The crisis of legitimacy of journalists and the political economy: autonomy and heteronomy as explanatory keys of contemporary journalism

A crise de legitimidade dos jornalistas e a economia política: autonomia e heteronomia como chaves explicativas do jornalismo contemporâneo

La crisis de legitimidad de los periodistas y la economía política: autonomía y heteronomía como claves explicativas del periodismo contemporáneo
ABSTRACT
The objective of this text is to reflect on economics and politics in the field of journalism, particularly on its current state of instability. This text defines journalism as a form of social knowledge as proposed by Genro Filho (2012). It explores the processes and crises of legitimacy that have an impact on and are impacted by the combination of these two social fields. The two principles of legitimacy – intellectual and political economy – proposed by Champagne (2005) are analyzed in order to reflect on the role of corporate media in times of socio-political instability. The concepts of autonomy and legitimacy of journalism are strained by the democratic context, which provides a glimpse into the characterizations and perspectives in contemporary journalism.
Keywords: Journalism. Autonomy. Legitimacy. Crisis.

RESUMO
O objetivo do texto é refletir sobre os atravessamentos da economia e da política no campo jornalístico, especialmente em contexto de instabilidade como o atual, tendo como base a definição de jornalismo como forma social de conhecimento cristalizado no singular, como propõe Genro Filho (2012). O artigo explora os processos e as crises de legitimidade que impactam e são impactados por esse entrelaçamento de campos sociais. Os dois princípios de legitimação, o intelectual e o da economia política, proposto por Champagne (2005) são analisados para refletir sobre o papel da mídia corporativa em tempos de instabilidade sócio-política. Os conceitos de autonomia e legitimidade do jornalismo são tensionados diante do contexto democrático, o que permite entrever caracterizações e perspectivas para o jornalismo contemporâneo e suas crises.

RESUMEN
El objetivo del texto es reflexionar sobre los atravesamientos de la economía y de la política en el campo periodístico, especialmente en contexto de inestabilidad como el actual, teniendo como base la definición de periodismo como forma social de conocimiento cristalizado en el singular, como propone Genro Filho (2012). El artículo explora los procesos y las crisis de legitimidad que impactan y son impactados por ese entrelazamiento de campos sociales. Los dos principios de legitimación, el intelectual y el de la economía política, propuesto por Champagne (2005), se analizan para reflexionar sobre el papel de los medios corporativos en tiempos de inestabilidad socio-política. Los conceptos de autonomía y legitimidad del periodismo son tensados ante el contexto democrático, lo que permite entrever caracterizaciones y perspectivas para el periodismo contemporáneo.

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Introduction

The objective of this text is to discuss the relationship between the field of journalism and the fields of economy and politics. It is based on the definition of journalism as a form of social knowledge as proposed by Genro Filho (2012). It also explores the processes and crises of legitimacy that have an impact on and are impacted by these social fields (BOURDIEU, 2005; CHAMPAGNE, 2005).

The crisis affecting journalistic institutions has had an impact on the field as a whole, and it has also opened up gaps and opportunities for new initiatives to emerge outside of the mainstream. Both the crisis and the possible ways of ending it reveal a central question of social legitimacy which may be accumulated and lost, and may or may not be regained. It is through this perspective that this text reflects on economy and politics in the field of journalism, particularly on its current state of instability.

Legitimacy has no purpose per se, it is somewhat conditioned by certain contexts. Legitimacy in modern informative journalism corresponds to specific social needs and the codes and values that institutionalize it professionally.

The social needs that promote journalism are the growing universalization of social relationships and the
technological development in capitalist production. Changes in social structure have brought forth a new way of understanding reality, a way of understanding which materializes in the singular (GENRO FILHO, 2012). On the other hand, the values, codes, competences and routines are both the cause and effect of the institutionalization process of journalism, marked by disputes and shaped by different national and historical contexts (PONTES, 2015). They are the component of professional identity that demand its autonomy and social legitimacy.

If legitimacy is only a mid-term goal, then the end goal of journalistic initiatives is basically an economic and ethical-political project. Journalistic products have an exchange value, they are commercialized and bring profit to owners of production and circulation mediums. At the same time, since journalism is a form of knowledge that implies a subjective relationship with the world, it has the ability to communicate ideologies, namely built-in ideas that justify the certain practices of subjects and society (PONTES, 2016). These ideas can be attached to different ethical politics.

