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## Miscellaneous

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**Tiago Quiroga**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9095-1034>

tagorj@terra.com.br

University of Brasilia

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## Mediatization and epistemological otherness: a hermeneutic approach to the communication field of knowledge

### Abstract

**This article focuses on otherness in the field of communications studies, within the social context of generalized mediatization. We argue that, on one hand, the new organizational dimension of communication, mediatization, based on information hybridism (Sodré, 2014), turns communication into a form of knowledge that is decisive for societal functioning. Yet, on the other hand, insofar as it integrates communication within information regimes –in particular, speed flows– mediatization seems to challenge the constitution of epistemological otherness within this field of knowledge. As a space in which synergy among different social fields is created, mediatization not only amplifies the discursive contiguity of knowledge–production and professional spheres, but also establishes the absence of duration as a common institutional premise. This phenomenon points to the retreat of time as a space of difference. Within the new regime of temporality, based on the virtual acceleration of time, a significant portion of communication theories seem to appear without any type of virtuality. In epistemological terms, one of the most acute consequences of dismantling time, as a space of intelligibility, is the constriction of the principle of autonomy that, at one time, more thoroughly grounded different fields of knowledge,**

**especially within the humanities. Hence, the hermeneutic horizon becomes crucial to the development of social sciences. As a residual condition of discursive autonomy, hermeneutic resources shape an alignment of time and knowledge. In the end, understanding continues to constitute an existential quality.**

### Keywords

**Time, mediatization, otherness, speed, autonomy, hermeneutics.**

### 1. Presentation: Real Time and Epistemological Otherness

The underlying concerns of this article are the result of specific questions raised in relation to the field of communication, albeit not limited to it. In fact, the issues we discuss here may be extended to the field of humanities as a whole. We inquire into the otherness of this field of knowledge, especially within the context of the knowledge society (Machlup, 2016). We pose the question as to whether communication actually constitutes a discipline in itself or not, and if it presently even makes sense to think of the configuration of specific disciplinary knowledge. In short, we may even ask ourselves, “Why inquire into the otherness of fields of

knowledge, in particular those that are linked to the humanities, within the contemporary context?" Our point of departure is the following proposition: within the current landscape of the *positive society* (Han, 2014a), the information paradigm, founded largely on the binomial finance-speed, is responsible for the production of a certain discursive uniformization of different social fields (scientific or not) in which the imperative of calculation, management, and control pushes us in the direction of the "hell of sameness" (Han, 2014a). The term *positive society* is borrowed from Han (2014a) to describe the conjectures of the transparency society. Here, *transparency* refers less to the themes of corruption or lack of trustworthiness in the ways public policy is implemented, and more to a new type of totalitarianism. According to the author, such society is founded on the freedom of information principle and is obsessed with the permanent optimizing of the whole of societal functioning. In Han's view, the ideal of transparency should be understood as a "systemic coercion that takes over the entirety of social facts, submitting them to a deep transformation [...] [especially because] attempts to make them operational and accelerated" (Han, 2014a, p. 12). The transparency is coercive being that it is a new way to disseminate the intense optimization of present time, now founded on the principle of speed, leading to the discursive standardization of diverse social fields.

