconnection of politics and economy, urban and environmental planning, and agriculture and consumption.

For Becerra, the main ideas that drive the so-called information society are supported by an international liberalization, competitiveness, and non-regulation. He points out that the accomplishment of such ideas configures itself in the processes of technological convergence (2003: 76) which are placed:

... in the homogenization of the pillars, products, and logics of emission and consumption of the info-communication industries besides (...) the written press and editing. In these processes, the groups and platforms of multimedia assume the possibility of overlapping of technologies, cultures and traditions of production and informative processing, and distribution of the varied info-communication activities. (2003: 91)

In my view, within the information society and because of the technological convergence that encompasses journalism, the practices of journalism acquire increased importance due to the theory and ethics that are applied to the values, methods, and techniques of professional journalistic activity. Nowadays, this perspective seems to be viewed with suspicion, and such distrust is supported by quite reasonable arguments. Since information can be obtained through varied means, protagonists and sources, and in ways that are marginalized from the traditional journalistic process, is there still any point in talking about professional journalism and its distinct features?

Taking this argument and the democratization of communication and information into consideration, it seems necessary that professionals and academics in the area should be aware of and be involved with such perspectives. A number of researchers from Brazil and Argentina have been studying these aspects and, more importantly, situating new dynamics, new social aspects that appear because of the democratization of means of communication, on the Information Society (IS) or Information and Knowledge Society (IKS)¹ (see Crovi Druetta, 2004).

Assuming that this new scenario and its distinctive elements are intertwined within the IS or IKS, they can be considered as historic, political-economic, technological, or social examples (Crovi Druetta, 2004: 21). Crovi Druetta states that the end of socialism and the consolidation of a world dominated by North American hegemony have transformed the contemporary historic scenario by marking the strength of neoliberal policies. A reformulation of governments and a new political-economic scenario have risen, taken over by the privatization of social economy, the reduction of the regulatory role of the government, an accelerated globalization, and harsh adjustments in public expenses. According to Crovi Druetta, among other aspects, a certain degree of international modernization also causes the debilitation of national governments for those who seek only private capital, aspects also pointed out and detailed by Becerra (2003: 82). According to Druetta, financial systems can currently privilege much more speculative aspects but give much less privilege to productive aspects. Strongly integrated sectors are generated, whereas others are excluded. Crovi Druetta points out that in the social sphere the 'promises' of development are intensified; however, in practice, we live within scenarios that are even more industrial or pre-industrial in many regions of the planet. In the technological scenario, Crovi Druetta emphasizes that digitization becomes a reference and flexibility becomes crucial in the IKS within a new environment of technological convergence (2004: 21–40).

By observing the immediately available data, it seems important that aesthetic, technical, and ethical principles are used to provide intelligibility and immediate organization to the professional criteria in journalistic production, and consolidated by the many professions within the media field. Such knowledge and information can be disseminated through the varied technological standards, such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, internet, and photos. Moreover, although such means may overlap, I suggest there is a distinction from which ethical and technical elements justify the professional practice of journalism while anchored in a theory of the area, even if it competes with information of any other kind. However, it is impossible to ignore the current transformations.

The journalistic practice embedded in the information society and the process of technological convergence within the Polis as the public space of discussion about the immediate surroundings and their international consequences, reinforces, from my point of view, the need for the defense of values such as credibility and public interest; requires the dissemination of accurate, clear, and contextualized messages through any technological means; and requires the involvement with new professional routines derived from the amount of information, social rhythm, and specific demands for information from each and every social sector.

It seems necessary to define the potential and limitations of professional practice and, simultaneously, to depict the transformations that multimedia and new technologies bring to the area and to a new social mediation of reality that professionals will have to confront, as a challenge, and the limitations that add up to it. The new scenario – already in process of mutation and consolidation – is anchored in: a) the so-called *information society* in which, potentially, everybody sends and receives messages; b) the *technological convergence in journalism* with journalistic information circulating on the internet at the same speed and immediacy in which social phenomena occur (incorporating the newspaper, magazines, television, photography, radio, digital journalism with its peculiarities, graphic layout and so on); c) the *specific information deficiency* that generates a demand for information intrinsically related to the necessity of data, versions, and worldly interpretations in areas that are not contemplated – within the sphere of appearance of facts and interpretations – by any media in general. That specificity reinforces the necessity of editorial segmentation, and diversification of themes, sources, property, and narratives.

