INFORMATION SOCIETY, CAPITALISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY: REFLECTIONS ON POLITICS, INTERNET AND DEMOCRACY IN THE BRAZILIAN REALITY

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society has been characterized as an information society due to the pivotal role that information has assumed as a result of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), particularly with the spread of the internet, which has been generating changes on various levels in economic, social, political, cultural and philosophical relations. These changes are still in progress and are being transformed as the internet is redefining its scope and range. It seems that the internet can be regarded as a civilizing mark: life before and after the internet, since it has created high expectations in terms of change, some even revolutionary. Since we are facing a reality that is still under construction and which is changing very quickly, many conclusions have to be regarded as being of a precarious nature rather than a perennial one.

Of the various impacts caused by the internet, the one that is of the greatest interest from the point of view of this article is that of the political area, more specifically understanding how the internet can cause changes in political structures in the sense of promoting a growing democratization. When one talks about politics, there are two branches that have to be analyzed: on one side you have the State, with its structures and how these adapt to internet utilization in the sense of promoting the participation, interactivity, transparency and democratization of processes. On the other side you have society with its movements in the sense of political activity and its interactions with the State exercising a critical and participative assessment. Right at the outset, it can be seen that there are a lot more promises than there are realizations, with some these having only been slightly outlined.

The aim of this article is to discuss how the information society, by means of ICT, and more specifically by means of the internet, can represent not just a new way of doing politics, but also of strengthening politics itself. On the domestic front, the question seems to be take on even greater challenges. Does the internet have the capacity to break this structural situation in a society that is regarded as being passive and lazy? Up to what point can the internet change an existing structural picture and become a breaking point in the traditional way of doing politics on the part of civil society? Up to what point will the internet, on account of its well-known attributes of interactivity, ease of contact, permanent functioning and on-line nature, be able to activate and promote a greater political participation on the part of civil society? On the other hand, it could also be argued that, if civil society does not mobilize itself to participate politically using conventional, traditional channels, will it now turn to the internet to alter this state of things? Although it does find any complete definitive answers to

these questions, this article attempts to reflect on them in such a way as to promote their understanding.

OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM IN RELATION TO POLITICAL ACTIVITY ON THE INTERNET

When analyzing the internet's political impact, one notes the presence of two types of analysts: optimists and pessimists, along with other categorizations. For the optimists, "decentralization, interactivity, multimediality, trans-nationality and transculturality" are opportunities for the new technologies, whereas for the pessimists it creates "isolation and alienation, unrestrained commercialization of public and private spaces, and the appearance of new forms of digital colonialism and social differences of class" (DOMINGUES, 1999, p. 117, our translation).

According to the optimists, we are on the verge of experiencing a radical transformation from representative democracy into plebiscitary democracy, supported by an increase in citizens' participation in governments' decisions being made viable as a result of electronic voting. The internet will make it possible "to radicalize democracy, creating a new public space constructed around a civil society that will take shape alongside the State" (SORJ, 2003, p. 57, our translation). In addition the internet will play an "important role" by breaking with the power of the media, which structures political life by promoting the direct relationship between politicians and citizens, as well as its use by "rebel journalists, political activists and people of all types as a channel for canal for distributing information and political rumors" (CASTELLS, 2003, p. 129, our translation).

The optimists see in the internet

"a creative, libertarian, emancipating potential for the exchange of content" (MANEVY, 2009, p. 33). This is no small thing, but others go yet further. The Renaissance and the growth of capitalism created specializations, and since the 1960s there has been "a reversal of this process", as a result of ICTs (AMADEU, 2009, p. 67, our translation), and by use of the net, which unites what was constructed separately, "science, technology and art are increasingly bonding together" (AMADEU, 2009, p. 68, our translation). One of the internet's characteristics is that it is liberating: it liberates "text from the support of paper, it liberates music from the support of vinyl, it liberates the image from the support of film" (AMADEU, 2009, our translation). The internet also allows another situation, in which "there are communities that are deterritorialized, which are not there face to face and yet which have strong bonds", these are groups that come together by means of the internet. This would be another extremely encouraging way of doing politics, due to the fact that it is "a network where the intelligence on the periphery, rather than in the center" (AMADEU, 2009, p. 75, our translation) and because there is no company that controls it, rather it is "something that is in the hands of the people, they are the ones who built it" (AMADEU, 2009, p. 77, our translation).

