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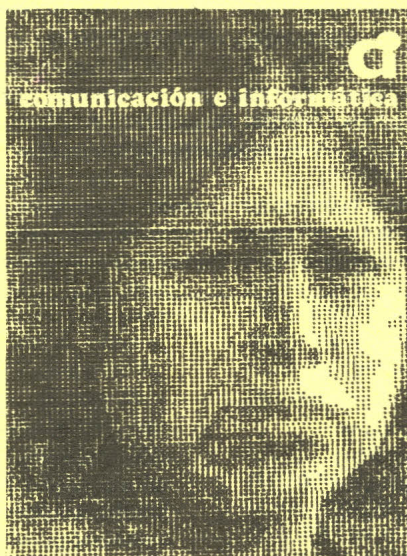
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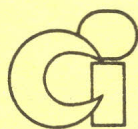
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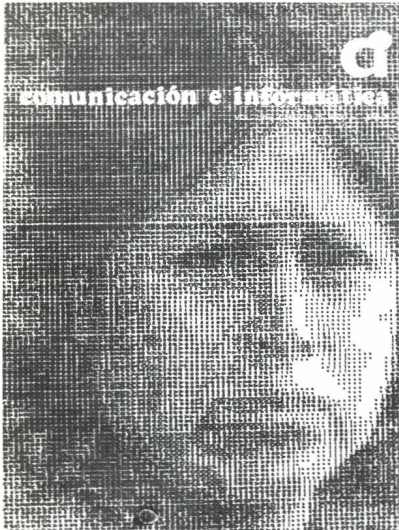
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AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE ORIGIN OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA

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I PRESENTATION

This work is intended as a primary approach to the analysis, from a critical perspective, of the origin and development of mass communication in capitalist society. Instead of trying to present an exhaustive picture of the problem, we will be pointing out, in a provisional manner, some of the principal materialist theses upon the rise of mass broadcast media as a product responding to the necessities of amplified reproduction of capital at its financial stage.

Consequently, we are seeking to demonstrate that the collective broadcast media do not burst out in history as a variable independent of technological development and historical evolution, but that their genesis responds to a determined type of historical necessity, which the capital — in its process of contemporary valuation — presents and needs to resolve.

With this, we will try to collaborate to clear up a conceptual gap persisting in the domain of critical interpretation of the phenomenon of mass communication. The development and appropriation of this theoretical-historical void will allow us to lay one of the major bases necessary for the creation of a new, alternative conception in respect to the field of social communication: a knowledge of the process of historical formation and consolidation of the dominating structure of mass culture.

II THE NEED FOR CAPITAL TO REDUCE ITS PROCESS OF CIRCULATION

In order to understand the relationship established between the emergence of mass broadcast devices and the reproducing mechanics of contemporary capitalism, we must take into account, as an initial reference point, the dynamics of material generation and renovation displayed by the central capitalist formations at the beginning of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Starting from the principle of capitalist development we may observe that its historical trend consists in obtaining, on an ever extended scale, the maximum profit under the social circumstances of exploitation, and that in order to survive, the bourgeoisie needs to constantly revolutionize its production techniques. We will see how the capitalist mode of production, after having affirmed itself in Europe with the commercial revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, in order to increment its rate of value accumulation, revolutionizes its means of production during the second half of the 18th century.

The first Industrial Revolution transforms the rudimentary working instruments by introducing the steam engine and coal as a fuel into both the process of production and the transport system.

This reaffirms the development of major industry at its new momentum: that of mechanized production.

Later on, during the last quarter of 19th century, capitalist industry is stimulated by a new technical revolution, made possible by the change of the source of energy in the systems of production and transportation, oil and electricity being introduced as energy sources. The internal-combustion engine and the electric motor again modify the working instruments, relegating the first, steam-moved engines to a secondary role and permitting other procedures of mechanical nature.

With the vertiginous development of the technological structure, industrial capitalism is consolidated at its new productive stage. Thereby, capital finds itself in the right condition to revolutionize its forms of value extraction, passing from a less income-yielding mode to a more productive one. The aim of introducing new sources of energy into the industry, "as with any other increase in the productiveness of labour, is intended to cheapen commodities and, by shortening that portion of the working-day, in which the labourer works for himself, to lengthen the other portion that he (the worker, author's note) gives, for free, to the capitalist. In short, it is a means for producing surplus-value" (1). Thus, the exploiting structure of capitalist society basically evolves from the stage of extraction of value through the relative surplus-value, in use at the stage of large industrial production.

From these moments on, the technological basis of economic development in European societies goes through substantial modification, while the output of the productive forces grows in a degree hitherto unseen. This crystallizes the victory of the capitalist mode of production as the predominant mode throughout history (2). The increase in productivity makes possible the production of great masses of commodities which need their outlet into the market and world consumption. The capital, in order to reach its fulfillment as a value generating surplus-value, not only has to reach the indispensable stage of commodity production but, also, needs the complete closure of an economic cycle that comprises both the complementary circuits of circulation and consumption of the commodities.