Such a process occurs – and increases – within global or regional systems of communication, which are more and more complex as they point to the direction of thematic and linguistic specialization, segmentation of means of communication, and public, cultural, and geographical variation. At the same time, technological barriers are more and more easily transposed by the varied social segments, or even individuals who transmit and receive any kind of information, whether making use of words or images. ‘Digital inclusion’ has become a motto that accompanies governmental and non-governmental organizations, companies, and worker unions, in order to provide a technological and knowledge emancipation that could eventually integrate citizens within a new public sphere, with greater freedom of choice.

However, does the new scenario of global communication stand for a greater freedom and capacity of choice, and by that I mean a greater citizenship? In the words of Robin Mansell, the president of IAMCR:²

There are, clearly, some potential benefits to contemporary society of information that provide the opportunity for a more open dialogue, learning, etc. However, I do not believe that such evolution will necessarily drive us to a solution for social exclusion. Social exclusion would not simply result from the absence of information or the lack of access to some technologies. Its causes are in the socio-economic formation of societies.³

It is pertinent to mention the detailed work developed by Becerra and Mastrini in their book *Periodistas y Magnates*, with the collaboration of many specialists from Latin America. That work examines data about media conglomerates and their relationship with the Latin American economy and

politics, which affect communication policies at large and complicate access to the processes of information and knowledge. It seems that there is a paradox: there are certainly technological circumstances, but the greater part of society still does not benefit from these conditions of access, decodification, and intervention.

Because of the new technologies and their consequences on the professional activity of those who work in communications or culture, and with the circulation of journalistic information – which is increasingly accompanied by commercial products and services – there is a rise in the number of critical studies about the possibilities and limits of technical, political, economical, and ideological instances of the informative activity and its contemporary tendencies. Along with the aforementioned optimistic perspectives, doubts are raised about those who benefit from this new scenario (Becerra, 2003; Becerra and Mastrini, 2006; Martínez Albertos, 1997; Moraes, 1998; Romano, 1998; Tcherkaski et al., 2005).

There is a historical preoccupation with the concentration of powerful vehicles of communication, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, in the hands of a few owners. Nowadays, these big companies also turn their attention to the digital media, and to multimedia as a whole, advertising new products in new markets to new publics and constantly using the justification that they bring democratization and more immediate access to information and knowledge. Such preoccupation with media conglomerates is not restricted to Brazil or to Latin America, but is international. There is great concern, especially among professionals who work with journalistic information, about the growing partnership between communication companies and other companies in distinct fields of production – such as banking, agricultural, and real state. This situation is not recent but has resulted in the establishment of a national and international vicious circle, where business interests in communications mix with those of other fields of production, knowledge, and power.

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The social division of labor – especially in the journalistic field and in the last 150 years – has given rise to a number of professional functions: the improvement of language, ethical–deontological principles, and the aesthetic presentation of informative mediated products that came along with the growth of the transportation systems and, with them, the communication systems that also carry symbolic goods. Conversely, there is a need – in an increasingly interrelated society – to know the surroundings immediately,

on an international and massive scale, in a public way and in increasingly short periods of time. Such a necessity accompanies the amount of knowledge and production of facts, events, versions, and interpretations about them.

The dedication to processes such as obtaining information, registering and investigating facts, and listening to varied social actors about the distinct and infinite productions of knowledge and power which drive them, has become more and more important. In this way, the public should be provided with relevant facts to give them freedom of choice and to enhance their knowledge.

Such freedom, which comes along with the rise and implementation of civil rights, is anchored in important moments in the history of humankind, when some expressions such as *citizenship*, *rights*, *equality*, and *freedom* acquire a more intense social dimension. Some notable examples are the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaimed by the French Congress on 28 August 1789, along with the French Revolution; the United States Declaration of Independence in 1776 (Virginia Declaration of Rights, 12 June 1776); the works of Mirabeau and John Milton about the freedom of the press; and, more recently, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in 1948, and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in 1950 (Bel and Corredoira, 2003; Caretti, 1994; Karam, 1997; Molinero, 1989).

