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Research Paper

Acculturation, Resistance, and Communicative Transformation: Critical Dialogues in the Era of Algorithmic Mediation

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Abstract: This article critically examines how Francesco Fattorello's concept of acculturation—understood as the sociocultural filter through which individuals interpret messages—is reconfigured in algorithmic communication ecosystems. Fattorello's theory emphasizes the centrality of the active receiver, the inevitable subjectivity of information, and the network structure of communication, anticipating contemporary digital dynamics. However, algorithmic filter bubbles pose a fundamental challenge: they do not eliminate interpretive agency, but rather isolate and impoverish it, replacing conscious, authentic filters with opaque, automated selections designed to maximize commercial engagement. The analysis integrates four complementary perspectives: Fattorello's social theory, Chang's deconstructive approach—which questions communicational transparency and reveals the structural discontinuities, opacities, and deferrals of meaning—Waisbord's post-disciplinary characterization, and Hepp's concept of communicative figurations. This convergence reveals that algorithmic acculturation operates paradoxically: subjects retain interpretive capacity, but exercise it within technically predetermined informational spaces that systematically eliminate cognitive diversity.

Keywords: acculturation, algorithmic mediation, communicative figurations, resistance

Introduction:

Contemporary communication theory faces the challenge of rethinking foundational categories in light of sociotechnical transformations that exceed the conceptual frameworks of the 20th century. The concept of acculturation, proposed by Francesco Fattorello in the 1950s—understood as the sociocultural filter that each individual employs to interpret messages—offers a privileged starting point for examining how interpretive agency is reconfigured in algorithmic communication ecosystems. However, updating this concept requires confronting it with perspectives that address both the disciplinary fragmentation of communication studies and the logics of profound mediatization that characterize digital societies.

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The emergence of algorithmic communication ecosystems raises fundamental questions about the persistence of individuals' interpretive agency in contexts of increasing automation of information selection. Francesco Fattorello's Social Theory of Communication, developed in the 1950s, offers a particularly relevant conceptual framework for addressing these tensions through its central category of acculturation. The following section critically analyzes how Fattorello's concept of acculturation as an interpretive "authentic filter" is challenged, transformed, and potentially eroded by the algorithmic personalization logics characteristic of contemporary digital platforms. It argues that filter bubbles do not eliminate acculturation but rather structurally reconfigure it, generating a paradox where interpretive agency is exercised within technically predetermined informational spaces.

In an alternative direction, Chang (1996), with his focus on the deconstruction of communication, unravels the inherent complexities of communication, questioning the transparency of language and the possibility of transmitting meaning without mediation or distortion. In this sense, there are several interesting points of convergence and divergence with Fattorello's analysis and its application to algorithmic mediation. Silvio Waisbord (2019), from his characterization of communication as a post-discipline, questions the very possibility of theoretical unity in a structurally fragmented field. Andreas Hepp, Andreas Breiter, and Uwe Hasebrink (2018), through the concept of communicative figurations, propose a non-media-centric framework that examines how situated communicative practices shape specific social domains in contexts of deep mediatization. Both perspectives, although developed independently of the Fattorellian tradition, offer conceptual resources for rethinking acculturation and resistance under algorithmic conditions.

The perspective we are developing argues that a critical dialogue among these three perspectives allows us to construct a theory of algorithmic acculturation that is attentive both to the persistence of interpretive agency and to the technopolitical infrastructures that structurally condition its exercise. The fundamental question guiding the analysis is: how are acculturation and the possibilities for resistance reconfigured when conscious, authentic filters are progressively replaced by opaque algorithmic selections designed to maximize commercial engagement?

Acculturation as an Authentic Filter and Foundation of Interpretive Agenc

The cardinal principle of Fattorello's thought is the centrality of the public/audience as an active agent in the communicative process. Fattorello introduces the term 'Soggetto Recettore' (Sr)—receiving subject—emphasizing that the receiver is not a passive object but a subject with agency, interpretive capacities, and their own cultural frameworks (Fattorello, 1969). Specifically, the Sr does not merely decode messages, but interprets, redefines, and reacts according to acculturation—a set of historically accumulated experiences, knowledge, and values (Martínez Solanas, 2006). As Seganti and Ragnetti (2012) explain, for Fattorello, establishing communication requires a convergence of interpretation between the Promoting Subject (Sp)—the one who initiates communication—and the Sr regarding the proposed form of opinion (O). This convergence is not automatic but contingent, depending on whether Sr shares sufficient acculturation with Sp to understand and ideally accept O. When acculturations diverge significantly, communication fails—transmission occurs,

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but a communicative relationship is not established.

Crucially, Sr is never terminal, since once Sr processes information and forms an opinion, it becomes Sp, addressing other Srs through available means, generating infinite chains of communication. This dynamic—represented in Fattorello's crystallographic diagram where points represent subjects constantly exchanging Sp-Sr roles—anticipates the network logic of digital communication where users simultaneously consume and produce content (Autor, 2023).