To synthesize, we can say that "a product is not really completed before it reaches the market" (3).

The sale and reinvestment of the mass of commodities produced in the immediate process of industrial production necessarily requires the realization of the process of capital circulation: the gradual transition of capital towards its stage of money and from there, back to its stage of productive capital (C - M - C'). This process is the condition *sine qua non* for the realization of capital as a new value, since the renewal of the production depends on the sales of the terminated products and these sales, again, depend on the circulation.

Now then, if "the trajectory traced by capital when passing

from one determination to another includes passages of circulation, and these passages take place in specific time spaces..., then the amount of products which can be produced in a given period of time, the frequency with which capital can be increased in a given period, and with which it can reproduce and multiply its value, will depend on the speed of circulation, on the time in which the latter takes place" (4). This is to say that "the proportion in which the same capital can repeat, in a given time space, its process of production (the creation of new value), obviously constitutes a condition that was not directly established by the process of production. Consequently, though the circulation never plays any part in the proper determination of value, which is true only of work, yet, on its speed depends the speed at which the process of production is repeated, the values created; and finally, if not the values, yet, to a certain extent, the mass of values" (5).

From the above we deduce that the time of circulation of the capital is of great importance to its valuation. This is due to the fact that capital, while in circulation, does not function as productive capital and, therefore, produces neither commodities surplus value. Thus, "the time of circulation appears as an obstacle to the productivity of the work needed = reduced time of surplus-labour = decrease of surplus-value = restraint, barrier to the process of valuation of capital" (6).

Thus, "a capital's time of circulation limits, generally speaking, its time of production and hence its process of generating surplus-value. And it limits this process in proportion to its own duration. . . Therefore, the more ideal the metamorphoses of circulation of a certain capital, i.e., the closer the time of circulation is to zero, the more does capital function, the more does its productivity and the self-expansion of its value increase" (7).

III APPARITION OF MASS BROADCAST MEDIA

The mere existence of material channels for the transportation of commodities, allowing their transition from the centre of production to the centre of distribution, does not yet solve the entire problem of capital circulation. What remains unsolved is the second stage of their circulation: how to reduce the time that elapses between the commercial placement and the final sale of the products. We must not forget that the capitalist process of production is slowed down or remains incomplete when the consumption of the goods is delayed or not accomplished. Consequently, we may think that the realization of the surplus-value sometimes requires a certain degree of conviction, that is to say, the necessity of consuming, unless it exists, has to be created in order to accomplish the cycle of capital replacement" (8).

Unless this second stage is accomplished rapidly, the costs of commodity circulation grow and the period of capital turnover is prolonged. We cannot deny the fact that "the permanence of commodity-capital on the market under the form of storage presupposes the use of buildings, storehouses, deposits of merchandise and therefore, continuous capital investments; it also presupposes paying wages for storing the merchandise in their depots. In the end, the merchandise deteriorates and is exposed to the action of elements harmful to it. In order to protect it from these effects, additional capital has to be disbursed, both under material form, as working instruments, and, as labour force" (9).

For the above reason, a seller always tries to dispose of his products as quickly as possible. For the seller, the commodities continue representing a mere exponent of their exchange-value and, by consequence, they can only assume this function when abandoning their commodity-form and taking the form of money. In other

words, the only thing that the producer and the salesman are interested in, at this stage of the circulation process, is the sale of the commodities, the only means of recovering the initially invested capital and obtaining the utilities derived from the surplus-value.

If with regard to the above we consider that each transformation performed in the process of production (particularly within the immediate process of production) proportionally affects the rest of the stages, we may observe that "a specific type of production determines a specific consumption, distribution and exchange, as well as specific relations between the different circuits" (10).

Ever since the last decades of the 18th century and the first of the 19th, when the industrial revolution came to modify the technological elements of the productive process and thus, to increase the degree of productivity of the productive forces, the dynamics of reproduction of capital on an extended scale forcibly modified, in proportion, the relationship between the production and the consumption of goods. Thus, the industrial capital enters a new stage of historical adaptation, which transforms the proportions of commodity consumption and establishes then on two levels, one of them local and limited and the other continuous, massive and world-wide. This is the only profitable way of using the intensified and permanent large-scale production of commodities that is made possible by the new manufacturing processes.

This harmonizes the rhythm and volume of production with the speed and mass of consumed commodities, in other words, to match with the large-scale production there is a massive consumption created which tends to continuous expansion. With this readjustment of the economic relations, contemporary capital enters a stage of international production that requires from its, among other things, a constant technological renovation of the methods which are used to promote the demand and consumption of material commodities.