However, the history of the conflict between giving knowledge to the public and restricting such knowledge – or even enforcing it by making use of institutional regulatory devices – goes back to Ancient Greece itself. Ever since then, we have seen the continuous fight for the right for information, even if journalistic information was far-fetched at some times, and there was restriction of such freedom and right (Farías Garcia, 1988; Mattos, 2005).

After the American and the French Revolutions and along with the development of means of transportation and the intensification of the circulation of goods (both real and symbolic), the amount of information mediated by full-time professionals dedicated to such activity also increased. The press, and later new means of communication, incorporated the right for information and freedom as a fundamental value in their final product. However, mass communication vehicles eventually became businesses interested in new products that were sold independently of information, a phenomenon relating to the expansion of capitalism itself. Professional journalistic values were frequently in conflict with the values of the journalism companies. The resulting debate about ethical issues – which accompanied the professionalization of journalistic information – continued until the deontological codes were set up following discussion about the limits of the actions of professionals and their right to act for the sake of journalism and

public knowledge itself (Bonete Perales, 1995; Kucinski, 2005; Restrepo, 2004; Villanueva, 1996).

Nowadays, the profession is going through structural modification. As a result of faster and easier access to modern technologies, access to information produced by anyone from the big television stations to personal blogs is also more immediate. Nevertheless, one activity can and must distinguish itself according to consolidated journalistic criteria when it comes to increasingly short periodic issues – principles of notability and aesthetics. When translated into daily usage, they enable credible access to current facts expressed in a specific language, continuing procedural ethics, and daily commitment to journalistic activity, which allows reference to the profession of journalism in its various kinds and specializations (Cornu, 1999; Gomis, 1991; Karam, 2004; Pavlik, 2005). Within the society of information, and facing technological convergence, would there be a distinctive element in the journalistic profession that would enable it to be a reference that is socially legitimated?

There are authors who study a new scenario and the epistemological and social role of journalism, still believing in a format that, despite the new challenges, has been consolidated on some historical factors such as those mentioned earlier. For example, Fontcuberta points to four dimensions for 21st-century journalism: as a *socializing dimension*; as a *space for citizenship*; as an *educative agent*; and as the *protagonist of leisure time* (Borrat and Fontcuberta, 2006: 19–29).

Within complex societies journalism would still be, using Borrat's words, a 'narrator in interaction', interweaving the social and representing various spheres of the public space (Borrat and Fontcuberta, 2006: 157–83), an even more challenging task in the society of information since technological convergence. Thus, the historical elements of journalism play a role in the new scenario, but still maintain their essential characteristics.

However, would such a new scenario allow a certain exclusion of traditional means of production and journalistic information processing? Many authors – and I agree with them to a certain extent – predict a very different scenario. Some of them talk about the possibility of the end of journalism or its substitution by new forms of production of information and interpretation of reality. Such a direction is suggested by a group of journalists – situated in the Cooperativa Lavaca in Buenos Aires – who present an overview of experiences that are outside the mainstream media in the book *El fin del periodismo y otras buenas noticias* (Cooperativa de Trabajo Lavaca, 2006). They emphasize new social means of communication that substitute – with political advantages, a wide cultural diversity and variety of sources – the traditional vehicles for those which do not operate under the political, economic, and marketing

limitations, especially in relation to macro-groups that work *upon* and *inside* the great media corporations, besides frequently being partners or stockholders of the majority of them.

The journalistic profession works within radio, television, the internet, photographic images, digital sites, newspapers, and magazines. Professionals work as employees or independently, as temporary workers or as consultants. None of such professional practices, it seems to me, can exempt any professional from a certain set of principles, because the activity is reflected in the people to whom it is directed and in those who make use of its mediation, and, in some cases, becomes a 'compass' for us to make choices about daily life and the immediate present, which is a central object to journalism.

