

Abstract

In this article we propose an itinerary for thinking about social networks as environments and the search for placing its incidences in reception studies on internet. We start from the understanding that the role developed by social networks in the organization of contemporaneous relations brings consequences for the configuration and uses of media, highlighting the internet. This demands a reconfiguration of the perspective on reception processes. In this text we discuss conceptual concepts concerning the repositioning of interaction in reception studies within the context of connected society. We draw attention to five dimensions that demand attention in this repositioning: ease of access to the production field, media convergence, interactivity, hypertextuality and heterogeneity of internet characteristics.

Keywords: Social Networks, Reception Studies, Internet.

1. Introduction

Our starting point in this article is the establishment of the centrality of the medias in contemporary society and culture and also from a brief return to reception studies, to situate, on the one hand, the contributions from the perspective of mediatization for such studies and, on the other, the limits of this same perspective in the understanding of the connected society as an environment organized by the mediation of the medias. This dual perspective leads us to focus the repercussions of a networked society on the processes of interaction which form the object of interest of reception studies, especially in terms of the development and growing presence of the internet in social life.

In the construction of this itinerary of reflection, we approach the idea of social networks through a brief distinction between a society of means, a society of medias and a connected society as environments organized on different levels by technological mediation, with the aim of raising and discussing conceptual aspects referring to the repositioning of the interactional in the reception studies concerning the internet within the context of social networks. Within this debate we highlight five different aspects

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² Denise Cogo is Head Professor of the Post-Graduate Course in Communication Sciences at the Unisinos University. Level 2 Research Coordinator for CNPq.

³ Liliane Dutra Brignol is a Doctor in Communication Sciences from the Unisinos University and professor on the Journalism course at the ‘Centro Universitário Franciscano’.

which establish the repositioning of the interactional in reception studies concerning the internet: the ease of access to the area of production; the convergence of media, the interactivity, hypertextuality and the heterogeneity of the characteristics of the internet.

2. Mediatized society and reception studies

The central position which the medias have assumed in daily life and in social relations is coming to be discussed as an important reconfiguration with various implications, including in relationships of time and space and experiences of identity. Various medias penetrate all forms of social life; they are at the focus of discussions over globalization in general and of culture in particular, as well as the acceleration of the flow of information, being identified as the protagonists of change in social interaction and forms of understanding.

The theory of the increasing centrality (and almost determination) of the medias in social life may indeed present interactionist perspectives as having a very low degree of permeability, such perspectives including that related to reception studies which highlights, as another characteristic of contemporary societies, deservedly distinct positioning, interpretations and temporality which demark the appropriations and uses of the medias. In postulating that communication has become “a question of mediations more than means, a question of culture and, therefore, not only of understanding, but also re-understanding,” Martín-Barbero (1987) synthesizes one of the central premises around which the different contributions from Latin-American authors have revolved over the last few decades, and which, since communicational consumption and reception, has been dedicating itself to thoughts of communication concerning the process within cultures. Researchers such as Néstor García Canclini (1996), Guillermo Orozco Gómez (1993) and Martín-Barbero (1987) himself, come together in the definition of culture as a plural, unstable, ambiguous, conflictive and complex process, which takes strength in day-to-day life and adapts distinct communication processes which may be mediated or not by the means of communication.

Around this watershed, we can set a group of studies which have been focused on an analysis of the reception of means of communication or practices of media reception in the Latin-American context. As a guiding premise, it is the perception that, despite the media processes fundamentally intervening in the constitution and form of interactions, memories and social notions, individuals are active subjects in the entire process of communication, conferring specific uses on media offers. There is no guarantee however, that the content and meanings offered by the producers of the means of communication are those to be appropriated by reception, in view of the fact that they

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are permanently negotiated based upon experiences of identity and the receivers' individual and collective social practices (COGO, 2008).

Another positioning or form of approach of the reception studies has been represented by research which seeks to study socio-cultural and communicational processes and practices in which the means of communication or specific forms of media materiality are not implicated, such as, for example, studies related to cultural youth demonstrations. Despite some researchers of communication having assumed positions which tend to affirm the media as a preponderant space from where to consider reception, we believe the instance of the communicational is inherent to any media process which either does or does not involve reception. On the one hand, in epistemological terms, the reception studies tied to cultural studies are historically founded in the break with instrumentalist visions over the incidence of the means of communication in social life, which take advantage of hegemony in the context of communication studies. This displacement collaborates to confirm that no reception practice in which forms of media materiality are implicated may be exempted from communicational interactions supplied by historicity and contextualized socio-culturally. On the other hand, the reception studies have been pointing towards forms of social use of the medias which extend or unfold beyond the moments and spaces of media consumption, being able to generate communicational dynamics which, despite maintaining marks, can assume a certain autonomy or constitute their own repertoires in relation to these forms of materiality.

