ANOTHER MODEL OF COMMUNICATION IS POSSIBLE

CRITICAL EXPERIENCES VS. THE MARKET TYRANNY

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Abstract

Along the lines of the alter-globalisation hope that has sprung forth in the social forums of Porto Alegre and Mumbai among others, the present article analyzes the underlying communicative experiences in four phenomena or specific situations: the Zapatista movement, the social reaction after the March 11 terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004), the incidents in Venezuela in 2002, and the proliferation of alternative sites on the Internet. The author tries to demonstrate that in today's society Another Model of Communication (AMC) is possible and that it may also be effective in its objectives. It is a model that radically questions the functions of each and every one of the elements that are part of the communication process as we know it today. The article maintains that taking control of the media is not necessary in order to implement this model. It even states that it would not be desirable for this to happen.

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Introduction

The social forums of Porto Alegre (2001, 2002, and 2003) and Mumbai (2004) underscored the vital need our planet has to find an alternative model to globalisation[1] imposed by multinational firms. Over the past few years, the slogan, "Another world is possible," has dazzled millions of people around the globe. However, for the dream to become reality, it must have precise tools that go with the times. Among other instruments, it is essential to forge the foundations of a new, communicative model that is different from the present model: one that is more exciting, ethical, participative, horizontal, and most of all, not as one-way, paternalistic, and dependent on power.

This article is based on the following hypothesis: despite the adverse conditions imposed by globalisation, Another Model of Communication (AMC) is possible. It would be a model that would place special emphasis on a liberating-transforming concept of the communication process itself (Kaplun 1998) without being obsessed with the short-term results such as the creation of the necessary conditions to give rise to a new, communicative, much more active and critical subject-receiver than there currently is which would act as a true driving force for change. The will of this new communicative subject would be determinant for the effective articulation of an alternative public sphere (Habermas 1962; Downing 1988; Fraser 1992; Splichal et al 1994; Atton 2002) fighting for some prominence and legitimacy in the agenda imposed by the big mass media.

First of all, let me analyze different aspects related to the prevailing communication model of today, emphasising some of its most perverse contradictions. I will point out four practical examples of how this alternative model of communication works in different parts of the world so that I can subsequently specify theoretical foundations of the new model that is being proposed.[2]

The Prevailing Model

Noam Chomsky, a person who has been critical of the present media framework, has always shown his scepticism regarding conspiracy theories that attribute the power of the media to hidden plots similar to those of the Trilateral.[3] On one occasion, an American student asked Chomsky (Halimi 1997, 33): "I would like to know exactly how the elite control the media. The professor responded with another question: How do they control General Motors? The question isn't even raised. The elite have no reason to control General Motors. General Motors belongs to them." The same occurs with broadcast media. Long ago, they renounced being part of the opposition and directly became part of the power structure.

Not in vain and long before Chomsky's thoughts on the matter, President Eisenhower summed up all of his economic doctrine into one sentence, "What is good for General Motors is good for the US." This company continues to be an economic giant with more political clout than many countries around the world, including European countries. General Motors' annual turnover (Taibo 2002, 27) is more than the GDP of countries like Denmark. Exxon-Mobil's volume of operations exceeds that of Austria. Any of the hundred largest companies of the world sells more than the total exports of 120 of the world's poorest countries (Ramonet 2001, 93).

The financial, industrial, and political sectors that govern the world meet more and more frequently at different Board Meetings without anyone apparently raising

their voice about such a suspicious conflict of interests. It is accepted as natural and innate to the globalising fever that has inundated the great *global village.*

Right now in the US there are more than 2,000 newspapers, 10,000 weekly publications, many radio stations, and more than 2,000 television stations. More than half of these companies are controlled by twenty companies whose main source of income – let's not forget – is advertising. These are the special interests, not the general interests of the citizens. The private news oligopolies are spread out across the planet. The main cultural industries are in the hands of giant multinational firms, which are the fruit of mega mergers like those spearheaded by AOL-Time Warner or Viacom-CBS. Our leisure belongs to them: the vast majority of the films we watch, the albums we buy, the media we watch, and the books we read belong to a small group of multinational firms who are outside the boundaries of any type of political or social control.

