

The Socio-Cultural Function of Media in Nineteenth-Century Latin America

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Annette Paatz,

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Abstract: In her article, "The Socio-Cultural Function of Media in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," Annette Paatz explores the function of the review genre in the context of Latin American nation building. Paatz focuses, on the one hand, on the genre's nationalist purposes and, on the other, on the appropriateness for intercultural communication. Drawing on the concept of mediated communication as social practice in the context of media cultural studies, Paatz analyses the reviews as representations of nineteenth-century Latin America's negotiations of transatlantic and thus intercultural relationships. She highlights the pragmatic ways in which Latin America utilized European media products in order to increase the flow of information and to sustain a Latin American pan-subcontinental communication. This fact suggests that the often noted importance of Paris as the cultural center of the Western world throughout the nineteenth century can be described in terms of the medial support it offered to Latin American nations in their claim for and building of cultural identity. By considering the conditions of production as well as reception, Paatz pays attention to cultural biases inherent in media communication between Europe and Latin America.

Annette PAATZ

The Socio-Cultural Function of Media in Nineteenth-Century Latin America

In 1879, Mariano Felipe Paz Soldán begins to translate into practice his project of a "Biblioteca Peruana" -- aimed at including the whole cultural production of contemporaneous Peru -- in his *Revista Peruana* (1879-80). In a first step, he assembles periodicals, "because they ... illustrate in a tangible manner the special progress of a nation" ("porque ellas ... hacen conocer de un modo palpable el progreso especial de una nación," Paz Soldán, *Revista* 1, 74; my translation). Periodicals are moreover of particular importance in a nineteenth-century Latin American context as the technical possibilities did not yet allow for the large-scale production of books. Boyd G. Carter, John E. Englekirk, and, more recently, Dieter Janik have emphasized the crucial ways in which periodicals contributed to the development of national literary cultures in Latin America. Owing to its national outlook, Soldán's "Biblioteca Peruana" includes mainly Peruvian periodicals, in addition to some publications from other Latin American countries. Thus it may at first seem surprising that the only European journal he mentions is the French *Revue des Deux Mondes*. He justifies this particular choice with the *Revue's* special importance, as in his view it "contains the real political, economic, and scientific contemporary history and that of the literary movement of the century" ("contiene la verdadera historia política, económica y científica contemporánea y del movimiento literario del siglo," Paz Soldán, *Revista* 2, 462; my translation). While this description highlights the wide thematic range of European review journals in general, Soldán's integration of the *Revue* seems to be symptomatic of nineteenth-century Latin American cultural politics: Despite a pronounced struggle for cultural autonomy, France -- the nation that, from a Latin American perspective, long remains synonymous with cultural progress in the "Old World" -- still figures prominently as a cultural model.

In this paper I bring together two premises of nineteenth-century Latin American cultural processes: On the one hand, the importance of journals and periodicals in the context of defining a Latin American cultural identity, and, on the other, the role of the emerging (mass) media system in negotiating the relationship between Latin America and France. In other words, I am interested in the conditions of mediated cultural transfer and mediated constructions of culture, with a special emphasis on the interdependence between Latin America's search for cultural autonomy and its simultaneous reliance on foreign cultural models. This interdependence can be described as a dynamic process, throwing into relief the ambivalent relationship between the new American nations and Europe: While in their *political* projects, these nineteenth-century creole republics focused on disaffiliating themselves from their former colonial power, they at the same time maintained close ties to their European *cultural* origins, thus striving for a new kind of reintegration of these two aspects. And, in fact, the "Biblioteca Peruana" is just one example of many: Latin American efforts at cultural institutionalization by means of an autonomous periodical press, combined with a simultaneous assimilation of parts of the European journalistic media system, prove to be characteristic of the inclusion of European discourses into Latin American culture in general. This interdependence becomes particularly clear in the context of mediated cultural transfer via periodicals, a connection which has received only scant attention from a contemporary media-theory perspective. The following reflections will thus focus on some of the central implications of mediatization in the context of nineteenth-century Latin America's cultural nation-building and its negotiations of transatlantic intercultural relationships.