In addition, these uses have increasingly collaborated toward the creation and production of individual and collective experiences of appropriation of the medias on the part of the receivers which can already be recognized in media projects created by social movements (in the form of bulletins, newspapers, videos, etc.), and will intensify with the expansion of the internet. From the perspective that we can call communicative citizenship (MATA, 2006), authors such as Jesus Martín-Barbero (2008) have become concerned, within the present climate, with proposing, for Latin-American reception studies, the displacement of instance of consumption or the reading of the means for the understanding of processes of *empowerment* or of *policies of subject* resulting from these experimentations with the technology of communication by the receivers.

We can confirm that this widening of the understanding of the receiver's "activity" beyond the dimension of the readings and interpretations, in a certain sense, produces an area of dialogue over reception studies with support from researchers of the phenomena of mediatization. In their reflections, the processes of accelerated transformation of media communication appear emphasized due to the development of technological devices and devices offering reconfiguration of their uses (VERÓN, 1997; MATA, 1999).

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Without dismissing the criticisms of those who see the studies of mediatization as a return to technological determinism, the reflections arising there from may collaborate with the reception studies from the perspective of valorizing and distinguishing the incidence of media logic as much in social practices and their representations, as in the constitution of the contemporary ties and sociabilities which may derive from the uses and experimentations with communication technologies by different social sectors.

From this perspective, taking different approaches in order to understand the phenomenon of mediatization, Verón (1997) calls our attention to the situation of accelerated change in the area of media communication, as a result of the evolution of technological devices and the emergence of new technologies. The author renders the concept of mediatization problematic, taking as the starting point the collective dimension of the media to consider it from the perspective of access, by a great number of individuals, of messages produced and posted in circulation. According to the author, a means of communication is a technological device for the production and reproduction of messages associated with determined conditions of production and the specific modalities (or practices) of reception of these messages, in which the contexts become vital to the study of media communication.

Silverstone (2002) makes reference to the texture of the experience through media as an impossibility of escaping its presence and representation when he summarizes that “we start to depend upon media, be it printed or electronic, for our entertainment and information, comfort and security, to see some meaning in the continuities of experience and, also, from time to time, for the intensity of the experience” (SILVERSTONE, 2002, p. 12). The author does not, however, reject the modes in which we move between the media spaces and beyond them, in a dynamic of flow within and outside the media, but being, in some way, impacted by its presence.

Mata (1999) highlights the passage of a mass culture to a media culture from the perspective of recognizing the insufficiency of the notion of “mass” to explain the production and consumption of signifiers in contemporary society. As an institution which generates meanings and stimulates social relations, the media comes to occupy spaces and assume functions which had previously belonged to other institutions (politics, education, justice, etc.). As the researcher points out, the means reach to where personal interaction and institutional influence do not, giving rise to a media culture which is made up of a new form of design of the interactions and of a new form of the structure of social practices marked by the existence of means. According to Mata, the mediatization of the experience would configure another political-epistemological circumscription of the human action, in which the means and technologies of the

information and communication (TICs) would be made up of guarantees of the possibility of the being and performing of the individuals.

The reflections made by authors such as Verón, Mata and Silverstone inform the reception studies which signal the passage from a *society of means*, responsible for the transmission of messages to the “masses”, to a mediatised society, in which the means do not only construct and circulate meanings, but configure an environment and redefine our experience. Such reflections do not reach, however, to the thinking of a networked society, at the point where this environment organized by mediation of the medias becomes responsible for an interconnection on a scale which was previously inconceivable and based upon individual and collective participation, with implications in the reorganization of the communication processes, including those in the sphere of reception, and which especially involve the materiality of the internet and its possible uses by society.

3. Networked society and a mediated environment

That which we understand to be a network, generically defined as an interconnected group, characterized by flexibility and adaptability, demands that we understand it as a product of human intervention and interaction on technological materiality. As Castells (2003) recalls, the formation of networks is a very old human practice, but the networks are re-dimensioned in the form of three processes which were advanced during the final decades of the 20th Century and listed by the author.