The overlapping between different powers is so obvious that even Madeleine Albright, while ambassador for the US to the United Nations, recognised in a display of sincerity (Marthoz 1999, 25) that CNN was the sixth permanent member of the Security Council. One of Albright's advisors, Tomas Friedman, went even further in his confession when, in an article published in March 1999 in the *New York Times Magazine* (Taibo 2002, 238), he declared:

> *The invisible hand of the market will never work without an invisible fist. McDonald's cannot spread without McDonnell Douglas, the manufacturer of the F-15. The invisible fist that guarantees the world safety of the technologies of Silicon Valley is the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines of the United States.*

NATO is the enforcer of neoliberal globalisation and the Silicon Valley is its particular Holy Grail. In 2000, the information and telecommunications sector made up a sixth of the Gross Domestic Product of the US.

In such circumstances, from a liberating perspective, it is legitimate and inevitable to wonder: Is there an ounce of hope? Is the power of the media invincible? And, probably most importantly, how can this hypothetical alternative be articulated?

Dissident Areas

From the left we are used to investing more energy in stigmatising the malevolent power of the media than exploring dissident areas that would shine a ray of hope. Historically, the socialist area didn't know how to create a real alternative model of communication either (Fontcuberta and Gómez Mompart 1983, 32). It is true that they changed owners, leaders, and messages, but fundamentally the same communication scheme remained intact. Private property was substituted by the State, market interests for Party conveniences, and capitalistic persuasion techniques for slogans of the leading bureaucracy. Both models of communication clipped the wings of imagination, cut off creativity, encouraged obedience, scorned participation, and ignored the basic laws of Rhetoric. They were models of communication that were decrepit, one-way, hierarchical, authoritarian, and paternalistic, meant to perpetuate a redundant, compact culture that favoured the imposing of the dominant ideology.

The alternative communicative experiences that have reached their objectives in today's information society have absorbed the most positive aspects of the different trends and movements of the left of the second half of the 20th century and of the beginning of the third millennium, knowing how to make the most of the contradictions of globalisation. All of this has a clear purpose – to stimulate the alter-globalisation also in the area of communication, which necessarily implies the destruction of the old dominant schemes.

The Zapatista Experience

The communicative Zapatista experience gave rise to numerous theoretical ideas[4] and illustrates perfectly the praxis of this new model of communication that we are trying to describe. Zapatism, with its leader Marcos at the helm, conquered astonishingly easily the hearts of many. When EZLN (Zapatista National Freedom Army) burst onto the international scene, it was like a volcano that, instead of spitting out lava and ash, emitted from its bowels tons of indigenous pride from rage that had been contained for 500 years amidst lies and oppression. It was a cry to remind the world, and especially Europe, of the cost of the first "holocaust of modern age," the one that in the 16th century caused the extinction of fifteen million Indians and the sale of fourteen million African slaves.

They chose an emblematic date for it: January 1, 1994, the day in which the North American Free Trade Agreement between the US, Mexico, and Canada came into effect. They symbolically took towns of the state of Chiapas in the mountains of Southwest Mexico, and subsequently resisted the attacks of the Army as best they could. They denounced the precarious situation of their people to the world and the moral misery of the Mexican political class. They used the element of surprise perfectly, something that has always moved the *gatekeepers* of all media. They so masterfully exploited the inventions of globalisation – the Internet – in order to combat globalisation itself. They renounced all dogmas. They refused to be on the forefront of anything or for anybody. They openly proclaimed their heterodoxy and demonstrated their faith in humanity as a proposal and future project, trying, perhaps, to move from a *defensive identity to a project identity* (Castells 2003, 99). The Zapatistas did not only rebel against exclusive neoliberalism and the power of multinational companies. They also revolted against the present world news order and mechanisms that make it omnipresent. Their greatest weapon was dissident communication, a different way of doing and saying things, a new poetical revolutionary. They made up the *first international guerrilla* (Castells 2003, 111). They inaugurated the *semantic phase of the revolution* (Bellinghausen 1994).

Marcos emphasised the importance of the media as an instrument for change (Vázquez Montalbán 2001, 236):

> *When it comes to media, which is the key weapon, right?, what we did was sneak into the house of power and took this weapon that was in their hands and pointed it at them, with the advantage that this weapon doesn't kill or destroy, but speaks, explains, and shows.*

Zapatism also revolutionised the rules of the game, the fossilised codes that imbued messages of other guerrilla movements. Among other reasons, this is due to the fact that his speech was not only political but also profoundly literary. There was a time when the need to change code became essential for the insurgents. Marcos

admitted this in an interview he granted to Vázquez Montalbán (2001, 191):

> *They don't understand us? We are transforming our language. It's a matter of survival for the initial core group that makes up the EZLN. We have to survive. If we don't come into contact with the communities, with the natives of the area, we cannot survive.*