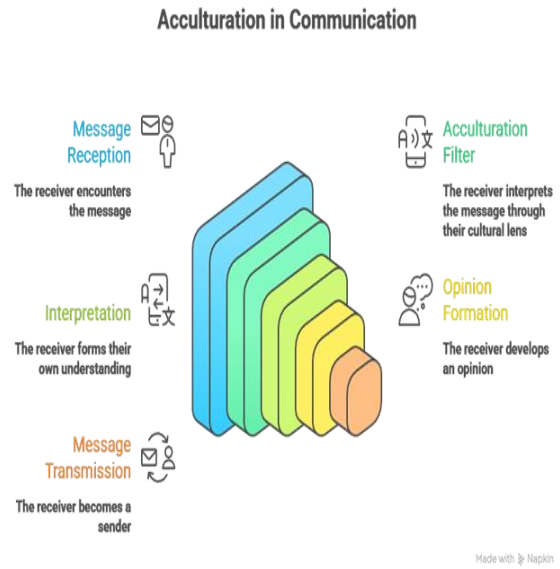

Diagram N°1 Acculturation in Communication

Inevitable Subjectivity of Information

The second fundamental principle is the impossibility of objective information. In Fattorello's formula Sp[x)M(O]Sr, fact x remains in parentheses, external to the communicative relationship, since 'reality' itself is inaccessible. What circulates are not facts but subjective perceptions, interpretations, representations of facts that Fattorello calls 'forms of opinion' (Fattorello, 1969). As Fattorello summarizes: 'Information is subjectivity. It goes with us and with the moment in which we live. Man cannot escape himself, his subjectivity, just as it is not possible to escape the contingency of events' (Fattorello, 1969, p. 71). This epistemological position aligns with social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), although Fattorello developed his ideas independently. He recognizes that journalists, communicators, and digital prosumers do not 'reflect' reality but rather organize, select, and structure it according to their own interests, ideologies, and cognitive frameworks. Therefore, the claim to journalistic objectivity is deceptive—every message represents a partial, situated view (Martínez Solanas, 2006). In the participatory digital culture where users share not 'pure facts' but interpretations, opinions, reactions—inherently subjective content such as comments on social networks, blog posts, TikTok videos constitute contemporary "forms of opinion", validating Fattorello's intuition that social communication operates through the exchange of subjective symbolic constructions, not objective data (Quiroga, 2023).

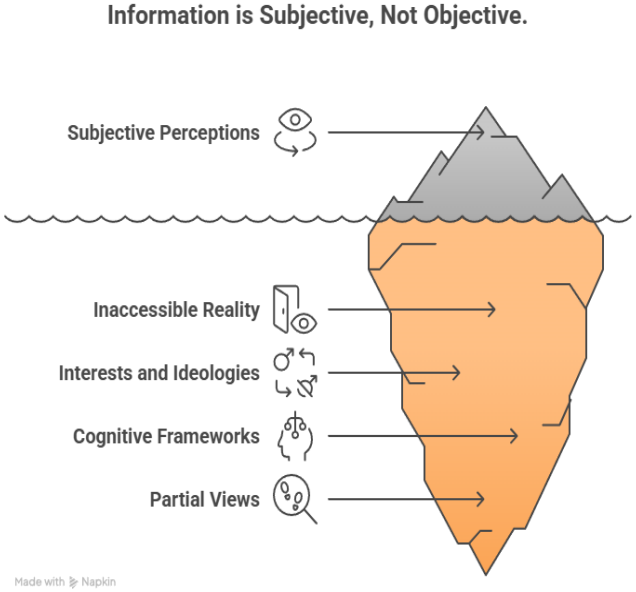

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Diagram N° 2 Information is Subjective

Relational and Crystallographic Structure

The third principle is the relational and networked nature of communication. Fattorello rejects linear sender-receiver models, proposing a crystallographic structure where multiple subjects interact simultaneously, constantly alternating Sp-Sr roles (Fattorello, 1969). A crystallographic diagram represents it as a network of nodes, the subjects joined by edges representing communicative relationships. This network extends infinitely, lacking a defined center or periphery (Seganti & Ragnetti, 2012). This networked vision resonates deeply with internet and web architecture. As Autor (2023) points out, the web model is characterized precisely by decentralization, multidirectionality, and the absence of a single sender center, where users are simultaneously producers and consumers (prosumers), initiating and responding to communications in rhizomatic patterns that Deleuze and Guattari (1980) would theorize decades later, but which Fattorello intuited through a crystallographic metaphor.

Additionally, Fattorello distinguishes between 'contingent' and 'non-contingent' information. The first is temporary, stereotypical, and directed at specific mass audiences—typical of advertising and current affairs journalism. The second is personal, profound, and transmitted through direct human contact. Although both share a Sp-M-Sr structure, they differ in temporality, personalization, and objectives (Martínez Solanas, 2006). This distinction allows for nuanced analysis according to the type of communication, recognizing a diversity of phenomena under the umbrella of communication.

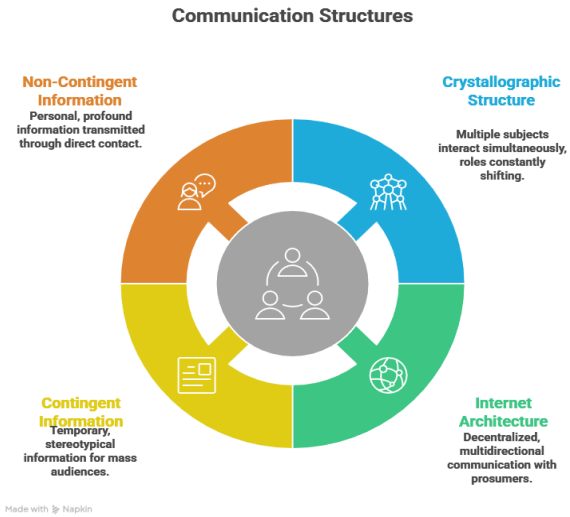

Diagram N° 3 Communication Structures

Acculturation as the Epistemological Foundation of Reception

Within Fattorello's theoretical framework, acculturation constitutes the set of historical, social, and psychological influences and stimuli that shape the individual as a social subject (Fattorello, 1969). This category operates as the epistemological foundation of all receptive acts, establishing that the interpretation of messages cannot be understood apart from the biographical and cultural trajectories that constitute the receiver. Acculturation generates three determining effects on digital communication. First, it produces a mental predisposition that shapes social attitudes and interpretive frameworks that condition the acceptance, negotiation, or rejection of content found on the internet. Second, it guarantees absolute subjectivity in reception, where the same digital event generates differentiated effects according to the personal motivations and interests of each individual. Third, it establishes that digital opinion is essentially provisional, emotional, and subjective, built upon networks of the individual's prior connections (Quiroga, 2023). This conceptualization fundamentally challenges any claim to universal or

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mechanical media effects. For Fattorello, the media do not transmit "pure facts" but rather "formulas of opinion" that depend entirely on the cultural background of both the sender and the receiver (Fattorello, 1969). Consequently, communication requires the Promoter Subject to construct their formula of opinion considering the specific acculturation of the Receiver Subject, thus establishing an intersubjective relationship where meaning emerges socially.

