Reflexes, reflexivity, refraction: Consequences of a choice!

Reflexos, reflexividade, refração: Consequências de uma escolha!

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intellectual production developed between the Master's thesis defended in 1985 under the Communication Graduate Program at the Escola de Comunicação e Artes of the Universidade de São Paulo, and the latest ongoing research. It seeks to identify the marks left by a graduate academic education, considering that the PhD was taken under the same Program, and relating it to other research performed during the academic path.

Keywords: Academic education, research, academic path

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RESUMO

Este artigo trata da produção intelectual realizada entre a dissertação de mestrado defendida em 1985 no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação da Escola de Comunicação e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo e a pesquisa mais recente, em desenvolvimento. O objetivo é identificar as marcas deixadas pela formação obtida em nível de pós-graduação, considerando que o doutorado foi realizado no mesmo programa, relacionando-as às pesquisas realizadas durante a trajetória acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: Formação acadêmica, pesquisa, trajetória acadêmica

S ELF-REFLECTIVE PROCESSES TEND TO HAVE surprising effects on those who perform them. It was no different when preparing the Memorial - the starting point for this text - for career progression to Full Professor at the *Faculdade de Comunicação e Biblioteconomia* (Fabico) of the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* (UFRGS). Reviewing what has been produced since the Master's dissertation at the *Escola de Comunicações e Artes* (ECA) of the *Universidade de São Paulo* (USP), resized the perception of the academic path run until then. It was like finding the connections, detours, add-ons, gaps but above all the traces of a life devoted to research and to certain issues and their motivations. Besides the research path, it also enabled measuring the effects on the nurturing of new researchers - scientific initiation fellows, Master's and Doctoral students - and on the building of collectives to act in research groups.

In a previous text, "*Pesquisar é se Tornar Aprendiz*!" (Research is to Become an Apprentice!) (Jacks, 2021), also resulting from the experience of writing the mentioned Memorial, I outlined some considerations about the production, the process I went through, and the long learning about the themes, questions, methodological procedures: the fruits of this pathway.

Here I will try to resume all that in the linking with my Master's and Doctorate studies at ECA/USP between 1985 and 1993, to highlight the marks left in this baseline experience of my path that now endures more than four decades.

I had never done any academic research when I decided to take a Master's degree, because at that time the Course Conclusion Paper (*Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso*, TCC) had not been implemented at the *Faculdade de Comunicação Social* (Facos) of the *Universidade Federal de Santa Maria* (UFSM), where I graduated, and was an assistant professor. On the other hand, I had never lived[1] outside Rio Grande do Sul when I decided to try for selection at ECA, one of the four[2] Graduate Programs (PPG) in Communication existing in Brazil in 1984.

The fact that I chose this program set the directions of the research I conducted during my graduate training and in further years as an emerging researcher in the field. It was at ECA that I took courses that enabled me to study the relationships between communication and culture, which went hand in hand with my undergraduate degree in Visual Arts and Social Communication, bringing together and enhancing aspects of this course.

The theoretical environment found at ECA in a few months undid the original idea of the project presented for the selection, i.e., study the advertising produced for the rural areas of Rio Grande do Sul, since I had a degree in Advertising. I kept advertising as a field to be studied, but matched it with an emerging problem at the time, which was the issue of regional identities in

[1] Until I was ten months old I lived in Pindamonhangaba (SP), where I was born.
[2] The other ones were at the *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo* (PUC-SP), the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro* (UFRJ) and the *Universidade de Brasília* (UnB).

the relationship with the cultural industry in face of the strengthening of the globalization process, aiming to understand its imbrications.

The scenario was the context of the Rio Grande do Sul's culture, in ebullience in the 1980s, when a revamping cultural movement - called 'nativism' - disrupted a previous movement - called 'traditionalism' - which had crystallized the cultural expressions of Rio Grande do Sul in all their dimensions. The theoretical proposal mainly challenged statements about the media's power to weaken, if not annihilate, popular cultures - a popular hegemonic view resulting from manipulation theories.

