# Communication space, culture and dissignification

Glauco Rodrigues Cortez[1]

**Abstract**

This article pretends to keep a dialogue between some thinkers that work with culture issue and the idea of communication space. The objective is try to develop bases to an understanding of a communication that is less vehicular and more spacial. In this way, looks for establish a relation between thinkers of geography culture, from Center of Contemporary Studies from the Birmingham University and also with the philosopher Mikail Bakhtin, in the way of to make possible understand, more specifically, the process that we call dissignification of information, that occurs on the same time that the news industrialization and the transformation of news into a product.

**Keywords**: space, culture studies, sign, communication, news

[1] Doctor of Social Sciences from Universidade de Campinas (Unicamp). Teacher at Faculdade de Jornalismo da Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas (PUC- Campinas). E-mail: glaucorcortez@gmail.com.

**INTRODUCTION**

This article is a theoretical effort that looks for establish a dialogue between some thinkers that work with cultural issue and the notion of communication space[2]. In this way, we began this analysis trying to incorporate to subject some studies realized by cultural geographers because the comprehension of communication that we have is mainly spatial. We search for, in this way, an alternative of synchrony of thought that allows relating communication, culture and space. The intention is to show that a comprehension of culture could be, in a certain way, integrate in a spatial process of communication. The challenge of this theoretical discussion is to look for a dialogue between authors of cultural geography, from United States and to with the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.

The concept of culture between the geographers isn't less complex neither less difficult that in any other area of scientific search in humanities. Culture already has been consider like a entity supra-organic, something that had its own laws, hovering over individuals without autonomy, as recall Correa and Rosendahl (2007). But cultural geographers were also strongly influenced by the debate on the subject at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, from University of Birmingham.

The culture was considered like the reunion of knowledge, techniques, beliefs and values that are part of everyday life and generated in the middle of social relations in a class society (Corrêa and Rosendahl, 2007). This set of knowledge, it can be said, is spatially, as culture can be studied as maps of meaning through which the world becomes intelligible to a particular community.

> Cultures are not simply systems of meanings and values we have in mind. Become concrete through patterns of social organization. Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped, but is also the world in which those forms are experienced, understood and interpreted (JACKSON, 1989, p.2 a*pud*: CORRÊA and ROSENDAHL, 2007, p. 174).

---

[2] When we refer to the communication space, we are making reference to spaces socially constructed that are capable to absorb important aspects of the debate, of the dialogue, the entertainment and of the collective confrontation. Physically, they can be media or physical spaces like squares, coffees, etc, but the important is to understand them not only like a reunion of structures or objects where happen, for example, the actions of the social actor or political, but like a process that forms itself in this interaction between actions and objects. In this way, if the space is a process that forms itself in this interaction, he gains autonomy and interfere into reality.

For Williams (2008), that is an important thinker of Cultural Studies, culture must have a large conception, that doesn't replaces the notions more specifics, but that be capable to indicate all of its complexes relations. For him, culture can be understood like a "system of significations" (WILLIAMS, 2008, p. 206). For Stuart Hall (2009), another thinker of Cultural Studies, culture can be understood like "the ground of practical, representations, languages and concrete costumers of any society historically specific" (HALL, 2009, p. 313). And include in this the contradictors forms of common sense that help him to shape it. But the proper author defends that the culture definitions are problem and aren't unique. "The concept continues complex – local of convergent interests, in spite of a logical idea or conceptuality clear" (HALL, 2009, p. 126). Cosgrove (2007), that works in the cultural geography perspective, goes on the same line and say that little is gained by attempting a precise definition of culture because, in doing so, implies its reduction to an objective category, denying its essential subjectivity. For the author, human beings, with its sensory and material reality, experience and transform the natural world through direct engagement.

> The production and reproduction of material life are necessarily a collective art, mediated in consciousness and sustained through codes of communication. This latter is symbolic production. Such codes include not only the language in its formal sense, but the gesture, clothing, personal and social behavior, music, painting, dance, ritual, ceremony and buildings. Even this list does not exhaust the range of symbolic productions through which we maintain our lived world, because all human activity is, at the same time, material and symbolic, production and communication (COSGROVE, 2007, p. 103).

