

The transition from immanent to transcendent critique in Douglas Kellner's cinema and television studies

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Otávio Daros¹

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0738-8207>

¹(Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Escola de Comunicação, Artes e Design, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação Social. Porto Alegre – RS, Brasil).

Abstract

Oriented by the critical method, Douglas Kellner disqualifies the line of orthodox Marxism, too focused on economy, and follows the political-culturalist approach, which is theoretically based on the immanent critique. He seeks an approach that preserves ideological criticism in the sense of class domination criticism, while incorporating at the same time other critiques that better reflect contemporary culture – issues of gender and race, for example. Under this view, Kellner advances in the research and analysis of cultural productions related to cinema and television, always linking them to the historical context of the United States. His analysis, at first, is aligned with immanent critique, but, in the end, he seems closer to transcendent critique, as it takes the form of a classificatory report.

Keywords: Douglas Kellner. Media studies. Critical theory. Transcendent critique. Immanent critique.

Douglas Kellner and his critical approach in media studies

American heir to the German critical tradition in the United States, Douglas Kellner¹ is recognized for his study of “media culture,” more specifically the examination of political and cultural bias of phenomena that pertain to cinema and television. Analyzing them critically, Kellner resorts to the study of history, because he believes that this is the material that provides the richest contextualization and explanation. His analysis presupposes, in this sense, a “dialectic of text and context, using texts to read social realities and context to help situate and interpret” (KELLNER, 2016, p. 2-3 – Our translation) the media productions in contemporary history.

In this sense, the Marxist tradition has also used history as a subject of critical inquiry, insofar as it has been interested in concrete, empirical and sensorial reality. The concept of ideology, as expounded by Marx and Engels, “was primarily denunciatory, and attacked ideas that legitimated ruling class hegemony” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 2). Aware of this, Kellner attaches importance to this tradition by incorporating the concept of ideology into the critical

¹ George F. Kneller Philosophy of Education Chair in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at University of California, Los Angeles.

method. "In this view, ideology critique consisted of the analysis and demystification of ruling class ideas, and the critic of ideology was to ferret out and attack all those ideas which furthered class domination" (KELLNER, 1991, p. 2).

The analysis based on the ideological critique considers that the ruling class, possessor of the means of material production, also owns the mechanisms of ideological production, aiming to establish itself as the dominant ideology in the whole society. That is, the concept of ideology is grounded here in the economic plan and, therefore, treats the phenomena of culture as secondary in the social order. For this reason, this model of analysis is disputed by many scholars – many of them even followed in the critical tradition, such as the Frankfurt theorists. Kellner identifies with them. The scholar proposes to maintain the ideological approach, as long as it is expanded to a broader analysis, because it needs to recognize the culture and its contemporary manifestations. In his point of view, this methodological direction "opens the way to the exploration of how ideology functions within popular culture and everyday life and how images and figures constitute part of the ideological representations of sex, race, and class in film and popular culture" (KELLNER, 1991, p. 3).

Kellner understands that ideology is present in all cultural productions and, therefore, argues that "even those fears and aspirations that seem least political can be read politically, for what they indicate is the presence of desires that are not being satisfied under the current dominant system" (KELLNER; RYAN, 1988, p. 294). Hence the importance of examining the popularity of certain cultural productions with the intention of "elucidating the significant changes which have taken place in our culture and society" (KELLNER, 1995, p. 18). However, according to the author, ideological analysis is not only about interpreting and judging social reality, and identifying the dominant elements that are part of it. The work of analysis must also specify, on the other hand, "any utopian, oppositional, counter-ideological, subversive, and even, if possible, emancipatory moments within ideological constructs which are then turned against existing forms of domination" (KELLNER, 1991, p. 11). All this must matter to a cultural and political critique with a radical pretension.

This model of analysis is called immanent critique. Kellner acknowledges that Frankfurt theorists have advocated this approach.

