MATRIZes

DOSSIER
*New Perspectives
on Communication Theories*

Rossana Reguillo

Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes

Juremir Machado da Silva & Álvaro Nunes Larangeira

Cíntia Sanmartin Fernandes & Micael Herschmann

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INTERVIEW
Jean-Claude Bernardet *(in memoriam)*

MATRIZes

INDEXERS

DIADORIM – Diretório de Políticas Editoriais das Revistas Científicas Brasileiras

DOAJ – Directory of Open Access Journals

EBSCO

ERIEHPLUS – European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences

EUROPUB

EZB – Eletronic Lournals Library

FUNARTE – Fundação Nacional de Artes

GOOGLE ACADÊMICO

HAL – Accès aux données de reference de HAL

J4F – Journals For Free

LATININDEX – Sistema Regional de Información en línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, el Caribe, España y Portugal

LATINREV – Red latinoamericana de revistas académicas en ciencias sociales y humanidades

MIAR – Information Matrix for the Analysis of Journals

MIGUILIM – Diretório das Revistas Científicas Eletrônicas Brasileiras

OPEN SCIENCE

PERIÓDICOS CAPES

RCAAP – Repositório Científico der Acesso Aberto de Portugal

REDALYC – Red de Revistas Científicas de Acceso Abierto Diamante

REDIB – Red Iberoamericana de Innovación y Conocimiento Científico

RESEARCHBIB – Academic Resource Index

REVISCOM – Red Confibercom de Revistas Científicas de Comunicación

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WIKIDATA

WORLDCAT

Summary

Demolitions, transformations, and renewals of communication objects

Demolições, transformações e renovações dos objetos da comunicação

COMMUNICATION IS A field of study constantly confronted with instabilities, where established frameworks lose influence and new practices emerge. Revisiting traditions, interrogating anticipated crises, monitoring insurgent cultural practices, or proposing new conceptual cartographies are ways to understand how the objects of communication deconstruct and reconstruct themselves in a present marked by intense struggles over meaning. From this premise, *MATRIZes* chooses to open this edition with a dossier that brings together articles attentive to these movements of demolition, transformation, and renewal, providing a panorama in which crises and insurgencies reveal both the vulnerabilities and potentialities of the field of communication.

Rossana Reguillo opens the collection with "Essays on the abyss: politics of the gaze, violence, technopolitics," a text that articulates institutional deterioration, the rupture of social pacts, and the exhaustion of ecosystems as challenges demanding new approaches grounded in communication. By placing methodological imagination at the center of the discussion, the author illuminates opaque areas of academic work and reaffirms the necessity of critically rethinking the social production of meaning and the dynamics of power.

Following this, Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, in "Brazilian telenovela and *Deep Brazil*," continues her established trajectory of research on Brazilian television fiction. Engaging with the categories of "national narrative" and "communicative resource," the author introduces the concept—still under construction—of *Deep Brazil*, in which she revisits and confronts the opposition between hinterland and coast, aiming to propose its hybridization as a key to understanding national culture. The analysis traverses images from *Cinema Novo* and three recent television productions to demonstrate how the telenovela and other fictional forms remain fundamental in shaping imaginaries about the country.

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Juremir Machado da Silva and Álvaro Nunes Larangeira continue the series of texts with "Will journalism die?," revisiting the long-predicted crisis of this profession to underscore the persistence of seven essential practices that ensure its democratic relevance. The authors argue that, although traditional structures and routines of journalism have been profoundly altered, core activities remain that render journalism an indispensable practice for society as a whole. The text, therefore, problematizes the notion of "death" to assert, instead, processes of transformation that keep journalism's essential role alive in a democratic society.

In the article "Dysphoric bodies in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the territorialities constructed by the Ballroom carioca scene," Cíntia Sanmartin Fernandes and Micael Herschmann examine how trans and dissident bodies occupy urban spaces and create new inclusive territorialities. This stands in contrast with the discourses analyzed by Erick Felinto in "The secrets of the red pill: machismo and reactionary imagination on the Internet," the subsequent article, which exposes the entrenchment of Red Pill culture within a neoconservative imaginary marked by microfascist traits. While the Ballroom scene mobilizes performances that expand urban democracy and destabilize normative boundaries of gender and sexuality, Red Pill philosophy seeks to reaffirm patriarchal hierarchies, projecting regressive narratives that intertwine technology and male resentment. The implicit dialogue between the two texts highlights the extent to which communication functions as a space of symbolic contestation, at times fostering the creation of more inclusive worlds, and at others reinforcing logics of exclusion and violence.