Wagner e Mikesell (2007), also studiers of cultural geography, emphasize the idea that search for understand the relation between the communication active, symbolical and material. For them, the culture results from capacity of human beings communicated with each other using symbols. So, when the people think and act on the same way, they do it because work and talk together, in others words, inside a space of social integration. They participated of the learning with the same friends and masters, "Prattle on about the same events, issues and personalities, watch around it, attach the same significance to man-made objects, make part of the same rituals and even recall the same past" (WAGNER AND MIKESELL, 2007, p. 28)

The construction of this relation mediated by communication demonstrated the centrality of the spatial question to comprehension of the culture, that can be also understood

like the space intersubjective where symbols and practical are capable to be elaborated, transmitted and divided. But we know that is not the geographical space that limits the boundaries of culture. When exist conditions to expand these spaces through the ability of the circulation of ideas and objects in a process of redesigning and symbolic sharing, culture expands. Wagner and Mikesell said that a community of people who share a common culture can be stuck in a remote village, in which all the inhabitants are in daily contact, but can also "extend over a vast territory where people, objects and ideas circulate more or less freely and continuously" (WAGNER AND MIKESELL, 2007, p. 29)

Until this point, we develop this relationship by communication, culture and space so that the concept of culture has become extensive and, often, does not reflect the differences presents in the same social class and in divisions of alternative cultures, regional, ethnic and others brought to light in the complexity of the major contemporary metropolises. Inside this large definition of culture, we can affirm that there is also a process of meaning and reframing constantly negotiated between specific groups and sectors of the same society and of the same social class. Williams (2008) shows that social class should not be understood as a culturally monolithic concept.

> Certain groups inside a class may be rising or falling of importance, according to the general development of the class and society. In addition, the groups within a class may have cultural affiliations, sometimes religious, alternatives that are not characteristic of the class as a whole. And yet, in any traditional class, there are processes of internal differentiation, often by type of work. (WILLIAMS, 2008, p. 74)

The point is that cultural studies almost exceeded a discussion that has already taken nearly 100 years and was generated by Marxism. This discussion is what Hall (2009) calls a double reductionism: economistic reductionism, in which economic processes are crucial to the development of ideas and class reductionism, by stratifying social conflicts restricted to issues of class (HALL, 2009, p. 253). This discussion of Marxist thought, but not so explicitly present in Marx himself, as noted by Hall (2009), had been started already in the first half of the twentieth century with the publication of the works of Bakhtin and Gramsci.

But these revisions did not mean simplification or a previous return to the criticism that Marx himself does to idealism. The analysis of culture comes, thereafter, to be a mutual interaction of all social practices, by passing the problem of the determination. For Hall, the

200

dominant paradigm in Cultural Studies opposes the concept of culture as a mere reflection residual and as a practice resulting from a structure that dominates human activity.

> He conceptualizes culture as something that intertwines all social practices, and these practices, in their way, as a common form of human activity: as sensuous human praxis, as an activity through which men and women make history (...) in no event shall the 'practice' to be treated as transparently intentional: we make history, but based on conditions previously not produced by ourselves. The practice is a way the structure is actively reproduced (HALL, 2009, p. 133/158)

The practice is expressed in rituals, behaviors, products, everyday services and other activities that materialize the ideas and ideology. For as already alerted Bakhtin, every sign is ideological. "Every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow of reality, but also a fragment of material reality" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 33). The practice limits the space of signs that are common to a community. The language provides a geography of the interaction of a given culture. It is in this cultural space that exist the communication space, a space that expresses the culture and is eminently ideological because is the place of signification. This space can also be what Althusser called the space of reproduction ideological state, represented by the media, schools, public agencies etc… "It is in this sense that "the social is never out of the semiotic. Each social practice is constituted in the interaction between meaning and representation" (Hall 2009, p. 169). The communication space is therefore an area of ideological struggle, which plays incessantly in a semiotic dialogue. Conflict and consensus seeking a hegemonic stability space, capable of expanding horizons and make similar the comprehension of signs. The more level the understanding of signs, the less tension, more power to expand the communication space, larger the geographic area of culture.

This comprehension is important when trying to understand the product resulting from the workers of the communications industry, or better, the workers who are producing and reproducing signs in areas of communication, as the result of this work is, itself, language and meanings that reproduce themselves ideologically. "Language is a means par excellence by which things are "represented" in thought, being, therefore, the medium in which ideology is generated and transformed. However, in the language, the same social relation can be distinctly represented and inferred (HALL, 2009, p. 262)." And this happens because language by its nature is not fixed to their referents in a relation of one by one, but multireferential (Hall, 2009). Accordingly, and as its known, the reception is also very open and can result in meanings that

201

are not fully predetermined.