These features put a strain on the relationship between journalism and other social fields, particularly with economy and politics. Even though it requires autonomy and propagates public interest, the field of journalism is traversed by political economics which determine the level of autonomy and heteronomy in each specific context.

However, these same features require that social actors have an arsenal of tactical interventions (expressed through language, verification processes, context, and editing) for covering daily events. Journalistic knowledge is materialized in the singular, but
its meaning is given through particular mediations (GENRO FILHO, 2012). This dialectic relationship produces universal content which may have an ideological function. Journalism can give meaning to social facts through a renewed understanding of the social fact (PONTES, 2016). This gives each piece of news its own space for discussion, whether deliberate or not. And structurally speaking, the professional consensus and work conditions for daily journalistic production are constantly strained and, to somewhat different degrees, fulfill the strategic role established by social actors in the field.

What often happens in moments of crisis is that these tactical interventions sometimes exceed the social conventions that legitimize journalism, revealing ethical-political projects of specific strategic interests (GADINI, 2016). Within these moments where the whole legitimacy of journalism is rattled is when alternatives may appear, looking to occupy high positions traditionally reserved for corporate media.

The singularity of journalism

According to Genro Filho (2012, p.32), modern informative journalism is the most common byproduct of a combination between a “new universal fabric of social relations brought on by the advent of capitalism” and the “industrial mediums that disseminate information”. Informative journalism dialectically overcomes its pure commercial and ideological phases due to a new social need that arises from these structural changes in society. “It is not just about economics or politics anymore, it is about a society whose social relations – due to the economic and political movement that changed it – lack information of a journalistic nature”
In the two preceding phases, newspapers were geared fundamentally towards the needs of the bourgeois (economics and politics). Now the modern phase, the current one, is an activity that includes these past moments yet provides an “[...] ontologic need for complexity and universal integration that comes from capitalism” (PONTES, 2016, p. 156).

In this specific context, informative journalism pioneers a new type of symbolic appropriation of reality, a specific form of social knowledge (GENRO FILHO, 2012, p. 32). Here, just as in the arts and sciences, journalism goes beyond the particular mode of production in which it was created. These are practices that are “[...] incorporated historically as new modes of subjective appropriation of the world that transcend the mode of production of its origin” (GENRO FILHO, 2012, p. 186). Even though it can be commercialized for its exchange value, journalistic knowledge has a “[...] valuable use, a universal activity indispensable to contemporary men and women” (PONTES, 2016, p. 156).

This knowledge is essentially characterized in the singular insomuch as it pertains to particularity and universality. Singular is a one-time phenomenon; it is unrepeatable, momentary, immediate: it is a new form. Genro Filho (2012, p. 52) believes “[...] the central aspect of this kind of knowledge is appropriating the real through singularity; in other words, through reshaping its entire phenomenal dimension”. This is what differs journalism from the scientific form of knowledge which searches to break down singular phenomena into universal theories. According to Pontes (2015, p. 326) and Genro Filho, “[...] science works towards understanding universal processes within a set of phenomena (law...
or concepts) while informative journalism pays more attention to producing singularity, searching towards reconstructing the phenomena the way it happened” (PONTES, 2015, p.326).

Stating that news is a form of knowledge which materializes in the singular (GENRO FILHO, 2012) does not mean that particularity and universality are rendered inactive. Pontes (2015, p. 327) explains that “[...] singularity is a complex of elements which is not exempt from possible mediations by particularity, much less disconnected from the historical development of social beings and from projecting a universality of gender”. It is this power of connecting determinations of a single event that makes journalism a form of knowledge.

For Genro Filho, journalism draws the public’s attention toward the immediacy and objectivity of the phenomenon in order to integrate it to particular mediations. Upon doing this it takes an ideological position without losing its phenomenal character of the social fact it reports on, maintaining a margin of liberty for the reader to translate and recognize the mediations for his or her daily life. This is why it is not journalism’s job to just repeat the phenomenon, it needs to recognize the particular framework in which this social fact is produced and will later be consumed by the public. With subsidies journalists can turn this strain into a more clarifying and precise news. (PONTES, 2015, p. 326).