As has been variously observed, the development of modern mass media has had a strong impact on cultural identity constructions and nation-building in general. In effect, processes of mediatization (including the industrialization of the writing process) are often closely related to processes of democratization. Benedict Anderson has highlighted the importance of a shared reading culture for the development of modern citizenship, considering a national press as an indispensable prerequisite for the constitution of what he terms "imagined communities." Throughout Western history, media have come to play an increasingly significant part in the transmission of culture, thus turning culture into media(ted) culture. At the same time, as one of the central premises of contemporary media theory holds, mediation not only entails the transmission of a cultural

product across time and space; mediation inevitably also shapes the transmitted material, thus leaving its specific organizational and structural imprints. In other words, media are not only transmitters of information; rather, the information transmitted is subject to specific conditionings generated by the media themselves. Therefore, since media create processes of communication, and, as Jesús Martín-Barbero suggests in his study *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1987), since processes of communication are culture-bound, it is of central importance to analyze the social implications of this transmission (10). Due to their involvement in the wake of explosive media developments throughout the twentieth century, media studies have so far focused primarily on television and electronic media. Yet the issues that seem so urgent to us at present are also highly relevant in earlier contexts. The central question of how media contribute to the organization of social reality, for example, may provide further insights into nineteenth-century press developments that go beyond the traditional reductionist historical accounts (consisting of mere listings of titles), or the positivistic studies arguing at the level of content, both of which fail to consider the consequences transmission itself has upon the reception of the respective materials. In this sense, Siegfried J. Schmidt has formulated in *Die Welten der Medien. Grundlagen und Perspektiven der Medienbeobachtung* (1996) the project of "media cultural studies" as the exploration of "the relationship between a society's predominant use of certain media, and the ensuing consequences for its methods of structuring knowledge" ("das Verhältnis zwischen dem gesellschaftlich vorherrschenden Gebrauch bestimmter Medien und den damit verbundenen Konsequenzen für die Struktur des Wissens einer Gesellschaft," Elsner et al. 167; see also Schmidt 41-43; my translation). One of the preferred fields of media cultural studies mentioned by Schmidt includes intercultural studies, which explore, for example, questions of interaction between cultures, cultural differentiation/disaffiliation, or constructions of cultural identity/alterity (42). In effect, mediation can be said to have the most drastic effects upon intercultural interaction and intercultural communication. And since, in the nineteenth century, cultural transfer reaches a fundamentally new quality due to the massive expansion of the periodical press, nineteenth-century developments in print media may arguably be considered as revolutionary, relatively speaking, as the late twentieth-century media developments.

According to Werner Faulstich in *Grundwissen Medien* (1994), the nineteenth century marks the conclusion of what is frequently referred to as the second period in media history, centered on so-called "secondary media" (i.e., media that require technology for production, but not for reception) (31-33). This includes periodicals, since they are produced industrially, yet can be read by individuals without relying on technology. A theoretical approach to this period of "secondary media" allows us to pay special attention to the emergence of a cultural industry as well as the specifics of processes of mediatory production and reception, or, in other words, to the above-described concept of mediated communication as social practice. In the context of communication processes enacted by periodicals, Faulstich has identified, at least since the mid-nineteenth century, a shift from author-centered to recipient-oriented publications (355-58). This shift strengthens the significance of communication on a larger scale, thus gaining particular importance in the context of mediated cultural transfer. In a national context, this audience orientation highlights the crucial role that periodicals begin to play in the constitution of the bourgeois public sphere; in a Spanish American context, it furthermore corresponds to the creole elites' aspirations to inform their (educated) peers about how they imagined their social communities. At the same time, once nationally-oriented periodicals are imported into different cultural contexts, their orientation toward a specific (national) audience leads to strong incongruities between their originally intended and their actual readership.