[...] The demands of the economy for administrative flexibility and for) globalization of capital, of production and commerce; the demands of society, in which the values of individual freedom and open communication become supreme; and the extraordinary advances in computing and telecommunications made possible by the micro-electronic revolution. (CASTELLS, 2003, p.8)

An understanding of the interconnection of the markets, societies and technologies is shared by researchers who highlight a reconfiguration of contemporary society based upon a dynamic of non-hierarchical, flexible and interdependent interactions. As Molina (2004) mentions, the emergence of the debate over the networks is associated with a sensation of interconnection which accompanies contemporary relations and which is not limited solely to the networks, unless it is a widely spread phenomenon.

Martín-Barbero (2004) assists the thinking to characterize changes in the policy based upon factors such as the de-articulation of the masses in a new organization of

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sociabilities: “*Una socialidad de red, hecha de nudos que la rearticulan cuando las grandes instituciones de la modernidad, la política, el trabajo y la escuela, han entrado en crisis*” (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2004, p.31). According to him, we are facing new ways of being together, with connections which do not come from a fixed territory or from a rational and lasting consensus, but from plural identities, nourished by various repertoires.

For Manuel Castells (1999), the networks set up the rationale of contemporary social organization, being characterized by the generation, processing and transmission of information as fundamental sources of productivity and power. For the researcher, the essential aspects of the make up of this social organization condition or have an impact in some way upon dimensions as diverse as the economy, understanding, power, communication and technology, suggesting that the network society would be the planet’s dominant social structure. (CASTELLS, et al., 2007). Castells considers the network society as having a transversal reach, based upon an analysis of economic, cultural, political and social aspects, at the same time in which he recognizes that network logic, despite assuming a global dimension, has not substituted other more centralized and hierarchy-based social structures. The dynamic will not be of immediate substitution, but familiarity and adaptation, an example of which we can see in the way the medias are organized, in a combination between what is possible to identify as mass medias and network medias.

In a study of internet uses in the Catalonia region of Spain, Castells (et. al., 2007) also highlights the non-homogenous character of what he proposes calling the network society, considering that the people who incorporate internet access and consumption into their daily lives constitute only a portion of the world’s population. In this network society, as Cardoso (2007) also suggests, the autonomy of choice in decision is directly linked to our capacity for interaction with the medias, without us excluding, however, the importance of face-to-face interaction or the limits imposed by the structuring and relations of power which occur in the access and use of the different technologies.

Even though the concept of a network has been gaining ground within the current scenario, mainly since the expansion of the uses of ICTs, the analysis of social networks recalls the studies from the 1930s and 1940s, notably in the fields of anthropology, psychology, sociology and mathematics. It was in the 1970s and 1980s, according to Lozares (1996), that methods of analysis of social networks based upon the development of the mathematical basis of graph theories would be proposed and consolidated. Ugarte also considers the origin of the analysis of networks, referring to “*una forma particular de análisis topológico: la descripción de las distintas estructuras que puede tomar una red y el estudio de las propiedades inherentes a cada una*” (UGARTE, 2007, p.3). Such which, later on, according to the author, would have

repercussions in the development of studies of social networks through the appropriation of a descriptive language of the theory of graphs as a basis for the identification of any network.

In relation to this focus, it is possible to distinguish that “*la red se define como un conjunto de **nodos** (también llamados puntos o vértices) que en análisis social representan a los **actores** de la red, unidos por **líneas** que representan la relación o relaciones que les unen*” (UGARTE, 2007, p.3). A large part of the trajectory developed by the analysis of social networks is related to a structural perspective, the recuperation of which helps us to understand the use of metaphors such as ‘web’ or ‘fabric’, by different studies, to understand the social reality of interlacing and interconnections of human interaction.

The 1990s are notable for the emergence of multidisciplinary studies of social networks based upon different focuses, many of which were motivated by an increase in the complexity of urban life and by communication mediated by the computer. With a wider reaching concept, in a separation from the theoretical-methodological focus of network analysis, researchers from distinct areas of knowledge started to think about the idea of a ‘network’ as an articulator of reconfiguration in the way of considering social organizations. This is one proposition which requires an epistemological perspective allowing an understanding of approximations between instances such as the local and the global, the private and the universal, more and more overlapped and responsible for the interconnection of identities in the contemporary scenario.