Shifting from social spaces to the academic sphere, João Anzanello Carrascoza's "Peer review: lucid opinions and blind comments," inspired by José Saramago's *Blindness*, problematizes the limits and subjectivities inherent in the double-blind peer review system. By illuminating the tensions among rigor, subjectivity, and power in the process of scientific validation, the text reveals how the academic field itself demands transformations in its mechanisms of recognition and legitimacy.

Concluding the dossier, Cicilia Maria Krohling Peruzzo, in "Popular communication and alternative and independent media in its original and current nuances," revisits the traditions of popular communication and observes their contemporary reconfigurations. The article proposes a typology distinguishing between original and current strands, demonstrating how progressive, community-oriented practices coexist in the contemporary landscape with conservative and even fascist-inspired extremist appropriations. Amid continuities and transformations, the author illustrates the diversity of communicational forms emerging outside the conventional spectrum.

In the Interview section, *MATRIZes* pays tribute to Jean-Claude Bernardet, recently deceased, in a conversation conducted by filmmaker Fábio Rogério, which reveals notable aspects of his personal, intellectual, and political life. Beyond discussing cinema itself, Bernardet reflects on it as an integral part of his trajectory—from his arrival in Brazil to his involvement with institutions such as the publisher Civilização Brasileira, the Goethe Institute, the journals *Última Hora* and *Opinião*, and the universities of Brasília and São Paulo. The interview traces his experiences with censorship, clandestinity, and his recognition as one of the country's leading film critics. He recalls his dissertation *Brasil em tempo de cinema*, and his long reflection on the representation of the people in cinema, echoes of which appear decades later in films such as *Cabra marcado para morrer* (II) and *Os filmes dos outros*. In closing, Bernardet faces the finitude of life with the serenity of Borges speaking of blindness: "it is like the evening." A testament to lucidity and renewal, consistent with his approach to the ruins and recreations of Brazilian culture.

MATRIZes opens the Agenda section with the article "Memory literacy: television fiction as a space for shaping politically conscious citizens." In this piece, Pedro Lopes, Gustavo Cardoso, and Maria Inácia Rezola examine how television fiction creates an alternative space for memory formation and representation, capable of reshaping collective identities and narrative disputes over the past—beyond the controls exercised over traditional historiography and in contrast to the dominant "book-based culture."

Next, in the critical essay "Jonathan Crary and the limits of a post-media utopia," Gilmar Montargil and Fabrício Lopes da Silveira deepen their reading of *Terra arrasada*, seeking to transcend the work itself in order to project it critically into debates on media and recurring themes within the field of Communication, such as environmental exhaustion, post-capitalism, and digital life marked by surveillance and sensory overload. The analysis of contemporary events and trends is also present in the article "Confined and tuned in: new circuits of Brazilian children's cartoons after the COVID-19 pandemic," in which Ariane Holzbach examines three moments: the growth of the animation market between 2006 and 2018, the situation of production companies during Bolsonaro's government and the pandemic, and, finally, the post-2023 landscape.

Luis Felipe Abreu, in "Derrida's machines: traces of a deconstructive concept of media," reconstructs a spectral thesis on the media, emphasizing deconstruction as a key to understanding the "processes of signification in the techniques of our communication," highlighting the role of computers and other technical devices as supplementary archives that shape forms of inscription and circulation of meaning.