In this context, the *Revue des Deux Mondes's* review format is interesting precisely because of its ambivalent self-positioning vis-à-vis national and international reference cultures, the construction of cultural identities, and intercultural acts of communication. Although including translations of foreign literary texts and related materials, for example, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* clearly privileges French national literary productions. This preference is related to the *Revue's* association, at least during the 1830s, with the Romantic movement (see Furman). Most variants of Romanticism are characterized by a strong tendency toward a nationalist concept of culture, which at

the same time also entails the comparative glance at other (national) cultures, hence presupposing, in contrast to current cultural premises, a homogenizing, essentialist notion of culture. Under these circumstances, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* was regarded as a metonym for French culture. This national paradigm may also be the reason why French review periodicals seemed to have had such a strong impact in Latin America, with their British and American variants, including the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, or the *North-American Review*, predating and even constituting a model for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* at its inception in 1831.

Reviews constitute what Klaus Merten has called in "Evolution der Kommunikation" (1994) a "meta-medium" (155), i.e., they present -- originally exclusively so, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* still to a great extent -- critical reviews of book-length publications. In this way, they offer a selective guide to a country's growing cultural production and hence contribute to the construction of cultural memory. They are furthermore closely tied to their geographic distribution range and thus to their original audience. This connection tends to be reflected in their titles, with the *Revue des Deux Mondes* as the exception that proves the rule. (The significance of this seemingly programmatic title for a Spanish American context will be addressed below.) In France, however, there also existed *La Revue de Paris* (which was taken over by the editor of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1834, subordinated to it, and finally folded in 1845). Argentinian Vicente Fidel López (1848-1893), in his *Evocaciones históricas*, refers to the *Revue de Paris* as an exponent of the enthusiastically-praised cultural climate of the French Revolution of 1830 and the subsequent monarchical government of Louis Philippe in his country: "Today noone is able to imagine the moral turmoil this incident has had upon the Argentine youth that attended the university halls. I do not know how it produced a massive influx of books and authors whose names up to this moment had not been heard. ... The *Revue de Paris*, where the new transcendental French literature of 1830 tried its strength, was sought like our most burning desire" ("nadie hoy es capaz de hacerse una idea del sacudimiento moral que este suceso produjo en la juventud argentina que cursaba las aulas universitarias. No sé cómo produjo una entrada torrencial de libros y autores que no se había oído mencionar hasta entonces. ... *La Revue de Paris*, donde todo lo nuevo y transcendental de la literatura francesa de 1830 ensayó sus fuerzas, era buscada como lo más palpitante de nuestros deseos," 29; my translation).

The success of the French reviews in Spanish America coincided with a period of strong interest in cultural development, manifesting itself in the establishment of institutions such as the Salón Literario (1837) in Buenos Aires, or the Chilean Sociedad Literaria (1842), to name only the most well-known examples. The Chilean intellectual José V. Lastarria draws attention to the launching of two publications "in the style of the European reviews" ("en la forma de las revistas europeas," qtd. in Carter, *Historia* 42; my translation) in the wake of the Sociedad Literaria's cultural climate. Like Paz Soldán in Peru, Lastarria is proud of this emerging media system, not only because of the new possibilities for transmitting information, but also because of the symbolic capital that can be acquired through the publication of *revistas*, European-style. Founding his *Revista de Buenos Aires* (1863-71), Vicente Quesada can already draw upon an existing Spanish-American review tradition by referring to the *Revista del Pacífico* (1858-61), or the *Revista de Lima* (1859-63) in "Prospecto" (1863). He shows his indebtedness to them by "send[ing] a greeting, not absolutely free from an excusable jealousy, to those precious shrines consecrated to American Letters in regions united across distances with ours by common efforts and tendencies that the Pacific and the Andes are unable to divide" ("[enviando] un recuerdo no del todo libre de una perdonable envidia, a aquellos preciosos santuarios consagrados a las Letras Americanas en territorios unidos a la distancia con el nuestro por esfuerzos y tendencias comunes que el Pacífico y los Andes no son bastantes a dividir," 4; my translation). In saying this, Quesada thus reveals the nationalist implications of his project, emphasizing furthermore that the absence of reviews in Argentina means "a kind of vacuum yet nearly incompatible with the culture of our society" ("una clase de vacío hasta incompatible ya con la cultura de nuestra sociedad," 3; my translation); at the same time, however, he displays his cultural solidarity with the other Spanish American nations.

