

# ***Publizistik*, the precursor of communication sciences?**

## ***Publicística, a precursora das ciências da comunicação?***

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### **ABSTRACT**

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In *Síntese de história da publicística: estágios reflexivos da ciência da comunicação pública alemã*, Francisco Rüdiger presents to the Portuguese-speaking readers an important contribution to the study of the communicational thinking history. We show how the work lights the origins, formation and decline of this academic project until the 1970s, when it gave space to the communication sciences, now media sciences. We assess the merits of the work, questioning the scholar's intention to offer material to support his suspicions: the *publizistik* as a precursor of the academic field of communication.

**Keywords:** *Publizistik*, Communication Science in Germany, History of communication studies

### **RESUMO**

Em *Síntese de história da publicística: estágios reflexivos da ciência da comunicação pública alemã*, Francisco Rüdiger apresenta aos leitores de língua portuguesa importante contribuição ao estudo da história do pensamento comunicacional. Mostramos como o relato lança luz sobre as origens, formação e declínio deste projeto acadêmico até a década 1970, quando cedeu espaço às ciências da comunicação, hoje ciências da mídia. Avaliamos os méritos da obra e questionamos a pretensão do autor em oferecer matéria para amparar sua suspeita: a publicística como precursora do campo acadêmico de comunicação.

**Palavras-chave:** Publicística, ciência da comunicação na Alemanha, história dos estudos de comunicação

SINCE 2012, FRANCISCO Rüdiger has been developing a translation and writing project on the history of academic thinking in journalism and communication in Germany, among other countries: he is also the author of studies on the subject in Italy, Russia and Japan. He justifies that this topic is relevant for our field, as it developed in Germany with pioneering and originality. The Germanic tradition subjects were, until now, obscure or unknown among Portuguese-speaking scholars, even among the most interested readers of Otto Groth, Emil Dovifat and Tobias Peucer<sup>1</sup>.

We had foreseen Rüdiger's project in his article "*A trajetória da publicística como proposta criadora de uma ciência da comunicação autônoma nos países de língua alemã*" ["*Publizistik's trajectory as a creator proposal for an autonomous communication science in German-speaking countries*"] (2012). He released the book *Origens do pensamento acadêmico em jornalismo – Alemanha, União Soviética e Japão* [*Origins of academic thinking in journalism – Germany, Soviet Union and Japan*]<sup>2</sup> (2017), where the supplementary material occupies two chapters. The *Síntese de história da publicística: estágios reflexivos da ciência da comunicação pública alemã* [*Synthesis of Publizistik's history: reflexive stages of the science of German public communication*] (2019) recaptures and develops the material from that first work. Similarly to the *Origens do pensamento*, the newest book is edited by the publisher Insular, from Florianópolis, responsible for publishing, for some years, many of the best works in journalism studies in the country.

To begin this review, we revisit the bibliography of the postgraduate professor at PUCRS and undergraduate professor of communications and philosophy at UFRGS, which is composed by more than 20 books of his own, transitioning between press history, critical theory, technical philosophy, cyberculture, communicational history, and journalistic thinking. On the one hand, we should highlight the researcher's intellectual trajectory and how he has been systematizing this theoretical repertoire since the mid-1980s. On the other hand, we realize that the theme of *Publizistik* itself is not entirely new to Rüdiger, looking at his early writings: *As teorias da comunicação* [*Theories of communication*] (1995/2010) and *Ciência social crítica e pesquisa em comunicação* [*Critical social science and communication research*] (2002).

In those 24 years that separate these two works from the current ones, there are two significant changes in their analysis. In earlier writings, he placed scholars from *Publizistik* within the framework of functionalism (Rüdiger, 2002, p. 61-62). He approached Dovifat to Lasswell from this perspective. Apparently a mistake has been corrected in the present work. Lasswell leaned on the Germans, and they were not, as he was not, a functionalist. The epistemological framework

<sup>1</sup> However, Tobias Peucer belongs to the most remote time – second half of the seventeenth century –, which does not fit this research.

