A Latin American approach to mediatization: specificities and contributions to a global discussion about how the media shape contemporary societies

SCOLARI, Carlos <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7792-0345> and RODRIGUEZ-AMAT, Joan <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8391-3638>

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A LATIN AMERICAN APPROACH TO MEDIATIZATION.

Specificities and contributions to a global discussion about how media are shaping contemporary societies

Carlos A. Scolari

Universitat Pompeu Fabra - Barcelona

Joan Ramon Rodriguez-Amat

Sheffield Hallam University- UK

Abstract

Theories on mediatization have been developed in Latin America in parallel to those flourishing in the Global North production. This article analyzes the former while keeping an eye on the more available theoretical production in English speaking publications. The main part of the article covers from Eliseo Verón's initial reflections on the semantization of violence to his later development of an evolutionary approach to mediatization. The article then introduces the contributions made by Latin American researchers who have followed in Veron's wake during the last decade. The article concludes with an overview of the parallelisms between the two theoretical strands, and considers their complementarities as well as the possible exchanges between them.

Introduction

Over the last 50 years Latin American researchers have made many contributions to media and communication theories. This article focuses on one of these developments: the consolidation in Latin America of a series of theoretical developments on mediatization that run parallel to the Global North production. This parallelism shows a schism in mediatization theories that seems to favor a western weighted approach. There is an evident absence of Latin American research on mediatization in the international literature on media research. Lundby's book on *Mediatization of Communication* (2014) included more than thirty authors, but only one Latin America contribution (Verón, 2014). Furthermore, the special issue of *Communication Theory* on "Conceptualizing mediatization" (2013) did not include any Latin American researchers. However, the dialogue between the two scientific communities is now beginning to get underway. In 2014 a special issue of *MATRIZes*, a journal published by the Universidade de São Paulo (Brazil), inaugurated the exchanges between Latin American and European scholars. The dossier included articles by Verón (2014), Vasallo de López (2014), Hjarvard (2014b) and Hepp (2013), among others. This was the first confluence of Latin American and European mediatization researchers in a single publication. In June 2015, a publication of the Centre of Advanced Studies of the National University of Cordoba (Argentina) also included a section with articles on Verón, with contributions from Sophie Fisher of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and Bremen-based Averbeck-Lietz (2015). In 2016 a special issue of the Uruguayan journal *InMediaciones de la Comunicación* coordinated by Sandra Valdettaro included contributions from three theoretical approaches: the "Nordic School" (Hjarvard, 2016), the Toronto School (Granata, 2016) and the sociosemiotic Latin American school (Fausto Neto, 2016; Fernández, 2016).

The article tackles many of the questions raised by the special issue of *Communication Theory* on "Latin American communication theory today: charting contemporary developments and their global relevance," in particular the consolidation of research on mediatization in Latin America in the last 10 years. This article is aligned with an ongoing effort to dewesternize the tradition of media and communication studies from the peripheries (Willems, 2014) by highlighting, in this case, the possibilities of engagement between the Latin American theoretical production and the latest developments in Europe and the United States. After exploring the differences and

complementarities between the different schools, the article proposes a general map of mediatization theories based on non-geographical criteria. The developments in media technologies have also generated new research objects in the field of mediatization studies: many Latin American researchers are now dealing with online collaborative platforms and hybrid media formats.

In this context of low visibility and incipient exchanges the main objective of the present article is to describe and analyze the latest developments in mediatization studies in Latin America keeping an eye on the more visible theoretical production in English speaking publications. To do this, the article will:

1. Briefly describe the more common approaches to mediatization, i.e., the more common categorizations of the conceptual field as approached from the Global North theoretical production (Section 1).
2. Briefly describe the evolution of mass communication and media theories in Latin America as the context in which the sociosemiotic mediatization theoretical approach originated (Section 2).
3. Introduce the main views and theoretical postulates of Latin American mediatization theories, especially those expanding Eliseo Verón's foundational contributions (Section 3).
4. Position the Latin American mediatization approaches within the international context, highlighting their contributions and suggesting possible convergences (and critical cross-roads) (Section 4).

To understand the dynamics of a scientific domain it is necessary to map the discursive territory, identify the interlocutors that participate in the conversations, and reconstruct their exchanges and the lack thereof (Scolari, 2009). In the first section, the article briefly introduces the current state-of-the-art of the international literature on mediatization from the Global North productions. The second section focuses on the evolution of Latin American mass communication theories and the emergence of mediatization theories. Even if the main theoretical productions in Latin America are still produced under the cultural paradigm, the early arrival of structuralism in the 1960s generated a strong nucleus of research around figures like Eliseo Verón. Although Verón's production is almost unknown outside the French-Iberoamerican academic circuit as most of it has been published in French and Spanish and less in Italian or

English (i.e. Verón, 1971; 1992; 2014), his work has introduced new challenges and led to new analytical categories.

The third section describes and analyses the early emergence of mediatization theories and studies, from Verón's initial reflections on the semantization of violence in the 1960s to his latest developments in an evolutionary approach to mediatization. The section also introduces current research contributions in different fields (mediatization of politics and war, mediatization of sound and audio-visual media). Finally, the fourth section presents an overview of the two theoretical productions, focusing on their complementarities and the possible exchanges between them. This last section also includes a short but necessary reflection on the paucity of exchanges between Latin American and international academic circuits. As the article is focused on the Latin America / Global North axis, other local theoretical conversations – like the differences between the sociosemiotic and the cultural approaches in Latin America, that is, the debate between *mediatizations* and *mediations* – will not be considered in the analysis.