Bakhtin already said that an ideological product is part of reality as any physical body, an instrument of production or consumer product, but, unlike these, reflects and refracts another reality that is external to it. "Everything that is ideological has a meaning and refers to something outside of yourself. In other words, everything that is ideological is a sign. Without signs there is no ideology" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 31). From this perspective, the result of the work coming from the industrial process of communication is not only highly ideological but at the same time, capable of producing meanings that go beyond the desired in the production process. Therefore, we can say that the movement of transformation the news into a product, developed by the industrialization process of the press of the nineteenth century, not decreased it in its mediator capacity, but on the contrary, increased and changed profoundly it significant capacity. It is known that the news or information sold by the media industry is itself a sign, regardless of their nature or purpose, especially if we compare it with a product of the food industry. The sign is necessarily the product of the media through language, different from food products, for example, that does not contain the language between their ingredients of production.

But Bakhtin already warned us that any product can be transformed into ideological sign. He cites the example of bread and wine, which are religious symbols. But this "consumer product as such is not, in any way, a sign" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 32). The product marketed by the media industry is, itself, ideological because it consists of signs and has no other function but to signify and represent.

> The ideological domination coincides with the domain of signs: they are mutually corresponding. There, where the sign is located, is also ideological. All that is ideological have a semiotic value (Bakhtin, 1988, p.32).

In the case of products consisting of the written language, the question then is very critical, because the word, for example, is itself an ideological phenomenon.

> reality of every word is absorbed by its function as a sign. The word does not carry anything that is not connected to this function, nothing that has not been generated by it. The word is the most pure and sensitive social relationship" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 36).

And the word is the primary tool of those who produce the news. On the same way, all artistic and symbolic image embodied in a particular physical object is already an ideological sign, capable of producing a reality outside it.

202

As for cultural geographers Cosgrove (2007), Wagner and Mikesell (2007), can be observed earlier in Bakhtin the construction of space in the interaction between the sign and communication. For the Russian author, every sign is the result of a consensus among individuals who are socially organized in the course of an interaction process. "The ways of the sign are conditioned both by the social organization of such individuals as the circumstances in which the interaction takes place" (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 44).

The complicating factor is that this interaction occurs in an area of conflict between social groups and classes, even if using a language that is common to all. For Bakhtin, social class (and also added social groups) should not be confused with community semiotics, which may be more restricted. To paraphrase Bakhtin, we can conceptualize communication space as an arena where happens the class struggle and the struggle of social groups, as every ideological sign is confronted with indices of conflicting values.

The ágora in ancient times, the public square in the Middle Ages and the Coffees of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are examples of spaces of communication in the same culture, same community semiotics, and that manifest themselves through the meanings and representations common to individuals who shared these places. The technological development that has produced media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television etc. did not change the relationship of mediation when it changes the character of spatial information in apparently vehicular (able to exceed the boundaries of the producing community), this is not a major change. These technologies have changed only the boundaries of the space community. After all, the traveler has make long distances before the appearance of the newspaper, but the representation of the traveler, as well as any newspaper, occur within an established and recognized semantic space, it can be an isolated island, a coffee or a continental nation.

It is this ability of strain space that is present in the transformation of the spaces of cultural mediation. The square and coffees are no longer an exclusive and limited to a collective communication of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The arrival of the press expands the limits in order to make geographically isolated people could share the same culture, same area of meaning. The great transformation was not the vehicular process of media technologies, but their ability to multiply the semiotic space shared. The industrial and technological development of the media is a process of production of space. The media production (print, radio, TV, internet) are the production and reproduction of space.

The production of space, then becomes, a major transformation and a challenge brought by the media. This is like that because we know that isn't possible to enlarge the space

203

of communication with just the development of a technology, even as the space is configured in semantic edges that need to be broken so that the meanings and reframes can be recognized by the expansion of the community semiotic. And in this process, the production of news as a commodity has a key role, since this is perhaps the most effective way to dissignification of language. It is an attempt to turn ideas into objects.

In fact, since the time when the news circulated by letter, as shown by Rizzini (1977), it absorbs a use of value and a use of exchange. The association somehow inevitable between merchandise and bourgeois class and that, in the process of social development of capitalism, built all the mode of constitution of the media, was the major generator of important historical interpretations, presents at critical theory, capable of revealing the ideological nature of this communication that expands the space of cities and countries and cuts go through social classes and groups.

Despite recognize that the news, product constituted by language, more specifically by word and image, is itself an ideological sign, the notion of communication spaces should not see this as the most important aspect for the understanding of its real effect on the society. It is not the discovery of underlying signs that proves the origin and manifestation of news on ideology of a social class.

What matters on communication space is the reverse effect of this process, perhaps more significant for the history of printing. The most important may not be trying to discover the ideological signs present in the news, because we already know by all history research in the humanities that the news is itself an ideological sign, which reproduces the ideology, and that is part of a space for dialogue socially and culturally significant of the community. Instead of this concern, that has an inherent character, the space communication tries to see it in its opposite: tries to show the capacity of annulation of an ideological sign contained in the production of information.