In order to shorten the time of turnover, commercial capital faces the necessity, not only of increasing and extensively developing the material transportation channels, but also of stimulating and producing, now on the level of superstructure, a new social division of labour within the sphere of circulation, likely to eliminate, together with the dynamics of industrial production of commodities, the conflict established between invested capital and the time needed for the sale of the commodities. To this end, by deliberately dedicating a specific portion of their excess value and through an applied recovery of the technological advances obtained through the process of development of the material basis (today, particularly of electronical nature), the capital creates the cultural apparatus for collective broadcast which, supported by its cultural expression, functions as a catalyst of the ultimate stage of the circulation: the circuit of consumption.

The apparatus of mass culture emerges and operates as a series of superstructural institutions that, through the constant and intensified diffusion of the commodities, produces a competent cultural system spreading collective information about the products existing on the market and inculcating their consumption. This ideological practice is of considerable help when cutting the time of sale of the commodities, especially when the expression of the mass apparatus is constructed on the basis of a "fetichism" in respect to the commodities introduced: these possess value not on account of the material properties they disclose but on account of what they represent from a social point of view.

If the industrialization of capital creates mass-production, the advertising practice of the mass culture apparatus, in its turn, creates mass-mass consumption.

In this sense we can say that the new mode of mass information, with the advertising message it conveys, substantially adds to the speed of the process of value realization and, in this manner, becomes an integral part of the whole process of capital circulation. The operation of the mass broadcast devices generates no value whatsoever; their exclusive contribution consists in creating the conditions for the realization of surplus-value at the level of intensified capital turnover.

By analyzing the phenomenon from the point of view of circulation it becomes obvious that any substantial transformation undergone by the capital (in its economic structure and with the aim of increasing its productivity) is ultimately followed by a related superstructural impact on the super-economic elements composing the circulation process; that corresponding to each new modification in the development of the productive forces, there are new infrastructural channels of communication and material transportation created and modernized and these in their turn require the presence of new and improved cultural apparatuses to meet the needs of mass communication. It can be said that, in capitalist formations, there is a dialectical interdependence between the degree of development of productivity and the type of appearance and evolution of the apparatus of collective broadcast.

At the monopolist and imperialist stage (1859-1920), capitalist economy is reproduced on an extended scale through the capture and control of new international markets; mass culture is created; news, photographs, editorials and the styles of information broadcast for commercial needs are standardized; in short, a uniform collective consciousness is created in order to harmonize consumption on the world market. Finally, at the stage of transnational development (1920-1980), the great trusts invade the world, requiring the creation of a planetary centre of commercialization, making possible a reproduction of global dimensions. From this period on, the capitalist mode of information enters its stage of massive commercialization and cultural internationalization.

The historical development of mass broadcasting appears determined by the material necessities imposed by the development of the longer or shorter economic circuits through which capital evolves. This occurs also in the sense that "along with an economic liberalism there appears a liberal state permitting a liberal minded management of the media and of communication, even in a juridical sense (existence of independent newspapers and reviews, real exercise of political dissidence, possibilities to publish and distribute critical materials). On the contrary, a different stage of development, a situation of international and internal crisis, requires a more direct intervention on the part of the state, whose behaviour vis-à-vis the communication media gets shaped according to the different stages traversed by economy (previous censorship, repression of authors and commentators belonging to the opposition, inspection of printing houses and advertizing materials etc.)" (11).

Now then, this process of creation of the mass culture apparatus at the stage of world centralization of capital not only contributes to the reduction of the conflict between productive capital and its time of circulation but also, both these stages are equally affected by the capitalist law of unequal development. Here arise three consequences that are to influence the entire production process and, further on, the system of social organization resulting from it.

In the first place, from the moment in which productive capital deviates a certain portion of its excess from its primary objective to dedicate it, not to produce but, to be realized as sur-

plus-value by means of intensifying the consumption — through advertising — the capitalist economy assumes a new unproductive expenditure which in no way improves the quality of the merchandise but still, increases its cost: the investments in advertising and propaganda imply a waste of value without creating a new one. It is undeniable that "neither circulation nor commerce add anything to the total amount of produced values, applying rather to the transformation of the already existing values from their money-form to their commodity-form, or vice versa" (12).

Under such circumstances, capitalist economy loses the proportion of the surplus-value dedicated to the functions of circulation and this is in contradiction with its principle of maximum profit. To solve this contradiction, capital adds the superstructural expenditure wasted on circulation to the cost of commodity production as if the former really were a productive expenditure, creating value. This is how the labour force, composing the consumer sector, finances not only the extraction and accumulation of surplus-value, but also subsidizes to the costs of capital reproduction on an extended scale insofar as it amortizes the unproductive expenditure by paying a more expensive price for the products it consumes.

