

# Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies



# Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies:

*Contemporary World-Society*

By

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To Mariana.

*Nisi utile est quod facimus, stulta est Gloria.*

Phaedrus, roman poet (15 B.C.-50 A.D.).

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# INTRODUCTION

“The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”  
(Debord, 1995, p. 12).

The human societies and the forms of communication are in constant interrelation, dynamic, and evolution. There is a dialectic between the constitution and functioning of human societies and the nature and forms of communication since the beginnings of humanity. Dialectics<sup>1</sup> is a method of dialogue, a method of reasoning that proceeds by question and answer, a strategy of establishing parallels, an approach that focuses on the opposition of ideas to arrive at other ideas, i.e. dialectic is, in a literal translation, a “path between ideas”. Therefore, the subject matter of this book implies a dialectic between communication and society, which has always existed and will always exist, although communication and society (as well as the dialectical relationship between these two poles) are constantly changing. This preliminary observation justifies the title of the book as *Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies: Contemporary World-Society*.

This assumption justifies *per se* the interest to study, understand, analyze, and critically reflect on societies as a resource to communicability and the forms and means of communication as a resource to sociability. Especially nowadays, when there is an intensification of the digital dimension of information and communication, after a recent change of communicational paradigm: from traditional forms and means of communication to the so-called new media or new information and communication technologies. The new paradigm is that of the immanence and contingency of communication and social relations through the images, as Debord’s epigraph refers to in this Introduction. The paradigm is defined by a kind of modern iconolatry

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<sup>1</sup> From the Greek *dialektiké*, which is the *techné* (“technique”) and the art (“skill”) of debate, discourse, and philosophical discussion, i.e. the art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions by discussion, resolving the subjacent aporias (difficulties, problems) of the subject matter of the *dialektikos*, “discourse”, “conversation”, “debate” or “discussion”.

regarding the spectacular, which is distracting and alienating. Social and communicational relations are, therefore, paradoxical. Both are invisible and visual; accidental and global; online and offline; contiguous (immediate) and mediated by the new media.

Today, with the globalization of all domains (technological, communicational, social, cultural, economic, political, geographic, etc.) of human life, and with technological developments and the complexity and diversity of the new media and their uses and effects in the transformations of collective and daily life, the interrelations between human societies and forms of communication are even more pertinent and relevant. They become an object of study of general interest. As Niklas Luhmann (1981, p. 122) points out in the essay “The improbability of communication”: “without communication there can be no human relations, indeed no human life”.<sup>2</sup> Communication forms and means are multiform and societies are relational structures and systems of interactions too complex and embracing to be both (communication and societies) objects of univocal and monodisciplinary study.

In *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo highlights this idea of narrowing and dialectic between communication and societies. The human sciences and social sciences, where Sociology of Communication is integrated, seek to understand societies that today are reconfigured in communication societies. According to Vattimo (2011, p. 21), the relationship between the human sciences and the communication society (our society characterized by the intensification of the exchange of information and the trend identification, i.e. the television, between event and news) is more strict and organic than is generally believed.

Communication is a social phenomenon and process. The communication is multiform, inevitable, and natural in the human being, who is essentially gregarious and, therefore, lives in society. The territory of communication, specifically that of communication as a social phenomenon and process, is the domain of study of this book. With the elaboration of the present work, it is intended to provide a synthesis of the main perspectives, components, and implications of the communication flow in contemporary societies. The

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<sup>2</sup> Although Luhmann refers to the thesis of the improbability of communication, this thesis does not advocate that communication is impossible. The improbability of communication is referred to as a problem because the improbability of communication has become imperceptible; it has to do with the obstacles inherent to communication, which is understood from the perspective of selection, and the practical conditions for communication to happen. Effectively, communication happens, and we cannot live without it, because communication is a social and indispensable human process, which is part of a social system.

objective is to compose a compendium of study and understanding of the phenomenon and process of communication and its effects on societies.

This manual is intended for all those who are interested in knowing a practice (act and activity), a phenomenon and a process as human and social, as natural and cultural, as frequent and spontaneous as communication is. Therefore, although it is designed regarding the students' needs within the courses in the scientific field of communication, it is not exclusive to them. This manual is a compendium, as mentioned because it intends to synthesize what is essential and characterizes the diverse and most relevant theories and perspectives of mass communication. There is not only one theory, one model, or one system of communication, but a plurality of theories, models, and systems. What is common to all of these is the search and presentation of an explanation (a hypothesis) for the phenomenon of communication, satisfying the need to understand the dual communicational and social dimension of the human being. Since the territory of communication is too broad, this manual aims to overcome any difficulties in the study of this field thus delimited, circumscribing it to the field of mass communication and providing its fundamental theoretical contributions. As a *compendium*,<sup>3</sup> a compilation or summary of what is most essential for the study of the interrelationships between communication and society is made.