1. Mediatizations from the Global North

Mediatization invokes a rather vague general awareness of a major cultural and sociopolitical transformation that involves the integration and impact of communication devices and practices within and on the social fabric. This is not a new concern; it emerged in the early 20th Century and has extended along multiple strands of research and intellectual discussion. Lately, some authors state that mediatization studies represent a research paradigm (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015; Livingstone & Lunt, 2014) that explains a process that "has more or less accompanied the whole history of humankind" (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 197) and is embedded in Western modernity (Thompson, 1995) as a meta-process comparable to individualization, commercialization, or globalization (Krotz, 2007).

1.1. The continental tradition

The literature on mediatization weaves its theoretical value around two main conceptual lines: one is from the German *mediatisierung* and the other is related to the concept of *mediation* that links the Mass Communication Research tradition of Lazarsfeld (see Lievrouw, 2009) and the Toronto School of McLuhan and Innis to the work by Altheide (1995). There is still a further, more cultural-centered, approach to mediation that follows the work of Silverstone (1999). These diverse pasts of mediatization have been

extensively quoted in the recent efforts to harmonize the field (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Lundby, 2009; Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015).

In 1976, Baudrillard used the French *information mediatisée* in line with Benjamin's work on photography and cinema and McLuhan's work on television (Lundby, 2009, p. 10), and in German there is still a distinction between *mediatisierung* and *medialisierung*. Ernst Manheim used the former in the 1930s in his research on Publizistik, referring to the "*Mediatisierung* of direct human relations" and considering modern subjects as increasingly shaped by "publicistic socialization" (Averbeck-Lietz, 2014; Jansson, 2013). In addition, Habermas (1987) normatively described the social role of media as transmitting systemic logics within the symbolic world as a subprocess by which the dynamics of the system penetrate and colonize the lifeworld with logics of power, influence and money. With these reminiscences Krotz writes, "The meta-process of mediatization in particular 'makes it clear that lifeworld specific communication remains the basis of communication and meaning in general'" (Krotz, 2009, p. 5). However, in Zurich, Imhof (2006) used the concept of *medialisierung*. For Lundby (2009, p. 12) *mediatisierung* refers to the process of change, while "*medialisierung* refers to the status of society as a media society and its consequences."

1.2. The English-speaking tradition

Scholars like Lievrouw (2009) locate the origins of *mediation* in Lazarsfeld's two-step flow model. Indeed, the people's choice model of indirect effects represents a "touchstone among those advocating the convergence of interpersonal and mass communication theory" (Lievrouw, 2009, p. 306). That initial model then split into the traditions of decision studies and diffusion studies. With the theoretical challenge of the media in the digital environment, the awareness that media integrate interpersonal communication within a broader social-cultural context led to the emergence of a new framework. The concept of *mediation* then extended and populated the scholarly literature at the turn of the millennium.

The Toronto School raised awareness about media as technologies. The materiality of media facilitates exploring the significance of the formats. Media are also shapers of everyday life. The technological environments of the medium theory (Lundby, 2009) or media ecologies (Altheide, 1995; Scolari, 2012) include a discussion about the interaction between media as technology devices and their integration in the social fabric. Media are also transforming forces of social institutions.

Media format the content of the social process of communication by imposing a certain logic on initially non-mediatized social symbolic processes: this is media logic. According to Altheide, "Mediatization may be regarded as the process by which this takes place, including the institutionalization and blending of media forms" (Altheide, 2013, p. 226). For example, Mazzoleni & Schulz argued that political actors "stage an event in order to get the media attention, or […] fashion an event in order to meet the media's needs as regards timing, location, and the framing of the message and the performers in the limelight" (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 251).

In the British context, Thompson's *The Media and Modernity* (1995) referred to *mediazation* as "a series of technical innovations associated with printing and, subsequently, with the electrical codification of information, symbolic forms were produced and reproduced and circulated on a scale that was unprecedented" (Thompson, 1995, p. 46). Roger Silverstone coined the term *mediation*, instead, "not just a matter of what appears on the screen, but is actually constituted in the practices of those who produce the sounds and images, the narratives and the spectacles, as well as crucially those who receive them" (Silverstone, 2013, p. 42). This is such an openly interpretive approach to the process of circulating symbols, both technological and social, dialectical and unevenly distributed across and within societies (Silverstone, 2013, p. 109), that does not require face-to-face communication any more. Couldry contributed to this debate focusing in particular on the possibilities of mediation (and mediatization) for understanding storytelling (i.e. Couldry, 2000, 2008) and by referring to the media space as a structured and asymmetric (rather than dialectic) space. These asymmetric, uneven, dialectical conditions highlighted by the British authors link their approach to the increasing concentration of symbolic resources in media institutions as a form of power, that is, linking mediation with democracy. The formation of social and communicative spaces emerging from this mediat(iz)ed culture becomes a relevant field to explore under the labels of public sphere, communicative and social spaces (Jansson 2013; Brantner & Rodriguez-Amat, 2016).

1.3. Media(tiza)tion: what's in a name

The debate surrounding mediation and mediatization led Couldry (2008) to finish his article by stating, that "It is important to retain within the developing field of new media theory the legacy of the concept of mediation." The debate, however, did not last much

longer. Livingstone (2009) explored the cloud of nomenclatures and meanings. In a clear gesture of cutting the Gordian knot, she pronounced:

> Two grand claims are being made: first, the media mediate, entering into and shaping the mundane but ubiquitous relations among individuals and between individuals and society; and second, *as a result*, the media mediate, for better or for worse, more than ever before. (...) This permits us not only to examine the empirical support for each claim but, more especially, to recognize their mutual relations and interdependencies. (Livingstone, 2009, p.6)

However, the works of different scholars (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2010, 2015; Hjarvard, 2008, 2014a; Hjarvard & Hepp, 2013; Krotz, 2007, 2009; Lundby, 2009) have brought *mediatization* to the fore. There are "different traditions doing mediatization research, […] the term mediatization does not refer to a single theory but to a more general approach within the media and communications research" (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 197). And of course, every now and then, voices emerge that criticize the rather catch-all effect and empirical difficulties of the imposing concept of *mediatization* (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). Nevertheless, just a few months later Deacon & Stanyer (2014) received a response: "the emergence of the concept of mediatization is part of a paradigmatic shift within media and communication research" (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2015, p. 1) a line of thought already discussed by Livingstone & Lunt (2014).