To a large extent, this standardization may be seen as the result of the disarticulation, promoted by speed, of the dialectical tension between positive-negative and self-other upon which modern culture has been founded. Recognized as one of the precursors of this cultural matrix, Hegel considers historical consciousness the result of the permanent tension between *what is* and *what is not* [...], which is a consequence of the "immediate disappearance movement of one in the other" (Châtelet, 1985, p. 52). This is the advent of dialectics as one of the frameworks of the cultural experience inaugurated by modernity. According to Hegel, "it is said that *Being* and *Nothingness* are ontologically exclusive and that, notwithstanding, to claim Being at the same time enunciates Nothingness and to claim Nothingness is also to enunciate Being. To say the *one* or the *other* is therefore the same" (Châtelet, 1985, p. 54). For Hegel, then, although governed by absolute difference, Being and Nothingness belong to the same unity: the movement of historical unfolding. Today, however, the principle of constitutive negativity of contemporary culture is being dismantled. Through speed, the self-other, positive-negative tension, which marks the formation of the historical subject, especially that of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is being undone. So, we may ask, "What, exactly, is this negative dimension of culture?" and "Why does its elimination imply the loss of a dialectical perspective, that is, the idea that we are necessarily constituted by an *Other* without whom we cannot understand ourselves as subjects of history?" One of the most objective answers is found in Freud's reflections when he argues that the human being necessarily results from a type of original septum. In his view, this condition becomes apparent when "the self denies exactly what the unconscious asserts and desires boundlessly." "That thing" remains largely hidden from the self. Thus, there is a schism running through the human soul that does not allow the ego (self) to reconcile with itself. This schism makes the transparency of the self, impossible (Han, 2014a, p. 14). In a similar vein, we are also reminded of Lacan's assertion that "the self is no more than a phenomenon *within* the subject" (Lacan *apud* Sodr e, 1996, p. 21). Fernando Pessoa follows in the same vein with his take on the *paradoxical shape of the truth*, expressed in his assertion that "life is not coherent with itself, because it dies" (Pessoa, 1986, p. 28). We therefore find, in all three cases, examples of what we refer to as the negativity of culture. We see, in all experiences, that the consciousness of the subject "is under the watchfulness of the Other" (Sodr e, 1996, p. 21). In other words, it is the negative the portion of the cultural experience that does not allow us a transparent idea of ourselves. However, what now becomes an issue is that, within the logics of transparency, we produce subjects oriented toward the outside. It is the decline of interiority that characterizes the productivist subject (Han, 2015). Under the current mode of the production of post-industrial capitalism,

this subject is aligned with the productive logics of communication (visibility) and circulation (information) whose valued ideals guide everything toward total exteriority, now founded on the imaginary of unlimited communication. Thus, in this context, “[...] people lose their interiority, since it is the latter that becomes a fetter to and holds back the speed of communication” (Han, 2015, p. 19). After all, the speedier the circulation, the greater the visibility and the better the productivity. From this, historical contingency marked by the “chain reaction of the same” is derived, expressly, the imperative of speed as a condition for the fluidity of finance capital. The “negativity of the other and that which is strange” (Han, 2014a, p. 12) becomes a veritable commercial. In producing the friction of distance, it blocks fluid economic circulation and, therefore, must be replaced.

This means that, among the consequences of the widespread acceptance of “digital logics” within different social fields, we discover what Bourdieu (2004b) refers to as the flattening of the different diligence of the spirit. What this refers to is the removal of the ‘jagged edges’ of experience from the functional premises of the communication-information hybrid; expressly from art, religion, literature, and most significantly, from science itself, which is increasingly brought within the realm of a single discursive regime of transparency. Within it, “things are smoothed and flattened out [...] [placed] without resistance into the smoothed chain of capital, communication and information” (Han, 2014a, p. 11). What, therefore, comes to the forefront is the blurring of the boundaries or distances between different social fields. It is the narrowing of reigning logics, which include their formative instances, as well as the logics that organize the social system, especially the field of labor, which is fundamentally structured by a type of technical rationale, once industrial but now cognitive, effectively constituted through economic domination (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1985).

However, this is not a generic phenomenon. It is largely the result of the current context of generalized mediatization where institutions and cultural practices merge with digital media in irreversible ways, particularly through procedures that engage with the temporality of *real time*. We refer particularly to the experience of time where “[...] events always [seem to move] ahead of people’s ability to interpret them, just as the social overflow of technologies anticipates their possible interpretation through individual and collective forms of consciousness” (Sodré, 2014, p. 77). In this context, not only distances, but the very differences present in the distinct world facts translations seem to shrink, despite the very specific principles inherent to each of the social fields to which they are supposed to respond. This is due to the fact that, within the culture of the interface, which in fact becomes fixed in the midst of progressive “integration” to the conjectures of real time, is the absence of duration. It becomes the common premise for the functioning of contemporary societies (Virilio, 1997). As a result, the principle of autonomy and the forms of otherness, constitutive of different social fields, have been shrinking. In both, it is the retreat of time, as a locus of difference, which seems to vanish. The hypothesis we develop within this text is as follows: the intelligibility produced through real time, sustained by the principle of speed and responsible for today’s logic of the simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1991), places constraints on the principles of autonomy and of the otherness of different social fields. This is a temporality based on the logic of the simulacrum because it no longer refers to a “territory, [...] a referential being or [...] a substance, but rather the generation, through models, of a real that has neither origins nor reality: the hyper-real” (Baudrillard, 1991, p. 8). As a consequence of the logics of the simulacrum, real time no longer operates on the basis of the immanence of time (Gil, 2008), as a space of discursive originality, when confronted by the so-called logics of the macrocosm (Bourdieu, 2004a). We speak of the macrocosm as the fundamental premise in which fields of knowledge are the result of determined social conditions. From this perspective, science is conceived as the result of the continuous spawning that permeates the social, always possessing a determined political dimension that reflects the sentiments of a variety of historical conjunctions. For this reason, resulting necessarily from social laws, to wit, from