Another optimistic manifestation sees "a gigantic democratization" in the internet on account of the possibility of having access to books and where you "get everything" (CASTRO, 2009, p. 87, our translation). In terms of revolutionary expectations, we can observe the emergence of other cultural producers situated within society itself, with the "absence of intermediaries" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 99, our translation). Hollywood and

Rede Globo have to compete with people who produce videos and put them on You-Tube, resulting in "a transfer of power" (LEMOS, 2009, our translation), however, pointing to the risk that the internet may adopt the broadcast model, which "eliminates the chance for the small user who has no money to speak with many people" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 100, our translation). The risk that the internet will become regulated and that in the end "there will only be space for the large established players" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 101, our translation). Thus the territory of freedom and of the internet creation would face great risk if this trajectory became feasible. It can be perceived that the idea of revolution and of democratization does not refer to conventional political activity. The inference is that by means of the internet one paves the way for political activity other than by conventional means, namely political parties. It should be recalled that these have already lost ground to social movements over the last few decades, and that the internet could now be the last straw for the political parties. But, as of yet there is no way to state anything more definite regarding a possible revolution in politics as a result of the digital media.

It should be noted that the word "revolution" has been used in a very broad sense, without any conceptual rigor. The digital culture "means a revolution in terms of daily habits" by breaking up industrial society transforming it into an "explosion", a network society (COELHO, 2009, p. 121, our translation). What is inferred by these arguments is the expectation of a broader change, with it being possible to think about a society that has no owner, which would demand a new way of doing politics, and not just a change focused on traditional politics. Based on this statement we

can ask whether it would be possible for there to be a fundamental change that does not originate from politics itself, but maybe from more anarchical or chaotic, individualized movements. The change in politics, in the way of doing politics, would come from other areas, essentially from the dissemination and of knowledge, towards politics.

On this point, André Lemos draws attention to the fact that the technologies that we currently have at our disposal "effectively allow for communicative, political, social and cultural transformation" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 136) due to the power "to transfer information, symbolic, non-material assets, in a way that has been seen before in the history of mankind" (LEMOS, 2009, our translation). The computer and the internet create something that is radical: "The possibility of collective, collaborative and distributive production of information" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 137, our translation). We can deduce from this the idea that we are experiencing a revolution of information and the possibility of collective and independent production of information.

All this leads to very high expectations regarding the internet when we consider that "for the very first time people can produce or try to make sense of their lives by means of these devices" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 140, our translation). Although he reeks of this optimism, André Lemos identifies a "major challenge" in this context which is "to make people produce things in collaboration" and also "in a distributive way" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 140), which clashes with the fact that we have been "used for many centuries" to being passive spectators of the means of communication, with the "maximum level of inclusion" being the possibility to be a "critical spectator" (LEMOS, 2009, our transla-

tion). Using the new technologies and interactivity it now becomes possible not merely to criticize the newspaper and TV program, but also for a person "to produce his own newspaper", as well as films and music. It is becoming clear that politics in the digital media is diverging from conventional politics based on political parties recruiting other types of militants, instead being more based on groups or individual activities that have nothing in common with the usual actions of political parties.

However, he makes it clear that this does not represent any sort of "participative cure-all" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 141, our translation), or that "mere participation and collaboration will resolve every problem" (LEMOS, 2009, p. 142, our translation). The author resumes an optimistic note when he states that we can "talk freely, hook up with others, we can reshape culture, society, and politics" (LEMOS, 2009, our translation). While we agree with the author in principle, it is worth bearing in mind that only a small percentage of people would have the inclination to participate and the desire to reshape society and politics.