1.4. Applied strands of the concept

In the special issue of *Communication Theory* on mediatization studies edited by Couldry & Hepp (2013) two main currents were identified: the institutional approach and the social-constructivist approach to mediatization. The former follows the media logic tradition of Altheide (2013) and sees media as a social institution with specific rules. Social systems are thus influenced by and adapt to the media logic (Hjarvard, 2014a). However, the social-constructivist angle believes that communication constructs a sociocultural reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2013).

The academic literature is now full to bursting with empirical applications of the concept. That is, and assuming the risk of reductionism and of falling short in the examples, the institutional front of mediatization involves extensive research into the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni & Schultz, 1999); the mediatization of religion

(Hjarvard, 2008); the mediatization of sports; the mediatization of health and of care, and even the mediatization of journalism.

At the same time, scholars considering mediatization as a metaprocess of "interconnected regimes of media related dependencies and normalizations" (Jansson, 2014, p.273) include dimensions like visual mediatization, mediatization and social spaces (Brantner & Rodriguez-Amat, 2016; Jansson, 2013) and mediatization and surveillance and cosmopolitanism, or the work by Tufte & Hemer (2012) on mediatization of development. These strands (and many others) highlight a flourishing internally-divergent concept and enrich the discussion.

2. The evolution of Latin American mass communication and media theories

2.1. From development to revolution

Scholars have organized Latin American media and communication research into two main periods (Scolari, 2015). The first period follows the dominant theories imported from the United States and Europe and extends over the third quarter of the 20th Century, and the second period starts in the 1980s and opens the dialogue between genuine, newly-formed theoretical production and the ongoing work in Europe and the United States.

The creation of the *Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina* (CIESPAL – Quito, Ecuador) in 1959 represented the point that Latin America entered the discussions on the theories and the subsequent policies of development in the United States (i.e. Rogers, 1962; Schramm, 1964). CIESPAL was both a research cluster and a top-level education center that trained hundreds of professionals in Latin America. This is how Mass Communication Research spread in Latin America. Over the next decade, the principles of technology diffusion in rural areas were hegemonic, while the higher education centers taught information theory and the two-step flow of communication.

However, soon the idea that mass media could be used as tools for economic and social development were discarded. In a very few years, critical and seemingly revolutionary views displaced the enthusiastic approaches of the development theorists, considering them patronizing and colonial. Schiller (1969) and Mattelart (1970, 1973) came to the fore with openly anti-imperialistic complaints. As Schlesinger (1993) put it:

> By the 1970s a number of quite distinctive approaches had developed (in Latin America, A/N), which will not be unfamiliar to Europeans. For instance, a strong semiotic current was associated with the Argentinean scholar, Eliseo Verón, and his collaborators, whereas a Marxist political economic analysis was being elaborated by Armand Mattelart, then in Chile, and others such as Héctor Schmucler, another Argentinean. Debates throughout Latin America about the relative merits of studying signifying practices against the political economic preconditions of media structures paralleled contemporary discussion in Europe. (Schlesinger, p.4)

In spite of the differences between the two periods, there was still an epistemological continuity that spanned from the beginnings of Mass Communication Research in the golden age of policies for development to the arrival a few years later of a set of anti-capitalist theories that combined both Marxist and structuralism concepts. In a few words: from the 1950s to the 1970s Latin American media and communication studies were a great sounding board for the theories and conceptions originated in the United States and Europe (Scolari, 2015).

2.2 The Latin American cultural turn

Jesús Martín-Barbero (1980, 1993) pointed out the perverse symmetry between the functionalist approach to media as development and as Marxist resistance in the Latin America communication research tradition. He criticized the coincidental underlying assumptions of verticality and unidirectionality in the two formally-opposed approaches to media. Martín-Barbero suggested redefining the approach to popular communication and local reception processes. For him, in line with other Latin American critical researchers, the subjects of communication ought to be "considered decoders and replicators of the domination discourses" (1980, p.11), and they had to be studied in relation to the role they played within the local popular cultures. Martín-Barbero was not the only one to contribute to the discussions on the cultural turn in the Latin America context; García Canclini (1995), González (1996) and Ortiz (1985) were also part of the discussions.

This cultural approach to media and communication, that runs parallel to the British cultural studies, is what has been recognized as the "Latin American tradition" in international media studies. However, the Latin American research and theoretical production on media cannot be reduced to just this approach: other approaches, also

"cooked" in the 1960s-70s, multiplied the theoretical conversations around media and communication in Latin America.

2.3 The semiotic approach in Latin America

Like many other European theories and ideas, structuralism spread in Latin America via Buenos Aires. Since the 19th Century, to visit Paris has been the dream of many generations of Argentine scholars and artists. For example, the first Spanish edition of Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* was translated and printed in Buenos Aires in 1945. If the Latin-American cultural turn has a key name – Jesús Martín-Barbero – the spread of structuralism in the Spanish language (not only in Latin America) and the consolidation of French semiology also has a referent: Eliseo Verón. This Argentine scholar, with a basic education in sociology and philosophy, moved to Paris in the early 1960s where he attended Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes' seminars. In 1961 Verón translated Lévi-Strauss' *Anthropologie structurale* (1958) into Spanish for the first time. Halfway between Paris and Buenos Aires, for over forty years Verón remained a key interlocutor of the semiotic research in Latin America, France, Italy, and Spain. In the specific case of Argentina, the introduction of the first wave of "French Theories" (i.e. R. Barthes, C. Metz, L. Althusser, J. Lacan, T. Todorov, A. Greimas) promoted the emergence of a new generation of scholars with clear structuralist orientation (J. C. Indart, O. Massota, L. Prieto, J. Sazbón, H. Schmucler, N. Rosa, O. Steinberg and O. Traversa, among others). This was the environment in which the first reflections on mediatization were generated.