the struggles and conflicts that generally characterize different fields, scientific production also exists in relation to this macrocosm. Thus, epistemic products not only find subsidy in the elements that their timeliness offers, or aspects given by their socio-historical context, but –above and beyond all– come to express, in their very analytical categories, the postulates and assemblages of their time (Quiroga, 2013).

However, characterized by the permanent dialectical tensions between the positive and the negative, the self and the other, duration, as a fundamental element of the immanence of time, becomes unbearable for digital intelligibility. Founded on the temporality of sameness, the new intelligibility, based on the obsessive optimizing of present time, no longer tolerates the presence of an *other* that represents something distinct from its own intensification (Han, 2014a). Consequently, the principle of the *negativity* of time is withdrawn from it, undoing the dialectical tension that not only founds modern culture, but, above all, establishes the immanence of time as the underlying element of the intelligibility of different contemporary fields of knowledge. We thus produce a kind of knowledge marked by the absence of exteriority, knowledge without any type of virtuality, devoid of what exists as a power to become, of what, uncertain or unknown, resides necessarily within the condition of what is not yet (Gil, 2003). The issue, then, becomes a concern if we accept the hypothesis, particularly dear to the humanities, that time, present time in particular, is the virtuality that historically enables connection to particular ideals of freedom (Bloch, 2001). In modern terms, perhaps the most expressive face of this connection is the advent of the idea of autonomy (Renaut, 2001). It stands as the principle that establishes freedom as the result of a new interiority in which men and women are their own legislators. They no longer bow to authority or tradition, but obey their own ability to teach themselves to what they must submit. To a large extent, this principle was the expression of a political and cultural ideal of freedom linked to the fundamentals of present time and modern forms of knowledge. Yet in the case of communication, as well as in the areas of knowledge that include or engage with the humanities originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and take the present time as the formative space of their principles of self-determination, the virtuality of the fundamental principle exercised by time is lost (Renaut, 2001). Within the permanent impossibility of duration, it is the otherness of the present that escapes us; it is the very immanence of present time that cannot be incorporated as inspiration within contemporary forms of knowledge. Although this may not be exclusive to the field of communication, given that it is its intimacy with real time that whisks everything else out of sight, the episode we are talking about here finds important repercussions in that arena. This is the issue we will now go on to discuss.

## **2. Knowledge, Mediatization and the Specific Case of the Field of Communication**

The process that involves the shortening of distances between social fields, depending, of course, exactly upon which of the latter we are dealing with, presents its own particularities. In academic terms, the phenomenon refers to the ideal of the university as a service provider. From the perspective of this new status, fields of knowledge, in general, and postgraduate programs in particular, take on a discursive and managerial information format that conditions their pursuit of quantitative results, based on universal productivism, as well as the way in which students are trained. The latter must now, above and beyond all else, be capable of planning, formulating strategies and managing projects. In the specific case of the field of communication, the event acquires widespread acceptance. We are here referring to an area of knowledge constituted in close proximity to the logics of the macrocosm. Examined from a historical perspective, it may not be too much to say that communication emerges from and develops under the aegis of a particular type of knowledge demand, originating in the market and easily incorporating the characteristics of the prevailing economic and technological paradigm. Unlike other social sciences for which the state became an important source of demands for knowledge production, communication, from the beginning, was

oriented toward the reproduction of a knowledge form originally legitimated by industrial routines (Sodré, 2014, p. 94). In addition to identifying educational background with practical competence, professional knowledge (market) attempted to enthrone a particular type of ideology in such a way that the principal of autonomy of the field went unnoticed or became irrelevant. Professional specialization was self-legitimized as providing a cognitive originality to be accompanied, most especially, by academic curriculum. As Sodré asserts, “This is the basis of a conflict (scarcely studied) within the field of representation that knowledge in the field of communication elaborates in reference to itself” (2014, p. 117).