Thus, the Master's research, published years later as *Mídia Nativa: Cultura Regional e Indústria Cultural* (Native Media: Regional Culture and Cultural Industry) (Jacks, 1998), problematized the media role in building regional identities, having the nativist movement as empirical object, and mainly focused on the advertising production of Rio Grande do Sul. The main concepts developed in the research - cultural industry and regional culture - underwent an appropriation process as by that time they the definition to account for the phenomenon in question was very strict. In his dissertation, Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva (1980), attuned to the debate on popular culture in the Latin American communication forums under the Gramscian perspective of hegemony, helped think that the concept of cultural industry could designate the creation, production, and distribution of media products aimed at their audiences, freed from the sense proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer to criticize the emerging mass culture in the 1940s. He understood that the expression might have been coined more for rhetorical than scientific purposes, but that it was useful to name the logic of the mass cultural production process.

In the same way and under the same perspective, Martín-Barbero - who had just joined the discussions about the relations between communication and culture being established at ECA - helped working with the concept of regional culture in a more flexible way. Based on his ideas, regional culture was understood in a broader sense, including manifestations of "erudite", "popular" and "mass" character. These instances were historically intertwined by determinations of the industrialization and urbanization processes (Martín-Barbero, 1987). The dissertation time was marked by paradigm shifts in communication studies in Latin America. Cultural identity was treated in the point of view of institutions, but also of cultural agents, subjects linked both to nativism and traditionalism, and to the media.

The doctoral thesis followed the same perspective, but from an angle that advanced toward the recipients and their cultural practices, also as a consequence of the arrival at the ECA of what became known as Latin American theories.

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Published under the title *Querência: Cultura Regional como Mediação Simbólica* (Fondness: Regional Culture as Symbolic Mediation) (Jacks, 1999), it explored regional cultural, but now in relation to a soap opera dealing with the mediation of regional culture in the recipients' sense-making process. The soap opera was chosen by virtue of my Doctorate studies at the ECA, considering the strong tendency toward considering this mass product with undeniable elements of the Brazilian culture, and playing an important role in the constitution of identities.

The recipients' daily lives, an essential context to understand the processes of reception, were incorporated into the object of study, and presented elements of regional culture that were experienced and that provided recognition and a sense of belonging to the group studied. We also identified the institutions that acted in the construction and consolidation of regional identity and the social markers present in the identity-building processes of the recipients, besides the articulations in the appropriations and interpretations of values conveyed by the soap opera *Pedra sobre Pedra*, aired by Rede Globo, 1992. The soap operas, after a period devoted to other issues, come back into focus also as an unfolding of the training at ECA, as will be further commented.

Back to the thesis, in theoretical terms two articulated axes marked the study that, in the words of Maria Immacolata Lopes (1999), empirically launched the undertaking of considering the theory of mediations[3], emerging in Latin America at that time, in the study of relations between culture and communication. In the first axis, the issue of cultural industries and their role in the building of contemporary identities; in the second, cultural mediation and the daily practices in the building of audiences, based on Martín-Barbero (1987) and Canclini (1990).

To deal with regional cultural identity, the notions of crossbreeding (Martín-Barbero, 1987) and hybridization (Canclini, 1990) assisted thinking the insertion of the media in its reconfiguration and, in this scenario, the constitution of the audiences' identities. Besides grounding the theoretical discussion, they guided the methodological paths insofar as they reallocated the discussion about the relations between culture and communication, evidenced the negotiated nature of communication and re-dimensioned the role of the recipient as an active subject in the reception process.

The selection of ECA's PPG as a place of training indelibly influenced everything I did in my academic life, both in the nurturing of new researchers and in my own research. That is so because it gave rise to all the Latin American discussion held in forums across the continent, and also because the *Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação* (Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Communication Studies) (Intercom) was headquartered at the ECA at the time.

[3] Regarding the appropriation of the concept of mediations brought by the Barberian proposal, already in circulation in Brazil, it was conjugated to the model of multimediations proposed by Guillermo Orozco Gómez (1991), an author popular in the Latin American publications.