3. Latin American approaches to mediatization

3.1 The social semiosis

According to Verón the main objective of social discourse analysis is to study the social construction of reality. Verón's theory of social discourses starts with a double hypothesis about the functioning of *social semiosis* (understood as the significant dimension of social phenomena): a) the production of meaning is social, and b) every social phenomenon is based on a meaning construction process. To approach social semiosis, the researcher must take into account that in every "social text" there are rules of generation (for Verón, *grammars of production*) and rules of reading (for Verón, *grammars of recognition).* Social discourses *circulate* in the semiotic network between these two sets of constraints.

> The social semiosis is an infinite significant network. In all its levels, it has a structure of interlocks […] to the extent that other texts are always part of the conditions of production of a text or of a given textual set. Every process of producing a text is, in fact, a phenomenon of recognition. And conversely: a set of effects of sense, expressed as grammar of recognition, can only be manifested in the form of one or several produced texts. In the infinite network of semiosis, any grammar of production can be examined as the result of certain conditions of recognition; and a grammar of recognition can only be verified in the form of a certain process of production; this is then the networked form of textual production in history. (Verón, 1987, pp. 129-130)

As the conditions of production become more complex because of the increasing intervention of technological devices, the mismatch between production and recognition grows; perhaps the main consequence of the social transformation of the technological conditions of discursive production for the theory of meaning "was the illumination of the existence of this constitutive mismatch, which remains 'invisible' when production and recognition work on the same level, as is the case with interpersonal exchanges" (Verón, 1987, p. 150). The rupture (or décalage) between production and recognition-that is, the establishment of a difference in scale between the conditions of production and those of recognition- is the main trait of going from a media society to a mediated society. The concept of mediatization emerges thus from Veron's previous notion of *décalage* (Olivera, 2015).

3.1. Veron's road to a theory of mediatization

As early as 1967 Verón analyzed the construction of political violence in Argentine newspapers (Verón, 1984). At that initial moment of his analytical path the key-concept was *semantization*, intended as "a process by which an event X that occurred in social reality is incorporated, in the form of meanings, into the contents of a mass media" (Verón, 1984, p. 144). In 1981 Verón published *Construire l'événement*, a media discourse-centered analysis of the nuclear meltdown of a reactor in 1979 at Three Mile Island (Pennsylvania), the most significant accident in U.S. commercial nuclear power plant history. In this case Verón analyzed how audiovisual and printed media 'constructed' the reality of the accident. He focused on issues like how the media discourse dealt with a highly technological language (Verón, 1981). In the following years Verón worked on developing a semio-discursive analytical framework of how

media construct realities and how television had positioned itself as central for political communication (Verón, 1995, 2001). The concept of *mediatization* was becoming the heart of his analytical model. If a medium is a combination of technology and production/appropriation social practices, a society in the process of mediatization is one where

> the functioning of the institutions, practices, conflicts, culture, begins to be structured in a direct relationship to the existence of the media […] The mediatization of society explodes the border between what is "real" in the society and its representations. One begins to suspect that the media are not just devices for reproducing what is "real," copied more or less accurately, but rather devices of sense production. (Verón. 2001, pp. 14-15)

According to Verón, mediatization operates through different mechanisms depending on the sectors of social practice that it affects; and in each of these sectors it produces different effects. At the same time, mediatization also works differently in advertising, politics, news and sciences because of the differences in the conditions of production and recognition (2001, p. 42). The following model (Verón, 1997) represents the different processes and aspects of mediatization:
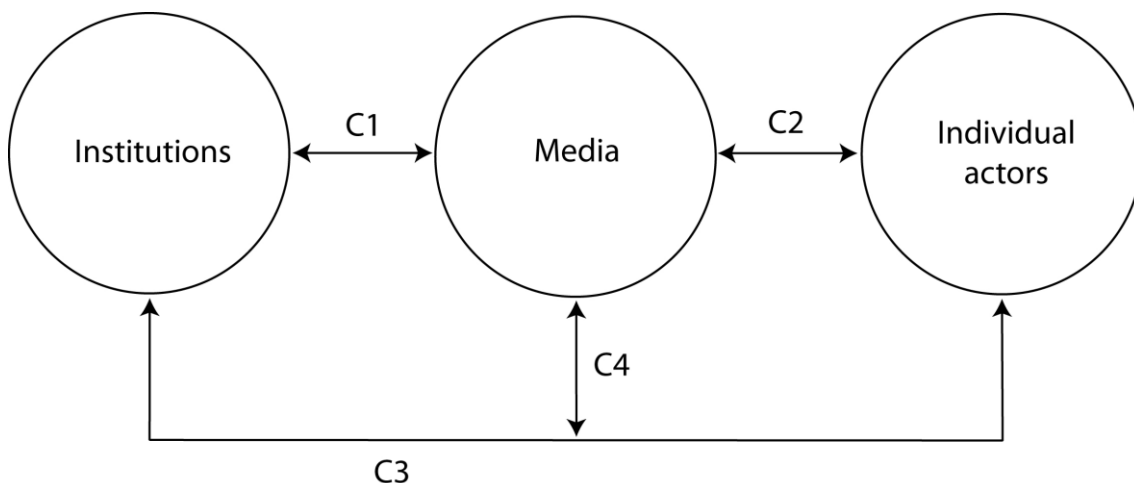

Fig. n. 1 - Mediatization process (Verón, 1997)

Mediatization processes include three main elements and four collective-production zones:

1. The *institutions* designate the multiple organizational arrangements of the society, except for the media.

2. Even if *media* are also institutions, when mediatization processes are studied they must be considered as separate from the rest because of their centrality.