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The following articles revisit debates on memory and communication crises, addressing issues of gender, race, and class. Hieda Maria Pagliosa Corona and Jozieli Cardenal present "Gender memory: decolonial cartography in Martín-Barbero and Ecléa Bosi," developing a methodological proposal that combines night maps and life histories to foreground silenced voices and the resistances of Latin American women. Daniel Reis Silva, in "Attack as defense: discursive disputes in crisis contexts," analyzes how organizations and social actors employ defense and counter-attack strategies to delegitimize accusations and reconfigure reputations. Returning to audiovisual production, Edson Pereira da Costa Júnior and Vitor Zan, in "Mundo histórico e liberdade especulativa em *Mato seco em chamas*," highlight how the film by Adirley Queirós and Joana Pimenta enacts speculative emancipation practices amid dynamics of incarceration—its central theme—and structural inequality.

The Agenda section concludes with Ana Taís Martins' article "Historical world and speculative emancipation in *Dry ground burning*," which proposes a mapping of recent approaches to the imaginary, identifying three major strands—social representation, allegorical inversion, and ontological presence—that structure the field and point to new research horizons.

The issue closes with two reviews that engage with each other from complementary perspectives on contemporary disinformation. Katarini Miguel analyzes *Doppelganger: A trip into the mirror world* by Naomi Klein, highlighting how the author constructs, from a personal dilemma, a political reflection on disinformation, polarization, and extremism. Lucas Lima Jansen reviews *The disinformation network: Systems, structures, and dynamics on social media platforms* by Raquel Recuero, emphasizing its proposal to understand disinformation as a systemic phenomenon rooted in the dynamics of digital platforms.

Once again, by bringing together different perspectives on contemporary communication challenges, this issue of *MATRIZes* seeks to offer critical reflections that contribute to keeping the field alive, current, and in dialogue with society. Enjoy the reading!

Luciano Guimarães
Maria Ignês Carlos Magno
Wagner Souza e Silva

DOSSIER

News Perspectives on Communication Theories

Essays on the abyss: politics of the gaze, violence, technopolitics [a]

Ensaios sobre o abismo: política do olhar, violência, tecnopolítica

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ABSTRACT

The essay incorporates three large areas of transformations that have shaken up the contemporary scene: institutional deterioration, the detonation of the social pact(s), and the exhaustion of ecosystems, both biological and sociopolitical. The objective is to think about the impacts of these transformations on our mindsets and address the critical work involved in the production of knowledge about the world. This essay brings the question of methodological imagination to the center of the discussion in an attempt to illuminate an area that often is opaque in academic work. Three dimensions that have marked the work of Rossana Reguillo as a researcher and thinker about the modern world are addressed, deepening understanding of the social production of meaning and the dynamics of power.

Keywords: Sociocultural studies, politics of gaze, violence, technopolitics, sociodigital analysis.

RESUMO

O ensaio incorpora três grandes áreas de transformações que têm abalado o cenário contemporâneo: a deterioração institucional, a detonação do(s) pacto(s) social(is) e a exaustão dos ecossistemas, tanto biológicos quanto sociopolíticos. O objetivo é pensar sobre os impactos dessas transformações em nossas mentalidades e abordar o trabalho crítico envolvido na produção de conhecimento sobre o mundo. Este ensaio traz a questão da imaginação metodológica para o centro da discussão, em uma tentativa de iluminar uma área que muitas vezes é opaca no trabalho acadêmico. Três dimensões que marcaram o trabalho de Rossana Reguillo como pesquisadora e pensadora sobre o mundo moderno são abordadas, aprofundando a compreensão da produção social de significado e da dinâmica do poder.

Palavras-chave: Estudos socioculturais, política do olhar, violência, tecnopolítica, análise sociodigital.

D

Essays on the abyss: politics of the gaze, violence, technopolitics

A good archaeological report does not merely indicate the layers from which the objects found originate, but, above all, those that had to be traversed beforehand.
—*Walter Benjamin*

BEYOND THE INTENSE transformations that have shaken the contemporary landscape, which I group—for analytical purposes—into three major areas: institutional deterioration, the collapse of social pact(s), and the exhaustion of biological and sociopolitical ecosystems, I am interested in reflecting on the impact of these transformations on our ways of thinking about and approaching critical work in the production of knowledge about the world. In other words, I am interested in bringing to the center of the discussion the question of methodological imagination, an expression with which I seek to shed light on a frequently opaque area of academic work that—so it seems to me—remains tied to a set of canons, procedures, and modes that today clash with a reality that is by no means the same as that in which ethnography, participant observation, interviews, or questionnaires emerged, to cite a few methods that were central to the development of the social sciences.