Communication is, above all, a social practice. However, it is a practice that can be theorized, a practice that needs theory to be understood. In the same way that Aristotle<sup>4</sup> conceives the action of theorizing<sup>5</sup> about some subject, the theorizing of communication (or dedication to admiring communication with thought) corresponds to removing something from

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<sup>3</sup> Precisely written like this, in Latin: *compendium*, “savings”, “profit”, “abbreviation”, “summary”.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle (2004, 1177a-1178b) says that “complete happiness” consists of some contemplative activities and is the updating of the supreme virtue, which is, in turn, “the highest activity, intellect being the highest element in us”, that is, the mind (*voûς*, “intellect”, “mind”, “reason”). For Aristotle, this is a theoretical work, the most continuous, pleasant, self-sufficient, and peaceful activity available to human beings.

<sup>5</sup> From the Greek *theoría*, “action to contemplate attentively”, “admiration of the thought”, “reflection” that allows us to find and confer meanings for what one intends to understand, bringing the human being closer to *Theos*, God. The Greek word *theoría* (*théa*, “through” + *horós*, “to see”) means to look through because whoever looks is called *theorós* (spectator). In the book *Greek Philosophical Terms*, F. E. Peters (1967, p. 194) confirms this etymological sense, stating that *theoría* means “viewing, speculation, contemplation, the contemplative life”.

what constitutes it, from its immediate reality, abstracting it and proceeding to a logically oriented reasoning exercise (Polistchuk & Trinta, 2003, p. 17). A theory on some subject presupposes the constitution of an ordered system of ideas that are produced with the act of theorizing/viewing (constructing reasoning) on that subject, forming a doctrine that focuses on the reality of the thought/observed object.

Therefore, the purpose of this compendium is to compile and structure the basic elements of the disciplinary area of Sociology of Communication, namely the principles, concepts, models, and theories that characterize communication as an embracing social phenomenon. This purpose is fueled and motivated by my over 20 years of teaching the discipline of Sociology of Communication in the university education system. The reason for this book's existence has to do with being useful, especially for students of Communication Sciences and Sociology of Communication. The book is justified and inspired by the clever saying of the roman poet Phaedrus, the epigraph at the beginning of this book: *Nisi utile est quod facimus, stulta est Gloria* ("Unless what we do is useful, our glory is foolish").

In addition to the simple display of content, it is intended to evoke a Socratic attitude of provoking and resolving questions, doubts, ambivalences, paradoxes, and aporias<sup>6</sup> for interpellation, interpretation, and understanding, through a critical and dialectical ability. In this sense, the themes and issues addressed in this book are necessarily related to communication as a social phenomenon and process that triggers reactions, effects, influences in collective life. Thus, the main methodological question "How might a dialectic play out in communication and society interaction?" is answered. Contradictory ideas about the social and the communicational are always well-come to fully understand the problem of the interrelation between these two poles (communication and society) and, thus, to study divergent perspectives and form an independent and critical idea on the subject in question.

These are themes and issues addressed succinctly, since communication, as a problematic theme and as a broad *corpus* of knowledge, refers to other interdisciplinary areas of Sociology of Communication (or Media Sociology), more specific in the treatment of some subjects: Philosophy of Communication; Cybernetics; Semiotics (Communication Semiotics and

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of "aporia" comes from the Greek *aporía*, which means "with no way out, difficulty, question, problem" (Cf. Peters, 1967, p. 22). According to Peters, "aporia and its cognate verb forms are closely related to dialectic (*dialektike*) and hence to the Socratic custom of interlocutory discourse". See note 1 about the understanding of "dialectics".

Social Semiotics); Linguistics; Anthropology (Social Anthropology, Cultural Anthropology, and Visual Anthropology); Psychology of Communication; Economy; History; Political Science; Literature; Film Studies, etc. The study of communication is interdisciplinary; it is not a discipline. As per Denis McQuail (2010, p. 16), “the study of communication has to be interdisciplinary and must adopt varied approaches and Methods”.

The complexity that involves the study of communication as a multifaceted phenomenon of interaction (more than the simple transmission of messages)<sup>7</sup> makes the univocal definition of “communication” difficult. Given this complexity, which is inherent to communication, McQuail declares in *Mass Communication Theory*:

“Mass communication is one topic among many for the social sciences and only one part of a wider field of inquiry into human communication. Under the name ‘communication science’, the field has been defined by Berger and Chaffee as a science which ‘seeks to understand the production, processing and effects of symbol and signal systems by developing testable theories, containing lawful generalizations, that explain phenomena associated with production, processing and effects’. [...] To complicate matters further, communication can be either intentional or involuntary and the variety of potential channels and content is unlimited. In addition, no ‘science of communication’ can be independent and self-sufficient, given the origins of the study of communication in many disciplines and the wide-ranging nature of the issues that arise, including matters of economics, law, politics and ethics as well as culture. The study of communication has to be interdisciplinary and must adopt varied approaches and Methods.” (McQuail, 2010, p. 16).