The professional principles defended throughout the 20th century are reaffirmed as moral values, but at the same time suffer certain political, economic, and cultural coercions. Nowadays, the media conglomerates, the interwoven media, and the great fusions of businesses encourage companies that produce journalism to consider such production as only one of the many aspects of their business. However, in the ethical-deontological codes produced by journalist professionals and businessmen, they reaffirm principles and values that are inalienable, such as verisimilitude, public interest, neutrality, plurality, respect for privacy, independence, credibility, and accuracy. The specificity of ethical procedures is the object – especially nowadays – of rising studies in the field. The ethical stand and the relationship between citizenship and journalism are referred to in many works (e.g. Alsius, 1998; Bernier, 2004; Bonete Perales, 1995; Bucci, 2000; Cornu, 1999; Karam, 1997, 2004; Kucinski, 2005; Villanueva, 1996). There are attempts in these works to define the moral contours of the journalistic profession and the need to establish principles of ethical procedures in its daily practice, including the new cyber-journalistic scenario.

The moral basis of journalistic ethics finds in the theoretical configuration of the activity the permanent disposition which is the epistemological ground to professional legitimization. The need to configure a mediated social environment, socially shared, is the object of many studies, in Brazil and in other countries as well. The theory of journalism, within the communications field of study, has deserved detailed analyses, investigations, historical revival, and revivals of authors (among them, those of Berger and Marocco, 2006; Genro Filho, 1987; Gomis, 1991; Lage, 2001, 2005; Melo, 2006).

Nowadays, there is so much theory about information that we are led to question ourselves about the legitimacy of the information itself, and to think that there must be other social worlds, other possible interpretations to the old social facts that are not reaching the public. It is known that journalistic

practice is related to the social *continuum* and is a result of professional values affirmed throughout history. Moreover, it is also the acknowledgement of concepts that express words and a concrete world, also legitimated through language.

Once again, I ask the questions: what is the function of journalism? What is it that journalism does that other activities do not? What could it do that other areas or professions would not do?

Moreover, I insist on some projections. Journalism has an important role in the sense that it has responsibilities that informal conversations do not. It has to inform about current facts with the responsibility of a professional who, because of his/her credibility, enables others to make choices about the present and the future based on information they have just received. This information must be produced using ethical and technical aspects consolidated over the last 100 years or more, and which are unfortunately under threat in the era of media conglomerates.

Journalism has become a qualitative intermediary in various fields of knowledge and power that also produce facts and figures – but not necessarily information anchored in journalistic principles. At the same time, the idea of a direct and real-time democracy that involves everyone (without representation or delegation) seems to be, from my point of view, rather distant from the concrete, distant from daily life, from real life. Furthermore, in my opinion, such an idea is even more impossible to fulfil in the complex societies that are our intense contemporary rhythm.

Even if there is a favorable technological environment and social inclusion in the digital era – and therefore, *access to* and *control of* digital technology and its convergence – complex societies praise the infinity of knowledge and, simultaneously, its repercussion in innumerable fields, which requires some general knowledge and a lot of specialized knowledge. That means that people will probably still have to live – at least for some time – in the areas they have chosen, or in those which they were obliged to take on as their daily work, since they had little or no choice in the past.

One of the consequences of such phenomena is, in my opinion, the need for some people to work on a specific area of journalistic information, search for information, explore it in detail, contextualize and report it in an immediate way, and also use textual techniques to give visibility to one or another specific area while allowing a certain social interweaving of different fields of knowledge – on the international, national, regional, or local scale. At a point where isolated experiences and professionalism are valued – and have developed methods, techniques, and technical and moral procedures – these factors end up influencing a number of activities, whether they are medicine, law, engineering, or journalism. The representations and legitimization of

such activities are, thus, endorsed by society. The engineer or the sociologist will not be as dedicated to journalistic procedures as the journalist himself, who must search for more immediate information and assess different versions of it, in the fast rhythm of daily life, taking into account the ethical, language, and technical elements required for the practice.