The subjective work of journalists can give meaning to social facts, but it does not take meaning away: quite the contrary, it searches to reconstruct the phenomenon (objective) of the social fact which has been transformed into news. Genro Filho (2012) believes that this objective-subjective relationship is
the essence of journalism. From the perspective of news production, the process of giving meaning is determined by both the objectivity of the event as it relates to society on a whole and the relationships built by journalists themselves when they interpret and write their stories.

If journalistic facts depend on the subjectivity of journalists, then the position of this profession in the world, and of its shared codes, will be some of the determining factors of this intellectual work. “In other words, we are saying that knowledge implies choices within a set of possible objectives, and these choices are connected to the political and ideological position of journalists” (PONTES, 2015, p. 368). The problem is that these choices are internalized in a practice that normally reifies, and is not mediated by theories, which form a common sense about the profession. Journalists usually adopt the ideological point of view of their employers and the dominant classes in general. Obviously, there is also a direct and coercive intervention of political and economic interests. Lastly, the very structural conditions of work restrict the ability to search for the mediations involved in each event, reducing the possibility of knowledge in the report and increasing the chance of just reproducing common sense.

However, a large part of Genro Filho’s (2012) work states that coming closer to reality has the hidden potential to unveil contradictions between social structure and the dominant ideology. Therefore, even though it does tend to reproduce the status quo, the nature of journalism has this critical and revolutionary potential which could emerge at any time or in any context, especially in moments of crisis in capitalism and the
increase of social struggles. For Genro Filho (2012, p. 187), social phenomenon that manifest in singularities tend to “[...] express the fundamental contradictions of society with more and more accuracy”. There are also “[...] contradictions (non-antagonistic) between the slightly bourgeois ideology of paid employment representing intellectual work, like journalists, and political interests of a monopolistic capital reproducing individualized views and critical perceptions of social phenomenon”. Lastly, Genro Filho (2012) highlights how the reception of journalistic content can be transformed into certain contexts:

Lastly, in virtue of the sharp global contradictions of the mode of capitalist production, of economic struggles that spontaneously appear and political struggles consciously promoted by vanguards increases the critical capacity of the masses in general and of the proletariat in particular. This provides a greater possibility to seize the connections that bourgeois journalism tries to obscure or distort (GENRO FILHO, 2012, p. 188).

It is precisely at this moment that corporate media tries to restrict journalistic production by intervening indirectly in its framework and scheduling, and even deliberately manipulates social events according to its strategic interests. We have come full circle to the issue of legitimacy in journalistic institutions. The fact that these modes of control in traditional mediums are now exposed to the public, particularly through the possibilities of technology, tends to lead to journalism being questioned more than before. These modes are not just exposed to the public, professional journalists see this intervention on the part of their employers and end up questioning the ideology of “objective journalism”. The interference of political
economy and the heteronomy of the field become more visible, even more so considering the high number of communication mediums that are controlled by a few families and global corporations. We can add this to other determining factors in the current crisis in journalism, particularly the technological changes that have reshaped the “public” role; it is a more active one that allows for content to be produced that does not go through the traditional media systems.

Legitimacy and autonomy

In his analysis of the crisis in Brazilian journalism, Sérgio Gadini (2016) bases his explanation on the so-called “functional inversions” operated by media: instead of measuring public life they produce propaganda of private interest and assume the role that is traditionally reserved for political parties. Motivated by the political crisis these “inversions” are like tactical interventions of political-economic strategy that clearly operate outside the socially accepted principles of journalism. Genro Filho (2012, p. 150) points out that in moments of political stability the bourgeois newspaper “[...] supports a specific form of knowledge about social reality”, but when there is a crisis it usually becomes “openly propagandistic or organizational”.

To put it another way, in times of political crisis and immediate economic needs the journalistic legitimacy of the Brazilian media conglomerate is jeopardized. The media is controlled by the business elite in Brazil and is engineered to intervene in political trends. This preserves a structure different from the one that founded our country and maintains privileges of the state. These contexts of instability and uncertainty demand more strict ideological ideas, more common
sense and less knowledge of the real in the news. In other words, less correspondence in the “essence” of journalism, the reconstruction mediated by the singular phenomenon and its “appearance” represented by the “ideology of objectivity”.