Lozares (1996) speaks of social networks as groups of actors (individuals, groups, organizations, and communities) linked by means of a set of social relations. From a similar point of view, Rizo Garcia (2003) considers networks to be forms of social interaction, familiar and connected spaces which are fundamentally defined by dynamic interchanges between the subjects which form them. As far as this author sees it, the networks are made up of social organizations which allow resources to reach their potential and allow a contribution to the resolution of problems through a logic of non-homogenization of the social groups, but organization of the society in its heterogeneity, through the structuring of links between groups with common interests and concerns. Despite the considerations about networks presented by Garcia (2003) being suggestive, they should be considered with care in relation to the principle that the social networks, always and by definition, would tend to seek solutions to problems. The movement of social organization in networks may often be accompanied by the simple need to form links, without a concrete purpose of action or social intervention, or any intention for the re-dimensioning of the hierarchies or of fragmentation situations or social disarticulation.

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In this text we start off, therefore, from the understanding of the networks as social interaction strategies, flexible, dynamic and constantly moving interchange spaces, which do not fail to bear express power relations in the disputes, hierarchies and asymmetries which constitute the sphere of communication and culture. The networks show a way of being together, of being connected and forming bonds, at the same time in which they can implicate in a form of social participation where the dynamic of either does or does not guide concrete changes in the lives of the subjects or organizations.

Furthermore, we understand that the social networks configure interactions between the subjects where they may be presented as informal networks, configured by subjective demands, or may be organized formally or institutionally through the collective activity of groups with leadership powers, able to be hybrids between the two configurations. On top of this, the networks, for their organization and functioning, count upon the mediation of information and communication technologies, especially the internet, at the same time as they are made more dynamic by species of 'invisible webs', made up of interactions between subjects not mediated by technologies.

4. (Re)positioning the interactional: social networks, internet and reception studies

The space which the networks occupy in the sense of organization of contemporary social relations certainly leads to consequences for the configuration itself and for the uses of the medias, with emphasis on the internet. The main consequence is centered on the movement of a hegemonic logic of transmission of information in a mass and generalized form, from a small producing group to an indiscriminate collective, for the possibility of the production of information and the establishment of communication in a more decentralized manner and distributed to segmented publics.

One prime aspect which it becomes necessary to highlight in terms of the transformations provoked by this other environment of social networks is that one means does not substitute another, just as the models of communication are not immediately supplanted by new media experiences. What we recognize is the complimentary nature between different means of communication, the proliferation of the media on offer and the expansion of possible uses made for each one of them or, in a way that is more and more incisive, between them and combining them. We can therefore say that the model of mass communication is maintained and can be identified in reasoning present on the internet itself, but it is impacted by a model of communication that is based, amongst other aspects, on the relation between the medias, in a space of participation that is bigger than the public in the production of information and autonomy in the communicative process.

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What we suggest for consideration is that there are aspects of communication mediated by the computer and by ICTs within the context of the networked society which have an impact upon contemporary communication, within which we can highlight the interdependency between the medias and their individual and socially divided appropriations, which have been called ‘media convergence’, ‘multimediality’, or, as suggested by Bolter and Grusin (1999), ‘re-mediation’; a concept which makes reference to the ways in which a media uses the esthetics or content developed by another media. The newness of the digital medias would lie in their singular strategies of re-mediation of television, cinema, photography and fine art, and of other means, through re-readings, references, adaptation of their contents, formats and languages. For Sodr  (2002), the phenomenon is identified as ‘multi-mediality’, marked by intertextuality, the mixture of means and the co-presence of various medias producing different meanings. Fragoso (2005), in turn, approaches the media convergence from three different aspects – the forms of coding, the types of support and the forms of media distribution.

I understand “convergence of the forms of codification” to mean the possibility of “packing”, in a single format (in this case, the binary code), enunciated originally as belonging to distinct semiotic categories (text, sound and image). This non-differentiation made viable the meeting between distinct types of message in a single support. In practice, this concerns the possibility of using the same storage unit (a diskette or CD, for example) to store, in an undifferentiated manner and at the same time, the text of a letter in progress, a set of photographic images and a musical tune (FRAGOSO, 2005, p.17).

The author highlights the fact that the combination of languages in forms which we can consider to be multimedia was prior to digitalization, drawing attention to the fact that the possibility of unifying the codification, storage and distribution of media products does not necessarily lead to the development of more creative formats for messages with higher quality content, as is generally suggested.