In this new Zapatista code, the mask takes on a leadership role, becoming an icon. The Zapatista leader revealed the meaning of his mask (Vazquéz Montalbán 2001, 199):

> *When they say to us or criticise us, why are they using masks? Why do they hide? Hold on a minute. Nobody looked at us before when our faces were uncovered. Now they are seeing us because we have our faces covered. And if we talk about masks, let's talk about what the political class hides in this country and what they show. Let's compare the meaning of their masks with the meaning of ours.*

New codes for new messages. And new attitudes, like humility, that give a bonus of authenticity to the communicative process (Vazquéz Montalbán 2001, 170):

> *We discover – said Marcos – that the world is not so simple, that there are not friends and enemies, but other groups that are bringing up things that we must listen to. In any case, the achievement we attained was that we knew how to stop and listen. We could have not done it and it would have been history.*

This renewal of codes, messages, and attitudes, this "semantic phase of the revolution" that Bellinghausen so happily baptised, would be neutralised without the interaction of a subject-receiver, deeply worried, active, critical, and able to break with the unidirectionality of the dominant model of communication. Marcos sees this historical subject of change in the Mexican civil society, the new point of reference for other worn-out, obsolete models within the left (Vázquez Montalbán 2001, 157):

> *The current system blurs the relevance of class when it comes to historical transformation and the citizen springs forth, and that is what we call civil society. He is a social actor that doesn't have a defined political militancy. He would be the actor of the most important change if he leans toward progressive change because he would do it by the power of convincing and reason.*

The Zapatista movement was innovative on many fronts, not only in the area of communications, but also politically, culturally, and in guerrilla warfare. However, they renounced being on the forefront (Vázquez Montalbán 2001, 173):

> *Things go better and develop better if the participants make their own historical contribution and not if a new schematic proposal is created in the face of neoliberalism and Zapatism is presented as a new world scheme. We create new communication networks and find ourselves.*

That is it. Time, always an implacable judge, will remove or put each one in his place and shall serve to evaluate the Zapatista contribution to the progress of humanity in its just measure.

11-M and the Spanish Elections

The citizens of Spain experienced four days of absolute trembling from the morning of March 11th until the night of March 14th 2004.[5] In less than a hundred hours, Spanish society witnessed the harrowing, historical events while totally astonished. The terrorist attacks of Madrid, the most cruel that have occurred in Europe since World War II (192 killed by *Al Qaeda*), the dirty news manipulations carried out by the conservative government of José María Aznar, the diligent reaction of the civil society in favour of the truth and against the war in Iraq, and the unexpected electoral upset that gave – against any prediction – the victory to the Socialist Party (PSOE) lead by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

The initial pain combined with the citizens' indignation for the attitude of the President and the mainstream media controlled by the ruling Popular Party that insisted, time and time again, on blaming ETA for the massacre when all of the clues from the intelligence services and foreign media pointed to the *Al Qaeda* network. They were also one hundred hours in which it was demonstrated that not only is AMC possible, but that it is able to surpass the threshold of marginality and able to have immediate effects on the electoral process.

As the hours passed, suspicions that the Minister of Interior at that time, Angel Acebes, and President José María Aznar were lying to public opinion became more and more evident. There were reasonable indications that the authors of the massacre were not Basque separatists but a satellite organisation of Bin Laden's terrorist network. The clues were as follows: the claim by a group linked to *Al Qaeda* in an Arab newspaper in London, the denial of ETA, the type of explosives used, the types of detonators found, the video tape with verses of the *Quran* on found by police in the van used by the terrorists. Despite this, the conservative government of José María Aznar insisted that ETA was the main suspect and even labelled whoever dared to doubt this version as "miserable."

The news strategy of the Spanish government pursued a clear objective: with ETA as the author of the slaughter, it reinforced the anti-terrorist strategy that had been carried out by the President over the past few years – making separatist political parties illegal, closing Basque national newspapers – and ensured they would once again have absolute majority in the March 14th elections. With *Al Qaeda* as the author of the massacre, Spanish public opinion – mainly against the war in Iraq – would blame Aznar's government for the terrorist attack for having taken Spain into a war that was declared illegal by the UN. The second hypothesis also involved a serious risk: losing the elections.

All of these contradictions blew up in the face of the government on March 13th, coinciding with the "day of reflection" (a non-working day to run electoral advertising). That afternoon, traffic of SMS messages in Spain (Delclós 2004) using cell phones increased remarkably: between 20% and 40% according to sources from the sector and inestimable according to Telefónica Móviles, a company that was controlled at the time by the Popular Party. The demand for alternative information on the Internet rose at least 5% during those days according to www.observatorio-e.democracia.com. Spanish Internet users crashed the website of the Basque media that were close to Basque nationalism as well as the main foreign newspapers. All of this occurred while the majority of the Spanish media continued giving credibility to the official version, among other reasons because they were pressured by the

president of the government who even called the managers of the most influential media so they would give credibility to his version.