Based on this aim of nation building on the one hand, and a voluntary affiliation with the cultural standards of Europe (and above all France) on the other, I now explore the intercultural im-

plications inherent in the review genre's transcendence of its original range of distribution. From the perspective of their countries of origin, reviews attain the status of cultural "ambassadors," thus proving particularly suitable for the purposes of cultural mediation and transfer. Located in an intermediate position between books and daily newspapers, they can claim more actuality than a book, but at the same time can accomplish a higher degree of reflection and analysis than the dailies. Because of the reviews' publication frequency (in general bimonthly or monthly), the transmission of information reaches a degree of continuity that corresponded -- at least theoretically -- to the transatlantic shipping frequency. Subscription assures continuous delivery, and cultural transfer thus no longer depends on contingency or personal initiative but, due to its institutionalization, reaches a complexity unknown up to this point. Within a media context, the specific function ascribed to the review is primarily that of international distribution. The distribution of French periodicals in Latin America thus establishes a connection between France, a country with a complex infrastructure, and a subcontinent with substantial deficiencies in this area, i.e. a connection between the metropolis Paris and different cultural centers within Latin America, including Lima, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Santiago de Chile, or Valparaíso (these are at least the cities with subscription bureaus mentioned by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*).

The *Revue des Deux Mondes*'s meaningful title, "review of both worlds," the Old and the New, presumably created a very particular expectation among the Latin American creole elites who at that time were anxious to partake of Western civilization. Yet the *Revue*'s editor, François Buloz (who set the standards for "his" review up to his death in 1877), actually did not invent this title with the specific goals of his journal in mind. Rather, it had been adopted from a former publication specializing in travel reports, a fact which clearly reveals the European journalistic media's attitude toward the "New World": (Latin) America was objectified as the exotic "Other" that was granted a place in travel reports. Political and literary journals, on the other hand, much less frequently featured Latin American topics (despite François Buloz's professed intentions) because it took some time before this continent was accepted as an integral part of the Western community's projection of a so-called "concert des nations civilisées" (Reclus 909).

Thus, despite the *Revue*'s programmatic title, the flow of information and communication between France and Latin America proved to be highly one-sided, an imbalance that was undoubtedly deplored by the creole intellectuals who had recognized the importance of communication via journalistic media for their nationalist project. They were not only keen to learn about the cultural productions of Europe, but also sought cultural exchange, i.e., a balanced transatlantic communication that equally took into account both Latin Americans as well as Europeans as producers of culture. Yet if the *Revue des Deux Mondes* was virtually integrated into the Latin American cultural system, this integration was not based upon the *Revue*'s extensive and balanced discussion of themes related to Latin America's cultural production, or to works by Latin American authors. As I have described elsewhere, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* perpetuates a pronouncedly Eurocentric perspective that provides the European reader with a highly fictionalized, exoticist, and hence pejorative, image of Latin American social, political, and (though very rarely) cultural conditions, thus corresponding to the above-discussed changes in the press system by primarily catering toward the expectations of the journal's national (French) audience (see Paatz). At the same time, however, the *Revue*'s essays not only reached the subcontinent but were used as "authorized" sources of information and were often cited or republished in local Latin American periodicals (occasionally even as separate publications in Spanish translation). In this way, Latin America regularly discounted the review's biased treatment of its materials in favor of its factual or informational benefit. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, for example, not only relies for his discussion of the battle of Tablada in his famous book *Facundo. Civilización y barbarie* (1845) on a report published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; he also includes a -- profoundly Eurocentric -- review of the *Facundo* that has been published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in the second, 1851-edition of his book (see below). Latin Americans were thus clearly disposed to occupy the rhetorical space assigned to them by Europeans; they accepted their role as cultural "Other" in the context of a Eurocentric concept of culture, as long as, in principle, they were not denied the chances for future cultural progress. The Eurocentric perspective of European journalistic media thus seems not to have ad-

versely affected their reception in Latin America; the *Revue des Deux Mondes's* concessions to a European readership were acknowledged, and its nationalist predilections could not detract from its popularity in Latin America.