<sup>2</sup> This and others are author's translations.

of Lasswell's (1948) *theory of communication*, like those of *Publizistik* German theorists, was Max Weber's theory of action (1922/1973).

In the first book, he attributed to the Chicago School the pioneer of communication studies, sometimes understanding the German approach almost as a late variation of communication research (Rüdiger, 1995/2010, p. 37). At the time, the author was unaware that Charles Cooley, founder of the Chicago School, was influenced by the German Albert Schäffle, translating *publizität* as communication. In the 2012 article, Rüdiger turns his attention to the German school, arising suspicion on Americans' inventive merit, and recognizes the pioneering spirit of *Publizistik* scholars. Now, in *Síntese de história da publicística*, he advances in the subject uncovering the German tradition origins and revealing its reflective originality.

This new book from Rüdiger presents methodological orientation that marks his bibliography: i.e. bibliographical and documentary research, supported by historical and hermeneutic method. Throughout his work, the journalist shows the "credentials of the historian's craft", as he offers us "materially ordered text". However, as we will approach, his study is not exempted from improving, even if occasionally, to offer the reader "due argumentative support" (Rüdiger, 2008, p. 229).

*Síntese de história da publicística* is composed by ten chapters – besides presentation and conclusion – comprising important elements for any monograph. In this work, Rüdiger aims to historically systematize the stages of *Publizistik*, a period that began in the Weimar Republic and extended to the organization of the communication sciences in Germany after the 1970s. The study aims to serve as a "synthesis of the main stages in which this intellectual process took place and an outline of analysis of its reflective elaboration, from the origins to its loss of identity, its dilution within the framework of the so-called communication sciences" (Rüdiger, 2019, p. 11).

The book presentation fulfills the purpose of informing the reader about the study proposal. However, the author could use this introductory space also to start the theme contextualization, which is the subject of the first chapter. Instead, he chose to begin the introduction with Martin Heidegger. This mention is interesting, since it shows Rüdiger's intellectual dominance about the philosopher, even though, we believe that Heidegger does not fit as an introducer of *Publizistik*, leaving the mention of the philosopher detached from the upcoming specialized content.

However, the situation is different in the ten chapters that develop the subject. In the first, Rüdiger invests in contextual subjects, introducing in detail pioneering *Publizistik* scholars such as Karl Jaeger and Hans Traub. Rüdiger shows how through these scholars "the door was opened for the

development of a science with the power to study all forms and means of public and anonymous exchange and spiritual influence among human beings” (Rüdiger, 2019, p. 26). The author tells how this broader knowledge has taken control of the *newspaper science* – *Zeitungswissenschaft* – and has established itself as *publicism science* – *Publizistikwissenschaft*.

Jaeger’s definition came from the subtitle of the work: *Estágios reflexivos da ciência da comunicação pública alemã* [*Reflective Stages of the German Public Communication Science*]. For Jaeger, *Publizistik* was the science of public communication, responsible for studying the manifestations of public consciousness. For Rüdiger, among the scholars in that period, Jaeger is the most valuable contributor.

Historiographic work is also seen in the following chapters, when Rüdiger works with contributions from other scholars: Karl Knies, Wilhelm Bauer, Johann Plenge, Emil Dovifat, Josef Krumbach, Otto Groth, Hans Münster, Walter Hagemann, Henk Prakke, Alphons Silbermann, Harry Pross. With the exception of a few, such as Dovifat and Groth<sup>3</sup>, we are talking about little known names in our Brazilian searches. However, they are scholars, who promoted a rich academic-intellectual contribution, and who dealt with the high sophistication of the communicative processes of the time, as Rüdiger ably points out.

The two most referenced thinkers in our journalism studies in Brazil appear in the fourth chapter on *normative Publizistik*. Rüdiger puts Dovifat in conflict with Groth, developing the discussion with originality, showing how Dovifat disregarded some of Groth’s widespread positions, such as: news autonomy, separation of information and opinion.