Spreading like wildfire, SMS messages shook their networks all over the country in just a few hours. They had a clear message: *6pm at PP headquarters. For peace, the truth, and against the war. Pass it on.* All afternoon on the 13th and until the wee hours of the 14th, thousands of anonymous citizens, particularly young people, lead tens of gatherings – declared illegal and illicit by the acting government – in front of PP headquarters throughout the Autonomous Communities of Spain. Foreign media with offices in Madrid and Barcelona as well as the few Spanish media that resisted government pressure – like channel T5 and the media from the Prisa Group – initially reported on the gatherings. Little by little, in a fearful way and obligated by the circumstances, the rest of the media followed the suit. By the end of Saturday, the clamour on the streets was unanimous. *No to lies, no to the war.*

On the eve of the elections, Román Gubert, Professor of Audiovisual Communication, wrote about what he had experienced during those days in the newspaper *El País*:

> *I hope that nobody is shocked if I make a comparison between this network structure (of the terrorist organisation Al Qaeda) and the communicative structure of the Internet, with its connection nodes, its capillarity, and exponential expansive capacity. In fact, Al Qaeda, meaning "the base" in Arabic, seems to be a medieval organisational replica to the structural modernity of global cyberspace.*

Contrary to what all of the polls before M-11 predicted, the PSOE won the elections on M-14 with 42.6% of the votes as opposed to 37.6% for the PP. The participation rate of the elections was 77.2%, almost ten points above the rate that was recorded four years earlier.

In any case, the true winner of the Spanish elections in 2004 – more than just the PSOE – was the civil society that reacted efficiently, thus defeating manipulation and official lies. Said response was forged horizontally, outside the guidelines of the big political parties – who publicly banned the gatherings – and the major broadcast media. Paradoxically, the protestors used the same tools in their protests that are frequently used for globalisation: the internet and mobile phones. It was demonstrated that another type of communication is possible and that it is also able to obtain short-term results.[6]

Venezuela 2002

In 2002, political and social upheaval in Venezuela acquired some especially worrisome shades. Political, military, and economic forces of the right tried to seize power by illegitimately using force. The coup barely lasted 48 hours (from the 11th to the 13th of the aforementioned year) and ended up failing. This was due, by and large, to the fact that an important social reaction was organised after the first military movements which ruined the intentions of the people involved in the coup.

From a communicative point of view, it is especially interesting to analyze the way in which the followers of the President elect Hugo Chávez reacted in the face of these events at a time when the major broadcast media was totally controlled by the supporters of the coup.

It is worth remembering that Hugo Chávez came into power after the elections in 1999 when he got 56.5% of the total votes counted and submitted a constitution for consideration that was backed by more than 70% of the citizens. From the start, the major broadcast media of the country as well as the radio and television media maintained a tremendously hostile attitude towards the president and his economic policy that was inclined to favour the most humble sectors of the population. The online editions of newspapers like *El Nacional, El Universal,* and *Globovisión* testified to it. The Global Media Observatory that came out of Porto Alegre, in its report regarding Venezuela, denounced "the lies, unfounded rumours, and slander" used by a good portion of the broadcast media against the President elect.

Just as Ignacio Ramonet (2002, 27) mentioned, a large, "neoconservative" alliance was formed that was made up by various sectors: the bourgeoisie that filled the streets of the rich neighbourhoods with pots, employers' organisations, broadcast media, and the working aristocracy – oil workers – mobilised by the CTV, probably the most corrupt union in Latin America.

Some particularly important events occurred during the days that the civic-military disturbance lasted. The overthrowing of the legitimate constitutional power, the self- promulgation of Pedro Carmona, the leader of the employers' organisation, for a new president of the country, and finally, the restoring of constitutional order with the return of Hugo Chávez.

There were some especially showy international uprisings such as a joint declaration of the governments of the United States and Spain that, in a declaration made public on April 12, 2002, justified the change in situation that was happening in the country and invited the social agents to the "consolidation of the democratic institutionality." Satisfaction with the coup even appeared in the main Spanish newspaper *El País* that branded Chávez as a "caudillo" (meaning war leader) and Pedro Carmona as a "peaceful man" in their April 13th edition. The second most important Spanish newspaper, *El Mundo,* stated something in similar terms in that Carmona was a man who was "born for dialogue" while the dismissed president was "an eccentric" (13 April 2002).