In fact, this popularity of European periodicals in Latin America can largely be explained by pragmatic circumstances. The Latin American nations simply depended upon the supply of information of all kinds, irrespective of potential representational biases. We have to assume that a medium like the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, besides informing about the cultural *status quo* of Europe, could supply Latin America with information about *their own* subcontinent's social, political, geographical, and literary developments -- information which often was not available within the respective countries themselves. The most important aspect here is the advantage of a pan-subcontinental distribution. Throughout the nineteenth century, Paris and its media served as a kind of information nexus for Latin America, which guaranteed the pan-subcontinental reception of both European and Latin American topics. This pragmatic use value is the most important reason for the ready acceptance of a culturally monolithic medium like the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by Latin America's emerging cultural system, as we have seen exemplified in the "Biblioteca Peruana."

Sarmiento was very much aware of these circumstances when, in the fall of 1845, he tried to convince François Buloz to include a review of his *Facundo* in the *Revue*. In this way, his book could become known throughout the whole Latin American world. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* thus offered a clear advantage over local Latin American periodicals (which were mostly restricted to a national range) as the infrastructural conditions did not allow for the establishment of subcontinental networks. This problem not only exists during the early stages of Latin America's cultural development, but is lamented time and again throughout the nineteenth -- and even up to the twentieth century. For example, in 1880, it is reported in the *Investigador* (Buenos Aires) that "the American nations do not know the productions of each other's bibliographers, men of letters, captains of industry, and scientists" ("los pueblos americanos no conocen mutuamente las producciones de sus bibliógrafos, literatos, industriales y hombres de ciencia"). On the other hand, "all of America is full of European periodicals, of literary works of all kinds, either in the Spanish original or in translation ... which, because of their cheap prices, are preferred to the productions of our own famous men of letters whose names are barely known" ("llena está la América entera de periódicos europeos, de obras literarias de toda especie, originales de España o traducidas ... que por la baratura de su precio están sobre las producciones de nuestros insignes literatos, cuyos nombres apenas son conocidos," Anonymous 167; my translation). This quotation also highlights the unequal levels of industrialization and commercialization of the respective literary marketplace; the latter had already received harsh criticism in France, mainly since the introduction of the *roman-feuilleton* in 1836. In Latin America, however, the problem consisted in the lack of professionalization and the concomitant absence of a media system sustained by professionals who were able to earn their living by editing and writing for periodicals: "The books from overseas are very well written and very cheap ... Since the authors do not earn their subsistence by their pen, those who condemn themselves to misery only for the sake of literary glory will be very rare" ("Los libros de ultramar son muy bien escritos y muy baratos ... Desde que los autores no se proporcionen con su pluma medios de subsistencia, serán rarísimos los que sólo por la gloria se condenen a la miseria," Amunátegui 464; my translation).

These advantages of the European media market were clearly recognized at the time and even led to the development of Spanish-language periodicals that were produced in Paris before being exported to Latin America, with the double aim of providing information about the cultural productions of Europe while at the same time creating a pan-American forum large enough to reach a great number of Latin American nations. The most important and long-lasting publication was *El Correo de Ultramar* (1842-86), and although it was criticized for flooding Latin America with bad translations of French novels, it also published texts from and about Latin American writers and, above all, functioned as a support for Latin America's media structure. But it was also the *Correo de Ultramar* that perpetuated a Eurocentric perspective by including Spanish translations of articles on Latin America by European writers. Yet the *Correo* was published for much longer than the Lat-

in American *revistas*, which often only appeared for one or two years, a fact that fully throws into relief the privileged advantages of the European media infrastructure. However, the *revistas* also had a very specific function within the emerging Latin American cultural field. Like the French *Revue des Deux Mondes*, they simultaneously promoted national identity and international exchange. Moreover, both the acceptance of European periodicals as well as the nationalist programmatic proposed by autochthonous ones are motivated by the aim of establishing a pan-subcontinental communication network. On this pragmatic level, the functionalization of the *review* genre within Latin America's media system explains the ready acceptance of foreign publications.