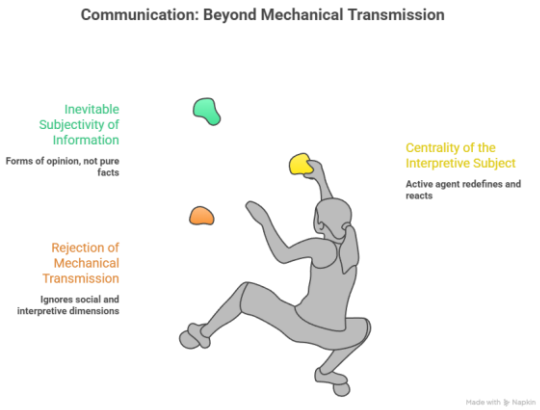

Diagram N° 4 Communication: Beyond Mechanical Transmission

The problematization of communication developed in both Fattorello's theory and Chang's deconstructive perspective is part of a radical critique of positivist informational models that conceive of the communicative process as a linear, transparent, and technically controllable transmission of meanings. In contrast to the Shannonian paradigm, which reduces communication to an exchange of quantifiable signals, Fattorello (1969) introduces an epistemological break by shifting the focus from the message to the Soggetto Recettore (receiver), understanding that meaning does not pre-exist the communicative act, but rather emerges in the conflictive encounter between discourse, acculturation, and social experience. This conception finds a point of convergence with Chang's approach, who, from a deconstructive perspective, challenges the possibility of a complete, stable, and univocal meaning, and situates communication within a field traversed by discontinuities, deferrals, and structural opacities. In this framework, subjectivity does not appear as a residue or distortion of the information process, but rather as its constitutive condition: for both Fattorello and Chang, the subject does not receive information, but rather produces meaning within a network of symbolic mediations that preclude any interpretive closure. Thus, Fattorello's principle of the impossibility of objective information—expressed in the notion of the circulation of "forms of opinion"—engages directly with Chang's critique of the illusion of communicative transparency, by demonstrating that every statement is already overdetermined by cultural frameworks, power relations, and historically situated regimes of intelligibility. Consequently, communication is configured not as a device for the transfer of pure facts, but as an irreducibly subjective, conflictive, and open process of meaning production, where communicative truth shifts from the order of correspondence to that of interpretation.

While Fattorello uses "acculturation" as a sociocultural filter that shapes interpretation, Chang focuses on "deconstruction" to reveal the underlying structures, contradictions, and absences that give form to meaning. Fattorello's acculturation, although dynamic, could be seen as a more "stable" framework for interpretation compared to the constant destabilization of meaning proposed by Chang. Fattorello posits that communication requires a "convergence of interpretation" between the Promoter Subject and the Receiver Subject (Seganti & Ragnetti, 2012). Chang (1996) is skeptical about the possibility of complete and seamless convergence, emphasizing the inevitable "misinterpretations" and the

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always partial nature of communication, since he understands it as a process of constant "deconstruction" and "reconstruction," where convergence is always provisional and never total.

Algorithmic acculturation takes a critical stance against technological determinism, arguing that while agency persists, it does so within technically predetermined limits. This position resonates with Chang's caution toward any form of determinism, whether technological or linguistic. Chang (1996), in deconstructing communication, seeks precisely to reveal how structures and systems, including technological ones, attempt to impose meanings and limit agency, but also how these impositions are always susceptible to being subverted or reinterpreted. The concept of "algorithmic mediation," which reconfigures acculturation by isolating and reinforcing it, is a key point. The different forms of mediation—linguistic, technological, cultural—shape communication and subjectivity; filter bubbles "replace conscious 'authentic filters' with opaque automated filters" (Autor, 2022) explains how technological mediation can alter the communicative experience, which must be approached with a deconstructive lens to reveal the implications of this "substitution".

Communicative Figurations and Deep Mediatization

Andreas Hepp, Andreas Breiter, and Uwe Hasebrink (2018) develop the concept of communicative figurations as a heuristic framework for investigating communicative transformations in contexts of deep mediatization. Unlike media-centric approaches that privilege the analysis of specific media, communicative figurations examine constellations of actors, communicative practices, thematic frameworks, and media repertoires that constitute social domains (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018).

The concept is rooted in the socio-constructivist tradition of research on mediatization, understood as a process of interrelated change between media/communication and culture/society. Hepp (2013) distinguishes between mediatization as shaping—the influence of specific media as molding forces—and mediatization as a transmedial transformation of communicative figurations through which we construct mediated worlds. This second perspective allows for the diachronic analysis of historical changes and the synchronic analysis of situated variations without falling into technological determinism.