The fact that we still need some kind of representation (or, as some authors prefer, *delegation* – which is nothing more than *delegated representation*) requires that such representation takes on the responsibility in a correct and permanent way, whether it refers to a profession or to an elected government. However, the available tools and the information and fields of knowledge are or will be more immediately accessible. At the same time, those coefficients can be related to the idea of continuity of representations, but also to a democracy which, besides being representative, can allow for even more participation (see, for example, Prince, 2005).

The previous factors can also be related to a more direct and immediate participation in professional representation. Nowadays, criticism of various social sectors emerges first on the internet – and journalism is an example of that. The volume of opinions and correction of information about news and editorials published in the sphere of journalism has increased significantly, whether posted in digital sites specializing in the area, or in the circulation of messages among members of the journalistic community. Such members, in turn, are connected to readers and the public in general, in small towns or big cities. The technological environment could, if supported by segmented initiatives and the state – which has a duty towards this situation – favor the volume of representation and more participative democracy. The results of this will certainly depend on the degree of social and political consciousness and on the interests at play. Such conclusions are possible because the formality of representations does not necessarily mean or lead to the establishment of ideals such as freedom, justice, and human and social development.

The theoretical and ethical culmination of journalistic practice – even if it is still temporary – happens in its technical production, establishing procedures that determine the final quality of the professional product, embedded in its own narratives, the elements characteristic of news, the methods of investigation, the structure of the text, and the process of editing. The technical stand is being renewed in the early 21st century, and it seems both to strengthen the journalistic principles – resulting from the theoretical and ethical affirmation of the activity throughout its history – and to require reflection and action upon the new operative consequences of the journalistic occupation proposed by the recent global scenario.

The contemporary social rhythm (which did not necessarily originate from information and knowledge, but surely reflects on them) has generated

a significant variety of fields of knowledge production. It seems that there is a rise – due to technical and moral necessity – in the segmentation of vehicles of information that deal with worlds which, although connected, relate to various specificities. The segmented information contributes to a broader knowledge of social particularities and enlarges the human present (at least, as a possibility). More significantly, it can make a connection between the specificity of a determined area and the social whole.

The great volume of information and knowledge presently produced corresponds to a quite intense social rhythm, established by humanity and the logics of social functioning. The ordering of such a volume and its editorial distribution and disposition do not correspond to the number of facts, versions, and interpretations produced every day, hour, minute or second. Hence, I can see a certain relevance and coherence in the need to select facts according to the newsworthy criteria, hierarchy and disposition in the text, in any technological means.

The object of journalism and its limitations exist in any media, in any vehicle. Considering that, I believe that there is a greater need for segmented and also professionally segmented means of communication, even if the non-journalistic ones are real, legitimated, etc. Nevertheless, it is necessary, as Wolton (2006) has asserted, to know *the place from which some talk*, based on *legitimacy* and *credibility*, taking into account the criteria for which the journalistic profession has stood and configured during the 19th and 20th centuries – despite always involving political, economic, and marketing limitations.

Segmentation and diversity favor the multiplicity of the present, surrounded by various areas which lack information and knowledge. They favor and create an environment that is open for non-visible interpretations inside the traditional media, for sources that are not often heard, for more contextualized interpretations. They bring information and reports about knowledge and culture produced in examples such as state and city legislation chambers, public relations agencies, public and university access television and radio; NGO and university news agencies; the city, state, or federal governments; the so-called third sector; and mediated public systems. Such segmentation should not exist to praise these areas, but to disseminate and discuss the knowledge and information produced in a plural world. Two different groups of information circulate and confront each other: one that is produced by the professional media and one that is disseminated on the streets and in the cities, produced and told by regular people with no intention of sounding journalistic. The rise of new media and the professionalization in segments of the areas of humanities, health sciences, exact sciences, and applied social sciences might reinforce such a perspective.

Along with the never-ending production and renewal of knowledge, information and culture, there is also the renewal of the relevance of professionalism in the mediation and work that ranges from the search for information to the editing of the encyclopedic set of knowledge produced by humankind and which needs to be immediately available to the public. Such a perspective does not invalidate the set of other informative and communicational processes, though I believe it should maintain a distinctive element in relation to them.