For the reception studies, it is important to consider that the convergence can be thought of as much as a form of appropriation of the content, through the combined use of different medias, as a standardization of the storage and distribution format, and as a reference of one media amongst others, through the approximation of languages and logics. It can be understood, furthermore, as a reconfiguration of the economic and organizational system of the medias administrated by large groups which, in the majority of instances, have unified the productive process for different medias, frequently generating a crossbreeding of content.

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In addition to the convergence of media, another notion to have an impact upon the communicational process, and having repercussion on the sphere of reception, is interactivity, noted as “one of the principal, if not the most important, elements in the redefinition of the psychological, cognitive and cultural forms and processes arising from the digitalization of communication” (FRAGOSO, 2001, p.1). Despite interactivity being a term created to “denominate a specific quality of the so-called interactive computation” (FRAGOSO, 2001, p. 2), with the modification in the user-computer relationship, we must be careful not to make the mistake of ignoring the possibilities of interaction between the producers and receivers in the other medias.

We therefore suggest the dismissal of the classification created by Thompson (1998), in which the possible interactions through the means of communication are called “mediated quasi-interactions”, characterized by production for an undefined number of receivers and by the flow of communication in a predominantly single sense, as well as its greater dissemination in time and space and the narrowing of the range of symbolic hints. Abandoning the concept of media as monological, we believe that the interactivity “embodies an interpretive activity analogous to that which is found around every media product” (FRAGOSO, 2001, p. 9).

Despite our recognition of interactivity as also being characteristic of other medias, it is in the internet that it gains ground as an effective practice in media uses. Despite being, in most situations, limited by a finite and predefined number of options, we can speak of greater interactivity in cyberspace for the more concrete possibility of approximation between the logics of production and those of recognition or reception. It is worth emphasizing here the necessity of defining the limits and the differences between the interactive systems. On the web, it is possible to observe situations of destabilization or relativization of these framings of participation into patterns that were previously established with a greater empowering of the receiver and the “exponential increase in the number of individuals effectively capable of performing the role of issuer in a communicational process on a grand scale” (FRAGOSO, 2005, p. 19).

It is also the crossing of different discursive forms (text, sound, image) which provides a margin for the appearance of another essential element in the communication mediated by the computer, the appropriation of which brings with it consequences for the universe of reception. Hypertext, the text composed of a non-sequential structure, leads one to think also of the content and the messages constructed by means of heterogeneous flows, within a context of inter-related processes. With the logic of hypertext, “the cognitive posture most fitting to the user is that of interpretive ‘exploration’, instead of the inference of truths” (Sodré, 2002, p. 54).

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Hypertext expands the possibilities of reading, but is also a long way from representing an original proposal for the production of meaning based upon the logics of the receiver. Even amongst medias with products that are characterized by linearity, the paths taken in accordance with the abilities of the receptors are those responsible for the meaning. It is worth mentioning, with reference to authors such as Piscitelli (1995) and Landow (2005), that non-sequential reading, before the advent of hypertext (the general form of electronic writing), is present in literature, in articles and in other printed texts, but the potential it has gained through the digital networks transforms the support of the written word and its forms of access, bringing along implications for our own model of thinking.

Just like interactivity, the idea of hypertext alters the relations between production and reception, being formed in one more characteristic of communication mediated by the ICTs, which demand a careful look and a renewed theoretical reflection to focus on a restructuring of the processes of communication through the logic of networks. Starting with a retired concept of technological determinism, we recognize that the changes arise from the negotiation and appropriation of the medias, in specific cultural contexts, responsible for the attribution of meaning to technological advances. Special attention is drawn to the internet, understood as being a multiple and complex environment in which different characteristics, as we demonstrate here, amongst which are: the ease of access to the sphere of production; the convergence of medias, interactivity and hypertextuality, coexist with the centrality of accesses and uses which are unidirectional or participated in to only a small extent.

We could talk of *numerous internets* with different characteristics, which combine appropriations which bring them close to media logic, often very close to traditional medias, and others which are related to an interpersonal means of communication through their interactional character. Due to the impossibility of dealing with the internet in a homogenous form, we need to understand it as a communicational environment which combines elements, processes and diverse logics. Cardoso (2007) considers the internet as a form of technology which, for the first time, provides the same pattern for interpersonal and mass communications; two dimensions present simultaneously, meaning that they assume a central role in the media system. For the author, the internet has arisen as a form of technology which, by means of its capacity for adaptation and interaction with other technologies, makes it a new form of media, one which “born of its diffusion and social appropriation, is established as a form of technology with which all the others appear to seek means of interacting by means of the establishment of digital or analogical links” (CARDOSO, 2007, p. 129).

