

# THE ETHICAL CROSSROADS IN THE AGE OF THE “NEW MEDIA”

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Brasileira de Pesquisa  
em Jornalismo

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**ABSTRACT** The spread of digital technology, which allows anyone (in theory) to disseminate information on the Internet, is the greatest and a dramatic new ethical question of the modern world. It is especially true for the principles that traditionally have guided journalism. This article addresses some of the central dilemmas that journalism faces in this new context, and poses questions regarding possible limits to what should be made public, in view of the loss of this control historically applied through journalism and the ever-present hypothesis of anonymity on the net.

**Key-words:** ethics; journalism; new media; media convergence; anonymity.

## INTRODUCTION

The opening of new possibilities for the instantaneous transmission of information, theoretically to anyone, was hailed as the “end of journalism” or at least as the “end of journalism as we know it”. Even more, it was seen as the cornerstone of a new democratic era, possibly even the arrival of a new utopia of total liberty, in which “everyone” could “communicate,” with no restrictions of any kind<sup>1</sup>.

It is not hard to see that the “utopia of total liberty” is still just that: a utopia, which the celebrated First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution helped to nurture despite the restrictions on free speech repeatedly placed by the Supreme Court, as legal scholar José Paulo Cavalcanti Filho (2005) so aptly pointed out. But these times of “media convergence” promote the spread of illusions, which theoretical work is obliged to undo.

This article seeks to identify the context in which the praise of the “new media” appears, to distinguish the new ethical problems that arise, insofar as this new reality collides with the classic position of control traditionally performed by journalism in relation to what should (or should not) be made public. At the same time, it restates the role of

journalism as a fundamental mediator for the transmission of information in the public interest, an exercise even more complex today in light of the jabber of network communication.

### **A world in permanent excitement**

To the beat of a stylized version of Ari Barroso’s classic samba “Aquarela do Brasil”, people and objects move in lockstep at a great open-air shopping center. The checkout line proceeds in cadence, until someone pulls out a checkbook; suddenly the music fades, people and objects falter, the line stalls. Embarrassed, the person puts the checkbook away and pulls out a credit card, as the music again surges and everything returns to normal, to the gratitude of all.

This advertisement of one of the world’s major credit card companies, broadcast on Brazilian television in 2008, is a perfect metaphor for the state we live – or should live – in: a state of continuous excitement, of perpetual motion, in which any pause is dysfunctional for the system. Exactly as Virilio (1996, p. 108), a once stylish author, observed: “If to be is to be excited, to live is to be pure speed, a metabolic speed that technology is dedicated to increasing and perfecting ...”. Notice that the line’s continuous movement in the ad is interrupted, not by someone who does not have enough money to pay, or by some rebel whose “credit card is a razor”<sup>2</sup>, but by someone who merely raises the possibility of paying in a less-than-ideal fashion, which does not allow an instantaneous transaction.

Well, we know that the global casino of financial markets cannot stop, although not even markets can ignore the “real world,” as they did recently with the U.S. mortgage crisis that triggered a global meltdown. But, consistent with capital’s tendency to extend its logic to all reaches of human activity, it is this logic – or, more accurately, this ideology – of permanent excitement that prevails in the modern world: an excitement predictably channeled to leisure activities that feed the most lucrative industries of our time.

Jenkins’ praise (2006) of the “convergence culture” follows this script, starting from an enormous simplification, that contrasts the “old consumers” – classified as “passive”, a kind of “predictable”, “silent” and “isolated” individuals who “stayed where they were told” and were “isolated consumers” – and the new ones, “active”, “migratory”, “noisy” and “more socially connected” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18-9). The “new media” urge everyone to participate, so that the public must necessarily take part in the process: silence, contemplation – the pleasure of slow maturation,

the indispensable distance for any reflection – are associated with passivity and accommodation.