This procedure draws on the sort of immanent critique practiced by the Frankfurt school in the 1930s when they turned earlier forms of democratic bourgeois ideology against current, more reactionary, forms in fascist society. An immanent critique of bourgeois society thus turns its own values against contemporary social forms and practices that deny or contradict widely recognized values such as freedom or individualism (KELLNER, 1991, p. 11).

However, Kellner does not deem only merit in the appropriation of this approach, but also accuses defect. The immanent critique from Frankfurt, he says, has not invested as much in systematic studies of popular culture as in erudite culture. On the other hand,

he well knows that this did not prevent the influence of Frankfurt's critical theory in media studies developed in the academic field of communication and culture. The concept of cultural industries, for example, has served as a theoretical guide to countless media studies since the 1950s. The critical approach to the cultural industries assumes that the media forms a "a highly commercial system of television that serves the needs of dominant corporate interests, plays a major role in ideological reproduction, and in enculturating individuals into the dominant system of needs, thought, and behavior" (KELLNER, 2007, p. 6).

Since Frankfurt's theorists did not give so much attention to media studies, Kellner seeks to occupy open space, so he presents himself as heir to the critical tradition that has seen great importance in the study of the media. He focuses mainly on the studies on film and television, considering that they are great means of entertainment and information of the North American population. Advancing in the analysis, the scholar defends a "critical multiperspectival", that is, he wants to combine critical theory with other views, such as British cultural studies. He believes that such a "multicultural" approach is more likely to account for the dynamics of media and cultural phenomena.

Textual analysis should utilize a multiplicity of perspectives and critical methods, and audience reception studies should delineate the wide range of subject positions, or perspectives, through which audiences appropriate culture. This requires a multicultural approach that sees the importance of analyzing the dimensions of class, race and ethnicity, and gender and sexual preference within the texts of television culture, while studying as well their impact on how audiences read and interpret TV (KELLNER, 2007, p. 14).

We turn to examine some of the most representative inquiries in Kellner's work. Our objective is to understand how the author articulates his theoretical-critical orientation on the practical / analytical plane.

Hollywood as narrative matrix and historical symptom

In "*Camera Politica*" (1988), Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan undertake a study of the social history of Hollywood cinematography between 1967 and 1987. They analyze the relations between American society, political movements, and cinematographic production of this period. They understand that these relationships are part of a process of "discursive transcoding," that is, the social, political, and economic context (United States' context in this case) is reflected in the production of narratives and cinematographic images.

Kellner and Ryan divided the analyzed period into three stages, each differentiated by the prevailing political movement in each decade: the 1960s were marked by liberalism, the 1970s represented the failure of liberalism and the transition to conservatism, and the 1980s were then dominated by conservatism.

This interpretation suggests that the films of the 1970s translated the intense battles between liberals and conservatives. As the decade progressed, however, conservative films gained popularity (*Rocky*, *Star Wars*, and *Superman* are cases), “indicating that conservative sentiments were growing in the public and that Hollywood was nurturing these political currents” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 1). They argue that even liberal-biased films ultimately worked to promote the conservative cause. A cycle of liberal political conspiracy films (*The Parallel View*, *All the President's Men* and *Winter Kills*) “vilified the state and thus played into the conservative/ Reaganite argument that government was the source of much existing evil” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 1).

Other films that showed a sympathetic working-class perspective and criticized the business world (*Blue Collar* and *F.I.S.T.*) “blamed corrupt unions for the working class’s problems” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 1). On the other hand, liberal films dealing with the racial issue (*Claudine* and *A Piece of the Action*) “attacked welfare institutions and celebrated individual initiative and self-help – precisely the Reaganite position” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 1). Even films with more socially critical messages (such as the Jane Fonda and Sidney Lumet films) “posited individual solutions to social problems, thus also reinforcing the conservative appeal to individualism and attack on statism” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 1).