The first research carried out as a newly-PhD had the partnership of two other "ecanes", Doris Haussen and Carolina Escosteguy, who worked at the *Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul* (PUC-RS). Sharing the same educational matrix, we joined together inter-institutionally to carry out the research *Indústria Cultural Gaúcha: Estudo dos Meios de Comunicação de Massa e sua Inserção na Cultura Local e Regional* (Rio Grande do Sul's Cultural Industry: Study of the Mass Media and its Insertion into Local and Regional Culture) (Jacks & Escosteguy, 1997), which continued the intent of relating communication and culture - a relevant topic for the three researchers - resuming the perspective that mass culture is a phenomenon intrinsic to contemporaneity, whose agents are inserted in the sociocultural context of which they are part and result from it.

With this focus, we identified and reviewed the structure and contents of Rio Grande do Sul's cultural industry - newspapers, AM and FM radio stations, television stations - of the ten cities with the largest media infrastructure. The analysis of their contents was based on local, regional, national, and international references. In other words, the local content should be produced about and for the community, and the regional content should be of interest to society in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. National contents were identified as those that referred to Brazil, and the international contents were those that did not concern the territory delimited by Brazil's borders. The history of each vehicle was also reconstituted, as well as the identification of their owners. This was an original goal for many of the vehicles analyzed, which did not have their historical paths systematized.

Two academic meetings - with Sérgio Capparelli, who was returning from a Post-Doctoral fellowship in Canada, and with the Danish Thomas Tufte, in a conference in São Paulo - marked a new theoretical and methodological challenge, as we decided to work on an integrated research[4], which resulted in the publication of *TV, Família e Identidade*: *Porto Alegre "Fim de Século"* (TV, Family and Identity: Porto Alegre 'End of the Century') (Jacks & Capparelli, 2006).

As our theoretical traditions were different - political economy of communication and cultural studies - we had to adjust our differences and overcome what had been happening in the area, i.e., analyses that contemplated the social and/or political-economic macrostructures or that went down to the details of the message, via semiotics, rhetoric, content or discourse analysis. Both neglected the subjects involved in the processes and practices related to communication. In an attempt to overcome this theoretical-analytical scenario, we proposed adopting a perspective that comprised understanding the interrelation of the macro and the micro-social spheres. Our purpose was to understand the systems -

[4] With Sérgio Capparelli and Nilda Jacks, for UFRGS, through the *Núcleo de Pesquisa Cultura e Recepção Midiática* (Research Center for Culture and Media Reception) of the *Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências da Comunicação* (Graduate Program in Communication Sciences) (PPGCOM). With Thomas Tufte, from the University of Copenhagen.

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media - and processes of communication, reception and media consumption in the light of a theoretical framework. This framework would have a view on the interplay between micro and macro contexts, structures and agents, fields of cultural production and everyday practices, and other issues related to the issue.

Authors such as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu were at the baseline to support an idea of society that would unveil movements between its many spheres. Methodologically, we were inspired by models proposed by the Latin Americans Jesús Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini, Jorge A. González and Guillermo Orozco Gómez, who deal with the relationship between media and audiences from a dense theoretical framework, operated through by a multimethodology. Nicholas Garnham, Graham Murdock, and James Lull were also among the inspiring models. The analytical strategies adopted from these references followed several paths and took several dimensions, linking Political Economy and Cultural Studies. Such a dialogue was little established in Brazil until then, but was ongoing in Europe, as shown by the intense debate between James Curran and David Morley (Curran et al., 1998).

The macrostructural analysis - headed by Sérgio Capparelli's team - approached both the production and broadcasting of TV programs in Porto Alegre and the other cultural offerings, which were studied from the historical and urban point of view, highlighting their transformations over time. The microstructural analysis, in turn, was carried out by the team coordinated by Nilda Jacks, who also supported Thomas Tufte's work in the city, and attached priority to the pole of media reception and consumption, working on the diachronic and synchronic axes in an articulated manner. In the diachronic axis, the family history technique weaved the path of three generations of five families intending to describe how ethnic, family, and regional identities were built and transformed from one generation to the next, under the influence or not of the media present in each period (newspaper, radio, broadcast TV, cable TV, and Internet). This strategy also allowed us to know how the family institution contributed to the nurturing of their members as a television audience, as regards the preference for genres and types of programs, type of relationship with the medium, definition of roles in the structuring of knowledge, opinions, world-views, etc. On the synchronic axis, the audience's ethnography - developed by Thomas Tufte - produced data on the daily life and social and family relations of a nucleus of each of the five families, in order to disclose cultural practices and uses of the media, especially cable TV, which connects global and local cultures[5].