It is no coincidence that Jenkins' analysis focuses on entertainment products (reality shows, TV series, game shows, etc.). And even less so that the concept of "audience" is replaced by "fans," as if both were equivalent. That is why he argues: "Right now, we are mostly using this collective power [of media interaction] through our recreational life, but soon we will be deploying those skills for more 'serious' purposes" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 4), such as the U.S. election campaign, which he analyzes in his book<sup>3</sup>. Hence the question:

How do we generate the same level of emotional energy challenging the Powers That Be in Washington that fans routinely direct against Powers That Be in Hollywood? When will we be able to participate within the democratic process with the same ease that we have come to participate in the imaginary realms, constructed through popular culture? (Jenkins, 2006, p. 234).

Never, I would say, because they are two matters of a different nature. So, as it should be obvious, the comparison is not pertinent. The distance between playing "alternative reality" games – with all this can mean for the experts of the "psi" universe – and the decision-making that affects both political and day-to-day life should be sufficient to show the fallacy of the question. Jenkins enthusiastically embraces the "games" people played – without discriminating their level of commitment to any single candidacy – during the American presidential campaign of 2004. He could have recalled what happened in 2000, during the expectations for the decisive vote in Florida, which eventually gave Bush a controversial victory. At the *Time* – as a Reuters photo showed on November 10 – Democratic voters protested: "This is not a game! This is our nation's future! Let us be responsible!" For the media, however, it really was a game: whether it was the competition among the TV networks, which trumpeted the successive records of access to their sites (for example, cnn.com, which had an average of 30 million viewers a day, registered 10 million hits an hour), or whether through the interactive offer of the "election game" broadcast by the Los Angeles Times.

For those who take the election for a conflict, ABC News is offering on its site (abcnews.com) the "challenge of the American election," incorporating one of its most popular online sports programs. "Match the Analyst's Game" permits the players to make their own predictions. Family members and friends around the country can access the game

to test their political knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

Thus it seems clear what sense prevails in this mishmash of activities by “fans, consumers and citizens.” However, it is because of this jumble of concepts, it is because of this theoretical superficiality that Jenkins (2006, p. 247-8) can oppose the support of the “critical utopia”, associated with the new media, to the “critical pessimism” of the “victimization” of the public, taken as typical of traditional criticism. The former would focus on what we are doing with the media; the latter, on what the media are doing with us. To avoid the classical discourse and impoverish theories of manipulation is certainly laudable, because it encourages the taking into account of the dialectical relation between the dominators and the dominated, between the media and their public; but this is not the author’s perspective. He treats the two poles as equivalent forces that merely “interact” – although he recognizes in passing that “corporations (...) still exert greater power than any individual consumer” (Jenkins, *idem*, p. 3)<sup>5</sup>.

In fact they do exercise this power, and continue to do so, while the bases of the system do not change, in the social relations of the real world. Even Caio Tulio Costa, a journalist, professor and advisor who is an enthusiastic supporter of the “new media”, shows that the network indeed has a center.

Although it seems to be democratic, the global network has a control. Who controls it? What are the controller’s goals and powers? A simple decision taken by one country, the United States, can block access to the network in any part of the world, because the principal servers of the network are supervised from there. (...) The dispersion of individuals creates the sense of democracy on the Web. In fact, to varying degrees, access to the Web is in the hands not only of the United States but also of institutions, companies and governments that can change rules and erect technological and/or financial barriers. (Costa, 2009, p. 237)

And that is the sticking point in the proposal for a new “sharing ethic” and collective deliberation, intrinsic to the supposed “decentralizing” nature of the Web: whether in the systematic monitoring of the user – as consumer or worker, as seen in the practical experience of daily life<sup>6</sup> – or in the action of pressure groups and social organizations of every possible ideological leaning that predictably use the Web for their own interests. None of this should be surprising, because the virtual world reflects – and magnifies, considering its own qualities – the contradictions

and relations between the forces present in the social world.

But what is most relevant here is to perceive this appeal to perpetual excitement – typical of the narcissism and hedonism of a generation that grew up with the attitude “what I want, when I want it” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 244), that Freud would have no trouble diagnosing – this appeal does not foresee ethical dilemmas.