From the biological sense of communication, according to which communication is a sensory and nervous activity (i.e. important for the survival of the species), passing through the conception of the systematic and interactionist model of communication (which involves a new definition of communication as the participation of an individual in a system of interactions that links him to others, where it is impossible not to communicate, since communication is omnipresent and not to communicate is already to communicate) until the plurality of theories, models and more complex systems underlying the study of communication, it is intended to

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<sup>7</sup> Transmission of a message that is integrated into the process of production and reception. The message is transmitted and produces effects on the recipients. Consequently, even if communication is faced as a simple message transmission, it is already a complex process to be studied and understood, making it difficult to define “communication”, let alone communication as a multifaceted phenomenon of interaction.

underline the necessity and the pertinence of the study and relation between the human societies and the means of communication. As Lucien Sfez (1992, p. 54) points out, “chaque domaine de connaissance a sa propre définition de la communication, spécifique du champ qu'elle recouvre”.<sup>8</sup> Thus, we conceive the communication as being many different things, as many as the sciences that study communication in its disciplinary areas.

In Sociology of Communication, the meanings of communication are those that are established, in a widespread, unilateral, and massified way, with society, the social system that already integrates the means of information and communication as institutions with social functions and responsibilities. Therefore, the study of Sociology of Communication is relevant. According to McQuail (1983, p. 19), the mass media (press, radio, and television, mainly) has considerable and growing importance in modern societies. McQuail (1983, pp. 20-22) says this view about the mass media is widespread and the reasons are rooted in the fact that the media suppose:

1. A resource of power, a potential instrument of influence, control, and innovation in society.
2. A sphere where many matters of public life unfold.
3. An important source of definitions and images of social reality, that is, a place where the changing culture and values in society are constructed, stored, and expressed more visibly.
4. A primary source of fame and the positioning of celebrities and efficient performance in the public sphere.
5. The origin of an ordered and public system of meanings.

The mass media are an important and expanding industry, with clear social implications. In the same perspective of McQuail, Mauro Wolf (1992, p. 9) states in *Teorie delle Comunicazioni di Massa* that the mass media are:

- A very important industrial sector.
- A symbolic universe subject to massive consumption.
- A technological investment in continuous expansion.
- Daily individual experience.
- A field of political confrontation.
- A system of cultural intervention and social aggregation.
- A way to pass the time, etc.

Thus, considering all these assumptions, this book has the main objectives of:

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<sup>8</sup> Translation: “each domain of knowledge has its definition of communication, which is specific to the field it encompasses”.



- a) To recognize the importance of communication in the contemporary “information societies”, so named due to the preponderance of flows and means of information and communication.
- b) To study and understand the influences of the means and mechanisms of production, transmission/diffusion, and reception of information and communication within simple or complex societies on daily interactions.
- c) To sensitize and train for a critical attitude about the social, technological, and cultural transformations around the communication phenomenon, considering the recent or present communication paradigm-changing (from the old and traditional media to the new technological media, mainly from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>9</sup> when the Sociology of Communication emerges as a specific discipline and branch of applied knowledge, after a period of expansion of the mass media.
- d) To provide the theoretical basic elements of mass communication processes according to the multiplicity of forms and means, presenting a systematic view of communication as a power of expression, representation, and influence.
- e) To frame communication studies in the fluxes of contemporary thought, considering that communication is multiiform and that the means and techniques of communication are in continuous transformation, as is the society in which they are based.

Considering the multiple approaches that the themes and issues underlying communication raise, it would be possible to establish a study *corpus* for a teaching and learning process in the discipline of Sociology of Communication. Thus, with the title *Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies: Contemporary World-Society*, this compendium begins by addressing the early stages of Western rationality related to social themes and issues, in Classical Greek Antiquity. It is recognized that, long before thinking about a science of the social, one moves from thinking about the social to thinking about the communicational. The compendium ends with an understanding of contemporary societies, which are characterized by the mastery of the new media, the virtual and digital mediation.

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<sup>9</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century is rightly considered as the century of mass communication, namely by Adriano Duarte Rodrigues (s/d, p. 17), who is one of the leading and pioneering Portuguese experts in communication studies.