3. The *actors* are single individuals but are involved in complex social relationships.

The "Cs" that appear in each of the double arrows designate the *collectives* ("the citizens," "the consumers," "the viewers," etc.) as constructions that occur within the communication processes. At the same time, according to Verón, these intersections can also be useful for identifying research objects:

1. C1 (institutions/media): Research focuses on the relationships between political systems and media, or on the relationships between education systems and media.

2. C2 (media/individual actors): Research focuses on the strategies of newspaper readers or TV viewers or on the transformation of everyday life due to media.

3. C3 (institutions/individual actors): Research focuses on the transformation of internal institutional communication.

4. C4 (media/relationships between institutions/individual actors): Research focuses on specific conflicts, for example when a media scandal affects the relationships between individual actors and institutions.

It should be remembered that all the relationships are represented with double arrows to indicate the two-way nature of the link between the two elements.

If the analysis focuses on C2 a central concept emerges: the "reading contract" (Verón, 1985). From a semiotic perspective, any text includes a communication program or proposal that the reader must accept and activate in the first step of an interpretation process. In this context, Verón proposed the notion of the "reading contract" to conceptualize the relationship between an addresser (i.e. the newspaper) and an addressee (i.e. the reader). As they are situated in a very competitive symbolic market, each media (newspapers, magazines, radio or TV shows) proposes a contract to readers, who may accept or refuse it according to their values, expectations, and information needs. Verón discovered that very often media competitors – i.e. fashion magazines – offer the same content but propose a different contract to their readers (1).

The "reading contract" can be considered the molecular dimension of the mediatization processes. However, from a macro-perspective, Verón considers mediatization an

ancient and non-linear process with "radial effects" that reach every functional level of society. His vision is non-deterministic: the appropriation of a technological device by a community may adopt different forms. Following a classic distinction introduced by Lévi-Strauss, from a semiotic perspective tool-making should be considered as a secondary signification system (language being the first one). For Verón, mediatization is a long historical sequence of institutionalized media phenomena, from clay tablets to papyrus, codex, printed books, newspapers, cinema, radio, television, and the Internet. However, Verón considers that mediatization has accelerated due to the emergence of "new media." like Gutenberg's printing machine or, even more, with the Internet (2013, 2014). In this sense, Verón's (2013) late statements about the Web focused only on the conditions of access/circulation rather than on its transformative possibilities in terms of mediatization.

3.3. Mediatizations today

Some of Verón's approaches to the epistemology of communication studies have an impact in the transnational sense, beyond the specialization of the national communities of communication research (Averbeck-Lietz, 2015). However, as it is impossible to synthesize more than 30 years of scientific production, this section only introduces a few approaches, categories and contributions from a series of Argentine scholars who work closely to Verón's mediatization model. They represent four lines of development of Verón's work: the mediatization of politics, of war, and the mediatization of sound and of audio-visual media. Many other Argentinian, Brazilian and Mexican scholars could have been included in this analysis (some of them are mentioned in the reference list).

3.3.1. Mediatization of politics

According to Verón (1998)

> In the mediatization of politics, the political sphere has lost ground in relation to the media: trying to gain control of the media at all costs, politicians lost control of their own sphere. (p. 230)

From the perspective of production, the mediatization of politics implies both a collective and an individual strategy: the collective strategy refers to that of the political party, and the individual strategy refers to the candidate's personal traits and ambitions. The same may be said about the media: they combine collective strategies (regarding

the positioning of the media) and individual strategies (the personal profile of well-known journalists) (Verón, 1998).

On another research front, Verón's analysis of Juan Perón's return to Argentina in 1973 and the tragic internal conflicts between different factions from a media discourse perspective offers a useful model for analyzing similar "arrival" situations (Verón & Sigal, 1986). Verón's contributions to the analysis of political discourse, electoral television debates, and the mediatization of politics are considered central references in Latin America, where his works have inspired at least two generations of researchers.

3.3.2. Mediatization of war

Immediately after the end of the Falklands/Malvinas war in June 1982 Lucrecia Escudero began analyzing the mediatization processes during the conflict. Like Verón, Escudero considered that researchers must deal with the transformation of media societies into mediated societies or, in other words, the change from a society with a representation regime founded on media that "tell the truth" to a new regime where media produce the reality (Escudero, 1996, p. 41). In this context media readers establish a "fiduciary contract" – inspired by Verón's "reading contract" – that implies an *a priori* acceptation of the media narrative as true, keeping for themselves the possibility of *a posterior* verification (p. 47). This contract is based on the legitimacy that media have as institutions.

The discourse of the news shares many properties with fictional discourses, such as the construction of possible worlds or the presence of subjects with specific properties and action programs. The Far South war generated so many media discourses that it is a perfect situation for analyzing the mediatization of a conflict in a context where different enunciators battled to impose their version of the facts.

> If war is a form of bloody conversation between two adversaries: What were the textual devices that were set up to develop a massive information strategy to generate consensus and political legitimacy? And what were the mechanisms of collective reading that gave verisimilitude to the (story) narrated by the media? (Escudero, 1996, p. 27)

After seventy-four days of "victory construction" by Argentine media the sad reality finally arrived from the Far South. As the Argentine military leaders did not have a media strategy – for example they did not take advantage of the sinking of the *HMS*

Sheffield, one of the jewels of the British fleet – and they had only succeeded in proposing a victorious plot, the defeat of the troops generated a "rebellion of the readers" that started the end of the dictatorship. Almost a decade after the Falkland/Malvinas war the new paradigm of war mediatization would arrive in 1990 with the Gulf War, a conflict that for the first time showed in real-time, and prime time, the missiles hitting their targets.