In the contemporary world, however, given generalized mediatization and its informational hybridisms, the organizational dimension of communication is intensified and the proximity of professional and knowledge-producing fields is radicalized. This is, in the first place, because its constitutive hybridism is one of the major sites of contemporary economic circulation. As Sodré argues, “In today’s globalized world, finance capitalism and communication become an inseparable pair. Contemporary capitalism is simultaneously bound to finance and media: financialization and media are two faces of the same coin called advanced society” (2014, p. 55). In the second place, due to increasing orientation toward its function as an essential component of the organization of life, the communication-information hybrid produces “the premises of the process of formation of a new way of socializing, a new existential ecosystem in which communication becomes a general mode of organization” (Sodré, 2014, p. 14). Thus, rather than an aesthetic alternative, the incorporation of this “knowledge,” which originates within communication technologies, becomes the condition for enhancing institutions and social participation.

Today, there is major consensus regarding the fact that communication, in its practice, is an ideology that mobilizes a new type of labor force, one that corresponds to the present stage of commodity production by global command. From the perspective of the liberal bourgeois State, it becomes a major element in the social, cultural and political equilibrium of the *polis* that is now situated under the reign of finance (Sodré, 2014, p. 85).

Unlike mass communication, which is linked primarily to the problem of entertainment, persuasion, and publicity, mediatization places the competencies and uses of communication within an effectively organizational dimension. This is thereby the condition that seals its role, not only as the basis for a broad cognitive project of institutional organization but, above all else, as the dynamizing pole of synergy between different social fields. The paradox, however, is that through this new organizational dimension and although interests in its acquisition as a new type of knowledge are emphasized, it is this very condition that leads mediatization to undermine any otherness in the epistemological point of view. In the face of a new practical configuration, the discursive contiguity of the knowledge-production and professional spheres is amplified. Technological development, increasingly devoted to the urgencies of real time, provides incentives for theoretical incursions that, persistently aligned with the so-called facts of the world, lead to the reproduction of the logics of the very techno-cultural order they claim to examine in a critical light (Sodré, 2014, p. 115). With this, the fragmentation of the field is consolidated, transforming means into ends, consecrating a bias toward practical application, and, above all else, promoting the idea that the epistemological debate is extemporaneous to the field and therefore unnecessary. In reality, we are left on the defensive, since this attitude is much more the fruit of disciplinary entrenchment than the result of consistent conceptual articulation (Sodré, 2014, p. 103).

### **3. A Blurry Ontology: Issues of Transmission and Speed**

On one hand, the double event introduced by the paradox of the knowledge, society establishes and recognizes, in the new organizational dimension of communication, knowledge that is decisive to the workings of society. Yet, on the other hand, when integrated into new information regimes (Wiener, 1968), and to speed flows in particular, knowledge is