Kellner and Ryan thus argue that Hollywood films, escapist at first sight, are, in fact, strongly political, and that an ideological reading of these productions of the 1970s heralds the arrival of Reagan and the New Right. These films generally show that “conservative yearnings were ever more popular within the culture and that film and popular culture were helping to form an ideological matrix more hospitable to Reagan and conservatives than to embattled liberals” (KELLNER, 1991, p. 1-2).

Let us, now, emphasize Kellner’s analysis of *Rambo* (1982, 1985). Part of the study is in “*Camera Politica*” (1988) and the other in the article “*Film, Politics, and Ideology: Reflections on Hollywood Film in the Age of Reagan*” (1991), which is represented with some modifications in “*Media Culture*” (1995).

The first film, *First Blood* (1982), introduces Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) as a victim. He is unjustly imprisoned in Vietnam but is able to flee and promote a war against the oppressive forces: all law enforcement agencies in the country. In the second film, *Rambo* (1985), the leading character is transformed into a superhero who rescues a group of US soldiers missing on mission, who were imprisoned by the Vietnamese and their evil allies.

All of these cinematic attempts to overcome the “Vietnam syndrome” show the U.S. and the American warrior hero victorious this time and thus exhibit a symptom of inability to accept defeat. They also provide symbolic compensation for loss, shame, and guilt by depicting the U.S. as “good” and this time victorious, while its communist enemies are represented as the incarnation of “evil” who this time receive a well-deserved defeat (KELLNER, 1995, p. 64).

The return to Vietnam films thus exhibit “a defensive and compensatory response to military defeat in Vietnam and, I would argue, an inability to learn the lessons of the limitations of U.S. power and the complex mixture of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ involved in almost all historical undertakings” (KELLNER, 1995, p. 64). On the other hand, they can be read as symptoms of working-class victimization. Stallone’s figure is resentful, inarticulate, and brutal. In Kellner’s reading, this is an “indicative of the way many American working-class youths are educationally deprived and offered the military, or activities like sports that channel violence into socially acceptable behaviour, as the only way of affirming themselves” (KELLNER, 1995, p. 65).

For Kellner, the Rocky and Rambo syndrome also reveals the male chauvinism that is part of the socialization and ideology of conservatism: “The only way that the Rockys and Rambos can gain recognition and self-affirmation is through violent and aggressive self-display” (KELLNER, 1995, p. 65). At the end of the film, “Rambo’s pathetic demand for love [...] is an indication that the society is not providing adequate structures of mutual and communal support to provide healthy interpersonal relationships and ego ideals for men in the culture” (KELLNER, 1995, p. 65).

Another aspect that excels to Kellner is the “happy ending”. According to the scholar, this is another sign of the return to the conservative tradition of Hollywood: “the victory over the evil communists codes Rambo as a mythic redemption of U.S. defeat in Vietnam by heroic action” (KELLNER, 1995, p. 69). Something that was not only reproduced in Stallone’s films, but in countless other productions of the cinema and television, which reinforces the positive result of resolving the conflicts through the brute force.

Consequently, although the U.S. was denied victory in Vietnam, it has attempted to achieve it in media culture. This phenomenon shows some of the political functions of media culture which include providing compensations for irredeemable loss while offering reassurances that all is well in the American body politic – reassurance denied in less conservative films such as Oliver Stone’s *Salvador*, *Platoon*, *Wall Street*, *Talk Radio* (KELLNER, 1995, p. 69).

In conclusion, Kellner and Ryan attempt to show how popular films articulate “pre-political fears, desires and needs and that can be channeled in politically progressive directions” (KELLNER; RYAN, 1988, p. 292). Scholars demonstrate, through analysis, how films can act to satisfy or not such societal needs and desires, as well as to calm or promote fears (of aggression, domination, impotence, indignity, social disintegration etc).

We find that the analysis present in *Camera Politica* (1988) is taken up by Kellner two decades later, in *Cinema Wars* (2009). Presenting the thesis that the 2000s were marked by a cycle of apocalyptic films, Kellner argues that Hollywood – often exploiting scenarios of catastrophic destruction (wars, bombings, natural disasters etc) – somehow anticipated the dreaded collapse of the socioeconomic system, faced by the United States, at the end of the

Bush administration. For all this, the scholar is again grounded in critical multiperspectivism and immanent critique, similar to the 1988 study.