Based on the approach, we begin by emphasizing in Chapter 1 the relevance of the disciplines of Sociology, firstly, and Sociology of Communication, subsequently, as comprehensive, analytical, and critical reflections on communication in some issues:

- i) Communication as a social and global phenomenon and process, with effects.
- ii) Communication as an exchange and sharing of experiences, expressions of moods, or simple descriptions or representations of the world.
- iii) Communication as a form of exercising power, a form of domination, influence, and persuasion, namely mass communication and strategic communication activities and techniques.

Chapter 2 highlights the importance of communication in the evolutionary history of humanity, while Chapter 3 studies the triadic relationship between society, culture, and communication based on common effects, such as massification, and involving inevitable interactions because there are no societies without communication (nor communication without social interaction) and communication is culture.

From Chapter 4 to Chapter 13, relevant and sharp approaches and perspectives on communication are developed. For all these chapters, references are made to authors, whose works and reflections on communication are indispensable contributions to understand the complexity of the social and total phenomenon of communication:

- Marshall McLuhan and the technological effects of the media (Chapter 4).
- Denis McQuail and the role of the media as a social institution in modern societies, i.e. the dialectic between communication and society (Chapter 5).
- Niklas Luhmann and the communication systemic or society as a macro-system of communicational interrelations (Chapter 6).
- Jürgen Habermas and social action as a rational and communicational action (Chapter 7).
- Anthony Giddens and the inevitable relationship between the social phenomena of communication and globalization, both involved in the development of technology and the profound transformations of societies and cultures worldwide (Chapter 8).
- The involution from the *homo sapiens* to the *homo videns*, due to the preponderance of the image and the seeing (the sensitive) at the expense of the word and understanding (the intelligible), according to Giovanni Sartori (Chapter 9).

- The characterization of Victoria Camps of contemporary societies and their relationship with the flows and means of information and with citizenship in the public space (Chapter 10).
- The forms and manifestations of certain tyrannies that are exercised by the media, according to Ignacio Ramonet (Chapter 11).
- The problematization of a time of transition from modernity to post-modernity, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, Charles Taylor, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Lipovetsky, Gianni Vattimo, Zygmunt Bauman, and Byung-Chul Han (Chapter 12).
- The conceptualization and problematization of the present digital and virtual dimensions of communication, through the specific production of images that generate hyperreality, with effects on perceptions and sensations and the culture converted into cyber-culture (Chapter 13).

Having presented the object of study, the objectives, and the methodology or strategy followed for the design of this book, the structure and content of the study previously reported justify the following of a guiding thread in the sociological approach of fundamental themes and issues to the Sociology of Communication. To this end, one must first address the basic elements of the “mother science”, the Sociology. Then, already with the bases of the scientific area about the social, one may depart for the study and understanding more directed to the reported i) themes and issues related to the performance, roles, and functions, and ii) to the effects/influences of communication and the several media (including social and digital media), thus giving meaning to the title of this book: *Contributions to Communicational, Cultural, Media, and Digital Studies: Contemporary World-Society*.



# CHAPTER ONE

## FROM SOCIOLOGY TO SOCIOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION

“Sociology is now obliged to come to terms with the digital, or miss investigating and theorizing whole swathes of significant cultural activity.”  
(Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p. 35).

Communication is constitutive of human beings. There are no societies without communication. Human beings are social beings. Communication is an essential anthropological phenomenon, as Dominique Wolton (1999, p. 15) emphasizes. Communication allows social relationships. Therefore, communication is characteristic of human beings either in two main dimensions:

1. A natural (biological) dimension: communication is innate; it is proper to the human being who is born with communicative capacity.
2. A cultural (i.e. adaptive)<sup>10</sup> dimension: communication is adapted, just like the human being himself and everything he produces to satisfy his relative and daily needs. Through communication, human beings understand each other, as well the world around them.

As a branch of scientific and academic knowledge, communication is a *sui generis* object of study, i.e. it is different from the traditional parameters of the other sciences' objects of study, which are also circumscribed and specific. For the branches of knowledge, sciences or disciplines, communication is configured as an abstract, wide-ranging, and multiform object of study. Therefore, the notion of communication covers a multiplicity of meanings, as stated by Armand Mattelart and Michèle Mattelart (1997, p. 7) or McQuail (1983, pp. 17-18). According to McQuail,

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<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the adaptation to the environment and to other human beings (the community), with whom one is in permanent interaction.

it is unlikely that a communication science will become independent and self-sufficient, given its origins in numerous disciplines and the broad scope of communication.