If it is just a game, why not film yourself having sex with your girlfriend and put it on Youtube or Orkut – for simple voyeurism or as revenge for a breakup? Why not – in classic “Clockwork Orange” style – strip and rape a drunken, unconscious girl at a party and put the scene on the Internet? Why not go around spreading the most absurd rumors just for fun, with no consideration for the consequences?

And when, quite the opposite, everything is far from being a joke and follows the same interests that foster “trial balloons” and “planted” news items, old standbys of traditional media?

### **The nature of journalism**

As usual in the face of technological innovation, the emergence of the “new media” brought with it a profusion of hurried theorizing, equally catastrophic and congratulatory. Among these theories are those that decree the end of journalism, or at least a fundamental change in its nature, “from a lecture into a conversation” (Bowman e Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004), as if traditional journalism were a castration of public freedom of expression, now made viable by the dissemination of digital technology.

It would be too much here to resume the contrary arguments, which I detailed on other occasions (Moretzsohn, 2007, p. 255ss), and which, in my opinion, are still valid. But it is important to reaffirm the nature of journalism, which remains a fundamental mediator for democratic life, due to its historical legitimacy and to its service as reference in socially relevant events, or – as it is often said – of public interest. For the same reason – and for various others, which include the difference in status between each of these forces – I insist that it is not possible to state that the four agents in the process of information (source, journalist, company and audience) “enter into combat on an equal footing.” (Costa, 2009, p. 226)

However, it is clear that two problems stand in the way of this new reality: first, the greater complexity of journalism, considering the difficulty in confirming information, given the ever-quicker pace of work and the vast array of sources – many of them anonymous, or of dubious

identity – that “communicate” instantaneously over the Web; second, the loss of control traditionally held by journalism, regarding what should and could be made public, aggravated – once again – by the hypothesis of anonymity, which prevents the assigning of responsibility. And this represents an unprecedented ethical problem for society.

### **The risks of instantaneous information**

The first case is full of examples that also derive, perhaps principally, from the un-checked competition between journalistic companies, radicalized in the age of “real time.” The news of Michael Jackson’s death and the video showing a young Iranian woman dying during protests against the alleged fraud in the re-election of President Ahmadinejad are two of the most relevant recent examples of this.

Amid the excitement and the flood of exaggeration and rumors typical of the celebrities’ world, the case of Michael Jackson was especially poignant because the singer, after years of decadence and scandals involving his personal conduct, showed signs he was preparing a comeback on a scheduled tour of England. Broadcast firsthand by TMZ, a site specialized in the gossip and factoids that sustain the star system, news of the popstar’s death created a predictable turbulence among the communications media, with an avalanche of conflicting simultaneous information: Jackson was dead; Jackson was in a coma; Jackson was recovering in an Intensive Care Unit. The news was so unexpected that it raised suspicions, fueled by the mystery surrounding the disappearance of his body: how low could the marketing strategies of showbiz sink?

The fever of speculation involved even respectable, traditional newspapers like *El País* of Spain, which featured, in its electronic edition of July 29, the (supposed) result of an autopsy that allegedly revealed the deplorable physical condition of the singer. Attributed to the British tabloid *The Sun*, the story was quickly denied – or rather, as it is strangely frequent in online journalism, the updated headline denied the information that was still contained in the body of the text. The use of such a dubious source warranted a protest from readers and criticism from the paper’s ombudsman, who asked: “Should the information from such an unreliable source be verified before it is published or is it enough to identify the origin?” The answer from the editor in charge of the digital version and the Culture editor expose a fundamental problem of the nature of online journalism: “The news from *The Sun* about the autopsy spread rapidly on the Net and *El País* could not help but use it. (...) In an online medium, information is divulged and modified constantly. What

is important in this case is to give the reader elements to evaluate the reliability of the source.” However, as the ombudsman argued, “the problem is that the reader is not constantly online, and expects that what he reads is always reliable.”

Nevertheless, the fact that the information can pop up at any time...