In the Kellnerian analysis, for example, the growing number of awards won by foreigners appears as an indicative of the “increasingly global nature of film and cinematic culture, but also constitutes a rejection of the narrow nationalism and chauvinism of the Bush-Cheney years” (KELLNER, 2009, p. 12). However, the progressive tone brought by the figure of Barack Obama did not change, at least immediately, the trends produced before and during the period of economic recession. This only proves the contradictory dynamics that are natural to contemporary culture.

As this study indicates, the number of post-apocalyptic films in the Bush / Cheney years has proliferated dramatically as living conditions have worsened for many and crises intensified. Still, the cycle of post-apocalyptic films continued during the years of Obama, *Acker* (2009), *Hillcoat* (2009), *Emmerich* (2009), *Proyas* (2009), *Fleischer* (2009), *Albert and Allen Hughes Kosinski* (2013), *del Toro* (2013), *Blomkamp* (2013), *Edwards* (2014) and *Forster* (2013), among many others (KELLNER, 2016, p. 26 – Our translation).

Kellner reinforces the view that American culture has been the scene of intense political struggles since the 1960s, and that media culture is a battleground between competing forces, which explains why some films have liberal positions; others, radical; others, furthermore, conservative. “Many films, however, are politically ambiguous, exhibiting a contradictory mixture of political motifs or attempts to be apolitical” (KELLNER, 2009, p. 1). He suggests, therefore, that Hollywood cinematography should be read as a “contest of representations and a contested terrain that reproduces existing social struggles and transcodes the political discourses of the era” (KELLNER, 2009, p. 2). In his view, transcoding is the task of describing how specific political discourses “are translated, or encoded, into media texts” (KELLNER, 2009, p. 2), using a specific historical context.

We therefore argue that Kellner’s approach is historicist. He understands Hollywood as a symptom of history as “social indicator of the realities of a historical era, as a tremendous amount of capital is invested in researching, producing, and marketing the product” (KELLNER, 2009, p. 4). Films give cinematic expression to social experiences as they illuminate tendencies, conflicts, crises and anxieties of a time. Hence, he argues, film analysis must be “contextualizing”.

Politics as a media spectacle

In “*Media Spectacle*” (2002), Kellner defends the thesis that we live in a time dominated by the spectacle. It has been a cultural phenomenon in full development, but it has already been manifested in all spheres of society, as is the case of politics. After theoretical

exposure, Kellner investigates the different forms that the show has taken throughout the history of the presidential career in the United States. The author is based on the argument that presidencies are staged and presented to the public in cinematic, spectacular perspectives.

In this view, politics is in constant interaction with the spectacle, and the media appears as mediator of this relation. However, in contemporary times, he explains, this relationship between politics, spectacle and media takes on more confusing forms. At times, it is not only the media's role to mediate both, but it is also its role to command them: "the codes of media culture determine the form, style, and appearance of presidential politics, and party politics in turn becomes more cinematic and spectacular, in the sense of Guy Debord's concept of spectacle" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 160).

In an attempt to illustrate the scheme of such relations, the author goes on to analyze, on a case-by-case basis, how the "media spectacle" appeared in different governments in the country. According to him, the phenomenon developed more strongly from the government of John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Kennedy (1961-1963) is introduced as "the most photogenic president in the TV era, and arguably the first to effectively use the medium of television to communicate regularly with the public" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 161). For the scholar, this was no accident. Kennedy's father, Joe Kennedy, was a film producer, as well as an ambassador and businessman (Kellner prefers to call him a "bootlegger"). In general, "Kennedy effectively used the media to sell himself to the public, and once elected became one of the most effective manipulators of television and political spectacle in the contemporary era" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 161-162). However, his presidency, as we all know, had a tragic ending. Kennedy's assassination promoted a wave of political conspiracy films, "ranging from Emile de Antonio's documentary *Rush to Judgment* (1968) to fictionalized views in early 1970s conspiracy films, such as *Executive Action* (1970) and *The Parallax View* (1974), to Oliver Stone's epic *JFK* (1991)" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 162).