In order to dimension the role of television in the process of reconfiguring regional identity, an analysis of the discourses on *gaucho* identity, published in *Identidade Cultural como Formação Discursiva* (Cultural Identity as Discursive

Formation) (Jacks, 2018), was carried out in parallel to the previously described research. The purpose was to update the discussion after the emergence of the nativist movement in the 1980s, which had been addressed in both the dissertation and the thesis, taking as corpus the collection "*Nós, os Gaúchos*"[6], published in the 1990s. Besides the discourses about '*gauchismo*', the cultural and social capitals of the producers of these discourses, and based on which disciplinary/professional perspective they wrote their arguments about regional identity at that moment were also identified.

The theoretical challenge in this endeavor was to consider cultural identity as a discursive formation (Murdock, 1993) and as a "regional field" (Bourdieu, 1989), which is socially spread and is produced by various agents, including the media and its producers. The approximation between the two authors gave us a framework to work with representations that ensue from power structures, but that are not static and suffer changes that follow the movements of history. Objectively, Bourdieu's categories of *mental representations* (language, accent, dialect, character, etc.), *objective representations* in things (emblems, flags, anthems, clothing, etc.), and in acts (symbolic manipulation strategies) were compared with those of Murdock, who points out three backgrounds[7] that distinguish modernity: 1) economic and political formations; 2) cultural and wisdom/knowledge formations; and 3) everyday life formations, in which the previous spheres are incorporated and experienced. He envisions cultural identity as organized ways of describing and explaining the social world or proportions of it, and comprising four elements: 1) classification systems; 2) favorite names and images; 3) forms of argumentation and reasoning; and 4) principles of evaluation (Murdock, 1990). Although discursive formations are organized, they are not necessarily coherent as they may present inconsistencies and contradictions, as well as dislocations between analytic connections and the connotations attached to preferred images, which are more open to various interpretations.

Meanwhile, the relationship with ECA is tightened again when an invitation to participate in the *Observatório Ibero-Americano de Ficção Televisiva* (Ibero-American Television Fiction Observatory) (OBITEL) was extended by Maria Immacolata Lopes in the late 2000s. Thus, the focus on the relationship of the subjects with the soap opera, addressed in the doctoral thesis, once again guides the new phase of the research. Since the OBITEL is a permanent project of analysis of production and/or consumption of fiction, it enables systematically following the ongoing transformations, providing a unique opportunity to collectively update the debate on processes and practices of reception. Like the other OBITEL researchers, it became mandatory the adoption of the nomenclature

[6] Published by the UFRGS publishing house it consisted of five volumes: *Nós, os Gaúchos* (1992), *Nós, os Gaúchos Volume 2* (1994), *Os Teuto-Gaúchos* (1996), *Os Ítalo-Gaúchos* (1996) e *Os Afro-Gaúchos* (1996). It gathers 239 texts by 34 authors, 31 historians, 26 literature professors, 20 journalists, 13 university professors (arts, music, political geography, physical education, etc.), 10 politicians, four sociologists, nine anthropologists, seven philosophers, five educators, five musicians/composers, five architects, four religious people, four physicians, three museologists, three theatrologists, three cartoonists, two physicists, two folklorists, two photographers, two filmmakers, one political scientist, one bookseller, one editor, one economist, one lawyer, one ecologist, one fashion designer, one artist, one military man (ex-president of the republic), one diplomat, and others who are not accurately identified.