not only emptied of any ontology of a wider scope, but is also stretched to the limits of its own representational possibilities. Therefore, this is an issue that is ontological in its origins and speaks to the phenomenon of communication itself. In light of the progressive hybridism that merges communication with the logics of information, inquiries into its contemporary nature are expanding (Marcondes Filho, 2010; Sodr , 2014). Given the unprecedented expansion of this organizational direction, changes point to the radicalization of the not-so-new idea of communication as a synonym of transmission (Sodr , 20014). According to Sodr , change occurs when communication is itself superimposed on that which is to be communicated (Sodr , 2014). The former loses its proper qualities and is increasingly understood in terms of an exchange of messages, signs, or commodities. The author goes on to argue that when communication is eclipsed by the issue of interaction, in addition to becoming a synonym of transmission, it is, above all, reduced to that which is communicated. Furthermore, although the experience of communication and that which is communicated are originally distinct, through mediatization they are made to overlap. Emphasis is placed on the expansion of the informational code which, in detriment of the subjects, turns into “the support base of phenomena or statements” (Sodr , 2014, p. 81). “Initially, to communicate –to act with others, or to refrain from acting with others– means to connect, relate, intertwine, organize or let oneself be organized by the constituent, intensive and pre-subjective dimension of the symbolic ordering of the world” (Sodr , 2014, p. 9). We will not go further into this approach here, although it is worthwhile to emphasize the author’s important critique in relation to the historical perspective that situates “the interpretation of culture in terms of communication codes” (Lafontaine, 2004, p. 90), pointing to “the sharing of communication as a common problem” (Lafontaine, 2004, p. 37). Hence, the problematic paradox of communication as transmission. This is what integrates communication within informational flows, enclosing it within the condition of “the thing that is communicated” (Sodr , 2014). In this case, the message is information, with much less importance placed on the problem of its meaning and much more on its function or performance as a unit of measurement within a particular operational system. In short, what we wish to highlight is that, seen from the organizational dimensions in which communication emerges as an essential attribute of institutions, not only are the conditions under which it becomes a synonym for radicalized transmission, but is effectively transformed into information exchange. Seen now from the vantage point of its centrality within contemporary society, and “understood in terms of the exchange of information, communication [becomes] the source of any organization” (Lafontaine, 2004, p. 41). Thus, this is the operation through which the first and most significant merging with the idea of information takes place.

The progressive integration of communication into information regimes, in which it comes to effectively constitute the “combination of data processing with electronics and telecommunications” (Sodr , 2014, p. 20), is, however, not limited merely to the problem of transmission but, above all, to the key issue of speed. As a new order of grandeur, what information seems to have brought to levels never before imagined is the notion of speed, that is, a kind of new universal metrics, as important for politics as material accumulation was for capitalism (Virilio, 1997). Indispensable on the international globalization scene, speed, within cybernetic networks, takes on the form of pure judgment, without substance and now invested with a materiality of its own. Its major trait is its intensification, within the order of time, of de-territorializing logics, which are now elevated to a generalized level. Within this context, perhaps more than territory, it is time, particularly the speed of automotive bodies, that becomes the true source of the most recent obsessions of international geopolitics. Yet it is precisely within this scenario that the notion of speed takes on the condition of a new universality (Virilio, 1997). It is here we find the second vector through which communication is engulfed by information processes.

Attracted by the hybrid notion of placement, communication becomes so connected to the idea of information that this attachment no longer allows for any quality other than those linked to the materialities of accelerating flow, circulation, and data verification. Within this context, the notion of communication is subsumed within that of information. It is a culture of acceleration within which the idea of information no longer recognizes any otherness, particularly that of time, external to the speed of transmission of its internal mechanisms of intelligibility. Put in other words, the vector of speed is the second decisive element in the current expansion of mathematic codes that makes communication increasingly a synonym of transmission. Through the virtual acceleration of time, mathematical codes are expanded in such a way that a specific type of representation, one that at first served a limited set of social practices and forms of knowledge, now becomes a new general equivalent of value. Vectors of transmission and speed are a part of the event, which then seems to dilute any other quality that communication may have. Thus, it gradually becomes the condition of information exchange, in which what prevails is more “[...] the code or structures of phenomenological conscience” (Sodré, 2014, p. 83) and less communication as a common action, a type of symbolic a priori, without which no vital exchange can take place (Sodré, 2014, p. 16). Thus, it is this organizational dimension that retains communication, not only as the basis of a wide cognitive institutional project but, above all, as the dynamic pole of synergy for the contiguity of social fields.