Communicative figurations articulate micro-analyses of individual practices with meso-analyses of specific social domains, enabling contextualization with macro-level questions about society (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018). The empirical studies published by Hepp et al. (2018) demonstrate the applicability of this conceptual framework in diverse domains: urban youth communities, critical social movements, hacker groups (Chaos Computer Club), gaming communities, and the Roman Catholic Church. Crucial to this is the concept of media repertoires, understood as individual patterns of media use that reflect both personal dispositions and structural constraints of the communicative environment (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012). Repertoires are not mere aggregations of media consumption but rather meaningful constellations through which individuals navigate transmedia complexity. In contexts of deep mediatization, characterized by the proliferation of mobile platforms and the internet, repertoires become increasingly complex and dynamic (Hepp et al., 2018).

Algorithmic Mediation as a Field of Tension: Between Closure and Openness

The algorithmic mediation characteristic of contemporary digital platforms constitutes

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a paradigmatic case for productively examining the tension between attempts to close meaning and deconstructive resistances. Recommendation, filtering, and personalization algorithms operate through computational logics that aspire to predict, model, and guide users' communicative behaviors toward specific objectives—link maximization, advertising optimization, behavioral modeling (Zuboff, 2019). This aspiration to algorithmic control could be interpreted as the technical realization of communicative closure, which Chang considers structurally impossible. However, rigorously applying the deconstructive perspective implies recognizing that even the most sophisticated algorithmic systems fail to completely eliminate communicative indeterminacy. The irreducible gap between algorithmic intent and situated appropriation constantly generates spaces of resistance: users who interpret content in ways not foreseen by predictive models, communicative practices that elude algorithmic categories, oblique readings that subvert hegemonic meanings, and tactical uses of platforms for purposes not contemplated in their design (de Certeau, 1984). These micro-resistances are not anomalies correctable through technical refinement but rather manifestations of the constitutively open nature of all communicative processes. Hepp et al. (2018) offer a complementary perspective by conceptualizing digital media as "institutionalizations" and "reifications" of communicative practices that, once established, exert a structural influence on future interactions. From this perspective, algorithms are not mere technical instruments but materializations of specific social relations—relations of corporate power, commercial logics, and technopolitical imaginaries—that configure architectures within which communicative practices unfold. This institutionalization generates fields of tension where actors with differing resources and positions constantly negotiate the terms of their communicative participation.

Conceptualizing algorithmic mediation as a field of tension rather than unilateral determination allows for an empirical understanding of seemingly contradictory phenomena: platforms that exert control without completely eliminating resistance; users who develop evasion tactics without being able to fully escape algorithmic logic; communities that build spaces of relative autonomy within corporate infrastructures. This perspective avoids both the naive techno-optimism that celebrates agency without acknowledging structural asymmetries, and the deterministic pessimism that denies any possibility of effective resistance.

Dialectic of Sedimentation and Reconfiguration

Chang emphasizes the fundamentally provisional nature of all communicative convergence, arguing that no interpretive agreement achieves definitive stability but remains subject to destabilization through future rereading, recontextualizations, and deconstructions. This provisionality is not a correctable deficiency but an ontological condition of communication: meaning is never fully present but deferred, displaced, and permanently reconstituted (Derrida, 1967). Applied to digital contexts, this perspective suggests that no algorithmic architecture—however sophisticated—can definitively fix circulating meanings, as these remain structurally open to reinterpretations that overflow programmed intentions. Hepp (2013, pp. 58–59) offers a complementary conceptualization through a dialectic between communicative practices and institutionalized forms. The media, he argues, operate as institutionalizations of communication that, having historically emerged from specific practices, become

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sedimented and acquire the character of a seemingly objective "second nature." However, these institutionalizations are never completely closed off; rather, they remain subject to transformation through innovations in communicative practices developed by social actors. Therefore, there is a permanent dialectical movement between institutional sedimentation and practical reconfiguration.

This dialectic makes it possible to analyze communicative transformations in contexts of profound mediatization, since digital platforms represent powerful institutionalizations—technically, economically, and politically—that strongly shape the conditions of contemporary communication. Their algorithms, interfaces, and protocols sediment specific logics that operate as structural frameworks within which millions of users carry out everyday practices. However, this institutionalization does not equate to absolute determination: the history of the internet constantly documents how innovative communicative practices reconfigure intended uses, generate unexpected cultures, and subvert dominant logics (Castells, 2009). The articulation between deconstructive provisionality (Chang) and dynamic institutionalization (Hepp et al., 2018) allows us to conceptualize resistance not as a frontal confrontation against total structures but as a continuous process of destabilization and reconfiguration of sedimented forms. Algorithmic filter bubbles represent institutionalizations that attempt to stabilize interpretations through automated personalization, but remain constitutively vulnerable to practices that overwhelm them: users who deliberately seek exposure to diverse information, communities that develop alternative media repertoires, collectives that hack algorithms to subvert their logic (Hepp et al., 2018).

Communicative Figurations and Deconstructive Resistance

Chang's deconstructive perspective illuminates resistance as a structural possibility inscribed in all communication, and Hepp's concept of communicative figurations allows us to analyze how these micro-resistances are articulated—or fail to be articulated—in politically significant collective practices. Individual resistance, while theoretically important, has evident limitations in contexts of massive technological and economic power asymmetries. The relevant question is not only whether resistance is possible—since Chang, it is constitutive—but under what social, organizational, and technological conditions these possibilities materialize into effective transformations of communicative domains. Hepp et al. (2018) empirically demonstrate through case studies how different communicative figurations—urban youth communities, critical social movements, Chaos Computer Club, gaming communities, religious institutions—develop distinctive communicative practices that shape their respective social domains in contexts of profound mediatization. These figurations do not respond mechanically to technological impositions, but rather actively negotiate their conditions of communication, developing situated media repertoires that selectively combine available technologies according to the logics specific to each domain.