The ironclad control that those who revolted established on the Venezuelan media didn't stop some really strange events from happening. Hugo Chávez, for example, managed to get a crucial document out to his followers. It was just a few, handwritten lines where the ousted president basically denied the official version that underlined his voluntary resignation from his post to say to his people, "I am with you. I am your President." The letter was initially sent by fax. It was photocopied thousands of times and passed out in the most humble neighbourhoods of Caracas where the Chavistas are especially influential. The limited community radio stations that were not controlled by the people involved in the coup and the websites that were faithful to Chavez spread the document to everyone. In a few hours, thousands of people showed up at the presidential palace of Miraflores to demand the return of their ousted president, something that happened only a few hours later. All of the media and military machinery warped by the supporters of the coup succumbed to the humble piece of paper sent by fax.

Over the past few years, Venezuelan society has woven a dense network of alternative and community media (Caguaripano 2002, 49) from different ideologies and trends. It was these media that made the Caracan society's reaction possible

in 2002 that restored the constitutional power in Venezuela. Radio Perola, Radio Catia Libre, TV Catia, and TV Caricuau are the names of a few of them. Many times, they are operated by volunteers who, based on their daily work schedules, have managed to interweave active social networks. The headquarters of many of these media were occupied by the supporters of the coup. Others, however, found a way to continue broadcasting information and continue transmitting the content of the presidential message to international public opinion. In other cases, as is the case of the channel *Venezolana de televisión*, it was the citizens themselves who were able to directly take back control of the media.

Other media that were apparently secondary, like the website www.antiescualidos.com, were vitally important during those times, managing to provide reliable, minute by minute information, becoming a reference even for international media and destroying the news blockade in a practical way that the supporters of the coup had set up. That is how they overturned the attempted coup.

In Venezuela in 2002, alternative communication acted as a catalyst of social response that neutralised the civil-military coup. The spark that started the fire of popular protest was a brief letter transmitted by a modest channel, something that is almost obsolete in our day and age: the fax machine. The network of alternative media held a decisive importance in the failed attempted coup d'état.

Dissenting Communication on the Internet

The world panorama of the broadcast media has been slowly but inexorably changing over the past few years. Whereas general press, radio, and television consumption has experienced ups and downs depending on the area of the globe that is analyzed, another set of media like the Internet, mobile phones, and free press has experienced spectacular increases.

The amount of hits on the Internet sites goes through the roof when there is an international incident of special magnitude such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003. At that time, websites that were critical of or independent of the official global truth saw a spectacular increase in the number of hits. It was especially outstanding in countries like the US, Spain, and the UK, whose governments internationally lead the invasion. Quite a number of people consulted sources of information that were different from traditional media. A poll taken on the Internet use by Americans during the war (Pisani 2003, 8) revealed that 55% of Americans exchanged *emails* related to the conflict. Visits to the BBC's website increased by 47% during the time that coincided with the most critical phase of the invasion. The same thing occurred with the British newspaper *The Guardian* that was against the war whose website experienced an 83% increase in visits. The Internet was also the means chosen to broadcast the *damning* photos that irritated the American government in 2004. Pictures were shown of prisoners tortured by marines in the Iraqi prison Abu Ghraib and coffins of twenty American soldiers inside a plane before returning to the US. These snapshots were taken by digital cameras – another product of globalisation – and quickly and easily distributed to the entire planet via the Internet. In order to get these photos, two conditions were required: access to the Internet and the will to get them.

In Arab countries, 60% of homes with TV receive it via satellite. During the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the English edition of the *Al Jazeera* website[7]

(http://english.aljazeera.net) was the most widely used news source on the Internet. In 2002 the site had over 161 million visits. Even today you will still find it among the 50 most visited sites on the Internet.

The supply and demand of dissenting information with the official truth is growing across the globe. Internet sites with critical, dissident, and/or alternative information have experienced a geometric progression over the past few years. This trend found its latest ally in the phenomenon of *weblogs* or *logs.* The term is a typical product of the Internet culture. It is a merging of two words: *web + log*, or rather a "daily logbook" or "captain's log" that each person makes for us to read on the Internet. They are personal, online diaries (Pisani 2003, 8) made with simple programs that allow you to type text into the computer, log on, and send it instantly so that it is published on a website that has been built specifically for that purpose. These sites combine information, opinion, and links to other sites that the author deems of interest to his potential readers. They are instruments that are easy to use. It takes a little more than five minutes to make a personal website like this.[8] According to a report from the Pew Center of the United States, it is estimated that at the end of 2003 there were more than 3 million *bloggers* around the world and the number was constantly increasing. Four percent of Americans that have Internet access regularly visit these types of sites. That doesn't mean that all the sites – not in the least – are alternative media, or that the criticism is coincidental. In fact, most of the weblogs that came out in the US after 911 criticised the Bush Administration for its "lack of patriotism" and/or severely criticised the far too "liberal" attitudes of certain broadcast media.