[7] Murdock (1993) states it is more useful to think of contemporary society in terms of *formations* concerning both institutions and regimes, since the current sociocultural context is made up of a complex and contradictory process that cannot be thought of in structural terms alone.

transmedia reception to designate the new relations of the recipients with the media in face of media convergence.

In this scenario, our proposal in the last four editions was to longitudinally review the soap operas aired by Globo at the time of the biennial research. The soap operas *Passione* (Jacks & Ronsini, 2011), *Avenida Brasil* (Jacks et al., 2013), *Império* (Jacks et al., 2015b) and *Velho Chico* (Jacks et al., 2017c) were part of the corpus in an attempt to follow the changes and trends in the sphere of both production and reception. To that, the methodological procedures are always resumed in order to monitor and compare the behavior of audiences on digital platforms, thus exercising the observatory methodology, a key point of our team's proposal. In 2019, these narratives were resumed to explore the creation of *likely worlds* - the theme of the year - in the search for the fictional building of popular worlds (Jacks et al., 2019), continuing the systematic way of developing our analyses, even if this time not exactly repeating some procedures, as in the three previous editions, due to the theme of the year.

Belonging to OBITEL was crucial to set the directions of the next surveys, as a CNPq scholar and coordinator of the *Programa Nacional de Cooperação Acadêmica* (National Program for Academic Cooperation) (Procad) in 2013, as the concept of transmedia (Jenkins, 2008) was investigated in *Jovem e Consumo Midiático em Tempos de Convergência* (Young People and Media Consumption in Times of Convergence) (Jacks et al., 2015a) and in *Jovem Brasileiro e Práticas Midiáticas em Tempo de Convergência: O "Brasil Profundo"* (Young Brazilians and Media Practices in Times of Convergence: The "Deep Brazil") (Jacks et al., 2021). Both studies were developed in a comparative manner and with national and regional coverage, respectively, in an attempt to learn about the relationship of young people from all regions of Brazil with digital social networks.

The objective of the first research was to identify the most popular themes among young people in the 26 states and the Federal District[8], in addition to the practices and rituals related to the use of the most popular platforms among them. Contextual information - historical, geographical, economic, demographic, cultural, media, etc. - about each state (Jacks & Toaldo, 2014) and its capital (Silvestrin et al., 2016) were produced to understand and try to explain juvenile practices. Context and situation are two important scales for designating subjects' belonging, forging triangulation strategies to review the use of time and space and the practices that occur there. A pilot study combined with an exploratory survey was part of the procedures which, in technical terms, adopted a questionnaire applied to 10 university students[9] (girls and boys between 18 and 24 years old), followed by an observation of the Facebook profile of additional 10 youngsters. An online questionnaire was formulated based on these initial data, and made available to the youth living in the capital cities.

[8] Surveyed by local teams linked to the *Rede Brasil Conectado* (Connected Brazil Network).

[9] To map the cultural and media consumption. The observation of Facebook raised practices, rituals, and content made available and submitted, in addition to media and cultural consumption.

The successful experience with young people from the capitals raised the desire of some teams from the *Rede Brasil Conectado* to learn about practices of the youth from the interior of Brazil. The research *Jovem Brasileiro e Práticas Midiáticas em Tempo de Convergência: O "Brasil Profundo"*[10] (2021) entered the interior of three states in an attempt to learn a little about the reality of the youth[11] living far from the metropolises and belonging to specific social groups. Young people from small towns in the interior of Pará, Sergipe, and Rio Grande do Sul, as well as from rural and riverside areas and some belonging to *quilombos* were studied in relation to media consumption, and convergent practices in the digital domain (Jacks et al., 2020).

Also tributary to the training at ECA, especially in the discipline of research methodology, was the trend toward producing meta-research, in order to update the state of the art of media reception and consumption research carried out in the PPG. This endeavor gave rise to volumes I, II and III of *Meios e Audiências* (Media and Audiences) (Jacks et al., 2008). The first volume highlights the emergence of these studies in Brazil, the second its consolidation, and the third its reconfiguration in face of media convergence, and is planned to be continued in volume IV (scheduled for 2023).