Starting from this question, in this essay, I aim to develop three dimensions that have shaped my work as a researcher and thinker on contemporary issues: the analysis of images and regimes of visibility; violence and atrocity; and network analysis through large volumes of data. All three are closely related to my concerns with deepening my understanding of the social production of meaning and the dynamics of power.

POLITICS OF THE GAZE: UNDERSTANDING (IN)VISIBILITY

In the collection of essays *Horizontes fragmentados: El desorden global y sus figuras*, which I wrote in 2005, I was interested, among other things, in questioning the gaze and its technologies—the gaze that seeks to unveil, understand, and produce knowledge. My concern was, and continues to be, focused on what I will call "regimes of visibility," which I understand as complex socio-historical constructions articulated with:

a) Particular historical formations, for example: West/East; Europe/Latin America; Modernity/Late Modernity; Center/Periphery. This means that invisibility is always situated.

b) Socializing and intermediary institutions that shape and modulate it: the family, schools, churches, the media, and the cultural industries. We learn to see, and this has cultural and sociopolitical repercussions.

c) Logics of political power that become cognitive power. Whoever determines what is visible and invisible shapes what is knowable and speakable in the world.

At that time, I questioned the technologies of the gaze and their relation to what I called the sciences of proximity or distance, associated with "seeing and understanding the distant" and "seeing and understanding the near," a path I traced through the inventions of the telescope and, soon after, the microscope. But this question gradually transformed into a meta-reflection fundamentally articulated around disputes over the representation of reality. The historically produced and never neutral modes of seeing interested me insofar as they allowed me to approach the field of social and cultural struggles for the legitimate definition of reality.

In the documentary *A girl like me*, several African-American girls narrate their self-perception, the way they experience their racialized identity, and their discomfort with their hair, skin, etc. The documentary revisits the experiment conducted by Dr. Kenneth Clark in the 1950s, known as the "doll test," which consists of showing African-American children (one by one) two dolls, one white and one black, and asking them questions: Tell me which doll you like best; tell me which one is the prettiest; tell me which one is the ugliest. The test is harrowing because the children tend to choose the white doll as the prettiest and the black doll as the ugliest. The most dramatic part of the test is that, at the end, they are asked: "Tell me which one looks like you," and they select the black doll, previously described as ugly and bad.

From this documentary and other exercises, my interest in the forms of the gaze—what I will call the "politics of the gaze"—grew. I understand the politics of the gaze as the set of tactics and strategies that, on a daily basis, manage the gaze: the gaze that produces effects on how we perceive and are perceived; the gaze that closes and opens other paths; the gaze that reduces or restores complexity. Politics of everyday life that "we do not see" because, through them, we see.

Regarding these politics, I am interested in three aspects. First, understanding how the gaze constructs representations that are assumed to be "natural orders," "doxas," as Bourdieu (2002) calls them—those truths that do not admit refutation or questioning. Second, how processes of masking and invisibility occur, tending to domesticate a reality that is all too real. The motto is not only not to show, but not to look, to close one's eyes. And finally, the process of aestheticizing and emptying what is being looked at in order to separate it from its context and meaning. Pasteurizing

the image to separate it—or, paraphrasing Barthes, consuming the image aesthetically, not politically. It is the political gaze that fundamentally interests me.

The ways of looking at violence, for example—how one looks at images of the atrocious, what one sees when looking at a dismembered body, intuiting that there is a prior scene of torture. In this sense, I am interested in certain images, extreme scenes, that disturb daily life insofar as they produce what Didi-Huberman (2016) calls "sensible knowledge" (p. 32). This involves introducing what is being looked at into an emotional dimension that shocks and transforms.

Thus, the gaze is a space of permanent tension, of constant struggle between what enters as sensible knowledge and what remains blocked as emptiness.