Mobile phones multiply the possibilities of these tools being powered by voice, armed with images or texts in SMS format bringing about services like *photologs* or *moblog.* So, we find ourselves facing an emerging phenomenon with undeniable possibilities for expansion that deserve to be analyzed in detail. More than with journalism, weblogs surely have to do with everything relating to the management of knowledge. Obviously, we have to distrust weblogs as much or more than traditional media since they also lie or make mistakes, sometimes more easily. They are, however, an original expression of horizontal communication with wide ranging possibilities to expand and that favours the creation of new social networks.

A clear example of dissident communication, far from one-minded thinking, can be found on the *Adbuster Media Foundation* (http://adbuster.org) website located in Vancouver, Canada. People all over the world participate in building this site including artists, political activists, writers, comedians, students, professors, educators, and businessmen. Their objective is strikingly clear: *Based on the fact that we are living in the information era, we want to work toward creating a new social movement that is able to tear down the existing power structures of the 21st century.* In addition to their online edition, this foundation also has a printed magazine with more than 120,000 copies distributed in sixty countries around the world. One of the most popular sections offered in their online edition is called *Creative resistance* where they characterise the power of large commercial and multinational firms in a satirical way.

It would be impossible to talk about all of the alternative or dissident information sites that exist on the Internet at this time. Even if we could write out a list, it would always be incomplete. But that is not the objective of this article. However, we will point out some particularly interesting sites such as www.moveon.org

where more than 1.7 million people all over the world participate in the site. The site organised a video contest in 2004 titled *Bush in 30 seconds* that was broadcast all over the planet. You should also visit websites like the Alternative Media Watch (www.zmag.org/altmediawatch.htm) where you will find the email addresses of 70 magazines worldwide, or Independent Media Center www.indymedia.org (the site is in various languages and the sections are divided into the five continents), or www.rebelion.org where intellectuals like Heinz Dieterich, James Petras, Noam Chomsky, Marta Harnecker, Ignacio Ramonet, and Subcommander Marcos contribute.

In July 2004, in view of the growing magnitude of dissident communication, the US government has increased its endeavours to avoid the transfer of the control of the Internet to international bodies such as the UN, as communicated in the Second Summit of the Information Society that held in Tunisia in November 2005.

An Alternative Model

The four examples that we just analyzed in this article – the Zapatista movement, 11-M, Venezuela, and alternative Internet sites – show, in my opinion, that beyond economic, legal, and ideological restrictions imposed by the present world order of news, it is possible to develop AMC – critical to the neoliberal mindset – able to reach the proposed objectives and to have a wide ranging social echo. In addition to this, these examples destroy another myth trying to confine the alternative information to marginality. It is far away from reality. In all cases, the subject-players of the information were millions of people.

The model of communication that is proposed here has its raison d'être in participatory democracy. It is a multidirectional model by definition that necessarily questions the functions of each and every one of the elements that make up the process of communication, from the transmitter to the receiver, going through the channel, code, and capacity for *feedback*. In the words of Mario Kaplún (1998, 13), I would say that our objective is to have *participatory, problematic, personalising, interpellating communication.* Let's not forget that communication is derived from the Latin word *communis* meaning to put something in common with another. It is the same root for *community* and *communion*, expressing something that they share or experience in common (Kaplún 1998, 60).

A model of communication that aspires to be alternative can only be so if it comes from, by, or for civil society. This entails setting aside ideological and economical servitudes imposed by the main streams of thought.

Alternative communication (Atton 2002) is different from the current globally prevailing communication model. Its origins, actors, and objectives are different. The free exchange of ideas is a priority and not reaping a profit. Fundamentally, information has use value but not exchange value in alternative communication. Alternative communication promotes social change, combats the current neo-liberal model, and fights for a fairer, more equal social model all around the world. This gives information an essential value, a key, strategic role for social action.