Similar to Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1968), Richard M. Nixon (1968-1973) was a "cinematically deficient president, who, as it turned out, ended up creating the paradigm of president as villain, the man we love to hate, the very symbol of political corruption and chicanery" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 163).

On the other hand, Ronald W. Reagan (1981-1989) was represented as "a highly effective president, despite lacking in political experience" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 166). The Kellnerian analysis suggests here that "Hollywood is the new aristocracy, in terms of cash and lifestyle, as well as social connections and glamorous public image, so that it's no accident that Hollywood would produce a president" (KELLNER, 2002, p. 166 – Our translation). In Kellner's view, Reagan's administration as a set of media spectacles was one of the most successful in history. He combined two figures: the celebrity and the political leader, a combination that has become a role for future candidates.

Despite the monotonous beginning, Reagan was boosted through the spectacle that was created after the assassination attempt in 1981: "The event created intense drama, but

also sympathy for a man who reacted to his tragedy with humor and fortitude” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 166). In the end, Kellner summarizes the plot of the Reagan administration: deregulation, triumph of capitalism, and the defeat of Communism in the Cold War.

George H. W. Bush (1989-1993), in turn, undertook a major media campaign and easily defeated Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis. His campaign team promoted the image of an “experienced, energetic, and hard-working public servant” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 168), presenting him usually surrounded by American flags, or alongside the military, or at home serving soup for the family. More than that, the Bush campaign sought to attack Dukakis, especially with the Willie Horton TV ad. In it, the Democrat was portrayed as a “crime liberal” for defending prisoner recovery programs.

The adversary Bush met in 1992, however, “was a brash young Governor of Arkansas named Bill Clinton, who was relatively unknown on the national scene. But who made an excellent campaign in the media” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 170). For Kellner, Clinton recalled the Kennedy figure, marking the return of a younger generation to politics.

Clinton played his sax on Arsenio and did teary and soulful melodrama and soap opera with Hillary on *60 Minutes*, as he admitted to have affairs and problems in their marriage, but stressed that they had worked hard to solve the problems and strengthen the marriage, a narrative line many in the audience could buy and identify with. Clinton bantered about underpants and boxers on MTV, he had a serious conversation about marriage with Donahue, and he was the first presidential candidate to appear on these talk shows – now a campaign necessity after Clinton’s successful manipulation of popular TV genres (KELLNER, 2002, p. 169-170).

Like Reagan, and unlike Bush, “Clinton gave good spectacle: sex scandals, soap opera, melodrama, impeachment, cultural war with the right, and ultimately the spectacle of survival under constant adversity” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 170-171). The Kellnerian analysis suggests that Clinton was a political figure moved by scandals and crises, which, surprisingly, produced positive effects as well. Clinton approached a younger audience that ignored traditional politics but was interested in “spectacular” politics.

The author argues that as we move from an economy based on production to another based on consumption, media culture is increasingly “defined by image, appearance and spectacle, requiring presidents to have a pleasing personality and to sell themselves to voters” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 172). To connect with audiences, politicians follow the celebrities’ trends, creating an attractive profile, blending mundane and supernatural characteristics. “Hence the importance of public relations, media handlers, polls, focus groups, and media spectacle in promoting candidates and policies” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 172). Image management becomes a fundamental part of politics. For Kellner, that was the great merit of Bush II.

Despite being a low-skilled politician, marketing and media specialists have created an effective speech: “Bush II was a different kind of Republican, a compassionate conservative, who could get Democrats and Republicans together to ‘get things done.’ Of course, none of these claims was true, but created a positive image and the media, generally, agreed with them” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 173).