Communication studies and human communication researches date back to Classical Antiquity. In Ancient Greece, Plato<sup>11</sup> and Aristotle<sup>12</sup> were concerned to understand communication as a social process of influence (e.g. the application of rhetorical language).<sup>13</sup> However, the systematic studies on communication only occur from the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a subject matter or a privileged, in-depth, and multidisciplinary field of study of certain sciences (Fiske, 1990, p. 1). This systematic studies on communication were launched by the Mass Communication Research and based on the effects of mass communication on societies. Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld or Marshall McLuhan are precursors in this field, but also Shannon and Weaver's *Mathematical Theory of Communication*,<sup>14</sup> from 1949, which "is widely accepted as one of the main seeds out of which Communication Studies has grown" (Fiske, 1990, p. 6).

Although communication has always been part of the daily life of human beings, it has only recently been given more attention to its study, mainly due to the development of mass media, the multiplication and deepening of interpersonal relationships, the progress from new communication

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Cratylus*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *The Sophist*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *On Interpretation*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and *Politics*.

<sup>13</sup> Communication is a process of influence, where a simple communicative exchange causes a social change (McQuail, 1983, p. 39). For example, in *La Comunicazione come Processo Sociale*, Pio Ricci Bitti and Bruna Zani (1997, pp. 237-239) highlight this characteristic of communication, from Aristotle's classic approach about the rhetorical use in persuasive communication to contemporary studies of Harold Lasswell and Paul Lazarsfeld (both from 1948) on the effects and influences of mass communication.

<sup>14</sup> Shannon and Weaver conceived a model of communication, the so-called Information Theory, which has become one of the main sources of communication studies. According to this model, communication is the transmission of messages. It is a basic and processual model that conceives communication as a simple and universally applicable linear process. A useful contribution of this model is the identification of three levels of problems in the study of communication: 1) Level A-Technical problems: How accurately can the symbols of communication be transmitted?; 2) Level B-Semantic problems: How precisely do the transmitted symbols convey the desired meaning?; 3) Level C-Effectiveness problems: How effectively does the received meaning affect conduct in the desired way? (cf. Fiske, 1990, p. 7).

technologies, and the specialization of the object of study, ceasing to be so wide-ranging and abstract and starting to be studied in a piecemeal and interdisciplinary way. By becoming an object of systematic study with the formulation of laws, theories, and models, the communication and the mass media constitute a field of study for a recent science, the set of disciplinary areas called Communication Sciences.<sup>15</sup>

Communication Sciences is a multidisciplinary study; it integrates the intersections of similar disciplines previously mentioned that together and with interdisciplinarity, have the study of communication and the understanding of the communicational phenomenon in all its envelopment and implications as their object. Therefore, it is understandable McQuail's (1983, p. 19) thesis that it is difficult to establish a dividing line between thinking about the mass media and the social sciences in general. The relationship between the means of communication and society is due, firstly, to the understanding that the media are an established social institution.

What is the relationship between communication and society? What is Sociology of Communication? What is Sociology? What is science? Sociology<sup>16</sup> is the science that studies the phenomena, practices (guided by social norms and values), social behaviors, and relations, integrated into a macro-structure or system of interactions called society.

In a text from the year 1813 entitled *De la Physiologie Sociale*, Saint-Simon (1760-1825) refers to the science of the social for the first time, without yet using the word "Sociology". Saint-Simon adopts the designation "Social Physiology":

"Une physiologie sociale, constituée par les faits matériels qui dérivent de l'observation directe de la société, et une hygiène renfermant les préceptes applicables à ces faits, sont donc les seules bases positives sur lesquelles on

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<sup>15</sup> Communication Sciences is a recent science and has followed (and are "obliged" to follow) the late developments in information and communication technologies, especially Internet and multimedia technologies, often referred to as the new media. According to Jean-Pierre Meunier and Daniel Peraya (2009, p. 383), if these technologies have given rise to new uses and practices (e.g. pedagogical, social, and ludic-educational activities), they have also given rise to the development of new theoretical and methodological approaches.

<sup>16</sup> From the Latin *socius, socii*, "the other(s), the partner(s)" and from the Greek *logos*, "study, discourse, reason, word". Therefore, the term "Sociology" etymologically means the "science of society" or the scientific study of the social.

puisse établir le système d'organisation réclamé par l'état actuel de la civilisation.” (Saint-Simon, 1965, p. 29).<sup>17</sup>

In *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, Durkheim (2011, p. 62) underlines this contribution of Saint-Simon in the foundation of a “new science”, as he defines, i.e. the “science of man and societies”. Later, in 1839, Comte coins the equivalent word “Sociology”. Whatever the name of this new science, scientific progress is revealed in the knowledge of subjects in this field concerned about the social.<sup>18</sup> Social phenomena, practices, behaviors, and relations are not isolated; they exist in a given place and happen at a certain time. Therefore, each society has its social phenomena, practices, behaviors, and relations; all societies are dynamic, evolve and change, including what constitutes them (social phenomena, practices, behaviors, and relations).