Communicative experiences expressed here provide an answer from the school of the public sphere and entails – just as Perez Luna points out (2001, 8) – educational rhetoric marked by the process of self-conscience. Yurén understands the latter concept (1992) as the practical conscience that surpasses the intellectual limits

to become free will. The conscience is self-determined, overcoming the barrier of particularity to reconcile itself with universality. This occurs *when the goals that specific will has are reconciled with the goals of the community that is the people* (Yurén 1992, 76).

Yurén recalls (1992, 76) that, according to Hegel, the unit of conscience and self-conscience is reason, and, therefore, you must enable *the unit between the epistemic system (the subject that knows) and the practical subject (the subject that acts)*.

Implementing Another Model of Communication (AMC), in many cases, is articulating transgressive and defiant communicative practices towards cultural, political, social, and economic patterns imposed by the dominating culture. The transgression is valid if it favours reflection and even more so if it also articulates the social action Transgression→ reflection→ action. This is the main point. The Zapatistas are successful every day on the Internet. The same can be said about many other alternative websites. Another point was scored by the demonstrators in Caracas in 2002 and in Madrid in 2004.

Articulation of AMC allows the construction of an alternative public sphere, understood as the communal field in which opinion is forged, identities are made, and consensus are reached that are different from the ones imposed by the dominant ideology and market dynamics. It is a communicative model controlled by citizen networks and not by state and/or corporate networks.

The experience shows that a change in the ownership of the media or the exchange of the content does not guarantee, in itself, the existence of AMC. Investing in the sign is an essential condition to reach said objectives but not the only one. There are a multitude of messages that are formally revolutionary in their content but absolutely reactionary in their structure, code, and narrative models used since they annihilate the possibility of response or interpretation on behalf of the subject-receiver. Just as Pericles warned over 2,500 years ago, it would be useless to have ideas if we don't know how to transmit them later on. Today Umberto Eco insists that it is possible to say new things without searching for new ways of saying them.

Things like irony, poetry, utopia, imagination, and tenderness are scorned by the present communicative model. Without these resources, it would be impossible to improve our expression, cultivate argumentation, or stimulate persuasion.

We are seeing a mirage of the image where the dream is restricted daily and rhetoric, a key instrument in any communicative project that aspires to be liberating and transform reality, is annihilated. We must understand the proposed AMC from a broad sense of the term. We are talking about basic action – communication – that deals with the very essence of human beings, an activity that determines social attitudes and conditions human relationships. To think and speak efficiently facilitates social intervention.

The domination of rhetoric is the key for any communicative project that aspires to have a social impact. Just as Hernández Guerreo and García Tejera stated (2004, 31):

> *Rhetoric, just as all other Human Sciences and the rest of language disciplines, is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary: it is related to and links other subjects among themselves like grammar, linguistics, dialect, and epistemology. It is a linking or hinging subject; it is based on and is the basis*

for other disciplines like philosophy, ethics, logic, history, poetry, sociology, and psychology.

We are speaking about the base point, about the fulcrum that is able to move the entire framework of communication: rhetoric.

Along with cultivating this discipline, the AMC project rests on another essential premise: training of a new, active subject-receiver, who is media literate, meaning that he is able to use, encode, analyze, and critically assess the different broadcast media – press, radio, television, video, computer, and the Internet – he has access to. To do so, it is imperative that subjects like Education in Communication or Educommunication be included in the curricula at all stages of the educational process.

Even UNESCO stated (Sánchez Noriega 1997, 432) that Educommunication *is not an optional addition or a voluntary specialisation, but a central element that in the present educational system of developed countries is considered a necessary educational transverse in curricula.*

If we really wanted to reinforce AMC, we must give the receiver what Habermas called *communicative competence* so that he can effectively interact with the transmitter. It isn't a simple accessory or an occasional condition but a prior, essential requirement so that there is real communication.

The efficiency of the process will depend on not only the empathising ability the transmitter has to put himself in the place of the person receiving the message, thus becoming the receiver (*emirec*). This involves a humble attitude that is constantly available to listen to criticism and exercise non-complacent self-criticism. The paternalistic or *ex-catedra* attitudes that are so abundant in leftist media and publications hinder thinking, restrict imagination, and obstruct dialogue.