...poses a crucial question in this transition to digital journalism: the dramatic contradiction between speed and security. Checking information requires time. When you do not have enough time, it is important to select carefully the sources you trust. The responsible press was careful to stake out its claim to quality, to credibility, in relation to the sensationalist tabloids. But if it uses tabloids as its reference and risks disclosing false news, how can it ask its readers to value the difference? The credo “anything for an audience” that caused so much damage to television can now affect the credibility of digital newspapers if their only obsession is to get there first, whatever the price. (Pérez Oliva, 2009)

The story of the video that documented the agony of Neda Agha-Soltan is even more relevant, because of the political dimension it involved. On June 20, 2009, a video post-ed on Youtube and rapidly linked by Facebook and Twitter, as well as by channels and sites in the traditional media, showed shocking scenes of a young woman bleeding to death in Teheran, during a protest against the re-election of the Iranian president. As long as there was no confirmation of the authenticity of the images, the main newspapers were careful to publish them with that warning. In his column for the daily *Folha de S. Paulo* (“Toda Mídia”, 6/22/2009), Nelson de Sa wrote: “It does not matter; Neda, as she was called, became ‘an ever larger symbol of the Iranian crisis’, according to the site of *Time* magazine. And the uprising found its ‘martyr’”.

Days later, it was possible to confirm the accuracy of the event and the identity of the woman. Would it have been the same, from an ethical journalistic viewpoint, if the image had been faked, even though it could symbolize the degree of violence used by the Iranian government against the demonstrators?

The answer should be obvious, given the need to respect the referential character – the respect for factual truth and, in this sense, objectivity – that guides journalism. The ease with which we downplay this question depends on the political context and reveals another ethical problem: when what circulates as information is convenient, from the ideological viewpoint – such as in the case above, where accusations of fraud prejudicing the candidate supported by the principal Western

forces won immediate space in the media – the tendency is to accept it as true. In controversial situations, we tend to be more alert to the possibility of fraud and appeal to the elementary ethical principles of credibility, at the same *Time* that we enlist the difficulties confronted in the fair exercise of “real time” journalism.

In this regard, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 offered several examples, right in the first months of combat: newspapers the world over published a photo purportedly of a black American soldier captured by the enemy, when in fact it was the image of a plastic dummy; they published reports of the fictitious but “spectacular” rescue of an American soldier from an Iraqi hospital; and they showed as genuine a video that a young American had forged, filming himself in his own house, as if he had been kidnapped by Iraqi rebels, to show how unable the system was to filter information properly, especially in times of patriotic hysteria.

In Brazil, one celebrated story was the case of the purported crash of a Pantanal Airlines plane in downtown São Paulo, published on the Globo News website on May 20, 2008 and immediately repeated on various other sites and respected journalistic blogs, when in fact it was simply a fire in a mattress store. The context was the “air traffic crisis” afflicting the country, with the serious TAM Airlines disaster in São Paulo’s Congonhas airport a year earlier and a series of subsequent smaller incidents. It led a journalist, who reportedly tuned in to the in-flight radio frequency of a pilot who was preparing to land and asked the control tower what was causing the smoke that he saw in the distance. The journalist misunderstood the communication and hastily concluded that the smoke was caused by the plane going down. The confusion was quickly cleared up, but it led to accusations against the government and Infraero, the commercial airport administrator, accused of negligence and incompetence after it claimed it had no information about any crash.

Even more relevant, because of its consequences, was the news of a young Brazilian woman allegedly attacked by skinheads in Switzerland, and who reportedly lost the twins she said she was expecting because of the attack. In fact, for reasons still not entirely clear, the woman made up the whole story, even producing photos that supposedly proved the violence and sending them to Ricardo Noblat, one of Brazil’s most respected journalists, who published them in his blog on Feb. 11, 2009, and stood by the accusation<sup>7</sup>. Although a closer analysis of the images would have given rise to doubts as to the authenticity of the injuries, newspapers, sites and TV networks reproduced the story, with sufficient pressure to involve some of the highest-ranking authorities in Brazil –



the National Secretary of Human Rights, the Foreign Minister and the President himself, who also did not take the necessary care to confirm the details and reacted hastily, barely avoiding a diplomatic incident<sup>8</sup>.