Sociology seeks to understand the different forms of association of people in the community and their social relationships at two main levels:

- Interpersonal relationships.
- Relationships between people and the social environment (social institutions).

All relationships result from the different categories of association. Sociology is interested in studying and understanding, therefore:

- Social relationships.
- Social actions, behaviors, and practices (e.g. uses, customs).
- Sorts of association.

As it may be understood reading the entry “Sociology” of any encyclopedia:

“The word ‘sociology’ was invented by Auguste Comte and is composed by the combination of two other terms, one Latin (*socius* = associate, ally) and another Greek (*lóγος* = discourse). Etymologically, sociology will therefore

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<sup>17</sup> Translation: “A social physiology, constituted by the material facts that derive from the direct observation of society and hygiene containing the applicable precepts to these facts, is, therefore, the only positive bases on which we can establish the system of organization required by the present state of civilization.”

<sup>18</sup> By the way, it is in this period that the concern with the systematization and compilation of the Enlightenment knowledge arises, resulting in the publication, in 1751, of the first of 28 volumes (the last was published in 1772) of the emblematic work *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (*Reasoned Encyclopedia or Dictionary of Sciences, Arts and Trades*), directed by Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert.



be the science that studies the association or alliance of men with each other, as well as the behaviors they adopt in the resulting collectives. Relationships, collectivities, and behaviors are the three essential elements of social life that Sociology proposes to study.” (Silva, 2000, p. 1213).

This excerpt is, however, reductive. Considering that Sociology is an embracing area of knowledge, reducing its object of study to social relationships, collectivities and behaviors omits many more aspects and elements that make up a society. In *The Study of Sociology*, Herbert Spencer (1873, p. 52) proposes to start with the general principle that the properties of units (i.e. people) determine the property of the aggregate (i.e. society), to conclude that there is a social science that expresses the relationship between people and society. Spencer discusses whether there is a social science, given the specificities of this science and its object of study (Spencer, 1873, p. 73). He argues the peculiar nature of social science.<sup>19</sup> It must be noted that the term “Sociology” is hybrid, as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer underline in *Soziologische Exkurse*. According to them, Sociology is an unpleasant linguistic mix, half Latin and half Greek:

“The word ‘sociology’—science of society—is a malformation, half Latin, half Greek. The arbitrariness and artificiality of the term point to the recent character of the discipline. It cannot be found as a separate discipline within the traditional edifice of science. The term itself was originated by Auguste Comte, who is generally regarded as the founder of sociology. His main sociological work, *Cours de philosophie positive*, appeared in 1830-1842. The word ‘positive’ puts precisely that stress which sociology, as a science in the specific sense, has borne ever since. It is a child of positivism, which has made it its aim to free knowledge from religious belief and metaphysical speculation.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973, p. 1).

The artificial and arbitrary nature of the word “Sociology” refers to the late birth of the subject. “Sociology” is not found as such in the traditional construction of knowledge. Effectively, the term “Sociology” goes back to Comte, whose main sociological work on positive philosophy appears between 1830 and 1842. The word “positive” accurately fixed the emphasis that Sociology preserves, from the beginning, as a science in the *strict sense*, point out Adorno and Horkheimer. “Child of positivism”, Sociology was born from the desire to “free knowledge from religious belief and metaphysical speculation”.

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<sup>19</sup> Spencer’s interest is to conceive a true and rigorous knowledge about the social, focusing on social changes and transformations that, according to Spencer, follow a deterministic line of progress in societies.

Adorno and Horkheimer highlight the unorthodox origin of the term “Sociology” justifying it with the late birth of the subject and the disqualification of the discipline among the branches of scientific knowledge. However, they emphasize Comte as the precursor of Sociology, on the one hand, and the attribution of a positivist nature to this area of knowledge or doctrine of society.

In Lecture One of his *Introduction to Sociology*, Adorno states:

“First of all, I should like to mention something very simple, which you can all understand without any prior discussion of the problems of social antagonisms. It is that sociology itself, as it exists today, is an agglomerate of disciplines which first came into existence in a quite unconnected and mutually independent way. And I believe that many of the seemingly almost irreconcilable conflicts between schools of sociology arise in the first place—although I am aware that deeper issues are also involved—from the simple fact that all kinds of things which initially had nothing to do with each other have been brought together under the common heading of sociology. Sociology originated in philosophy, and the man who first inscribed the name ‘sociology’ on the map of learning, Auguste Comte, called his first major work *The Positive Philosophy*.” (Adorno, 2000, pp. 7-8).