For André Parente as well "the digital culture has completely changed and subverted all the orders – from the economic to the political, to the artistic (aesthetic, in this case), to the very relation between people" (PARENTE, 2009, p. 165, our translation). It has brought a "radical transformation" in the way in which people have begun to produce. Changes are even taking place in the industrial sector as a result of the internet with it now being possible for the consumer to assemble his own car, as well as the possibility for each person to do their own programming (films, documentaries, programmes) downloaded from the computer. Strictly speaking, it can be observed that although this indeed

happening, as of yet it is only a small percentage of the population that does it or is able to do it.

Information can also be seen as increasing the possibilities of choice, representing a "freedom of choice", and this leads to the appearance of a "much more critical" new generation (SANTANA, p. 199, our translation), which can be understood with more political information for decision-making. André Stolarski points out that "there is a clear transfer of an important part of people's lives to the network environment", with this transfer being characterized by "a very complex dialetic", where "multitudes are set in motion" (STOLARSKI, 2009, p. 217, our translation), identifying that the internet has to "disassemble the traditional structure of large companies, of the publishers and so on" (idem, p. 18). Therefore, this movement could be seen as an attack on big capital, which represents a political activity in itself. It is the author's opinion that there is "a good degree of democratization" of access to digital media, so that "anyone can be a designer" (STOLARSKI, 2009, 226, our translation), and that provided that "the tools are more accessible" and that knowledge is no longer "in the hands of specialists", people will manage to produce (STOLARSKI, 2009, our translation). What should be noted once again is the internet as a space for manifestation of autonomy and the possibility of facing up to capital, which could, on the one hand, be seen as political, but at the same time cannot be considered to be very revolutionary because capital (which should be taken to mean big capital) can not only coexist with these new forms of production of knowledge, but can also appropriate them, colonizing them, as will be shown below.

The digital culture can shake "some concepts that were very well

established in our society, for at least one or two centuries" (ESTEVES, 2009, p. 243, our translation). With the new digital technologies, the text changes as well as "the reader, the author, the reading, all the production, circulation and acquisition of knowledge processes" (ESTEVES, 2009, our translation). In the area of science, a fundamental change, which represents "a threat to a very old system in terms of the validation of scientific knowledge, namely peer review" idem, p. 245), is embodied in arXiv, which is a repository of articles where the documents posted keep receiving criticism, resulting in "more open" review and in a far greater number of people carrying out evaluation than in the case of the peer review system. As can be seen, the internet and the entire digital arena open up a whole range of possibilities of collaborative activities in the production of knowledge the likes of which has never been experienced before in the human trajectory.

The possibility of researchers constructing their own sites in order to publish their research interests with greater freedom, regardless of the institutions to which they belong, "would have been impossible before" (HERCULANO-HOUZEL, 2009, p. 280, our translation) the internet and can be seen as yet another step for people to disconnect themselves from the institutions, in other words, promoting a deinstitutionalization, where employees can do without their institutions, creating direct communication channels with society where they can present their work, their research and their ideas etc.

Another aspect of the internet taken into account is its "invisibility" (PRADO, 2009, p. 51, our translation): it "was born because it was invisible", it was not perceived by the corporate business world as a

"business opportunity" nor by the "regulatory world" as being a "threat to anything", not being submitted to any regulation nor co-opting, and when it is finally noted "it is already large enough to be anarchical, chaotic, and uncontrollable" (PRADO, p. 52, our translation). From this we can infer the contra-hegemonic nature of the internet's attempt to construct a new order without there being any effective realization of what is taking place on the part of the hegemonic sectors.