The episode also revealed that, in the age of the Internet, significant distinctions in the practice of journalism, such as the zealous preservation of the image of those involved in accusations of violence, are soon watered down. In fact, Swiss newspapers initially avoided identifying the woman, blacking out her face whenever they published a photo of her, but the measure was fruitless because Brazilian newspapers did not act the same way and her image circulated on the Web, accessible to all. No criticism of our newspapers is intended, in this specific case, because the initiative of publishing her photos was her own; besides, maintaining the privacy of her image was improbable, because anyone could obtain a photo of her on Orkut.

### **A fragile journalistic mediation in the age of the “new media”**

Here we arrive at a second problem, typical of an age in which “everyone” can divulge “everything” via digital technology: even if there were a consensus among journalists about what may be legitimately published, the information – true or not, or true but has-ty or inconvenient – will certainly circulate via some other ways. This means that the information will produce effects, even if they are not the same, or of the same intensity, as they would be if traditional quality newspapers lent the information credibility.

Some recent cases in Brazil are quite significant: a teenager who agreed with his brother to film him having sex with his girlfriend and then put the video on the Net; a girl, also a teen, who got drunk at a party and after she passed out, was stripped and raped by some boys in Joaçaba, in Parana State, who also filmed the scene and showed it on the Web; a teacher photographed nude and having sex with her boyfriend, who published the images on a relationship site – with her name and telephone number, as if she were a call girl – in revenge for breaking off the relationship. All these episodes sparked lawsuits and were published with due caution by newspapers in general, but the damage to the image of the victims was irreparable.

Other cases involve the improper use of Twitter, the most recent sensation among consumers of new technology. Many involve rumors about TV celebrities, causing them predictable discomfort<sup>9</sup>.

The convenience of revealing information with a potential political impact will always be controversial. The classic example is the case of

Monica Lewinsky, revealed on the blog of Matt Drudge, thus rendering the major American newspapers powerless to quash the story or even to publish it more carefully. The kidnapping of the reporter David Rohde, who was held by the Taliban in Afghanistan from November 2008 to June 2009, exposed the responsibility of users of the Net and the difficulty to control them. *The New York Times* tried to hide the information, fearing for the life of its reporter and concerned with the difficulties of negotiation, but someone ran the story on the page about the journalist in Wikipedia. From then on it was cat and mouse: the postings were systematically erased and soon replaced, to the point where the newspaper appealed to the founder of Wikipedia, James Wales, for collaboration in monitoring the page, which eventually was blocked. Only when the reporter managed to escape was the information properly disclosed, including a mention of the negotiations that caused the suppression of the news<sup>10</sup>.

The insistence on trying to publish information about this episode at this specific address – when theoretically the news should be free to circulate to an unlimited number of blogs – can only be justified by the old criterion of credibility that Wikipedia itself sought to cultivate, although in ways unrelated to traditional journalism. One example is the faith in self-correction by the “community” of volunteer collaborators. This is not the forum to discuss whether this process is adequate and reliable, but rather to stress the need to search for parameters for reference information, even – or perhaps especially – in these times when everything seems fluid, ethereal, impalpable and uncertain.

The behavior of Wikipedia in this episode was widely debated in blogs and sites such as Slashdot. Some accepted the motives for concealing the news. There were frequent charges of “censorship.” But perhaps the best summary of the dilemma in this case was made by Kim LaCapria, in the blog “The Inquisitor”: “Luckily for Wikipedia, this issue was clearly life or death. But what if it isn’t? Or what if it’s just a ho-hum person and not a NY Times reporter?<sup>11</sup> And how can you stop the crowd from releasing possibly harmful information – and should you? If so, when?”