The concept of media repertoires is particularly relevant for understanding resistance in algorithmic contexts. Hasebrink and Domeyer (2012) conceptualize repertoires as individual patterns of media use that reflect both personal dispositions and structural constraints of the communicative environment. In this deep mediatization, characterized by a multiplicity of platforms and devices, repertoires become

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increasingly complex and dynamic. Resistance to algorithmic personalization logics can manifest itself precisely through the deliberate construction of diversified repertoires that counteract homogenization: users who combine multiple platforms with distinct ideological biases, who alternate between algorithmic and non-algorithmic media, and who participate in communities with alternative communicative norms. Resistance operates here simultaneously at the micro level—individual reinterpretations, tactical uses—and the meso level—institutionalized collective practices—in specific figurations.

Critical Literacy as a Collective Deconstructive Practice

The integration of Chang and Hepp allows us to reconceptualize critical digital literacy beyond individualistic models that hold isolated users responsible for compensating, through personal skills, for the structural asymmetries of platform capitalism. Following Chang, critical literacy implies the capacity to deconstruct supposed algorithmic transparencies and neutralities, revealing their internal contradictions, constitutive biases, and systematic blind spots. This requires not merely technical skills regarding the functioning of algorithms but also the development of epistemological sensitivity to the opacities, deferrals, and indeterminacies that permeate all technological mediation. A deconstructive literacy recognizes that algorithms attempt to impose meanings through architectures that guide interpretations, but always partially fail because no technical system can completely close off the semantic excess of what can be communicated.

This perspective shifts literacy from instrumental competence to epistemological critique that understands the structural limits of algorithmic mediation. It implies recognizing that algorithmic categories—"relevant," "similar," "recommended"—are contingent constructions shaped by corporate decisions, cultural biases, and specific commercial logics. Deconstructive literacy cannot remain individual but must be institutionalized in communicative frameworks that develop shared critical practices. Studies on hacker communities and free software movements document how critical literacies emerge through participation in communities of practice (Hepp et al., 2018). Pedagogically, this requires immersion in frameworks where critical practices are exercised collectively, not conventional courses. Politically, democratizing critical literacy involves facilitating access to communities where deconstructive resistances are cultivated through situated interaction.

Filter Bubbles as Deconstructible Structures

Filter bubbles constitute a contemporary paradigm of attempts at algorithmic closure of meaning through automated personalization that aspires to predetermine interpretations by eliminating exposure to cognitive diversity (Pariser, 2011). From a deconstructive perspective, however, these bubbles represent not the effective realization of closure but its constitutive impossibility: no technical architecture can completely eliminate misinterpretations, semantic slippages, or oblique readings that overflow programmed intentions (Chang, 1996). The illusion of closure that filter bubbles project operates by naturalizing algorithmic selections as reflections of authentic user preferences, rendering invisible the technical mediations and corporate decisions that shape what content circulates. Nevertheless, this naturalization is never absolutely complete, since users can experience the strangeness of inappropriate recommendations, the arbitrariness of

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content that appears or disappears without apparent reason, and the opacity of selection criteria. These experiences of mismatch between algorithmic intent and situated appropriation constitute entry points for critical deconstruction that reveals the contingency of what is presented as necessary, the particularity of what is universalized, and the arbitrariness of what is naturalized.

Hepp et al. (2018) argue that filter bubbles do not affect all users uniformly, but rather generate differentiated effects according to the specific communicative figurations in which individuals participate. Users embedded in figurations with diversified media repertoires—combining multiple platforms, alternative sources, and collective verification practices—experience filter bubbles in a qualitatively different way than users whose communicative practices are concentrated on single platforms. Effective resistance to algorithmic homogenization does not emerge primarily from individual will but from participation in figurations that institutionalize practices of information diversification. Critical social movements develop tactics to subvert filter bubbles: multiple identities on platforms, manually curated lists, and communities that share excluded content (Hepp et al., 2018). These practices destabilize algorithmic mediation, operating within the irreducible gap between the intention to control and the excess of meaning that Chang identifies as constitutive of all communication.

Meaningful resistance in contexts of algorithmic mediation requires reconfiguring communicative figurations that institutionalize alternative practices in specific social domains. Hepp (2020) argues that substantive transformations emerge when media innovations reconfigure constellations of actors, thematic frameworks, and repertoires, altering structural conditions of communication. Subscriber-funded independent journalism exemplifies this reconfiguration, institutionalizing economic models that reduce dependence on algorithmic logics and allow for practices incompatible with the imperative of viralization (Hepp et al., 2018). These reconfigurations face limitations: massive asymmetries with respect to technology corporations with superior resources and political influence (Zuboff, 2019). However, from deconstructive perspectives, these limitations do not invalidate resistance but rather confirm its provisional and situated nature. Chang suggests that even seemingly failed resistances fulfill a critical function by highlighting the contingency of dominant orders, revealing that hegemonic configurations are contestable, not inevitable.

Resistance as Dialectic

The articulation between Chang and Hepp allows us to conceptualize communicative resistance in algorithmic contexts through a dialectic of two complementary analytical levels. At the micro-deconstructive level, all communication contains the potential for resistance because no mediation—including algorithmic mediation—can completely close off meaning. Creative misinterpretations, unforeseen tactical uses, and oblique readings that subvert hegemonic meanings constitute everyday forms of resistance inscribed in the very structure of communication. This micro-resistance emerges spontaneously from the constitutive gap between the intention to control and the uncontrollable excess of meaning. At the meso-configurative level, these micro-resistances acquire political significance when they are articulated in communicative figurations that collectively develop alternative media repertoires and institutionalized communicative practices in specific social

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domains. Effective resistance is not merely the sum of individual resistances but the product of collective organization that builds material infrastructures, develops shared normative frameworks, and cultivates critical literacies that allow for the systematic identification and exploitation of contradictions within algorithmic systems. Communicative figurations transform structural possibilities for resistance into effective capacities for practical reconfiguration.