With the "connectivity that is generated", a person could once again become "an agent of culture", which represents "a radical dislocation" (DOWBOR, 2009, p. 57, our translation), since "the more you generalize knowledge [...], the richer all of humanity becomes" (DOWBOR, 2009, our translation). In this case, the generalization of knowledge can be seen as a political activity. "Knowledge enriches interactive research processes" (DOWBOR, 2009, our translation) and leads to the "dislocation from a paradigm of competition to one of collaboration" (DOWBOR, 2009, p. 64, our translation). Although competition never disappears, "the collaborative practice could become dominant" (DOWBOR, 2009, our translation), evolution to a society of knowledge "does not guarantee it, but it does pave the way for the possibility of a much more democratic society" (DOWBOR, 2009, our translation).

Up until we have examined a predominantly optimistic vision. For their part, the pessimists think that "the new virtual sociability destroys the bases of interaction that allow the construction of the public space and increase the State's capacity to control the population" (SORJ, 2003, p. 49, our translation). Essentially the problem lies in the fact that "the internet destroys face-to-face relationships,

which is the only source of communication that is capable of generating solid, stable groups, with a historical memory (instead of the timeless world of the internet), which would be the only possible base of sustenance of a public life and of constant political action". This would lead to growing control over citizens by the State and by companies (SORJ, 2003, p. 57, our translation). For another pessimist, "interactions on the internet are only a pale imitation of face-to-face interactions, in other words, of real interactions" (SARTORI, 2001, p. 40, our translation). Interacting "is an impoverished contact which in the end always leaves us alone in front of a keyboard" (idem), although, putting it into perspective, "the internet's potential is almost infinite, both for evil as well as for good" (SARTORI, 2001, p. 42, our translation). On the positive side we could list the obtaining of information and knowledge, however, "the majority of internet users are not of this type and, according to my prediction will not be" (SARTORI, 2001), but instead "cultural illiterates who will kill time on the internet, an empty time in the company of "kindred spirits" whether sporting, erotic, or amusing themselves with small hobbies" (SARTORI, 2001, p. 43, our translation).

The political participation that is made possible by the ICTs has been looked upon as one of the benefits promised by the internet. However, as shown below, the results have been very limited. Participation has to be understood in the context of contemporaneity, where one can detect an abandonment or devaluation of politics. "Politics is in a crisis both as a result of an objective, structural situation as well as on account of the activation of very specific ideological and dissolution projects, although related to the fundamental utopias

of modernity" (NOGUEIRA, 2001, p. 18). In contemporary society, the "combination of information technology, internet, along with large communication, media, television and entertainment industry networks play a decisive role in helping to dislocate politics, turning it into just another spectacle, trivializing it, depriving it of its axis and substance (NOGUEIRA, 2001, p. 18, our translation). Having said this, the citizen loses his references and becomes "confused and bored with the script and overwhelmed by information that he is unable to decipher, and ends up fleeing from politics" (NOGUEIRA, 2001, p. 22, our translation). For those who believe in the political participation of the poorest segments of the population, the expectations are not encouraging. "The poorest, who are permanently dissatisfied with what they have and what they receive from governments, from the State or the community, do not find any reasons to be interested in politics or to be loyal to political institutions" (NOGUEIRA, 2001, p. 22, our translation).

Moreover, "a radicalization of the individualization process" can be observed, whereby the individual no longer feels "supported by traditional values or by the rules, institutions or ideologies of modernity (country, parties, work, patriarchal family)..." (SORJ, 2003, p. 38, our translation). On the other hand, by linking up in the context of global information and by increasing his contacts using various social networks, the individual, "participates in the process of radicalization of individualism, to the extent that it separates him from the local context, increasing his possibilities for insertion into the widest possible range of meaningful worlds" (SORJ, 2003, p. 39, our translation). Thus, the internet, at the same time as allowing the citizen a greater insertion, also

represents an escape from facing up to his closest, most immediate problems.