#### **4. Epistemological Issue: Duration, a Condition of Otherness**

Initially limited to the phenomenon of communication itself, the issue of duration extends itself to theories that subsume their own interpretive activities within the duration that allows them some respite from the intermittent speed of a present made ever accessible, as well as emptied of any emancipatory vigor (Han, 2014a). Although echoes of the new communication-information hybridism have been various and that point, initially, toward important shifts in the nature of the phenomenon of communication itself, they also move ahead at the level of representation, that is, in the way they are interpreted within the realm of this knowledge. From the perspective of transmission and speed, however, communication is subsumed within the information paradigm by all that is perhaps dearest to it. Within the new temporal regime, based on the virtual acceleration of time, the phenomenon of communication gestures toward the limits of its own representation, within the order of consciousness, through whatever duration is possible (Sodré, 2014). To a large extent, change is related to what may seem to Sodré as the undoing of time as an instance of conceptual representation in the field of communication. In his view, speed and the incessant production of events breed a type of immediatism that makes “the consciousness of the representation of phenomena within a duration (thereby, within a temporal thickness)” (Sodré, 2014, p. 76) into an unlikely achievement. In his opinion, unlike the postulates of the traditional social sciences in which the statute of time as an instance of retreat persists, “the future now falls technologically on the present, and the latter, through the digital treatment of images, seems to become the past” (Sodré, 2014, p. 76). Thus, within this context, a significant part of the research in this area is engulfed by the intelligibility of that which is called real time and which subsumes the experience of duration within its interpretive dynamics, as a space of difference that is decisive to the constitution of the autonomy of the field.

Concerned with determining the limits and possibilities of establishing sociology as an autonomous field of knowledge, Bourdieu defends the radical character of conceptual networks as the original nucleus of the principle of the autonomy of scientific fields. Specific derivatives of the social field, these networks are composed of attributes and abilities that grant them a certain autonomy to refract or filter the influences of the social world in their own particular way. According to Bourdieu (2004b), if these fields are able to enjoy such relative autonomy, it is because they are constituted by specific capacities that authorize them

to speak, to wit, that offer them legitimacy and a place of their own from which to translate diverse social phenomenon. Hence, the attempt to identify, safeguard and dig more deeply into a certain theoretical corpus, with justification based solely and exclusively on the recognition of the originality of its interpretive attitudes in light of the facts of the world. The goal is to demonstrate that there is no scientific object that does not necessarily result from the intentionally created conceptual connection between social phenomena and the theoretical framework of each scientific field. Bourdieu argues that it is due to this that scientific fields, if they are to acquire autonomy, must produce, especially within the ambit of the accumulation of so-called “pure” intellectual capital, original translations of the facts of the world (Bourdieu, 2004a). By originality, we mean “the care given to man’s humanity in all his creations” (Sodré, 2014, p. 90). Restated, it is an experience that connects interpretive activity to the density of a precarious and immanent time, understanding it as an activity that is not disconnected from its own existence (Dilthey, 2010; Carneiro Leão, 2002).

Therefore, our argument is that within communication, as inebriated as we have become with real time, we lose sight of the issue of originality because we no longer recognize the immanence of time. Bewitched by the pyrotechnics of technological effects, we understand the experience of the present as availability, that is, we see it according to its need for permanent optimization. As a result, the reflections we produce are restricted to the temporality of sameness (Han, 2014a). We remove the principle of negativity, inherent to the immanence of time, from it and allow it to be constituted by the principle of exteriority, taken from our desires of dominion through language. Furthermore, this operation only becomes possible because it implies the dismantling of the dialectical connection between the positive and the negative, self and other, which are foundational to modern culture and constitute the unfolding of history itself (Châtelet, 1985).

Considered one of the founders of 19<sup>th</sup> century intelligibility, Hegel (1770–1831), in the *Science of Logics* (2012) asserts that the unfolding of history (of truth in the order of time) is the result of the permanent tension between that which is and that which is not. Although apparently separate, dialectical movement brings them together as a unit that, actually, has always existed, notwithstanding the appearance of separateness. In other words, in the tension between *Being and Nothingness*, “each one disappears within its opposite,” thus becoming the movement of history itself (Châtelet, 1985, p. 52). In fact, this says that, by undoing this tension, it becomes possible to position the absence of duration as a new social imperative. Yet as a result, historical experience is no longer seen as a process of unfolding. It becomes a record of time without instant, event or destiny (Han, 2014a). This may explain, at least in part, the prevalence of theories that are increasingly disinterested in the incalculable within thought and ever more concerned with the calculability of data. Research of this sort is guided more by the performance of devices, devoid of consequences, and less by the resistance of a general other that is necessary to thought (Han, 2014b, p. 54). Within communication, this perspective generally leads to a subsuming of the logics of duration within those of speed, thereby leading to a type of reflection that is closer to technological description. Rather than having a merely deforming effect on theory (Han, 2014b, p. 56) – rather than shaping, or, in other words, “clarifying the world before explaining it [...]– the quantity of information results in a massive increase of entropy [...] and levels of noise” (Han, 2014b, p. 56). However, above all, this reinforces the effects of the undoing of time as a space of otherness within the communication field. Once coupled with real time, such research no longer embraces the immanence of time and, thereby, the impetus of history as it unfolds. In short, it represents the updating of the not-really-so-new idea that we should not be subordinate to the inexorable character of time.