The dialectic between these two levels is crucial: without micro-deconstructive resistance, alternative figurations would lack the raw material for innovation; without figurative articulation, micro-resistances would remain dispersed and ineffective in the face of massive structural asymmetries. Methodological convergence would involve combining deconstructive analysis of algorithmic discourses—revealing contradictions, absences, and opacities—with ethnographies of resistant communicative figurations that document situated practices of specific communities. This dual perspective allows us to simultaneously address the structural persistence of interpretive resistance and the social conditions that determine whether these resistances are collectively amplified or neutralized through isolation.

This conceptualization shifts the central political question from "Is it possible to resist?"—which, since Chang, has been trivially affirmative—to more productive questions: Under what material, organizational, and technological conditions do individual deconstructive resistances articulate themselves into collective communicative figurations? What technical, economic, and normative infrastructures facilitate or hinder these articulations? How can public policies democratize access to resources that allow for the reconfiguration of dominant communicative figurations? These questions should guide empirical research and political action toward structural transformations that expand effective spaces of communicative autonomy under conditions of algorithmic capitalism.

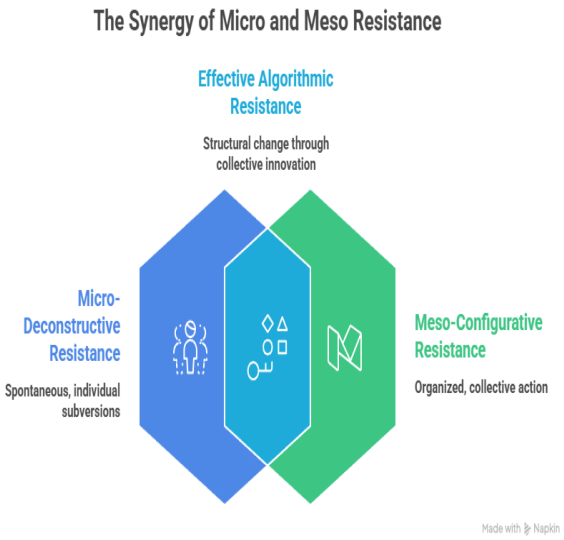

Diagram N° 5 The Synergy of Micro and Meso Resistance

Determinism and the Centrality of Agency

The fundamental convergence between Fattorello, Waisbord, and Hepp lies in their shared rejection of deterministic conceptions of media influence. Fattorello (1969) explicitly constructs his theory against models that attribute mechanical effects to media, emphasizing the interpretive capacity of receivers. Waisbord (2019), although from a disciplinary perspective, questions narratives that naturalize unidirectional media power. Hepp (2013) explicitly positions the concept of shaping forces against the effects paradigm, privileging the analysis of situated communicative practices. This convergence has profound epistemological implications. All three frameworks recognize that communication does not operate through the mechanical transmission of content but through the social construction of meanings in

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relational contexts. Fattorello's Soggetto Recettore, the fragmented researchers of Waisbord's post-discipline, and Hepp's actors in communicative figurations share a capacity for interpretive agency that resists structural determinations, albeit with differentiated emphases.

The articulation between Chang's (1996) deconstructive perspective and the communicative figurations approach developed by Hepp et al. (2018) allows for a complex understanding of communicative resistance that transcends both individualistic voluntarism and structural determinism. Both theoretical frameworks share a fundamental rejection of conceptions that naturalize the unidirectional power of communicative technologies over subjects, although they articulate this critique from distinct intellectual traditions. Chang, from his deconstructive logic, challenges the possibility of the definitive closure of meaning, arguing that every communicative structure—including algorithmic infrastructures—necessarily contains fissures, contradictions, and opacities that preclude its totalization. Resistance, in this perspective, is not an exception to the normal functioning of communication but rather its constitutive condition: the structural deferral of meaning constantly generates spaces for subversion, reinterpretation, and unforeseen uses (Chang, 1996). This conceptualization shifts the focus of resistance from the realm of individual heroic will to the terrain of contradictions inherent in every system of meaning.

Hepp (2013, 2020), for his part, develops the concept of communicative figurations precisely to overcome the technological determinism implicit in media-centric approaches that attribute direct causality to specific technologies. Communicative figurations—constellations of actors who, through patterned communicative practices, configure social domains—emphasize that mediatization does not operate as a unilateral imposition of technological logics but as a dialectical process where situated social agents actively shape the conditions of their communication, albeit always within structural limits that they do not fully control. This perspective recognizes the simultaneity of agency and structural constraint without resolving it through unilateral determination in either direction.

The fundamental convergence between these two frameworks lies in recognizing that resistance does not require externality to technological mediations—impossible both theoretically and empirically—but rather operates tactically within them, exploiting their internal contradictions, margins of indeterminacy, and blind spots. For Chang, all technological mediation attempts to impose meanings, but is constitutively susceptible to subversion; for Hepp, media institutionalizations establish structural conditions that, nevertheless, can be reconfigured through innovative communicative practices developed in specific figurations. Both perspectives reject both the uncritical celebration of individual agency and capitulation to supposed total technological determinations.