3.3.3. Mediatization of sound and audio-visual media

In the last fifteen years José L. Fernández (2008, 2012) has developed one of the most comprehensive analyses of the language of radio. Based on the contributions of semioticians (Metz, 1982; Steimberg, 2013; Steimberg & Traversa, 1997; Verón 1987, 1995), Fernandez focused his research on how the radio constructs the idea of body, space and time. In this theoretical context, he proposed the following enunciational modes:

Enunciational Mode	Space	Characteristics	Examples
Transmission	Social space	This space has a previous and external existence to the radio	Live transmission of a concert or a political meeting.
Support	Zero space	No-space characterized by the absence of ambient sound.	Certain FM "silent" music transmissions or interview programs.
Emission	Media space	Space whose existence is only justified by the existence of the media.	Sport transmissions with multiple connections with different stadiums, studios, etc.

Table 1 Radio enunciational modes - Based on Fernández (2008, 2012)

The research agenda also included analyzing the emergence of the radio as a "new" media in the context of the urban culture of the metropolis (Buenos Aires). The emergence of a new media depends on the combination of a series of elements (devices, genres and discourse styles, communicational exchanges) to form an "epoch style." This combination of elements may promote unexpected exchange modes in social practices (the social life of sport, fiction, information, and music were transformed by the emergence of radio). The successive incorporation of technical devices (i.e. frequency modulation) generated possibilities and restrictions into the discursive construction, new genres and styles (like the radio theater in Latin America) as well as new social

practices (e.g. taking a small portable transistor radio to the soccer stadium). More recently, Fernández and his team have expanded to new sound media practices and included a *glocal* perspective:

> Sound media such as radio or phonograph revolutionized perception and opened the way to globalization. The most global texts with international success, such as songs of popular genres (jazz, bolero and tango) are the most local texts, in the sense that 'tango is the music of Buenos Aires,' jazz is from New Orleans, the bolero from Central America, etc. The notion of *glocal* could have been created at that moment. (Fernández, 2008, p. 66)

The emergence of social media and collaborative practices has radically transformed the territory of sound media. Fernandez (2014) therefore employs the concept of *post-broadcasting* to define the new environment in which new forms of mediatization of music are operating, both on production (e.g. the DJ as a performer or platforms like SoundCloud) and on delivery (e.g. platforms like Spotify or Grooveshark).

Regarding the mediatization of audio-visual media, according to Mario Carlón, another scholar from the University of Buenos Aires, television includes different devices (*dispositifs*) and therefore different viewer positions.

> The distinction between technological supports, media and *dispositifs* enables three levels of description (with different evolutionary rhythms) that are indispensable to begin writing a good history of mediatization (Carlón, 2004, p. 14).

The analysis of metadiscursive phenomena may serve as an example of this proposal. Carlón studied a set of local TV programs from the late 1990s based on the do-it-yourself logic, as well as the diffusion of politicians' verbal slip-ups and television bloopers. This metadiscursive turn led to the concept of *metatelevision*, a kind of television that cannibalizes itself (Carlón, 2006).

In their latest works, Carlón and his team have focused on new forms of mediatization in social media, and the "convergent mediatization," a process that combines discourses from different media (i.e. Facebook and broadcasting television), including the discursive construction of the "presidential body" in politics, or the emergence of YouTubers as the new media celebrities (Carlón, 2016; Scolari & Fraticelli, 2017).

3.2.5. The institutionalization of mediatization research in Latin America

This map of mediatization studies in Latin America has only included the researchers closest to Verón's concepts and analytical categories. Many other scholars, events and research centers could have been included in this conversational network. On the Brazilian side, the activity of the *Centro Internacional de Semiótica e Comunicação* (CISECO) has been a central cluster in the diffusion and exchanges in Latin American mediatization research. Their annual meetings ("Pentalogos") have generated many publications about the mediatization of politics, surveillance, urban life, etc. (i.e. Fausto Neto, Verón & Heberle, 2013).

Another cluster of mediatization research in Latin America is the *Centro de Investigaciones en Mediatizaciones* (CIM) of the Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina). Directed by Sandra Valdettaro (2015), the CIM has a long history of research projects, publications and events around mediatization that combine the tradition of sociosemiotics with the contributions of the Toronto School.

With these references to the institutionalization of research we conclude this overview of Latin American theoretical reflections on mediatization. As it can be seen, the research rooted in Verón's contributions has been very intensive and productive over the last decade; this research also opens many strands of discussion that, in spite of their low visibility, could complement well the current lines of work around mediatization as a field of research, as a metaprocess, and as a paradigm.

4. Discussion

4.1. Barriers and bridges between traditions

Although the objectives of this article do not include analyzing the limits of Latin American scientific circulation in the international arena, or discussing the notion of westernalization of the media and communication theories, a couple of reflections on these questions may serve to put into perspective the relationships between European and Latin American mediatization theories. For a critical discussion on westernalization, the works by Willems (2014), Waisbord & Mellado (2014), and Slater (2013) are good references. In this context, the invisibility of what we could call Latin American mediatization requires further discussion; however, on this occasion we have opted to focus the argument on the semiotic dimension of Verón's understanding of mediatization, and this includes his unavoidable French *flaire*.

On the specific front of the Latin American scientific circulation, especially that coming from a semiotic-discursive theoretical approach, researchers had solid exchanges with their French and Italian colleagues in the 1960s to 1980s. French (and not English) was the scientific language for many of those scholars. The boom of semiology and structuralism in the 1960s reinforced this predominance of French and marked the future evolution of international exchanges in mediatization studies. Therefore, the increasing hegemony of English in the global scientific exchanges contributed to isolating the Latin American production (Ortiz, 2009). From the European perspective, the semiotic approaches have progressively retreated from the social sciences to the humanities in many European institutions, since the 1980s. At the same time, the emergence of Cultural Studies displaced the hegemony of the structuralist methodologies by incorporating alternative research instruments (i.e. ethnography, critical discourse analysis, etc.). In the specific case of Latin American scholars, instead of migrating to other theoretical frameworks (such as the new emerging cultural paradigm) some researchers decided to redouble their efforts and deepen and update the study of media from a sociosemiotic perspective. It is in this context that the theories of mediatization introduced here should be interpreted. In the same sense, the differences between the Latin American and the European traditions complement rather than oppose each other.