As we have seen above, in the context of these foreign publications, cultural transfer leads to quite specific articulations of culture. First of all, the mediatization of Latin American reality served to perpetuate, even on the subcontinent, a Eurocentric perspective that formed the basis of subsequent transatlantic cultural relations. Establishing a link between their own living conditions and the mediated material, Latin Americans tended to overlook the European attribution of cultural alterity and accepted their being positioned in a cultural relationship that relied on the notion of their own cultural progress projected into the future. Thus, given the difference between the material's originally intended audience and its actual Latin American readership, its reception has a strongly constructivist character.

On a theoretical level, this would challenge the concept of a one-dimensional conditioning of the audience by means of mediated communication processes, in this way leading to a new valorization of mass communication that centers on cognitive autonomy and social tuning. When media generate processes of communication, the perception of the "reality" that is gleaned from these communications strongly relies upon the audience's social situatedness. If such processes of communication occur between different cultures of completely divergent horizons of social experience, the constructedness of their reception is obvious. The acceptance of an Eurocentric perspective as perpetuated, for example, by the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, acquires a different significance in the context of Latin America's concrete socio-cultural situation, which privileges the development of a media-supported culture by overlooking the demeaning implications of the European bias. This may even have been made easier because of the *Review's* integration of fictional elements into factual reports with the aim of catering to the expectations of its European audience. Aníbal González in *Journalism and the Development of Spanish American Narrative* (1993) has demonstrated that the relationship between literature and journalism proves particularly important for nineteenth-century Latin American narrative texts, which suggests that the audience may well have been aware of such mechanisms. Moreover, the circumstances of a text's reception have to be seen in the organizational context of existing media systems: the pragmatic need for medial support from Europe is inextricably linked to the way in which European periodicals were received, similar to the crucial role played by France's positive image in the selection of French periodicals.

16. In my application of contemporary media theory to a historical situation, I should add that, for the period considered here and above all for a Latin American context, we cannot yet presuppose as dispersed an audience as is typically assumed by current theories of mass media. Even in Europe, printed media did not reach the majority of the population until about 1850 (see Stein 118). But even if, during the nineteenth century, the audience of reviews primarily consisted of social elites, we can observe a tendency to expand the reading public and cater toward this new readership, a tendency that is constitutive of the periodical press in general. Print media are no longer restricted to scientific circles, but contribute significantly to the formation of modern societies. In a Latin American context, these meta-medial reflections offered by European as well as American reviews on European and American culture thus gain a crucial importance. Nevertheless, in our examination of European-Latin American intercultural transfer, the asymmetry of the described situation is beyond doubt. According to Reimann's taxonomy, the present example of a transatlantic exchange of cultures would thus rather constitute an example of *trans*-cultural communication. *Inter*-cultural communication, on the other hand, would presuppose the equal participation of both sides in the transfer process (see Kriener). In fact, participating in intercultural communication processes by means of journalistic media proved as impossible for the Latin American intellectuals of the nineteenth century as it does for many countries with just emerging communication infra-

structures today. Owing to an existing North-South divide, with the communication monopoly located in industrialized countries, mass communication only runs in one direction, without allowing for a balanced participation of all partners involved as both subjects and objects of representation. My observations thus show that, despite Latin America's clear awareness of the necessity of transatlantic recognition, and despite its efforts to participate in a medially-organized communication process, it remained the "Other" in a Eurocentrically constructed notion of culture. The only way Latin America was able to somewhat relativize this imbalance was by dealing pragmatically with these hegemonial structures and appropriating the infrastructural advantages of the European media system for their own national and pan-American purposes.

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