The second point of convergence concerns the recognition of subjectivity as a constitutive dimension of communication. Fattorello (1969, p. 71) categorically states: "Information is subjectivity. It is inherent in us and in the times we live in". This position anticipates the social constructivism that Berger and Luckmann (1966) would systematize, establishing that 'reality' is a social construction mediated by language, institutions, and power relations. Waisbord (2019) does not directly address the epistemology of communication, but his characterization of the post-discipline implies recognition of an irreducible plurality of theoretical, methodological, and thematic perspectives

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that resist unifying synthesis. This epistemological fragmentation reflects, on a disciplinary level, Fattorello's recognition of subjectivity on a communicative level: multiple interpretive frameworks coexist without the possibility of objective convergence. Hepp et al. (2018), from a socio-constructivist tradition of mediatization, assume that social domains are shaped by communicative practices that institutionalize and reify specific forms of action. Media operate as 'institutionalizations' and reifications of communication that, once established, exert influence on future interactions (Hepp, 2013, pp. 58-59). This dialectic between social construction and structural constraint acknowledges the tension between agency and determinism without resolving it unilaterally.

Critical Divergences: Unity and Fragmentation

The fundamental divergence between Fattorello and Waisbord lies in their positions regarding the possibility and desirability of theoretical unity in communication studies. Fattorello (1969) deliberately constructs a Social Theory of Information—unique, articulated, and systematic—that aims to explain communicative relationships through integrated categories: Promoter, Medium, Form of Opinion, Receiver, and Acculturation. Although he acknowledges the subjectivity of information, Fattorello aspires to a coherent conceptual framework applicable across disciplines (Seganti & Ragnetti, 2012).

Waisbord (2019), on the contrary, argues that aspirations to theoretical unity are structurally impossible and epistemologically undesirable in communication. The post-discipline is characterized precisely by embracing fragmentation, cultivating pluralism, and resisting temptations toward totalizing syntheses that inevitably render differences invisible, marginalize minority perspectives, and reproduce intellectual hegemonies. For Waisbord, the richness of communication studies lies in its capacity to address problems from multiple angles without requiring paradigmatic convergence. This divergence is not merely nominal but reflects radically different conceptions of the nature of communication knowledge. Fattorello assumes that communication as a social phenomenon possesses regularities identifiable through systematic theorizing. Waisbord questions this premise, pointing out that communication encompasses phenomena so heterogeneous—from interpersonal interactions to political propaganda, from social networks to organizational communication—that they resist reduction to a unified framework.

Fattorello (1969) conceptualizes acculturation as a property of individuals—the set of experiences, knowledge, and values that each subject accumulates historically and that shapes their interpretive filters. This focus on individual subjects reflects a phenomenological tradition that emphasizes lived experience, consciousness, and personal agency (Autor, 2023). Hepp et al. (2018), while acknowledging the importance of individual practices, prioritize meso-analysis of communicative figurations: constellations of actors who, through patterned communicative practices, configure specific social domains. The concept of figuration, inspired by Norbert Elias, privileges relationality over individuality, understanding that subjects are constituted through networks of interdependence that exceed personal interpretive capacities (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018). This difference in analytical scale has methodological consequences. The Fattorellian perspective suggests research on psychosocial processes of reception, opinion construction, and conscious

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filtering. The communicative figurations approach requires ethnographies of situated communicative practices, analysis of media repertoires, and mapping of actor constellations in specific domains. Both scales are legitimate, but they produce different knowledge about communication.

The Fattorellian concept of acculturation faces its most radical challenge in algorithmic communicative ecosystems. Filter bubbles—personalized informational ecosystems that algorithms construct through analysis of past behaviors—do not eliminate acculturation but rather isolate and selectively reinforce it, limiting exposure to social diversity (Autor, 2025). This dynamic generates a qualitative transformation in the very constitution of acculturation as a process. While Fattorello (1969) conceived of acculturation as the result of a chaotic multiplicity of diverse social stimuli, algorithmic bubbles produce impoverished and homogeneous acculturations. Instead of processing a variety of 'opinion formulas' to construct their own judgments, subjects receive representations that systematically validate pre-existing beliefs. The resulting 'echo chambers' create spaces where only homogeneous narratives circulate, drastically reducing exposure to ideological and cultural diversity (Seganti & Ragnetti, 2012).

The central paradox lies in the fact that algorithms attempt to mechanize authentic filters—attention, interests, prior knowledge—which Fattorello conceptualized as conscious human mechanisms of active processing. This substitution is problematic for three reasons. First, Fattorellian filters operate consciously and critically; algorithmic filters function opaquely, without understanding of selection criteria. Second, human filters are open to surprise and accidental discovery; algorithmic filters systematically minimize these possibilities by privileging confirmation of previous patterns. Third, Fattorellian acculturation is enriched by exposure to social complexity; algorithmic acculturation is impoverished by the elimination of cognitive dissonances (Quiroga, 2022).

Political Economy of Platforms and Structural Conditioning

The problem of filter bubbles cannot be adequately understood without considering the political economy of digital platforms. The dominance of global technology corporations—Meta, Google, ByteDance—has consolidated a model where proprietary algorithms determine which content circulates and which is made invisible, configuring structural limits within which individual acculturation takes place (Quiroga, 2022). This concentration of power raises questions that go beyond Fattorello's original framework. How does individual acculturation relate to oligopolistic structures that systemically condition access to diverse information? To what extent does the interpretive agency of the Receiving Subject persist when the very repertoire of available opinion formulas is predetermined by commercial logics of maximizing engagement? These questions require integrating a critical political economy perspective with a phenomenological analysis of reception.

Algorithmic personalization is not a technically neutral phenomenon but a commercial strategy aimed at maximizing users' attention spans to optimize the sale of targeted advertising. In this context, filter bubbles do not simply represent an accidental limitation of diversity but a structural consequence of business models that commodify human attention. Acculturation is subordinated to economic imperatives that prioritize confirmation over confrontation, cognitive comfort over intellectual challenge.