Is important to recognize with Bakhtin that the dominant class tends to give a character to the ideological sign intangible and above the differences of class, "in order to suppress or conceal the struggle of the social indicators of value where it locks, in order to make sign monovalent" (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 47). This is perhaps the most important process of understanding the production of news and information as a whole, which made the media can break down the barriers of geographical space and establish new boundaries of semantic construction. The communication space, with its cultural diversity, can only be built, extended, expanded, as a process of dissignification. This is the utopia of the media, through the process

204

of dissignification, trying to subdue the ideological sign and produce spaces breaking new frontiers.

This is the process that we can call institutionalization of the media, the time when the media seeks to shed the ideological signs in an attempt to mediate the cultural process in the space of communication. In the midst of its industrial expansion, the press submit itself into a major transformation processed by techniques of writing and language, expanding the horizons of coverage, objectivity, new themes, new format, thematic mapping, recognition the periphery of the great centers, recognition differences, professionalization, standardization and indignation at the lawlessness, corruption, crime etc..

All of this development should not be seen exclusively as a process of ideological camouflage, but as a process of hegemony that has established itself in the process of dialogue with other social classes and political groups, a process to cleanse the language. The problem is that this process needs to be reconstructed and negotiated constantly because the signs are polyvalent.

> This values of an ideological sign is a feature of very importance. In fact, is the combination of different index value of signs that makes the sign alive and mobile, able to evolve (Bakhtin, 1988, p. 46).

The treatment of information as a product was key in this process, since it seeks to exempt it from an ideological charge and polysemy to make it continuously a product in which the use value is expressed in its maximum value. The news is so much more a product when it is able to expand its own space of movement and reach different cultural spheres, classes and social groups. And this expansion of space is a process constantly negotiated of ideological signs, a process of building the culture.

In this sense, you can understand what the journalists called an impoverishment of language promoted by writing techniques. That is, an attempt to bring the news to an ordinary commodity in our daily life, with significant load monovalent and rudimentary. This process seeks to smooth out the news on the contradictions of society, class and ideological conflicts. This is the process that can be called dissignification of news. Although it is inherently ideological and significant, the news generated in the process of constitution of the media as a hegemonic model of information society means there is a process of dissignification the press originated in a specific social class. The closer the news is of the products, the more it creates an illusion and a reality of its expression objectified. However, the process of meaninglessness news should not be valued as a masking process of ideological intentions, but as a class utopian

process, negotiated and originated in the need for dialogue between social classes and groups in order to sustain a significant process hegemonic, capable of reducing the differences in modes of production, cultural, ethnic, religious and other.

But it is certain that the transformation of news into a product didn't have this deleterious effect on ideology, but also served the reproduction process of capital. The process of capitalist development enables the reproduction of capital in new technologies and cheaper cost, increased capacity and use of technologies that establish a new dynamic in the production of signs, with potential resources that insert images possibilities that undermine the very harshness of the language writing, opening space for new heights between the different possibilities of reception. When moving from one character class, it allows to multiply and expand in various segments of society and regions, generating a cumulative character of capital, culture and, especially, space.

## REFERENCES

BAKHTIN, Mikhail (volochinov). *Marxismo e Filosofia da Linguagem.* São Paulo: Hucintec, 1988. 196 p.

CORRÊA, Roberto Lobato e ROSENDAHL, Zeny (org.). *Introdução à Geografia Cultural.* Rio de Janeiro: Bertand Brasil, 2007. 224 p.

COSGROVE, Dennis. "Em direção a uma geografia cultural radical: problemas da teoria" p-p: 103-134. in: CORRÊA, Roberto Lobato e ROSENDAHL, Zeny (org.). *Introdução à Geografia Cultural*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertand Brasil, 2007. 224 p.

HALL, Stuart. "A relevância de Gramsci para o estudo de raça e etinicidade" p. 276-316. In: SOVIK, Liv (org.) *Diáspora: Identidades e Mediações Culturais*. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2009.

_____. "Estudos culturais: dois paradigmas" p.123-150. In: SOVIK, Liv (org.) *Diáspora: Identidades e Mediações Culturais.* Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2009.

WAGNER, Philip e MIKESELL, Marvin. "Os temas da geografia cultural" p.27-61. In: CORRÊA, Roberto Lobato e ROSENDAHL, Zeny (org.). *Introdução à Geografia Cultural.* Rio de Janeiro: Bertand Brasil, 2007.

WILLIAMS, Raymond. *Cultura.* São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2008.

206