Is it possible to implement AMC without taking control? This is the recurring question that comes up in all of the social forums that have taken place around the world in the latest years. Not only is it possible, but it is also desirable for it to occur in that manner. One of the most accurate maxims that alter-globalisation movements have come up with boldly invites us to do so: *Don't hate the media, become the media*. Each person has within himself an enormous, communicative potential that should be explored, cultivated, and perfected. Leftist parties and movements often use substantial human and economic resources set aside to create newspapers, magazines, radio stations, including TV stations, trying to compete with the capitalist media. These attempts–praiseworthy and successful at times–have many times ended up reproducing the same communicative schemes as the capitalist media they criticise, succumbing to their own internal contradictions and/or victims of the boycott of a market they are not in the position to compete in. It is not very congruent to emit liberating messages with signs of the dominating thought since, just as Julio Cortázar pointed out (Kaplún 1998, 160), *our new wine needs new wineskins*.[9]

The proposed AMC considered here does not throw out – evidently for its open character – any possibility, but is more on the same wavelength with the philosophy outlined by Subcommander Marcos and Professor John Holloway (2002) who maintain that it is not necessary to take control of the media in order to implement AMC. For more than a century in the heart of the left, there has been a hidden debate as to whether reformation or revolution is better in order to liberate human beings. What is certain is that neither social democracy nor the so-called

real socialism has been able to create this new human being who is a catalyst for social change. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Gramsci, Mao, and even Che Guevara gave priority to taking over the power by forging the new subject based on revolutionary pragmatism that the times called for. Holloway (2002, 34) declares, however, that you cannot change the world through the State since *this realism is the realism of power, and it cannot do anything else than reproduce power.* Neither does Holloway offer a marvellous recipe that helps us search for concrete solutions. He does provide us with some clues derived from the search for personal dignity that, *far from taking us in the opposite direction, it totally confronts us with the urgency of the revolution* (Holloway 2002, 36). This revolution raises the idea of a society based on the mutual recognition of human dignity. Holloway insists that *the only way we can envision a revolution today is as the dissolution of power, not a conquering of it.*

The proposed AMC outlined here should be a part of the process that is also subject to multiple contradictions. It aspires to be a useful tool, necessary so that human beings can liberate the communicative potential that they have inside.

Conclusions

AMC is possible despite the adverse panorama that the present informative world order offers. The new model prioritises the value of use of information over its exchange value. It is a communicative model controlled by social networks and not by state or corporate networks; a model that works for social change globally.

The model questions the functions of each and every one of the elements that make up the process of communication, from the transmitter to the receiver, going through the channel, code, and capacity for *feedback*. The proposal requires the transmitter to renounce their hegemonic function within the process, exploring their empathising ability toward the receiver to the fullest.

AMC enables the unit between the epistemic subject (that knows) and the practical subject (that acts). The formula transgression→reflection→action exemplifies the new model.

The communicative experiences analyzed here show that if AMC is possible, articulation of an alternative public sphere is also possible, an open area that defies the servitudes imposed by the main streams of opinion that dominate the mass media's rhetoric.

Articulation of AMC also requires the implementation of a new Education of Communication that is able to increase the *communicative competence* of the receiver converting him into a subject that is able to use, encode, analyze, and critically assess different media.

In the search for this AMC, practical rhetoric takes on a leadership role. To think and speak efficiently facilitates social intervention.

The critical use of new technologies helps to articulate this AMC. The progressive advancing of the Internet, which is far from posing a threat, constitutes an opportunity to develop the model that is proposed here.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the anonymous reviewers of *Javnost–The Public*, who made very valuable suggestions for improvements of an earlier version of the manuscript, and to the translator, Nekane Ramírez de la Piscina.

Notes:

1. There are recent, extensive bibliographies on the alter-globalisation movement, e.g. O'Brien et al 2000, Calderón 2003, Danaher and Burbach 2001, Cockburn 2000, and Starhawk 2002.

2. The theorisation and research regarding alternative communication is one of the pending tasks of communication research (Downey and Fenton 2003).

3. A right-wing pressure group formed in 1973 by Rockefeller and comprising of business people and former politicians whose main aim is the defense of multinational corporate interests.

4. For details see EZLN 1994, Bellinghausen 1994, Moreno Toscano 1996, Sierra 1997, Subcomandante Marcos 2001, Vazquez Montalbán 2001, Tótoro 2001, Castells 2003.

5. The Catalonian communication magazine *Trípodos* published in April 2004 a special issue dedicated to these events.

6. Other experiences that illustrate the links between social movements and alternative media can be seen in recent contributions by Downing (2003), Gillet (2003), and Spitulnik (2003).

7. More information on this television channel can be found in Al Nawawy (2002).

8. The most used sites for making these kinds of pages are as follows: www.blogger.com and www.movabletype.com. No special software is needed to make them nor any payment requested.

9. There are numerous examples of alternative experiences that have failed to mimic the use of market techniques belonging to the neoliberal model (Atton 1999; Khiabany 2000).

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