In Lecture Three of the mentioned book, Adorno continues his explanation about the term “Sociology” and the origin of this science:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the central concept of sociology, the very concept which very many sociologists would like to throw overboard today, is the concept of society. For sociology—that abominable hotch-potch of a word—means: the *logos* of *societas*—the knowledge or science of society.” (Adorno, 2000, p. 26).

According to the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*:

“Commonly accepted definitions of sociology agree that it is the scientific or systematic study of human society. The focus is on understanding and explaining, and ranges from the individual in social interaction to groups to societies and global social processes. Unique to sociology is its emphasis upon the reciprocal relationship between individuals and societies as they influence and shape each other. [...] As a discipline, sociology arose early in the nineteenth century in response to rapid social change. Major transformations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as rapid industrialization resulting in a large, anonymous workforce with workers spending most of their time away from families and traditions; large-scale urbanization throughout Europe and the industrializing world; and a political revolution of new ideas (individual rights and democracy), directed a spotlight on the nature of societies and social change. The French social

thinker Auguste Comte (1798-1857) first coined the term sociology to describe a new way of thinking about societies as systems governed by principles of organization and change. Most agree that Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), the French sociologist, made the largest contribution to the emergence of sociology as a social scientific discipline. Both empirical research—collecting and quantifying social data—and abstract conceptions of society were major elements of Durkheim’s research. Durkheim’s work had a major, early impact on the discipline, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries two more of the giants in sociological thought emerged in mainstream German sociology: Max Weber (1864-1920) and Georg Simmel (1858-1918). Additionally, Karl Marx (1818-1883), while on the edge of sociology, had a major impact on German sociology and on the discipline as a whole. Marx was concerned with the oppressiveness that resulted from industrialization and the capitalist system rather than the disorder to which other social thinkers were reacting. Advocating revolution as the only means to end the inequality between the controlling bourgeoisie class and the exploited proletariat class created by the new industrialized society, Marx produced much of his work while in exile from his native Germany [...] His writing provides a continuous strand of sociological theory, heavily influential in Europe and, at times, in the United States. The importance of Marx’s work in shaping early sociology also lies in how German sociology developed in opposition to Marxist theory.” (Kuipers, 2008, p. 660).

Sociology is the systematic study of people’s lives in society and the consequent interrelationships between people and between people and institutions and organisms that make up the social structure. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sociology emerged as a science from a set of social concerns:

- The understanding of the most profound changes (social reforms) that occur in human societies.
- The observation of living conditions and social organization.
- The social criticism of the structure and *status quo* of the societies.
- The review of the consequences of certain circumstances of anomie, when societies developed more quickly than the organization, normalization, and regulation of social life.

Consequently, the conditions for the advent of a science or area of study that covers the problems that are not properly approached by any other were created at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sociology emerges as a wide-ranging science capable of studying and understanding societies and their transformations at three major levels:

- 1) Political level: political and social instability raises interest in the study of social reality; the 19<sup>th</sup> century is characterized by profound political changes, inspired by the French Revolution of 1789.

- 2) Economic level: changes from the primary sector to the secondary sector with the Industrial Revolution.<sup>20</sup>
- 3) Social level: the emergence of new social classes (proletariat and bourgeoisie), the formation of large cities with a large number of rural workers, whose exodus causes an imbalance between urban and rural areas and more social asymmetries (the precarious conditions of workers favor socialist ideals).

According to Raymond Aron's *Les Étapes de la Pensée Sociologique*, "la sociologie [for Weber] étant science compréhensive de l'action sociale, la compréhension implique la saisie du sens que l'acteur donne à sa conduite"<sup>21</sup> (Aron, 1967, p. 501). In the thought of Weber, Sociology is comprehensive, it is the science that deals with the interpretive understanding of social action, seeking to provide an explanation from the causes of that action and the probable effects it produces. In this perspective, the "interpretative understanding" and "causal explanation" are highlighted, because both expressions define the scientific scope of Sociology. The former is characteristic of the human sciences' interpretive method; the latter is characteristic of the natural sciences' causal method. It may be concluded that social sciences have neither an objective method nor a specific object of study. Between understanding and explanation, there are notable differences. An area of study must fill requirements to be recognized as a science, namely:

- A specific object of study and a delimited field of study.
- Epistemological objectives, i.e. aiming the production of scientific knowledge to understand the object of study.
- A methodology to achieve objectives and lead to the desired results.
- A systematic *corpus* of knowledge, allowing the formulation of laws and explanatory theories of the phenomena (object of study).