SOME EXPERIENCES AND RESULTS

By the mid-1990s one could already note the existence of thousands of virtual communities. However, what could also be perceived was the short-lived nature of these networks in relation to participation in them by interested parties, since "the greater part of the contributions to interaction are sporadic, with the majority of people joining and leaving the networks in order to tend to changes in interest and unsatisfied expectations" (Castells, 1999, p. 386, our translation). When Pinho and Winkler (2008) analyzed a discussion list of teachers at the Federal University of Bahia they also detected a truly participative anemia, even within a homogenous group that had no problems of cognition or of digital inclusion.

In Amsterdam's Digital City (DDS), which was set up in 1994, based on solid parameters of construction of transparency, residents "expressed their feelings, formulated their opinions, organized protests and voted on proposal" (CASTELLS, 2003, p. 121, our translation). During the first few years the level of insertion and of participation by citizens in DDS was impressive, but it dropped rapidly over the course of the following years (CASTELLS, 2003, 125, our translation). These experiments seemed to point to an apparent paradox: on the one hand, during the first few years they were successful, generating an active society, with citizens willing to participate and express their political points of view. On the other hand, as time went by, they lost interest and the political commitment waned, paradoxically during a period in which

digital resources were improving. It may be that the citizens left and the users remained.

Therefore, the internet's potentialities and possibilities are far from what was expected, given that governments merely use the internet as "a bulletin board", with the same thing being seen in the Legislative, where the members of government answer e-mails using pre-prepared standard format answers, as is the case in the United Kingdom (CASTELLS, 2003, p. 128, our translation). From society's point of view, there is the same situation with political information that is found on the internet which is only used in a "minimal" way (CASTELLS, 2003, p. 128, our translation).

This has led to the internet's role and potential being putting into perspective, as "it would surprising if the internet, by means of its technology, were to invert the political distrust that is ingrained among the majority of the citizens throughout the world" (CASTELLS, 2003, p. 129, our translation). The internet cannot be viewed as a lifesaver to the problems of lack of political participation. In addition to this, due to "generalized crisis of political legitimacy" that characterizes the modern world, and "citizens' indifference to their political representatives, few people make use of the interactive, multi-directional communication channel provided by the internet, of both sides of the connection" (Castells, 2003, p. 129). Therefore, the politicians "publish their statements and respond in a bureaucratic way", while citizens "see little point in spending energy on political questions, except when affected by an event that arouses their indignation or that has an impact on their personal interests" (Castells, 2003, p. 129, our translation). Thus, the problem does not lay in the internet's deficiencies, in things

which it promised but has failed to deliver, but rather in the "crisis in democracy" itself (Castells, 2003, p. 129). It has already been shown that there is more than enough technology to foster interaction between citizens and governments, but little democracy in the sense that these channels are not designed to create a real digital democracy (PINHO, 2008).

Taking all these arguments into account, it seems possible to say that the internet's so highly acclaimed revolutionary potential needs to be put into perspective. In order for this potential to come about, it depends on the political willingness of the State and of civil society, by means of their institutions, associations and social movements. In the Brazilian context, we observe the historical and structural flaws and limitations in the two components of this political equation. In synthesis, the internet can be seen as an instrument which "facilitates society's participation in the government and the exercise of social control", with conscience, but that nevertheless it will not be "by means of technology that participation or social control will be created, but if there are already mechanisms for this, then it may make it easier to accomplish them" (CHAIN, CUNHA, KNIGHT and PINTO, 2004, p. 49, our translation).

POLITICS IN THE FOREGROUND

As we can observe, the political question does not appear in an explicit way, with the perceptions and expectations regarding the internet's role resting much more on the possibilities of access to information, on the production of knowledge outside the traditional standards of capitalist companies and on the radical transformations in social relations that the instrument provides. We do not envisage greater expectations in terms of possibilities of transformations in the way of doing politics by means of the internet.