At the same time, the recent scenario of technological convergence points to the need for diversity of technologies, themes, characteristics, sources, and public. The need for segmentation may accompany the need for being involved with the immediate surroundings, and simultaneously, with the social surroundings of humanity as a whole, since globalization involves facts and decisions that might happen far away but influence any region of the earth.

Information, knowledge, and culture may be lacking in any media and any technological means because of the social rhythm and the production of information and contemporary knowledge, immediate facts and versions and opinions about them. Nowadays, with the creation of digital television, the need to end such a lack of information is even more intensified. Because of the increasing value of information, state and city governments, universities and higher education institutions in general, state offices and other executive bodies; state federal offices; professional or business institutions; state and city legislative chambers; and medium and small regional media are constantly worried about new knowledge and new ideas for improvement that range from agricultural production to the problems of great extensions of land; from urban expansion and complexities to new social behaviors; from scientific discoveries to the use of medicine; from theatrical and cinematographic productions to neighborhood soccer tournaments; from statistics relating to healthcare to those relating to employment and unemployment and their consequences, and so on.

Facing such a perspective, individuals and social movements, segmented sectors, public and private institutions and entities that are concerned about information of the journalistic kind confront a scenario that is favorable to the establishment of projects which point to democracy and greater success of the journalistic activity – a scenario, however, unfavorable in the global hegemonic sphere caused by the fundamentalism of the market.

In the globalized world and the so-called information society, where information and knowledge can be accessed by anyone, a question persists in journalism: can it provide essential services to the citizen, so that s/he can be connected with others in an immediate way and be able to give opinions and choose wisely and autonomously?

It can be argued that the informative demands in the simultaneously globalized and segmented world can generate a better journalism from 'inside out' than from 'outside in'. In other words, if there were the necessity and possibility for public and private institutions to produce journalistic information and knowledge that could be received or accessed immediately by anyone (depending on their education and technological inclusion/access), would the professional journalistic mediation of the 'great journalistic companies' still be necessary? Or has journalism, by transforming itself in the new scenario of the information society and of technological convergence, been also practiced in what was earlier called press or public relations agency?

Or, going a little further, should we recognize that – because of political, economic, and financial limitations – traditional journalism would be unsatisfying, aggravated by the media society which has other sectors of the productive process, and by the hybridization of newsmaking? It is possible to reformulate the question: would non-journalistic companies be producing better content and better aesthetic presentation of the information if they incorporated the professional standards of journalism, than the journalistic companies themselves, which could be driving themselves to hybrid information/advertising as a mean of economic survival? If the answer is yes, even partially, then journalist press assessors could, in the end, produce better content, with the technical, theoretical, and aesthetic characteristics of journalism, than those journalists limited by the pressure inside the media. Regarding ethics, and to the extent that historical professional values are coerced by the group of stockholders, commercial advertisers, and owners – who also have global interests in other products – ethics could be indeed more limited than in public relations agencies, provided that they disseminate well the facts and interpretations relating to any sectors, e.g. healthcare, agriculture or the working class. This is a dilemma brought by globalization in the economic and financial spheres, and which can be solved or minimized by the rise of segmented vehicles of easy access and participation/debate about new technological platforms.

In the era of media conglomerates, the environment of the information society and of technological convergence paradoxically favors such perspectives. Segmentation can, quite well, involve immediate journalistic productions of entities and institutions or collectives from various areas. Finally, there is a world that is transforming itself but which is also transforming the immediate representation of reality, which potentially allows a more intense and controversial participation and, ultimately, feeds the bases of social democracy itself.

Notes

- 1 In Portuguese, 'Sociedade da Informação' (SI) or 'Sociedade da Informação e do Conhecimento' (SIF).
- 2 International Association for Media and Communication Research.
- 3 Interview between Robin Mansell and Edgar Rebouças (Mansell and Rebouças, 2006: 163).

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Fonte: Journalism online, v. 10, n. 109, p. 108-125, 2009. [Base de Dados]. Disponível em: <<http://jou.sagepub.com>>. Acesso em: 17 nov. 2010.