In *Meios e Audiências* (Jacks et al., 2008), the corpus was related to the 1990s, with a total of 49 surveys that identified three types of theoretical-methodological approaches: sociocultural, behavioral and others. Technical and empirical aspects were also analyzed to prepare a state of the art of research in the area, aiming at proposing an agenda for the next decade. This method followed in all volumes. *Meios e Audiências II*[12] (Jacks et al., 2014) comprises the study developed between 2000 and 2009, whose corpus was composed of 209 surveys focused on the empirical relationship[13] of recipients with the media. The great novelty was the social-discursive approach, tributary to the adoption of discourse theories, mainly brought by journalism studies. *Meios e Audiências III* (Jacks et al., 2014) approached a shorter period - 2010 to 2015. The interval was reduced to keep up with the fast changes operated by media convergence, which brought confusion to the role of the recipient, often participating as a producer, and the inclusion of social networks into the object of study.

In this volume, a distinction was made between media reception studies and media consumption studies (Toaldo & Jacks, 2017), two major strands of Latin American studies, as they are different issues, even if related, which suffer new tensions with media convergence, and also led to the differentiation between media and social media. Institutionality, formality, and regulatory mechanisms characterize the former. Telephone sets, floppy disks, USB sticks, sidings, t-shirts were not considered media, therefore, neither was the human body, as

[10] Expression inspired by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, who wrote *Mexico Profundo* (1989). "*Profundo*" (Deep) was a notion coined to designate, among the different strands of contemporary Mexican society, the indigenous one. *México Profundo* is the denied civilization formed by a diversity of cultures, communities and social sectors that constitute most of the population of that country.

[11] The concept of youth adopted considers the impossibility of associating it with a single definition, related to a temporal period. Physical condition is reflected in longings, emotions, experiences, signs used, and in the body's own strength, energy, and productive capacity, in a feeling of invulnerability. Other variables additional to age, are: generation into which one is socialized; gender; family condition; and institutions to which they belong

[12] Between *Meios e Audiências I* and *II* the *Análisis de Recepción en América Latina: Un recuento Histórico con Perspectivas al Futuro* (Jacks et al, 2011) was published. The study ensued from a Latin American integrated research that reviewed the production of almost all countries of the continent in the period from 1990 to 2010. The network of researchers met in Quito to discuss the early advances with guest experts to build a Latin American agenda based on the data of each country. Jesús Martin-Barbero, Guillermo Orozco Gómez, Valerio Fuenzalida, and Maria Immacolata Lopes attended the meeting, and produced texts in which they propose a research agenda for Latin America.

[13] The so-called «others» approach was eliminated because they are surveys that only assume the recipients.

considered by some researchers. For Klaus Jensen (2010), the human body, as well as the other devices mentioned above, are first-degree media that are part of their historical development. O'Sullivan (1993) states that this notion is too broad, and its use declined so as to make room exclusively to mass media, which for Jensen (2010) are second-degree media that act one-to-all, i.e., they are basically analog media.

Social media, in turn, according to Martín-Barbero (2015), is a communication channel between people and between social institutions and their audiences. They produce a set of socially woven information that can be consulted on the networks, what Jensen (2010) calls metamedia or third-degree media. For this reason and by virtue of the analysis undertaken, social media were only considered in the corpus when used by some communication vehicle to expand its relationship with audiences, inserted in the process of media convergence. In this case, the processes of media reception and consumption may occur in a transmedia way, dealing with network audiences, a phenomenon widely identified in the experience of research with OBITEL.

The long process that began in the 1980s, with the first research experience when I took my Master's degree at ECA/USP, still enriches the ongoing research: *Recepção Fílmica e Espectatorialidade Cinematográfica: Explorações Teórico-Metodológicas* (Filmic Reception and Cinematographic Spectatoriality: Theoretical-Methodological Explorations). In it, as in the other surveys conducted, fundamental issues such as starting from the knowledge of field production and having strong methodological bases are commitments sealed with the training received, expressed in a previous text as "know, assimilate, create" (Jacks, 2020). Without this reflective exercise, there is no way to advance and innovate on solid grounds. **M**

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