Eugenio Bucci brings a politically more open perspective when he recalls that "capitalism does not know how to exist without making radical changes each second, each day" (BUCCI, 2009, p. 204, our translation). At present, we are experiencing a "revolution on a par with the Gutenberg Revolution" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation), noting a "utopian exuberance regarding the internet and in relation to the new digital technologies, as if they brought equality, gave everyone a voice" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). However, "this technology will not necessarily bring greater democratization, access to power or inclusion. This is not built into the technology's DNA" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation), with it being correct to work with the idea of continuity, as in the technologies of cinema and television, than "overvaluing the rupture" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation).

Shifting the debate of this question to the specific reality of Brazil, the author points out a barrier in the fact that we have a country where "there are many people who functionally illiterate", in other words, a person who is able to read, but who does not understand what he is reading" (BUCCI, 2009, p. 205). In other words, the possibility of revolution has to be put into perspective both on account of the condition of the technology itself as well as the objective conditions of Brazilian society. This picture is now carried over to the internet. "You have someone who gets onto the computer, who accesses his e-mail, but who is still excluded from a whole series of advantages that he does not have access to" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation), including among other political demonstration.

In his vision, this is "another level of illiteracy" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation), that we could refer to here as digital functional illiteracy. In addition to this, "images play a very important role in the internet", this could make it easier for people who are digital functional illiterates to browse the internet. They are included digitally, but only to the easiest-to-understand accesses, those that do not require much by way cognition. This would be the equivalent of flicking through a magazine that had a lot of photos and not much text, which would be accessible to people who had only had a limited amount of schooling.

In this way, the "same technology that came to enable more people to have access to the public space also established a vertical differentiation that previously did not exist" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation), which is expressed by the "degree of technology that you can handle, and then by the familiarity which enables you to have access to millions of devices" (BUCCI, 2009, p. 206, our translation), in other words, by the user's cognition. Thus, in order to have "a privileged access to the digital world, you need to count on these things: more technology and more mobilization power" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). In this way, the creation of any "sort of digital socialist utopia" is not foreseen (BUCCI, 2009), given that everything which has been happening "does not revoke the laws of capitalism", very much to the contrary, "the internet turbocharges the processes by which capitalism is going to operate", which will occur "as a result of the differentiation" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). There is the recognition that making associations has become easier with the digital era, but this does not mean however that "sympathetic or collaborative logic supersedes cumulative logic" (BUCCI, 2009), as "the logic of the remunera-

tion of capital" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation) will continue to prevail. In other words, "it is not technology that changes society. It never has been. It is society, or social movements or social relations that give social and historical meaning to technology, rather than the other way round" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation).

The question of the freedom to produce content to be posted on the internet will only be economically viable if "it awakens mobilization of the public" (BUCCI, 2009, p. 209, our translation). In other words, undoubtedly the internet creates infinite possibilities for participation, but these only crystallize if they arouse the interest of a great number of users. Therefore, we undoubtedly have a freedom, but it does not necessarily lead to collective changes. So, once this "moment of being dazzled" is over, "a new form of concentration of capital will occur and the accumulation will happen all over again" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation).

The internet has nothing to do with what Habermas calls the public sphere, but rather, with the concept of life-world, given that "[the] life-world was already in place before the internet was even thought of" (BUCCI, 2009, p. 211, our translation). Recalling that the life-world is "the place in which things happen, in which people get along with each other, where the senses are interwoven – the world made of more or less natural things, of non-problematic repertoires" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). With the internet, this life-world "gained visibility" (BUCCI, 2009, p.212, our translation), and the public sphere and civil society concepts, along with others, are, in the Habermasian conception, connected to the life-world, "are supplied by the life-world" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). As topics, interests of the life-world the author mentions

prosaic things, such as the breeding of canaries, German films from the 1950s or people who want to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