Groth is commented again in the chapter seven: “Da Escola de Frankfurt à Escola de Munique: a chegada da sociologia e a nova ideia de ciência do jornal” [“From the Frankfurt School to the Munich School: the arrival of sociology and the new idea of science in the newspaper”]. Rüdiger reports in this chapter how Groth differentiated journalists and *publicists*. However, the highlight of this chapter is: it concerns the relation between the Frankfurt School to the reception of empirical social research in Germany. Rüdiger is not a stranger to the historian’s task: to bring out what is hidden – the unknown – at the same time, to do it critically, in order to lit the so-called known facts already dominated.

He undertakes this task by reporting the situation of *Publizistik* until 1960, when it was linked to the spirit sciences, and it adopted an empiricist approach. The period was marked by the decay of the *theoretical Publizistik* (situated in the *sciences of the spirit*), and the birth of another school of thought: the communication sciences, result of the north-american influence (*communication research*).

<sup>3</sup>In Dovifat’s case, his reception was with the translation of *Zeitungswissenschaft* (1931) into Spanish in 1959 (Mexico). Groth’s reception took place in a fragmented way. First in summaries: Angel Faus Belau (1966, Spain), Jose Ortego Costalles (1966, Spain) and Wilson da Costa Bueno (1972, Brazil). Then in full texts: in the collection of Christa Berger and Beatriz Marocco (2006) and, finally, in the volume translated by Liriam Sponholz (Groth, 1960/2011).

However, this is not a sudden process, it had been underway since 1950, with the emergence of empirical social research.

The author succeeds giving the subject such dense thorough analysis, and if not properly examined, generates intellectual confusion. According to him, empirical social research from the United States invaded the spirit sciences through the University of Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, while its members, the critical theorists, especially Theodor W. Adorno, became the principal critics of this approach (Rüdiger, 2019, p. 114).

Following in the discussion, Rüdiger clarifies how Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, the *spiral of silence theory* creator, led this transition movement and implanted the empiricist methods of American sociology within German studies. In this sense, he elaborates an interesting dialogue between Noelle-Neumann and Alphons Silbermann, another important scholar within German communication studies of the period.

Rüdiger notes the growing mastery of the empiricist approach, but reveals that this did not prevent the existence of initiatives to resist *Publizistik*, such as Harry Pross. We should point out that the theorist is known among us Brazilians thanks to Norval Baitello Junior's continuous efforts over the last three decades. However, we emphasize the difference in the appropriation between the two Brazilian scholars.

In Rüdiger's work, we see how Pross was responsible for *Publizistik's* return to its starting point: the reflective doctrine. Meanwhile in Baitello's book (2010), we see Pross as a media theorist, communication thinker and meaning processes, from the perspective of semiotics. That is, scholars appropriate Pross in different ways.

Concluding the discussion on Pross, Rüdiger delivers the conclusion of his book, which summarizes the trajectory of German communicational thinking: started with an academic-reflective attitude in the 1920s with the *Publizistikwissenschaft* (*publicism science*) and the *Zeitungswissenschaft* (*newspapers science*); moving to *Kommunikationswissenschaft* (*communication science*) in the 1970s; to the most recent stage: the *Medienwissenschaft* (*media science*). In his last judgment, Rüdiger concludes what remains strongly in this century of the German communicational project history is its characteristic as a multidisciplinary enterprise.

At the end of the reading, only a light improvement could be done in this book. For example, the reader's understanding would be easier if the author added, in the conclusion, a balance with the main definitions of *Publizistik* and the divergences between the scholars presented. Regarding this content, we praise the use of collection images throughout the book, which enriches the finishing of the material. Historical photographs allow the reader to confer the research

centers buildings, such as the Leipzig University Institute of Newspaper Science, founded by Karl Bücher in 1916 (p. 32-96).

In sum, we think that Rüdiger's research has merit as a well-rounded historiographical work, and serves to alert us to a problem in our field of work: the handling of texts isolated from the context of origin. In the German scholars case, we are talking about a sophisticated tradition from the reflexive-conceptual point of view, hitherto seen with limitation in our historical research in Brazil. Thus, *Síntese de história da publicística* opens up new possibilities for revision and discussion of communicational thinking.

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