In early 2002, a *USA Today* poll rated Bush as the most admired person in the United States, and he continued to enjoy high approval ratings, although economic slumps and scandals in 2002 and the unearthing of Bush and Cheney’s many corporate skeletons began to focus critical media scrutiny on their pasts and their present policies. Yet the media can destroy what they build up, and a coming Bushgate could reverse the fortunes of the Bush dynasty with a series of crime dramas, political corruption and conspiracy narratives, and family melodramas that would rival any comparative saga in US literature or history (KELLNER, 2002, p. 174).

In summary, Kellner examines how the phenomenon of media spectacle in the recent history of the US presidency, from John F. Kennedy to Bush II, produced a series of political-spectacular narratives, some of which favored and others undermined the image of the presidents. According to him, the kind of stories the media tells about a government can determine its success or failure, or generate an ambiguous legacy. This is because “public sees presidencies and administrations in terms of narrative and spectacle, so that theorizing the cinematic and narrative nature of contemporary politics can help us to understand, analyze, and transform our political system” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 176).

The result of this is damaging to society, Kellner reflects. The political spectacles articulated by the media weaken participatory democracy, because they distort more than they approach the individuals of the political struggles, and, in this way, they hamper the articulation of great social guidelines. He mentions the case of the New Left in the 1960s, a movement that was often more concerned with “television cameras, rather than organizing for change” (KELLNER, 2002, p. 177). This is another case in which media spectacles impair effective actions and collaborate to simulate actions, to the detriment of appearance and unrealism.

From immanent to transcendent critique – a setback?

As we have seen, Kellner analyzes the productions of media culture within the historical context, valuing political perspectives. His analysis is developed through theoretical guidance from the critical tradition. But he has long detected that the method of transcendent critique, legacy from the orthodox Marxism, values, above all, the concept of ideology based on class domination and, therefore, presents reductive visions of culture.

However, it is precisely in the culture that lies the theme which Kellner considers important and wants to invest his research on: the media culture.

Kellner concludes that the immanent method, which is not the legacy from orthodox Marxists, but from Frankfurters, is more enriching for the kind of analysis he intends to undertake (analysis of the media culture). But he also has some restrictions on them. He argues that Frankfurt theorists did not engage in the study of popular culture, among other topics, which were best worked on by British culturalists.

The scholar plans to update the analysis model to ideological criticism with contributions from both, that is, with a certain multiperspectival approach. This incorporates critics about gender and race, for example, to the, so far, ideological model, aiming to offer a richer examination of contemporary culture.

Giving light to Kellner's theoretical orientation, we take the synthesis presented by Rüdiger on the principles of transcendent critique and immanent critique, according to Adorno's "*Cultural Criticism and Society*" (1951).

The transcendent approach consists in placing oneself in a position outside the phenomena and referring them to the material interests that act through them and through this mediation are covered up[...]The immanent method, on the contrary, seeks to read them from within, based on the hypothesis that the falsity of ideologies is not in themselves, but in the pretension to coincide fully with reality (RÜDIGER, 2004, p. 246-247).

We turn now to how Kellner articulates the theoretical application in his media studies summarized earlier. We started with "*Camera Politica*" (1988). We believe that the analysis presented here, despite being the oldest, is more sophisticated, since it has greater fidelity to the immanent critical method. In this book, Kellner analyzes the cinematography of the United States "from within". Analyzing from the outside would be to say that Hollywood and the companies dominate the whole society through films. Kellner says something else. Hollywood is part of society, and its films interact with political scenarios, in varying dynamics that alternate in an unmanaged or programmed way. The conclusions of the scholar are provocative: the films reflect the yearnings and expectations of the society; Hollywood does not have the capacity to shape society, what it does is to stimulate or repress certain feelings contained within it; American culture is contradictory, reflecting in multi-sensory film narratives; a conservative bias film can promote liberal values and open space for cultural transformation.