There are many areas of coincidence between the two traditions, and thus many bridges connecting them. For example, the foundations of the Latin American tradition described here include the idea of considering reality as the product of a process of social semiosis (Verón, 1987). This foundation suggests that it is possible to bridge that notion with the considerations of mediatization as a metaprocess within a socially constructed reality (Krotz, 2007). Such an epistemological coincidence enables bridges both at the theoretical and methodological levels. Of course, these are not straightforward links: for instance, the long shadow of the Lazarsfeldian paradigm in the German tradition prioritizes reception studies; whereas the institutional schisms in the German speaking universities that place media research and communication research in opposition make it difficult to integrate semiotics within the mediatization debates (Averbeck-Lietz, 2015). This starting point hinders the chances of fully considering "the message as a social reality and as a mediated relationship with social boundaries and premises" (Averbeck-Lietz, 2015, p. 157). Indeed, integrating Verón in the flourishing

German tradition of mediatization research seems to be a fruitful opportunity for further writings.

However, keeping to more specific and analytical levels, there are more areas of contact in sight. For instance, the idea of an acoustic space as studied by Fernández (2008, 2012) in his radio enunciational model opens a very interesting area of exchange with the mediatization of social spaces as analyzed by Jansson (2013) and Brantner & Rodriguez-Amat (2016). Jansson (2013) refers to the socio spatial regimes of dependence defined by mediatization, starting from the representations of space in line with Lefebvre's triad and the everyday practice of the transmedia age (Brantner & Rodriguez-Amat, 2016), empirically exploring the spatial configurations of urban demonstrations by considering the factors shaping the communicative practices and information flows. Instead, Fernandez (2008, 2012) deals with enunciational space and the soundscapes enabled by the new technological ecosystems. Although these approaches seem to start from different points, it might be worth exploring the possibilities of epistemological and methodological dialogues. Both the notion of "mediatization as metaprocess" and that of "mediatized space" are examples of the possible contact areas between the different approaches.

4.2. Towards a general map of scientific conversations about mediatizations

Any map of the scientific conversations about mediatizations should go beyond geographical borders and organize the different enunciators and scientific contributions from other perspectives. One possibility could be to recover Eco's distinction between *general semiotics* and *specific semiotics*. General semiotics proposes a philosophical overview of production and interpretation of sense; it is fundamentally comparative in its approach and "it is influenced, more than any philosophy of language, by the experiences of specific semiotics" (Eco, 1986, p. 8). On the other hand, a specific or applied semiotics focuses on the grammar of a particular sign system; it "studies phenomena that are reasonably independent of their observations" and "their objects are usually 'stable,' even though the duration of a code for traffic signals has a shorter range than the duration of a phonological system, whereas lexical systems are in a continuous process of transformation" (Eco, 1986, p. 5). Following Eco's logic, it would be possible to identify two approaches to mediatization:

1. General mediatization: in this case the research and reflections focus on the transition from media to mediated societies, the long-term evolution of

mediatization and the general dynamics of mediatization processes beyond the specificities of each society. General mediatization works as the "umbrella" of specific approaches.

2. Specific or applied mediatizations: in this case the research focuses on well-delimited phenomena, either the substance of the medium (sound, visual, audio-visual mediatizations) or the social institution being mediatized (mediatization of religion, politics, health, journalism, sports, etc.). Paraphrasing Umberto Eco, it could be said that the general mediatization approach is influenced (and "fed") by the experiences of applied mediatization research.

Another possibility could be to reorganize the approaches to mediatization, following a temporal axis. Scholars like Hjarvard (2008) consider mediatization a phenomenon of modern and highly industrialized Western societies that began to pick up speed in the last years of the 20th Century. Thompson (1995), for his part, links mediatization to modernity and the consequences of the printed press. Finally, researchers like Verón (2013) and Krotz (2007) extend the origins of mediatization to the production of stone tools 2.5 million years ago. Traversa (2015), in this sense, highlighted Verón's notion of "the long haul to mediatization." In this context, the different approaches could be organized along a temporal axis from *long-term* to *short-term* mediatization.