Resistance and Critical Literacy

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Faced with the algorithmic reconfiguration of acculturation, proposals are emerging aimed at recovering interpretive capacity and cognitive autonomy. Critical digital literacy is presented as a fundamental strategy for citizens to identify manipulations through clickbait, viral content, or algorithmic personalization (Quiroga, 2023). This literacy does not simply imply technical skills but rather the development of critical awareness regarding the infrastructures that mediate access to information.

Media activism constitutes another strategy: the tactical use of digital media by social groups to construct counter-hegemonic narratives that break with the common sense imposed by algorithmic bubbles. These practices update Fattorello's intuition about the capacity of the Receiving Subject to become a Promoter, now with the added awareness that this conversion must confront structural obstacles of algorithmic visibility (Seganti & Ragnetti, 2012).

However, these strategies face significant limitations. Critical literacy tends to hold users individually responsible for structural problems of concentrated informational power, and media activism must compete on unequal terms with corporate actors who control the very rules of visibility on platforms. Both strategies are necessary but insufficient without regulatory transformations that democratize control over communication infrastructures.

Toward a Critical Theory of Algorithmic Acculturation

Infrastructural Dimension

A critical theory of algorithmic acculturation must integrate an infrastructural dimension that examines how technical architectures—algorithms, interfaces, protocols—structurally condition possibilities for acculturation. Interpretive agency does not operate in a technical vacuum but rather within limits materially configured by specific digital infrastructures. This perspective resonates with the emphasis of Hepp et al. (2018) in analyzing how media operate as 'institutionalizations' and 'reifications' of communication. Recommendation algorithms are not merely neutral tools but incorporate specific logics—link maximization, screen time optimization, advertising segmentation—that shape what information circulates and how. Platform interfaces design user experiences that facilitate certain practices—sharing, commenting, liking—while hindering others: in-depth reading, source verification, exposure to opposing viewpoints. Technical protocols determine who can publish, under what conditions, and with what visibility.

Political-Economic Dimension

The second dimension analyzes how acculturation is embedded in asymmetrical power relations between global technology corporations and atomized users, where the construction of meaning does not occur under conditions of equality but is instead shaped by commercial imperatives that privilege certain types of content and marginalize others. This perspective connects with traditions of critical political economy of communication, which Waisbord (2019) identifies as one of the field's many fragmented currents. Platform capitalism is characterized by oligopolistic concentration, where a few corporations control communication infrastructures used daily by billions of people. This concentration generates structural asymmetries: platforms unilaterally determine terms of service, design algorithms according to corporate interests, monetize personal data without adequate compensation, and exercise censorship power through content moderation. Individual users possess interpretive agency, but this is exercised within

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frameworks predetermined by opaque corporate decisions.

Ecological Dimension

The third dimension addresses the qualitative transformations that acculturation undergoes when the media ecosystem itself is designed to minimize cognitive dissonance. If Fattorello's acculturation thrived on exposure to social diversity, what happens when informational environments are systematically designed to eliminate this diversity? This question requires ecological analysis that examines not only specific content or technologies but also the systemic configuration of communicative environments. Hepp's (2020) concept of deep mediatization captures this ecological transformation: the proliferation of technical means of communication—mobile phones, social platforms, connected devices—generates 'media multiplicity' where no single medium exists as a driving force for change. This multiplicity does not necessarily imply informational diversity, since algorithms that operate transversally can generate homogenization precisely through personalization: each individual receives content adapted to their prior preferences, but aggregate diversity diminishes when everyone is trapped in isolated bubbles.

Interpretive Agency in Environments of Algorithmic Determination

The critical dialogue between Fattorello, Waisbord, and Hepp et al. allows for a complex understanding of acculturation and resistance in the age of algorithmic mediation. The relevance of Fattorello's theory lies in its fundamental insistence on the irreducibility of media reception to mechanical or deterministic effects. His conceptualization of the receiver as an active subject, endowed with authentic filters and interpretive capacity, constitutes a necessary corrective to techno-determinisms that naturalize the subordination of human agency to algorithmic logics.

However, algorithmic filter bubbles pose challenges that cannot be resolved merely by reaffirming individual interpretive agency. Automated personalization generates a structural reconfiguration of acculturation, replacing chaotic exposure to social diversity with homogeneous informational ecosystems designed to confirm pre-existing cognitive schemas. This transformation does not eliminate interpretive agency but exercises it within technically configured and economically oriented structural limits.

Waisbord's perspective on post-disciplinary fragmentation illuminates the impossibility of a unified theoretical synthesis that resolves these tensions through a single conceptual framework. Multiple research traditions—critical political economy, cultural studies, practice theory, platform analysis—offer complementary rather than competitive perspectives on algorithmic acculturation. Embracing epistemological pluralism does not imply relativism but rather recognition of the irreducible complexity of the communication phenomenon. The communicative figurations approach of Hepp et al. provides a meso-analytic perspective that articulates individual practices with constellations of actors in specific social domains. Examining how urban youth communities, critical social movements, religious institutions, or educational systems transform their communicative practices in contexts of deep mediatization allows us to understand the situated variability of processes that macro-theoretical frameworks tend to homogenize.

The central paradox of algorithmic acculturation lies in the fact that subjects continue to actively interpret content, but they do so increasingly within

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informational spaces that systematically eliminate anything that might challenge their interpretations. Agency persists, but it is exercised under conditions of structurally produced cognitive impoverishment. This situation requires responses that integrate individual critical literacy, collective media activism and regulatory transformations that democratize control over communication infrastructures are essential. Future theoretical elaborations must integrate Fattorello's claim of interpretive agency with a critical understanding of the technopolitical infrastructures that condition the very possibilities of exercising such agency. Only in this way can we develop appropriate conceptual frameworks to understand—and transform—communication conditions in a time of algorithmic digital capitalism, simultaneously recognizing the persistence of interpretive resistance and the structures that constrain it.

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