On the other hand, in "*Media Spectacle*" (2002), we have identified another theoretical orientation, which function is no longer to relativize. It is a kind of work that, in our point of view, undermines this multicultural analysis of phenomena and favors classification: a certain cultural product represents this or that, or all cultural products obey the same order.

The report selects a number of aspects of the phenomenon (the profile of US presidents, for example), and instead of making an analysis, in other words, dissecting their internal and external relations, subordinates the phenomenon to a concept imposed from the top to the bottom, which classifies it according to the abstract and generic concept. With regard to Kellner's work, this concept is called spectacle. Soon, more dogmatic modes of thinking emerge: the media spectacle manages society.

The classificatory report, based on the spectacle, has standardized the Kellnerian studies in the last two decades: *“Grand Theft 2000”* (2001), *“Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy”* (2005), *“Media Spectacle and Insurrection”*, 2011 (2012), *“American Nightmare”* (2016). In these studies, Kellner seems more interested in public controversy and in the work of classification than in the analysis of phenomena per se. Exceptions should be acknowledged, as is the case of the analysis presented in *“Cinema Wars”* (2009), which reworks and advances the discussion in *“Camera Politica”* (1988), but there are some limitations.

The distance from immanent critical method often leads Kellner to the extremist and simplistic explanations of cultural reality, which in the early studies was understood in contradiction and complexity. He often ignores the fact that the kind of cultural good that are cinema and television does not allow them to be controlled. This does not mean that there are no attempts of controlling. The adoption of the transcendent method emphasizes the belief that there is someone who commands the process as if it were “from the outside” or “from above”. It is not that this cannot happen, or that one does not try to do so. But it is not the rule. The rule is: movies and television programs need to get an audience, and for that, they cannot ignore the senses, the expectations of your audience or the general public. We are talking about cultural goods that are born of society, that are inserted within it and relate to society, and therefore, are dependent phenomena.

Conclusion

We evaluate that Kellner's work begins and ends within the critical orientation. However, there is a significant change in the bias of this orientation, throughout his intellectual trajectory. Since the beginning, he disqualifies the orthodox Marxism approach, because this imposes economic determinism. Distancing himself from this, Kellner follows the political-culturalist approach, theoretically based on immanent critique, coming from the Frankfurt School. The scholar finds here a promising ground to develop work in the area of his interest: the study of media culture.

But we must make it clear, Kellner does not ignore the economic plan, he only argues that there are other plans involved: it is necessary to incorporate other criticisms, besides the economic, that best reflect contemporary society. Moreover, as he well knows, the study of culture, and in his case, media culture study, does not accept economic determinism.

Aiming to diversify his model of analysis, the scholar appropriates not only the Frankfurt theorists but also the British culturalists, and adds to his study issues of gender and race, as we have seen, even briefly, in the examination of Rambo films.

We believe that Kellner's studies during the first stage, based on immanent criticism, are more sophisticated subjects, because they privilege the study of phenomena "from within," they are open to various issues (economic, cultural, political etc), so it works to relativize the relations of force in society, and to understand the social dynamics in their contradictions, and how the products of the media relate to this dynamic.

However, in the following works, we observe another conduct of the author, although there are exceptions. His analysis takes the form of a classificatory report and begins to overvalue the concept of spectacle. We conclude then that Kellner's work begins oriented by the immanent critique, but later, it becomes oriented by the transcendent critique, which he had disqualified in the first stage. But unlike the early Marxists, in Kellner there is no economic determinism, but rather a determinism of another nature: the spectacle is a cultural category. All that the media produce is spectacle, the spectacle commands society, these are some generalizations contained in the concept, which we condemn. Although this does not mean that his new works have no merit, or that the author is prevented from advancing in another critique or returning to immanent critique.

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Otávio Daros

PhD student and Master in Social Communication from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul. He is the author of “*Cultural Marxism and Media Studies: Trajectory and Analysis of Douglas Kellner’s Work*” (projected for 2020). E-mail: otavio.daros@gmail.com.

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