Patrick Champagne (2005) provides other elements for discussing legitimacy in the relationship between journalism and economy and politics. He states (2005, p. 58) that legitimacy, accumulated collectively by journalists over time, is the base on which media maintains its inherent “blessing” power: the power to say who and what is important, and what you should think about. But Champagne sees two principles of legitimacy: the intellectual principle and the political economy principle, both of which are included in the definition of the ideal professional and expose a fundamental duality within the profession.

The first principle is about the actual journalistic thoroughness and the autonomy against the strength of economics and political parties. The intellectual principle is related to our previous discussion in this paper about journalism as a form of knowledge. Champagne (2005, p. 58-61) gives the example from France about the editor-in-chief of Le Monde newspaper who rejected “holes” in stories and concerned himself with making sure every factual piece of information was accurate. This intellectual and moral thoroughness brought the newspaper large symbolic returns which quickly made it a highly influential circulation publication even though it experienced difficulty finding alternative models of financial management (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 59). According to Champagne (2005, p. 51), “[...] the major contradiction within the operation of the journalistic field lies in the fact that the
journalistic practices that best conform to journalists’ ethical codes are very often simply not profitable”¹.

The principle of political economy, according to Champagne (2005, p. 59), is personified in prime-time television news anchors. The legitimacy of these professionals is not necessarily based on journalistic quality but on the capacity to influence public opinion and generate a financial return for the company through its large daily audiences. Contrary to the intellectual principle, the size of the audience is key to its legitimacy. Influence from political economy is more easily recognized.

Their power does not reside in the intrinsic quality of journalistic work, they are basically “pick-up media” – they literally pick up stories previously covered by printed press and add voices and images to them. Their specific power lies on the influence they can have on a public, on the decisive contribution they have in creating public opinion (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 29 our translation).

According to Champagne (2005, p. 59-60), even though both principles respond to specific criteria of journalistic legitimacy they are extensively related and cannot cancel each other out. Not even the television anchor is exempt from professional judgment, nor can the editor-in-chief of a recognized newspaper ignore the imperatives of circulation and financing. Both antagonist universes ending up being somewhat reconciled. “An economically successful journalistic enterprise always also seeks journalistic, which is to say intellectual, success. And if large circulation does not always

¹ “The major contradiction within the operation of the journalistic field lies in the fact that the journalistic practices that best conform to journalists’ ethical codes are very often simply not profitable” (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 51).
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make a great newspaper, poor circulation is always perceived as failure” (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 57)².

Champagne (2005, p. 60) further recognizes that the polarization between “serious” and popular press is not new and dates back to conflicts from the last century between The Times and The Post in the United States (SCHUDSON, 2010). What he is trying to say is that emergence of television in the 1970s changed and continues to change this relationship extensively with audiovisual journalism having many more symbolic powers than the high circulation popular press ever had. The “serious” press is more and more subordinate and subjected to the scheduling demands of media, especially national television networks which now enjoy higher status levels in the media. In that regard, even though the internet has brought enormous changes to journalism and media, and TV broadcasters have seen their audience ratings go down each year, it appears to us that this type of interscheduling thrives in Brazil. The centrality of the media and the way in which it handled mainstream media (press and TV) during the current coup are examples. The news gained political validity and impact when broadcasted on television newscasts. At the same time, we could question how “serious” the Brazilian press is, or better yet, how much of its legitimacy is actually sustained by the intellectual principle and journalistic thoroughness, and if its reputation is also based on political economy then it is a clear complement to and poses no compe-

² “An economically successful journalistic enterprise always also seeks properly journalistic, which is to say intellectual, success. And if large circulation does not always make a great newspaper, poor circulation is always perceived as failure” (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 57).
tition to television business, contrary to Champagne's example (2015).

It is important to remember that the intellectual principle described by Champagne (2015) is not linked to the ideological position of journalists or newspapers. This is not determined by the ethical-political project, it is determined by the commitment to the singular and adhering to deontological codes which are more or less institutionalized. As Genro Filho (2012) demonstrated, the news allows for different ideological meanings according to particularities that will mediate the singular and the universal, and depend on the reader’s own values. This enables a newspaper to legitimize itself “intellectually” (which is not enough in itself) with a conservative, liberal, progressive and even revolutionary editorial line as long as the hierarchy of events is regularly respected and the singular is not dissolved.