## 5. Interpretation, a Condition for Autonomy

In epistemological terms, one of the most distinct consequences of dismantling the negativity of time is the exhaustion of its immanence, as a space of intelligibility (and otherness) of the different fields of knowledge. For this reason, the issue is not merely of the communication field, but of human sciences in general. We speak of knowledge based on an intelligibility that can be understood from the perspective of a consciousness of time, that is, a consciousness of the historicity of time (Gadamer, 2006). In this case, its particularities are derived from the so-called philosophies of history which, through the notion of progress, not only prepare the terrain for the entrance of time as an absolute agent of change (Koseleck, 2006), but effectively create the conditions for the establishment of present time or for the idea of the current moment (Foucault, 1984) as fundamental sites of otherness. Results of the paradigmatic understanding of human freedom as freedom of choice, autonomy being something that “demands in me the definition of my part of common humanity, irreducible to assertion of my unique singularity and to which my singularity must submit” (Renaut, 2001, p. 18), are that fields of knowledge of this sort, including that of communication, are derived from the “man of modern humanism [as] he who no longer accepts the dictates of norms and laws from the nature of things nor from God, but expects to choose them and base them on his own designs, through reason and will” (Renaut, 2001, p. 9)<sup>1</sup>.

Unlike authority based on tradition, these are forms of knowledge that unfold within a period that “perfectly admits the submission to norms and laws, as long as they are freely accepted” (Renaut, 2001, p. 17). It is, in short, a type of knowledge in which knowledge becomes the condition of possibility for philosophies of truth. Restated, it is the experience of freedom from which the humanities emerge, are consolidated, and are radically anchored in time as a principle of human self-determination. In other words, in removing the negativity of time from contemporary knowledge, what vanishes from the horizon of digital culture today is not only the important protagonism of the present time within the ambit of knowledge, but, above all else, the principle of autonomy that reigns in different fields of knowledge. Autonomy, the main principal in human sciences, is a historic precept for the production of epistemological otherness because, in fact, it is constituted as an instance in which time acts in the production of difference. Yet this condition comes as much from our experience of historical consciousness as do a large part of the epistemological issues that give the human sciences their singularity. Although not as interested in the problem of progress as in those issues that involve understanding, we may assert that these sciences are developed from the perspective of the formation of a consciousness of time or, perhaps, the consciousness we have of history, that is, of the “full consciousness of the historicity of every present time” (Gadamer, 2006, p. 17). Thus, understood as the path through which the individual can determine their own future, the idea of self-determination is founded in the order of immanent time that not only differentiates, in ontological terms, human and exact sciences, but also awards an intrinsic political value to the former, something which is often seen as undesirable within the realm of the natural sciences. In other words, the issue of the otherness in the human sciences is necessarily constituted from a political dimension that flows from the ideal of self-determination as result of the connection between the interior experiences of the subject and their immersion in the present time, that is, of freedom of choice as result of the immanence of time.

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<sup>1</sup> Within the ambit of the history of science or political philosophy, it is common to encounter a question regarding the advent of autonomy, whether as a truly modern creation or a direct legacy of classical Greece: “In Aristotle, the right that citizens have (and that defines their freedom) to collectively exercise a part of their sovereignty is in no way based on the recognition of the principle of autonomy [...]: citizenship, in this case, is much more –for those who enjoy it– a natural condition founded on the finalized organization of a nature within which some have been made to command and others to obey, some to become slaves and others, citizens” (Renaut, 2001, p. 10)