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Grillo believes the internet to be a set of diverse and connected forms of technology, not as a single artifact. What causes, therefore, the possibilities of appropriation and meaning to be expanded:

Su apropiación puede abordarse como una acumulación de prácticas que requieren diversos grados de experiencia y habilidad, que los sujetos adquieren en determinados sitios de traducción (cibercafés, hogares, escuelas o programas estatales). Internet aparece, asimismo, como un espacio cuyo paisaje imaginario contribuye a construir y reproducir las demás industrias culturales (a través del cine, la TV y la literatura) (GRILLO, 2007, p, 39)

For Hine (2004), the task of understanding the internet holistically also becomes problematic. In the vision of such researcher, the internet may simultaneously be understood to be culture and a cultural artifact. The first concept is based upon the premise that the communication mediated by the computer establishes spaces where relevant interactions are maintained, such which may be understood as being a culture in itself; and the second which is founded upon the notion that the internet is, at the same time, a product of culture, a technology developed by real people, with objectives and priorities which are contextually situated and defined, as well as being shaped by modes from which it is commercialized and used.

From an equally heterogeneous perspective, Fischer (2008), in analyzing the operative logics of the *YouTube* and *Globo Media Center/Globo Vídeos* sites, suggested three aspects with which to characterize the internet: as a databank, as media and as a relationship environment. The first idea can be seen based upon its logic of a network of networks of data, or, in other words, as a data bank, a set of information which can be filed, indexed and drawn upon by means of certain technical procedures.

Another facet is that of the media, encouraged by private access to the internet and the appearance of personal computers with a friendly interface, factors which converged with the creation of the *World Wide Web* (www or web), by means of which various protagonists from the field of the medias made themselves present on the internet. The web media, or in its “media facet”, is related to the capacity to allow data stored on the internet to be enunciated in languages which refer us to those present in the traditional means of communication. In addition, in the case of the concentration of access to a reduced number of pages, such as that of search engines (mostly Google, Yahoo and MSN), there is a movement similar to that which takes place in corporate media groups, with the structuring of an asymmetrical logic of “little for many”. However, Fischer highlights the fact that the internet grows out of a “binominal of concentration and multiplication of its communication properties” (FISCHER, 2008, p. 39).

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The third facet of the internet is that of the relationship environment, which is based upon the idea that the user establishes a relationship of various tagging levels relating to his or her presence on the internet: “What we recognize is that, with the correct evolution of the web, this will also provide the potential for the individual to present and identify themselves, personalize their actions, and as they do so, they seem to somehow enter and relate within the network of networks. (FISCHER, 2008, p.43-4). Here we consider the conversation or message software, email usage, chat rooms, social networking or relationship sites such as *Orkut* (www.orkut.com), *Facebook* (www.facebook.com) and *MySpace* (www.myspace.com), which are characterized by the creation of a profile and creation and visiting of lists of contacts with other users with whom it is possible to interact.

Within this context, we should highlight the development of sites which expand these interactive possibilities by means of taking advantage of the dynamic of social networks with the insertion, personalization and sharing of content produced or selected by their users, a dynamic which is connected to that which is generally referred to as *web 2.0*, with the expansion of the collaborative potential of the web. Amongst the examples of sites with these characteristics we have *Youtube* (www.youtube.com), which allows videos to be shared; *Flickr* (www.flickr.com), focusing on photos; *Last.fm* (www.lastfm.com), for music; and *Delicious* (www.del.icio.us), for recommendations on favorite sites, to name just a few.

From this perspective, as product and as part of contemporary culture, the internet is considered, in terms of its logic of networks, in terms of the possibilities it presents for the establishment of connections and to stimulate social interactions between the subjects which take them on. We believe that it is important for researchers into reception to reflect upon the internet in its multiple dimensions. In other words, to look at its conception as a communication environment which allows the production, circulation and exchange of content and information, the approximation of different media formats and logics, interpersonal interaction and dialogue, the establishment of connections, the construction of the projection of identities of its users, the configuration of a shared memory and the establishment of collaborative logics. It is also important to stress that the internet is always made up of its users, who are certainly not free, since they are derived from a relationship which arises from the very characteristics of technology, even though they can often be negotiated or subverted.