At any rate, this duality of accumulating a reputation in the profession is the fruit of tension between autonomy and heteronomy in the field. Journalism is pressured by other forces, particularly from the fields of economy and politics. Champagne (2005, p. 49) summarizes this very well when he says: “To paraphrase a well-known expression, many social actors, especially those belonging to various fractions of the dominant class, think that the press is too serious a matter to be left to journalists”³. Champagne believes that journalists are condemned structurally to producing under political and/or economic restraints; in other words, the level of autonomy will always be reduced. This double dependency is the cause of the endemic crisis

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³ “To paraphrase a well-known expression, many social actors, especially those who belong to various fractions of the dominant class, think that the press is too serious a matter to be left to journalists” (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 49)
and unrest that has affected the majority of journalists over time, including this time we live in now.

However, as a journalistic activity in “democratic regimes”, Champagne (2005, p. 52) believes that economics is the most responsible for the current heteronomy since the state, contrary to other times, does not intervene or directly control the mediums. Censorship is then much more economic and open – and invisible – than politics. This starts with “[...] newspapers themselves are economic enterprises and are thus directly subject to economic laws that often come into conflict with the imperatives of intellectual production”4 (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 52).

For Champagne (2005) there is a problem: autonomous journalism does not pay for itself, so in order to be viable it has to either resort to the market and economics or to the state and politics. In both cases the autonomy here is lost. Journalism exists in a double structural dependency. In this sense, a study comparing the autonomy of the fields of science and the arts could supplement analyses on journalism.

An empirical work on this tension in journalism is presented by Eric Darras (2005). He looks at the issue differently. There is no autonomy in journalism because it is contained within the field of politics. Darras (2005) analyzes the approach of political interview programs in France and the United States. He concluded that (2005, p. 158), contrary to Champagne (2005), the journalistic field has a “structural subordination” to the political field (and not the economic one). He explains that, even though there is interference,

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4 “Newspapers themselves are economic enterprises and are thus directly subject to economic laws which often come into conflict with the imperatives of intellectual production” (CHAMPAGNE, 2005, p. 52)
journalistic standards are too inadequate to prevent interviewees being selected by the political field itself based on the positions they hold within it.

The differences between the economic and political fields that the authors propose does not negate political economy. The objective is to clarify specific aspects of economy and politics as social fields which interlace but also have their own rationales. Structural subordination to the field consists of “imposing political boundaries, hierarchies, nominations and moods on the media”\(^5\) (DARRAS, 2005, p. 169). Darras (2005) gives us the example of the privatization of French public channel TF1 in 1986 which has maintained its audience. Darras believes that the logic of political invitees did not have much effect on the change to the financial structure because the rules from the political field overlap one another.

Darras (2005) states that it is not only the presence of the invitees that express the logic of politics but also the absences within programs are strategic decisions from social actors. Executives of multinational corporations, highly decorated military personnel and high court judges are rarely sources in political programs even though they have much more fact power than a good part of congressmen. Having political actors appear on television overstates its capacity to change the course of things and hide the real source of power, strengthening common sense (DARRAS, 2005, p. 160).

One of the explanations provided by Darras (2005) for the continual heteronomy in the journalistic field as it pertains to politics is the practical internalization of the values of the dominant classes in

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\(^5\) "The imposition of political frontiers, hierarchies, nominations, and moods on the media" (DARRAS, 2005, p. 169)
journalists expressed through “objective ideology”. This structural habitus is so strong that it makes many professionals bolster their main political sources even if it goes against their own political ideologies (DARRAS, 2005, p. 164). Journalists take on the representations of importance given to political institutions by the political field. “The journalistic Order is inserted within the political Order, and thus is Ordered without any need for orders”6 (DARRAS, 2005, p. 165).