### **A matter of limits, beyond journalism**

“The possibility that anyone can hold a tool of communication capable of reaching mil-lions of people is (...) unprecedented, and thus frightening.” That is how Caio Túlio Costa (2009, p. 259) concludes his most recent book, in which he seeks to confront the relationship between ethics, journalism and “new media”. His proposal is to offer more questions than answers, but this compelling invitation to doubt

tends toward a perplexity rooted in the most radical relativism, rather than suggesting hypotheses to face such complex issues.

The central theme of his work is the contradiction between the regulatory ideal of ethical prescriptions and the everyday practice of journalism. As he deals with them both in absolute terms, he sees an equally absolute opposition between these two fields. For this reason, he insists so strongly on the reference to the fact “the journalist lies” to obtain information. He suggests that journalism operates in “an ethical vacuum.” Hence his concept of a “provisional moral,” in fact a derivation of a misreading of Weber’s “re-sponsibility ethic,” which would be, according to this interpretation, capable of justifying almost anything.

The question of procedures, for example: in the age of media convergence, “for the individual who became the protagonist of a video of instantaneous global success, based on images obtained of a celebrity, it is relatively unimportant whether it was obtained and published by legal or illegal means – the Net dismantled the concept of legality.” (Costa, 2009, p. 237)

Thus it is not a case of “provisional morals,” but rather of the most utter amorality. However, if indeed “all is relatively unimportant,” how can we discuss ethics, if there are no parameters to base it on?

Let us return here to the narcissism and hedonism that arose based on “what I want, when I want it”: a generation that knows no limits. Yet discussing ethics means exactly discussing the setting of limits.

However, in the age of the “new media,” in which (theoretically) anyone can arrange for a tool to communicate on an infinite scale, the discussion about ethics surpasses by far the realm of journalism. And more seriously: the uncertainty or the absence of identifying authorship. Ethics implies responsibility, and it is clear that we cannot assign re-sponsibility to someone who hides behind a pseudonym. And as the Internet is, in the fitting words of Castanheira (2004), “the realm of anonymity,” we can calculate the dimension of the problem and the difficulties of treating ethics in this new context.

Writing about the hypotheses of control over the opinions that circulate in blogs and chat lists about politics on the Internet – about the legality and legitimacy of this control, without considering the possible techniques for enacting it – Gomes (2001) sums up the dilemma of ethics on the Net:

The fantasy of the worst of all possible worlds, that looms over the horror of regulation of content, would be that of a Kafkaesque

world in which you wake up with the censor examining your notes, where you could at any *Time* find a simple police officer rummaging through your diskettes, controlling your conversations or spying on your home page to find out, based on his own evaluation, what can or cannot be published among the things that you think and mean, or to impose penalties, reprimands or persecutions for the things that you have already published. By the same token, the worst nightmare for the supporters of restrictions on freedom of expression would be a world where any individual could transmit, with no brakes or filters, his innermost feelings, tastes, preferences and intimate convictions, emotionally composed for their expression and publication, without any care for the cognitive or moral quality of his convictions, preferences and inclinations. If we are frightened by a world in which anyone could freely write expressions like “filthy nigger,” “dirty Jew,” “death to homosexuals” on the wall in front of our house, with nothing happening to him, even more frightening is a world in which someone could do the same instantaneously, online, in bytes, to thousands and thousands of people, and remain equally unpunished. To each his own nightmare, but is anyone right?

Gomes concludes that yes, it is possible to discuss ethics, considering the tradition of moral rationalism in which “a law can only be accepted or imposed if it can be submitted to demonstrable procedures and if the evidence of its reasonability can be shown.” Thus,

a notion of binding value, the only one that can support or justify regulatory intervention, is valid only a) when the rule that guides it has been the subject of a practical discourse and withstood examination, with this achievement manifested in a reasonable consensus, and b) when the judgment itself is shown to be loyal and arguable in the public sphere and can be supported by a consensus that is reasonable and, most importantly, reviewable.