Both organizational proposals (general/specific and long-term/short-term) could be integrated into a single double axis cartesian graph: the epistemic specificity and the temporality of mediatization. For example: while a scholar like Verón developed a general overview of mediatization supported by specific analytical incursions in politics or journalism, and defended a long-term evolutionary vision, other Latin American researchers have gone deeper into the specific analysis of mediatization in sound or audiovisual media, mediatization of war, etc. Obviously, the same scholar(s) can be positioned at different coordinates depending on their individual contributions. For example, Hjarvard (2014a) proposes a general overview so should be situated on the top of the graph, while Hjarvard (2008) should be placed closer to the bottom as it is an example of applied mediatization (of religion). This graph should not be considered as a fixed picture of the mediatization research but rather an operative map to activate theoretical conversations between scholars working at close coordinates (see Fig. 2).
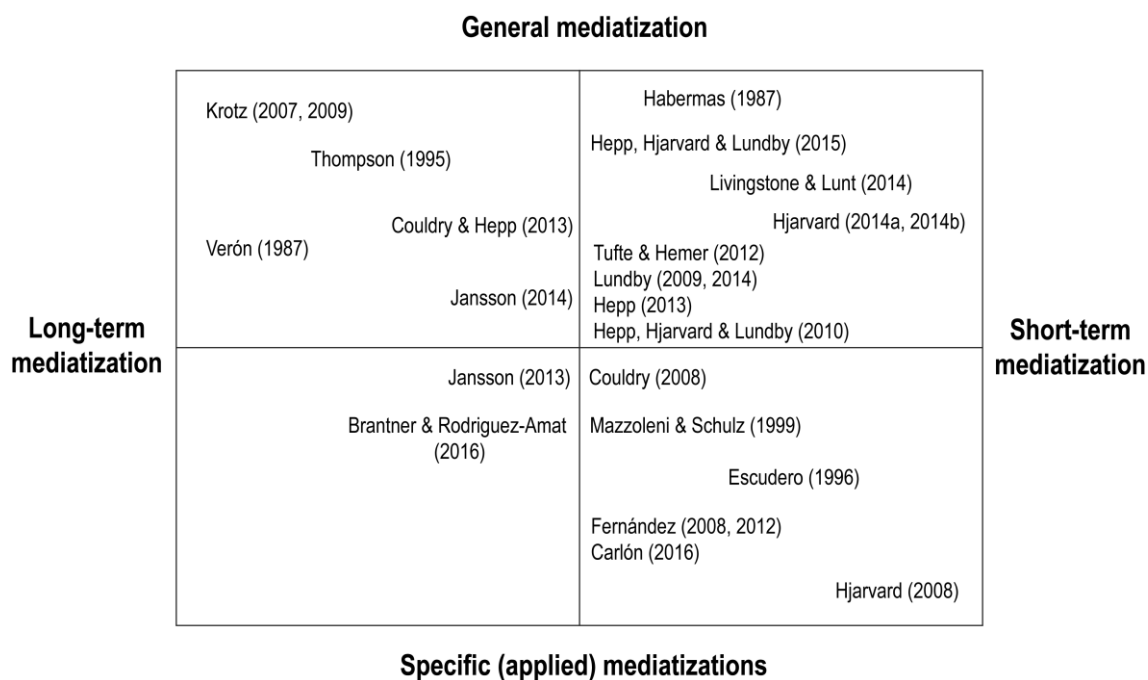
General mediatization

Krotz (2007, 2009)	Habermas (1987)
Thompson (1995)	Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby (2015)
	Livingstone & Lunt (2014)
Couldry & Hepp (2013)	Hjarvard (2014a, 2014b)
Verón (1987)	Tufte & Hemer (2012)
	Lundby (2009, 2014)
Jansson (2014)	Hepp (2013)
	Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby (2010)
Jansson (2013)	Couldry (2008)
Brantner & Rodriguez-Amat (2016)	Mazzoleni & Schulz (1999)
	Escudero (1996)
	Fernández (2008, 2012)
	Carlón (2016)
	Hjarvard (2008)

Long-term mediatization (left) — **Short-term mediatization** (right)

Specific (applied) mediatizations

Fig. n. 2 - An integrated map of theoretical contributions on mediatizations

This graph, beyond its utility for mapping the scientific production on mediatization, is also useful for detecting areas where research is still low and could be expanded, such as the analysis of specific historical experiences of mediatization (situated in the left lower quadrant). Different research objects could be positioned in this area, from the early mediatization of politics in the 17th Century in relation to the circulation of the first newspapers to the mediatization of religion before/after Gutenberg's mechanical reproduction of texts. In all of these cases the interdisciplinary conversations between media archaeology (Parikka, 2012), media evolution (Scolari, 2013) and mediatization could enrich the empirical research and the theoretical framework.

4.3. Theories of mediatization: new conversations and future convergences

Even if the distance between Latin American and the Global North theoretical productions is real, the globalization of the academic circuit and decided efforts like the above-mentioned international events, special issues, and collective volumes are reducing the gap and enhancing the exchanges. The increasing number of Latin American doctorate students and researchers around the world, and a growing number of translations will generate more theoretical conversations, define new areas of reciprocal epistemological exchange and innovative scientific convergences.

Amongst them, Latin American contributions to a mediatization theory could expand and complement the Global North approaches that are sometimes too centered on the reception or on conditions outside an undiscussed notion of media. In this sense, Verón's "arrival model" (see Section 3) could be applied to other recent political "arrivals" (i.e. Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump's successful entries into politics after being in the business and entrepreneurial world). Also, Escudero's analysis of the Malvinas/Falkland war could be employed to detect the presence of fictional components in the mediatization of 21st Century conflicts or in the debates around fake-news. The enunciational model proposed by Fernández in his analysis of radio's role in the mediatization of sound is useful for the study of emerging communicative spaces of public contention that integrate sound and interactive media. Carlón's reflections on metatelevision could be expanded to the increasing "mediatization of media," that is, the analysis of how media are cannibalizing and exploiting each other. Put together, these contributions offer a broad set of analytical categories and theoretical approaches for addressing the study of many critical contemporary situations, such as the emergence of new specific mediatization research fields (i.e. mediatization of refugees, mediatization of cultural heritage, etc.), or the redefinition of former mediatization processes (i.e. mediatization of politics in a post-truth culture). This is quite a conceptual and methodological opportunity to explain, in proper depth, a time of deep mediatization.

NOTES

(1) The idea of a "contract" and the existence of a "negotiation" behind any meaning construction process have a long tradition in semiotics: i.e. "enunciation contract" (Greimas & Courtés, 1983), "interpretative contract" (Eco, 1979), and "conversational contract" (Bettetini, 1994). This conception was also present in Hall's (1980) "negotiated code or position" of his encoding/decoding model. According to Verón (1985), to understand the "relative effectiveness" of the reading contracts, after identifying them with a semiotic analysis the researcher must develop fieldwork with real subjects (focus groups or individual interviews) depending on the nature of the problems arising from the reference media. The fieldwork concerns readers and non-readers (and/or occasional readers) of the media under analysis.

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