This means that the values shared by professionals (common sense, ideologies, doxa, habitus) in each socio-historic context between autonomy and heteronomy in the journalistic field and between the intellectual principle and political economy are crucial. And, the same way that journalism is considered a form of knowledge there should also be specific knowledge that raises journalistic work. The connection between practice and theory is vital towards raising the status of the field while searching for more autonomy. It is important to have work conditions that enable intellectual practice and collective organization to resist the more direct attempts at control that come from both the market and the state, especially in a time of crisis.

Journalism and Democracy

But how autonomous should journalism be? This is the question posed by Michael Schudson (2005). He states that American journalists, motivated by a practical sense of their autonomy, have historically fought against market or state interference, and have been relatively successful at doing so. However, following Bourdieu’s observation that autonomy in a field can

6 “The journalistic Order is inserted within the political Order, and thus is Ordered without any need for orders” (DARRAS, 2005, p. 165).
represent closing itself off in the defense of corporate interests, Schudson questions how far the autonomy of journalism should go in order to not be self-enclosed. In other words, should society only trust journalists with the job of evaluating news and shield them from the influence of the state or the market? Schudson says (2005, p. 219), “absent these powerful outside pressures, journalism can wind up communicating to itself and for itself”\(^7\).

Schudson (2005) argues that more autonomy for the field does not translate into more freedom of expression for journalists because evaluating news is the responsibility of the whole field, and is not defined arbitrarily by each individual. This means that a group of professionals protected beyond the state and the market might not be best for public interest. “No doubt, journalists are right that commerce and government control are the corruptions they should most strenuously avoid”, claims Schudson (2005, p. 219), and on the other hand, he considers that conformity to opinion in a particular group is also damaging\(^8\). Considering journalism has not developed a solid and systematic method of self-regulating and self-evaluating possible deviations, could complete autonomy mean the isolation of society, almost like a “cult” of its own reasons? (SCHUDSON, 2005).

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\(^7\) “Absent these powerful outside pressures, journalism can wind up communicating only to itself and for itself” (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 209).

\(^8\) “No doubt, journalists are right that commerce and government control are the corruptions they should most strenuously avoid, but the corruption of conformity to a climate of opinion in a group can be serious and damaging in its own right” (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 219).
For Schudson (2005), what keeps journalism alive is its public character, which develops in non-autonomous environments: they are exposed to criticism every day and every week from sources (political) and the public (whose disapproval can lead to economic losses via consumption). This scale focuses the role of journalism in society. Schudson (2005) states that the real dependence of the journalistic field is neither on the state or the market, but on daily unpredictable events that neither the state nor the market have complete control over or can foresee, at least not right away. This can clearly be compared to the theory of news as a form of knowledge crystallized in the singular. As we explained earlier, the emergence of the singular is unlimited of meaning, it is constituted and learned according to society. On the other hand, journalism is in contact with the singularity contained in facts that are given meaning socially. There are unpredictable and a relatively unlimited number of events every day, but there are also strategic, prefabricated events for journalists to report on.

Michael Schudson (2005, p. 220) describes journalism as being characterized by “the primary circulator of meanings in society, the realm in which the ideas and values of other fields and other lands come to the same page before a wide array of readers and viewers”9. This places journalism in the role of mediator for society, which is why Schudson believes:

A democrat should not want journalism to be as self-enclosed and separated from outside pressures as

9 “the primary circulator of meanings in society, the realm in which the ideas and values of other fields and other lands come to the same page before a wide array of readers and viewers” (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 220)
mathematics or poetry. At least in a American view of journalism, that I share, journalism is not supposed to be a set of individual thinkers and explorers in search of truth but a set of energetic and thoughtful communicators who try to keep a society attuned to itself. (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 220).)

A certain level of dependence on the “market” would mean a necessary dependence on the “public” who directly or indirectly consume and support the newspaper; and a certain level of dependence on the state would be crucial towards fulfilling journalists’ responsibility of relating citizens to the governing authorities they elected democratically (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 221).

In short, Schudson (2005, p. 221) believes that we can only be comfortable with autonomy in journalism if it represents a plural field, relatively vulnerable to interventions from government sources, to competition in the “market” and to unexpected daily events. These characteristics ensure that the news is not “a prisoner of a provincial, professional elite”. Journalistic autonomy cannot have an intrinsic value; when it conflicts with the “best practices of democracy” it should be challenged (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 222).