"What is most fascinating for people who think and look at technology is this effervescence of so many different things, so many people talking at the same time, revealing themselves. Now, this is the life-world" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). In addition to causing fascination, "it creates the illusion that the internet is an egalitarian form of communication". And therefore the internet is put in its proper place because it gives "visibility to processes that were there and which have now become interconnected, but it did not invent these processes. It gives visibility and enables them to flow more quickly for a projection to possible public spaces" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). And that "do not be dazzled into thinking that it is another public space. This is not really the case, what has happened is that there has been a complexification of this space" (BUCCI, 2009, our translation). And the author puts things in their proper place, throwing cold water on the optimists, when he affirms that neither "mankind nor communications" has been remade (BUCCI, 2009, our translation).

Politics is explicitly inserted into the coverage of the digital question when considering our "brutal class difference" (RISÉRIO, 2009, p. 295, our translation). In order to make digital inclusion feasible, you need to have "social inclusion". Although Brazil is "a production center of original information for the world" (RISÉRIO, 2009, our translation), such as soccer, bossa nova, concrete poetry and Brasília, it is unable to resolve the "most basic questions" (RISÉRIO, 2009, p. 296, our translation), representing a "social delay", whereby, beside one of the world's largest economies, you

have "people who are ragged and in tatters" (RISÉRIO, 2009, p. 301). Therefore, in order to make "a new civilizational project" possible, the country "needs to reach a conclusion as a people and as a nation" (RISÉRIO, 2009, p. 301, our translation). In this context, the digital question has to be placed, "without fear", in the arena of the "class discussion", emphasizing the problem of education as central. If the internet can be used "to try to reinvent the world", to overcome the current Brazilian reality, you have to know how "to deal with difficult things", as in Brazil "everything is magical: magical solutions, magical ways out, the people are magical, the people will resolve it" (RISÉRIO, 2009, p. 301, our translation). In other words, there is no voluntarist way out based on the people, or, more strictly speaking, based on civil society, until substantial changes take place in this area.

On the essentially political front, Laymert Garcia dos Santos asserts that "the technologization of society is intense" (SANTOS, 2003, p. 17) and, recalling Lenin, communism was defined as the soviets together with the addition of electricity. Could it be that now, "we can replace electricity with the internet, and the soviets with base communities" and we will get the path to current socialism? (SANTOS, 2003, p. 74, our translation). Thus, in the current world the internet would represent for socialism what electricity did in the 1920s. In his reflection, he believes that it is "naive to think that the internet is a free territory, that we are going to bring about a revolution using the internet" (SANTOS, 2003, p. 74), although he does not deny "the democratic aspect of the circulation of information that exists on the internet and the connections that it makes possible" (SANTOS, 2003, our translation). There are "gaps within

the systems" that need to be taken advantage of, but it should not be forgotten that the internet is a new technology and that "capital is now beginning to colonize it" (SANTOS, 2003, p. 75, our translation), and that there will be an outcome when there is "very extensive coverage in the industrialized countries, when life will be impossible without the internet, and at that point you will start to see regulation of the internet" (SANTOS, 2003, our translation).

In addition Santos points to the existence of a myth, the myth of progress, that present technologies as being democratic, disagreeing with the idea that all new technologies are a force for good. He also disagrees with the idea that "all individuals are equal" by observing differences between a computer operator in the First World and one in Brazil due to the educational inequalities. In his assessment, "the fact that there is a network does not necessarily mean that it is democratic" (SANTOS, 2003, p. 76, our translation).

It is also worth noting that, even though the internet is effectively a new instrument, it has resulted in the intensification of trends that were historically present in modern capitalist society, there not being however any indications that it is "a factor for radical transformation of the social structure, of the stratification system or of the norms and values of society" (SORJ, 2003, p. 41). Therefore, as in other historical periods capitalism appropriates the technologies for its own benefit. Although the internet with a label of a territory that is free, democratic and isonomic, the question that arises is what will capitalism do in order to exercise control? If it cannot control it, or fully control it, and it has to co-exist with this reality, what stance will it adopt? Up until this moment effectively, we do not have any conclusive answers to these questions.