5. Final thoughts

As we have pointed out it was not the rise of the internet which demanded a questioning of the idea of mass communication to emphasize the emergence of a

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networked society. We believe that, in association with the notion of social networks, the internet has meant an increase in the evidence that it is not possible to consider the sphere of production and that of media reception as homogenous blocks. This is an issue which, in a certain form, has not exactly been absent from reception studies during the last few decades, if we remember that the studies concerned themselves with confirming the role of the socio-cultural mediations, as much in an individual manner as a collective one, in the uses of the means of communication. However, the multiple possibilities of meaning which are opened by production opened up by web-based practices, with the growing individualization of schools and the increase of content in cyberspace, has been reinforcing the need to abandon the idea of ‘mass’ and, within the context of reception studies, expand the debate around social networks as a mediated environment.

It cannot be denied that cyberspace substantially alters the relations between the issuer and the receiver, meaning that the very categories have to be revised. How should one refer to an individual who, at the same time, accesses a news website, creates a message in a discussion forum, sends an email to a friend and reads a message posted on a relationship site? It is difficult to call this individual a receiver when their permanent processes of experimentation and their constant creation of content and meanings on the web are evident. This receiver, as he or she has traditionally been identified in communication studies, receives other attributes and starts to perform activities which make him or her a “subject who is now in an interface situation, being transformed into an operator” (TRIVINHO, 1998, p.117).

Going beyond the decentralization of the process and the informational circularity, it is the recognition of the alterations in the poles of production and reception which reveal the dynamic of complexification of the communicational process which, within the context of a networked society, appears explicit in the difficulty it has in naming the subject which makes use of the internet. Names such as “internaut”, a term in disuse which makes reference to the action of navigation performed in cyberspace, or of “user” - a category which is also reductive, despite being widely used (including in this article) to emphasize the distinction between the spaces of the production and consumption of uses – reveal conceptual limits, a resolution of which is found in the option, for example, of referring to the receiver as “reader-producer” (BRIGNOL, 2010). For some researchers, the concept of “interagent” (PRIMO, 2007) appears as the term which best captures the space of participation and exchange between technology-subject and between the subjects themselves on the internet.

Here we consider that the naming may vary depending upon the specific situation being referred to even though it is a strategy for us to avoid conceptual over-refinements which confine the debate. What this search for terminology can show us, in

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a productive manner, is the size of the transformations employed by the logic of networks as another positioning to be considered in the reception studies. If the study of communication by means of the isolation of one of the parts in the communicational process, with emphasis at times on production and at others on reception, without any questioning of the approximations and imbrications of the two spheres, based upon practices in cyberspace, was already problematic, this positioning shows itself to be even more limiting.

The reduction of the distance between issuer and receiver, in recognition of the multidimensionality of the communicational process, defines one of the characteristics of the internet in the sense that its technical potential and possibilities for use favor greater participation through a break from the model of 'one for all' and through the implementation of dynamics of production more regulated by an 'all for all' model, as noted by Lemos in analyzing what he calls the "liberation of the pole of issue" (LEMOS, 2003). Despite our having defended the impossibility of speaking of the annulling of the two poles (since the issuing from 'one for many' continues to be present on the internet, in news sites and large portals, for example, coexisting with models in which 'one speaks to many' or to just a few), these two instances – production and reception – in many situations, come together and are rearranged.

It should be highlighted, however, that these characteristics do not extend to all the spaces of the internet at the risk of reducing the discussion to a contraposition between traditional medias and the internet. It is also possible to recognize, as stated by Fragoso (2003), that, contrary to the expectations of use of the web for the horizontal and unrestricted use of information, "a growing number of users avoid the unstable ground of independent pages, directing their navigators to addresses rooted in recognized institutions, which have, preferentially, been conceived 'outside the network'" (FRAGOSO, 2003, p. 9). This finding leads us to the understanding that the model of the web could bring a structure very similar to that of other medias, in which segmentation and specialized content are recognized, within a tendency towards centralization.

However, in parallel to this movement, it can be observed that there is a multiplication of production possibilities, with the proliferation of personal sites, weblogs and specifically-themed sites on the web, meaning we catch a glimpse of spaces of communicative experimentation by those who have access to the internet with the opportunity of creation and publication of content and the generation of interchange and sociability.

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