Michael Schudson’s text (2005) clearly draws attention to key questions about the journalistic field which the common sense of the profession often ignores, namely the unavoidable relationship between

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10 “A democrat should not want journalism to be as self-enclosed and separated from outside pressures as mathematics or poetry. At least in a American view of journalism, that I share, journalism is not supposed to be a set of individual thinkers and explorers in search of truth but a set of energetic and thoughtful communicators who try to keep a society attuned to itself” (SCHUDSON, 2005, p. 220).
a journalism project and a society project. Schudson’s political principles are based on the liberal tradition of democratic North American pluralism.

The relationship between journalism, democracy and public interest is consensual in the common sense of the profession and in the majority of ethical codes. Like “freedom of the press”, the idea of “democracy” is part of the democratic-liberal idea of common sense in western societies, forming an “equal imaginary” (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2015). They are ideas that represent meanings that are open and contested due to the contradiction between formal and real equality. Laclau and Mouffe (2015, p. 248) state that “the prevailing appearance of equality and cultural democracy which are an unavoidable consequence of media action allow us to question privileges based on older forms of status”, if that is so then it means evaluating journalism’s role of conserving current liberal democracy or pressuring for a radical democracy that questions the socioeconomic and cultural inequalities that sustain a liberal democracy.

This makes the journalism alternatives reflect on competitive strategies for legitimacy within the field. They need to work with the shared codes that legitimize modern journalism in every socio-historic context, as well as their own dependent nature on daily events. What’s more is that nowadays it’s not only the failures and gaps in corporate media that need to be addressed, but the whole array of social, cultural, economic and technological changes involved in journalism. This means that if structural changes in society are what caused informative journalism to emerge they need to be analyzed as current transformations dynamically reshape this need.
In order to change a social field one needs to participate in it and not settle for lesser positions. For this purpose, organized and doctrinized journalism should be discarded because, apart from being disconnected from the shared principles that make informative journalism the most important way for circulating meaning in society, it compromises the possibility of news as a form of knowledge. The news, in “its intrinsic logic of pursuing the singular and expressing its immediate meaning”, reflects the hegemony of the dominant ideology, but also “expresses the contradictions that it debates, as it is obliged to respect a certain objective hierarchy of phenomenon” (GENRO FILHO, 2012); in other words, it also carries the potential to question the formal equality that ensures real inequality.

Final Considerations

In a time of financial crisis and legitimacy where traditional journalistic corporations are pressured by the information/entertainment industry and the growing intervention of political groups in public forums, the journalistic profession (its deontological, technical and intellectual dimensions) is looking at a possible erosion of its functional and critical characteristics.

Cabe a ressalva de que não há polarização essencial entre jornal de partido (organizativo e panfletário) e ”tradicional”; mas justamente o contrário, que cada opção editorial traz características específicas e se insere em formulações estratégicas que devem variar conforme a conjuntura e podem obviamente coexistir. A esse respeito, ver Genro Filho sobre as teses de Lenin do jornal enquanto organizador coletivo (2012, [1987], p. 42). Outros casos de impasses estratégicos e de divergências táticas de disputa dentro da imprensa alternativa podem ser encontrados na obra Jornalistas e Revolucionários, de Bernardo Kucinski (1991).
The accounts offered in the bibliography of social fields together with the analysis theory of the potential of journalism gives us the perspective of the dystopia and possibilities of the journalistic field. In a society like in Brazil where democracy is weak, the politics do not represent their own hierarchies and conventions, and the economic actors do not represent the majority of the excluded population, journalism cannot establish the heteronomy proposed by Schudson (2005). It is a cruel heteronomy of public and private interests exacerbated by the sensationalist role of media. Journalistic work becomes an object of unrelated interests, a cog in the capitalist engine, disposed of its liberating and possible dimensions.

The pressure on journalists in hegemonic media is so evident and powerful that alternative spaces emerge not only to question politics and democracy but as possible forms for recuperating the basic and often minimal elements of journalism. To understand the rise of journalistic structures outside the mainstream media one needs to see the connections in the journalistic field and the relationships it carries with the political and economic fields. In this regard, the concepts of legitimacy and autonomy, as explained in this text, help to problematize and contextualize the crisis in journalism.

References