CONCLUSIONS

The new ICTs, and the internet, have brought about significant changes in all aspects of life, including economic, social, political, cultural and psychological etc. The internet has become a turning point in the human trajectory due to the revolutionary potential that it contains. Although participating interests in the internet may have a public, collective content, searches of interest to the individual appear to be predominant. One of the great things promised by the internet and which is being delivered lies in its exponential capacity for communicating, making available and circulating information, the likes of which has never been seen before in human experience. The internet, (and the ICTs in general), come dripping with a creative, libertarian and emancipating potential, but which is possibly stronger at the individual level. The internet has the potential to break conventional power structures by democratizing access to information. It also enables a deinstitutionalization by making it possible for citizens to express themselves freely either as individuals or groups regardless of the force or the parameters of capital.

Another recurring aspect indicated would be the lack of intermediaries, which allows issuers to speak with a wide audience, in various fields of human activity, without intermediaries and without institutions. Although these very significant changes are not linked to conventional political activity, there is the possibility that like in the case of a fire, the flames will be spread by explicit political activity. The internet would allow for the emergence of active citizens.

One also finds the appearance of a collaborative, cooperative stance in production on the internet.

There is a pronounced trend to refer to what is taking place on the internet as a revolution. If there is such a revolution, it is more in the sense of capitalism revolutionizing the means of production and, therefore, technology, of which the internet is a part, would be in favor of capital, and capital's move to colonize the internet would be initiated as soon as it were convenient. Therefore, any discussion of the digital question has to take into account the context of the interests of capital and of the classes.

The internet also contains a paradox, a contradiction. On the one hand, it seems to be a territory of freedom and equality; on the other, it points to a risk of increased individualism co-existing with an aggregation of group interests, which would lead to ghettos of interest rather than an environment of broad democratization. Like something which is typical of a class society, it seems that we have and will continue to have a bit of each thing. As for the political results themselves, these are poor and discouraging, even in the context of more developed countries. In the specific case of the Brazilian situation, there are our historical conditions and the presence of vast groups of functional illiterates with serious problems of cognition. .

Therefore, the problem (and the salvation) does not lay with the internet, (and this should be made clear in order not to deny the internet's conquests and advances), but rather with the specific nature of the Brazilian socio-political situation, which has been reinforced by the position assumed by politics in the contemporary global society, characterized by the end of the great narratives, of the utopias. It is worth noting that the idea of a revolution occurring, or

at the very least a change, with the democratization of access to information that the internet effectively makes possible, depends fundamentally on the level of cognition and the educational formation of citizens, which requires a political decision in this sense. Therefore, there is no automatism made possible by technology.

Working with the idea of metaphors, it is worthwhile making a comparison with the experience of Speakers' Corner in London. Previously restricted to a few places, a few demonstrators, a few listeners, and speaking under relative vigilance, the internet would now be like a larger version of Speakers' Corner, with many places (portals, sites, blogs, twitters, and e-mails), many demonstrators, many listeners, and talking, up until now, with a lot more freedom. And functioning 24 hours a day, every day, both for issuing as well as for receiving content. Based on rapid, fleeting, topical insertions, that may come apart quickly. This would be the modern way of doing politics after the drying up of the great narratives, which imply great struggles, and the mobilization of large contingents for prolonged periods of time. With the internet, the collapse of the great narratives, the appearance of demands and struggles for more specific questions (feminism, environmentalism etc.), the insertions are more varied and quicker, lasting for as long as they maintain the interest of the participants. The internet plays a fundamental role in making this orientation possible. The intention of this article was to present some positions regarding the understanding of the internet phenomenon, but at the same time it also raises more questions

and anxiety, because we are in the eye of the hurricane and it is changing very quickly.

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