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<sup>20</sup> Deep and large-scale revolution, based on technical, economic, and social changes that first occurred in the United Kingdom between 1760 and 1850, when production went from an artisanal base to a machined production in a factory context, with the division of labor and mass production (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 150). With the Industrial Revolution emerged the so-called industrial societies, as well as several social problems that motivated a new academic science (Sociology) to study and understand them.

<sup>21</sup> Translation: "Sociology is a science that seeks to understand social action; the understanding implies the perception of the meaning that the actor attributes to his conduct."

Only fulfilling these requirements will scientific knowledge be obtained, which is true and verifiable as such. In this view, Plato's *Theaetetus* dialogue refers to a true and justified belief to define the knowledge, i.e. scientific knowledge. For Plato (1997a, 201d), knowledge is true opinion accompanied by explanation: "it is true judgment with an account".<sup>22</sup> True opinion (knowledge) has to be accompanied by a third requirement or condition (in addition to belief and truth), a rational explanation, to obtain the status of knowledge.

Considering that a) society is an encompassing and mutable object of study and b) it is scientifically possible to study the social life, Sociology is an obedient science to the principles of autonomy, interdisciplinarity, rationality, and objectivity.

### 1.1. Precursors of Sociology as a science of the social

Starting from Herodotus, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., it is possible to glimpse a line of evolution of thought about the social.<sup>23</sup> A line that begins with expedition trips to study and observe other peoples and is developed with the assumption of the diversity of ways of life and culture patterns in the community, in a given territory, and at a certain time. These are the stages of the sociological thought and the first ones are listed below.

The first stage of the sociological thought is the systematic reflection on life in society. In Ancient Greece, Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle. Herodotus travels to meet and study different peoples and territories, Plato characterizes the "ideal city", and Aristotle defines man as a "political animal", but the three are concerned with human interrelationships and behaviors within the collectivities, geographic and demographic factors, the division of both society and work. Despite the spirit of observation is incipient and the relativism and the search for regularities in collective action are hesitant (Silva, 2000, p. 1213), the initiative of these authors is pioneering, seminal, and inaugural. Therefore, the stages of sociological thought must be considered, i.e. the antecedents of reflections on social life, namely the following precursors.

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<sup>22</sup> According to the notes of John M. Cooper, the editor of Plato's *Complete Works* (Hackett Publishing Company), the word "account" translates *logos*, which can also mean 'statement', 'argument', 'speech', 'discourse'.

<sup>23</sup> Strictly speaking, it is not yet possible to speak of "sociological thought", but of thinking and knowledge produced about the social dimension in different peoples, conditions, factors, territories, and communities. It is an outline of what would become sociological thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.1.1. Herodotus

In Classical Greek Antiquity, Herodotus (485 B.C.-425 B.C.)<sup>24</sup> makes observations and comparisons between life forms of different peoples. It is attributed to Herodotus the production of the first historical narrative, on the one hand, and the interdisciplinary studies of History, Ethnology, Ethnography, Geography, Chronology, and Poetry, on the other hand (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 147). Therefore, he was a precursor in these sciences, producing important sources of information about the ancient world. However, Herodotus is best known for inaugurating the scientific practice of History and Geography.

The only known work of Herodotus entitled *Histories* suggests that he traveled extensively and visited various territories, such as Egypt, Cyrene (in present-day Libya), Babylon (in ancient Mesopotamia), Italy, Ukraine, the Black Sea, and the surrounding area to the Aegean Sea (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 147). He was the first to research, observe and record the past, human behavior, and ways of life, as well as considering them problems of investigation, study, and reflection. Herodotus is interested in studying the customs and uses of other peoples, disseminating them. The objective stated by Herodotus at the beginning of *Histories* is original: to preserve the memory of the past, recording his discoveries (facts and causes of events) about different peoples, from Asia and Europe.

In his extensive and descriptive work, Herodotus only mentions a predecessor, Hecateu of Miletus, who wrote a work on historical geography, entitled *Periods* (Hughes-Warrington, 2015, p. 150). Having followed this practice of travel-expedition of knowledge of other cultures and forms of collective life organization, Herodotus contributes to a methodology of observation and knowledge recording that allows understanding the gregarious dimension of the human being.

### 1.1.2. Plato

Plato (428 B.C.-348 B.C.) is a polygraphic<sup>25</sup> thinker and affirms, as far as Sociology is concerned, the need and protection of democratic ideals

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<sup>24</sup> Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus, in present-day Bodrum, on the Aegean Sea coast, Turkey.

<sup>25</sup> The adjective “polygraphic” comes from the Ancient Greek *πολύς* (“poly”) meaning “many” and *γράφειν* (“graphein”), that means “to write”. Thus, a polygraph is an author who writes in a variety of subjects, themes, and issues in different fields, i.e. he is a polygraphic author.