Thus, we need to understand how this notion of the subject becomes the bearer of a new political ideal of freedom, particularly evident in regards to the principle of autonomy. The latter is able to become a reality, to a large extent, through the way the notion of present time takes root within modern knowledge. Similarly, a variety of modern forms of knowledge, particularly within the human sciences, can be said to emanate from their respective translations of the ideal of freedom, in each present moment, within the ambit of knowledge. Firstly, it means asserting that, as heirs of modernity, our experience of freedom is historically determined. Thus, we speak not of a historical form of freedom, but of a cultural record of a freedom that is radically marked by time. Furthermore, it is marked in the sense of a time that acts by producing difference, constituting it in modern terms as autonomy. This means, secondly, that the present time is above all an interpretive device that produces otherness, insofar as it allows us to move beyond the continuity of tradition and, through the translation of its immanence, create our own notion of what is current. Our insistence, therefore, in reinforcing the issue of time as an absolute agent of change (Koseleck, 2006) occurs. If, on one hand, it is the notion that historically defines the human sciences, and thereby, communication, it is then, on the other, precisely the recent developments in the information paradigm that come to constrain the realization of any discursive otherness within knowledge. In fact, one of the major dislocations produced today, quite emblematically, within the field of communication, by the epistemological operators of speed and transmission, is that which attempts to undo the historical composition in which time and existence (Dilthey, 2010; Carneiro Leão, 2002) become instances of conceptual production. Within this context, and from here on, both the principle of the autonomy of the field and the possibility of any otherness are compromised; the retreat of time as a site of autonomy, and consequently, of the originality of different social fields, is upon us.

## **6. Conclusion: Hermeneutic Activity**

This brings us to the issue of the need to return to hermeneutic activity (Gadamer, 2006) as a residual condition of discursive autonomy, primarily because of its historicity. As Gadamer argues: “To understand is to produce a mediation between past and present, to develop in oneself a whole series of perspectives in which the past appears and beckons in our direction” (Gadamer, 2006, p. 71). Secondly, because understanding is, above all else, an existential quality. It is a state that refers back to what Heidegger (1995) called the hermeneutics of facticity, a way of being in which we are confronted with the gratuitousness of existence, with facts that we did not choose, yet which constitute a contingency from which we cannot escape. We are its best result. The context of facticity means to recognize the set of episodes that precede us, the moment we were born, and death as a common horizon. It is the set of successive occurrences over which we have no control. The field of facticity alludes to what Heidegger referred to as pre-possession or prescience, that is, the how the latter manifest themselves in our pre-judgments. “Heidegger’s basic argument is that, before we are able to correctly interpret the world, we must become aware that certain things cannot be interpreted subjectively, such as the things upon which interpretations depend” (Lawn, 2011, p. 78). What he intends to show is that “the conditions that make thought possible [...] are established much before we ourselves engage in such acts of prospection” (Lawn, 2011, p. 78).

The hermeneutic way of being is situated within the sphere of these pre-conceptions: the uninterrupted and involuntary activity of understanding the world we find ourselves in takes place before we are able to produce any reflections on it. For these reasons, hermeneutics, in Heidegger, is not merely a correct method for interpreting texts (Schleiermacher, 2009) or even a method that is capable of offering originality to the so-called sciences of the spirit, but becomes an existential quality (Dilthey, 2010). The fact that we are always interpreting, signals the presence of a basic and even more fundamental connection to the world, which precedes any judgment, theory or reflections on it, and enables us to speak

of a hermeneutic way of being, situating interpretive activity within the existential sphere. Finally, hermeneutics is justified as a field of work because the interpretive premise, nourished by the tension between that which can come to be and that which is not, that which is and that which may come into being, retains the horizon of duration as basis for different fields of knowledge. Summarizing, the choice of hermeneutics as a site for reflection on the retreat of the modern ideal of freedom –which rises around the principle of autonomy, “the ability to think for oneself” (Kant, 1985), and which conception harks back to the educational project founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, “knowledge as a condition of emancipation” (Kant, 1985)– comes from the contemporary scenario in which that ideal is dislocated to the imaginary of information (constantly moving beyond space and time). This finding bears important political and epistemological dimensions, insofar as it suggests movement away from an *ideal of value* toward an *ideal of efficiency* (Carneiro Leão, 2002), in which political and institutional processes are progressively dissociated from beliefs guiding the production of knowledge.

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