Otherwise, we run the risk, which historically has occurred, of ethics being used as an alibi for its opposite: barbarity and brutality pseudo-founded on moral arguments. The possibility of of-fense and discrimination is as disagreeable as the existence of a cybernetic Torquemada, destroying our computers and sites in order to presumably destroy the evil that lies within their hearts.

## | NOTES

- 1 This is a slightly expanded version of the text I presented at the VII SBPJor Conference in São Paulo in November 2009. I am very grateful to Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva, journalist and currently ombudsman of the *Folha de S.Paulo*, for our intense dialogue on the theme, which contributed significantly to the preparation of this article, and for the suggestion of journalistic material used herein.

- 2 A reference to “Brasil”, one of the most famous songs of Cazuza, a Brazilian pop music star of the 1980’s.
- 3 In 1968, light-years ahead of the spread of the Internet, the Uruguayan author Mario Benedetti published a story about the host of a live entertainment show who proposed a game with a song, to be modified progressively by the audience. Little by little, what started out as an innocent love song grew into a protest against the local police chief, hated for his truculence, and who finally was assassinated by an enraged mob. However, it was obviously a literary allegory, like others that so many authors have produced, especially during a dictatorship. Cf. Mario Benedetti, “El Cambiazo”, in *La muerte y otras sorpresas*, Mexico D.F., 1982, p. 82-89, 17th edition).
- 4 “American voters will have news all the time”. *L.A. Times*, 11/08/2000.
- 5 Only as an example, the Brazilian upper middle class, which has resources to lease a cable TV service, knows perfectly well its power to interfere in programming when the company decides to cancel the offer of certain channels.
- 6 Many articles have shown the efforts to trace the user’s profile for commercial purposes on the Internet. (cf., for instance, Eric Pfanner, “The Paradox of Privacy”, in *The New York Times*, 07/13/2009). In a broader perspective, Bruce Schneier, in a series of articles on his site, shows that there is no privacy on the Web (cf., especially, “Should We Have an Expectation of Online Privacy?”, [www.schneier.com/essay-270.html](http://www.schneier.com/essay-270.html), May 2009). In the case of labor relations, companies progressively expand their control over the use of the Internet. A student of mine accidentally supplied an especially eloquent example of this: as a trainee at a mobile phone call center, she said she had no access to her private e-mail at the company, whose slogan – to live without boundaries – was evidently a paradox, because it did not apply within the company itself
- 7 Cf. “Blog do Noblat”, “Brasileira torturada na Suíça aborta gêmeos”, in [http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/noblat/post.asp?cod\\_Post=160714](http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/noblat/post.asp?cod_Post=160714).
- 8 The case was widely debated in the electronic editions of the Observatorio da Imprensa in February and March of 2009. On Oct. 16, 2009, Brazilian newspapers reported that the woman was formally charged by the Swiss courts, on the grounds that she had forged the entire story.
- 9 Cf., for example, “Falsários ‘roubam’ nomes de famosos para espalhar boatos em perfis do Twitter”, in *Folha de S.Paulo*, 07/24/2009.

- 10 Cf. Richard Pérez-Peña. “Keeping News of Kidnapping Off Wikipedia”, *The New York Times*, 07/20/2009. Cf. also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_S.\\_Rohde](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_S._Rohde).
- 11 The doubt apparently is groundless, because it is standard practice among journalistic companies to avoid releasing information about kidnappings and other threats, as a way of preserving the safety of the victims and avoiding interference in the negotiations. In Brazil, one notable exception to this rule was the episode of the kidnapping and murder of a teenager, Eloa Pimentel, in a housing complex in Santo André, near São Paulo, in October 2008. There, journalists and radio and TV reporters spoke directly with the kidnapper on the air, with no interference from the authorities, who did not break off the connection or the transmission of the dialogue. After three tense days heightened by the systematic coverage that frequently broke into regularly-scheduled programming, the drama ended tragically with the teenager’s death. Because of its seriousness and what it represents for the (ir)responsibility of the media and the authorities themselves, the case merits a separate study

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