This means that the consumption-promoting function, fulfilled by the mass broadcast apparatus at the stage of monopolist capital, constitutes an additional source of inflation in respect to the commodity prices, as well as a factor likely to accentuate the structural differences established between the producer and the consumer, between capital and salaried work. They contribute to further enrich the owner of the means of production and foster the impoverishment of the proletariat.

In the second place, from the moment that the mass broadcast devices emerge as a necessary condition for the historical realization of surplus-value in the sphere of circulation, their functioning appears as intimately integrated in the general process of production. Consequently, as a fundamental element of the regime of capitalist production, they have to be substantially controlled by the social class that coordinates the social process of national and international production.

On the basis of the above control, the mass broadcast apparatus develops, as a predominant cultural trend, the production, distribution and inculcation of ideological contents proper to the fractions who run and profit from the process of extraction of surplus-value. This situation enables the proprietary class in possession of the means of production to impose the dynamics and the orientation to be adopted by mass consensus in contemporary civil society. This determination, ultimately imposed by the material basis, over the course and rhythm adopted by the mode of collective communication, places mass broadcast media in the very centre of the dynamics of class struggle, and principally during the periods of economic and political crisis.

Finally, in the third place, and as a result of the above, since the communication appear as fundamental elements of the present stage of capitalist development, they need to operate primarily in the fields of real consumption and only secondarily in the geographical perimeters of potential consumption. That is why the mass broadcast apparatus initially emerges in the principal world metropolises (England, France, U.S.A.) slowly expanding towards other regions where new markets emerge, with large masses of wage-earners in the process of incorporating themselves into the final stage of the cycle of value realization through collective consumption.

Once consolidated, this first stage, the new mode of collec-

tive communication, expands, still preserving its characteristics of a clearly cosmopolitan phenomenon, towards the periphery of the system obeying the rhythm and orientation imposed on it by the process of reproduction, on an extended scale, of transnational capital. This is how the mass broadcast media penetrate the zones of dependent capitalism, slowly creating the conditions of circulation for both national and imperial capital, by means of creating mass-consumption in the periphery. As we may observe, the appearance and distribution in space of the collective information devices are in direct proportion with the zones of realization of surplus-value: to major extraction of surplus-value within geographical coordinates, a major concentration of mass broadcast devices, and vice versa.

The organization of this new mode of social information not only assures the presence of the conditions for the second moment in the process of capital circulation but also implies the massive imposition of the dominating consciousness of the metropolises on the surrounding cultural formations. This is the first step in the cultural domination that central capitalism has collectively imposed, from 1920 up to our days, on its national and international periphery, through a public opinion compiled by the mass broadcast media.

To summarize we would point out that from its simplest forms (printing, telephone, cable, telegraph, etc.), up to the most complex ones (press, cinema, radio, television), communicational apparatus emerges in parallel with the evolution of the forms of production of central capitalism (North-American, French and British) and that each of these forms appears as ultimately directed towards the execution and reproduction of the dominating economic system. That is why it is necessary to emphasize, unlike the clauses issued by the functionalist version on the genesis of mass communication and its instruments of implementation, the origin of these as an economic-cultural response of capital, when facing the necessity of reproduction on an extended scale during its first stage that takes place in the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th.

This is why, in spite of the fact that the functionalist theses situate the origin of mass media at the moment when the primary technology of each medium is invented, we think they do not actually appear until the industrial revolution has appropriated the communications technology, from its mechanical up to its electronic stage, that is, the stage of continuous, intensified and massive commercial and cultural diffusion. Thus, though the accumulation of the primary technology is of fundamental importance for the consolidation of communication, a press with mass distribution does not emerge in England in 1456 with the introduction of John Gutenberg's printing machines, but in 1833 in New York, when printing technology has evolved far enough to enable the fast, income-yielding and collective distribution of the first mass newspaper: *The New York Sun*. Cinema as mass medium does not emerge with the discovery of film projection by Thomas Alva Edison in 1890, but when the visual technology reaches the standard of excellence allowing some commercial concerns to perform their massive shows at reduced prices in Paris and New York in 1895. The radio as a mass medium does not receive its crowning in 1907 with the development of the "Audion" of De Forest, but in 1920 when the incipient monopoly of Westinghouse Co. transmits its first commercial broadcast its KDKA station in Pittsburgh. Last but not least, television does not emerge as a collective broadcast medium with the innovations of Henry de France and René Barthélémy in 1929 in France, but with the first lucrative broadcasts of the BBC in 1936.

By way of conclusion, we find that it is from within the outburst and development of classical imperialism, of financial capital and of the monopolies that the modern mode of production, circulation and inculcation of information emerges, as required by capital in its new historical stage of reproduction.

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