Barthes (1964) states that:

> in every society, various techniques are developed to fix the floating chain of signifieds in order to counter the terror of uncertain signs: the linguistic message is one of these techniques. At the level of the literal message, the word answers, more or less directly, more or less partially, the question: what is it? (p. 44)

And Barthes adds, in a sentence as lucid as it is forceful, that:

> at the level of the message, the linguistic message not only guides identification but also interpretation; it constitutes a sort of clamp which prevents the connoted meanings from proliferating toward too individual regions (that is, from limiting the projective power of the image) or toward dysphoric values. (p. 44)

From these two quotations, I wish to retain at least two key ideas for the discussion. On one hand, what Foucault (2009) had already developed in great depth, referring to the obsessive power of control and surveillance that seeks to subjugate the eruptive, the anomaly, the uncertain, the surplus of meaning through different techniques or devices, whose objective—in broad terms—is to contain uncertainty and establish precise boundaries for the exercise of power. On the other hand, Barthes warns us about the artifices of the (literate) linguistic message as a device of control over the image, this "clamp" that blocks the interpretive machine through procedures of social normalization and, especially, the control of emotions. It thus seems that the image is intrinsically endowed with "emotional intensity" that must be subdued by the resources of modernity: literate reason and the Cartesian containment of passions.

Starting from these two ideas, I now turn to two empirical exercises in image analysis that I developed in 2007, because I believe that, despite the temporal distance, they are powerful examples of the disturbing capacity of certain images.

First frame: Scene of torture

In early 2004, CBS broadcast a series of photos and videos showing the treatment that Iraqi prisoners received in Saddam Hussein's former detention center, renamed "Redemption Camp" by the US government. The photos were brutal and quickly generated international protests.

Seventeen soldiers were implicated in the cases of torture, among whom Lynndie England, Sabrina Harmon, Charles Graner, and Ivan Chip Frederick stood out for their particularly pornographic sadism, the latter being the sergeant in charge of the prison.

The main information conveyed by these photographic documents is precisely their most astonishing effect: the complicity of the observer's gaze and the absence of causality—or rather, a grotesque causality for being absurd: the tortured bodies are at the mercy of the torturer, and he or she turns out to be someone's niece, someone's daughter, the husband of one of "us." In other words, the information that the photo gives us is that there is no "brute" force. However, the prisoner's arm reveals a small gesture of strength to prevent his head from touching the ground. Artificial lighting makes it difficult to distinguish between day and night, and papers and trash scattered on the floor complete the picture (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Image from the series of 198 photographs of abuses committed by soldiers against prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison, made public by the Pentagon in 2004 under pressure from the American Civil Liberties Union

Note. Public domain image.

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According to Roland Barthes (1989), one could say that there is in this photograph a *punctum*—that "disturbing accident in the photo," a "detail, a partial object that attracts my gaze; the detail appears in the field of what is photographed as an unavoidable supplement" (p. 79), not reflecting the photographer's art but rather the very fact of its being there. This is where the photographer's clairvoyance lies: in taking the total object without being able to separate this partial object (*punctum*) from the scene. The *punctum* in this photograph is that gesture of the arm, that minimal trace of humanity, that almost imperceptible wink of resistance that the "art" of the photographer could not isolate. This *punctum*, in turn, becomes an uncomfortable "piece of information." Despite the setting, despite the apparent calm of those photographed, the prisoner's arm suggests an escape route: domination is not total, and this reintroduces the dominated subject into the relationship of domination. In other words, the anomaly is not fully established, because the subject appeals, through a minimal gesture, to his humanity.

Second frame: The broken body and the war of the autopsy

In March 2007, news shocked Mexico: Doña Ernestina Ascencio, an elderly Indigenous woman from Zongolica, Veracruz, was brutally raped by members of the army stationed in the city. Initially, it was reported that Doña Ernestina had been gang-raped by soldiers posted in that critical rural area of Veracruz. Local authorities confirmed the act and carried out an autopsy, which indicated that Ernestina had been raped and that her death was caused by multiple traumas. This triggered an intense "investigation" among federal authorities, highlighting the role played by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). However, then-president Calderón declared that such rape had not occurred and that Doña Ernestina, 73 years old, had died of "chronic gastritis and acute anemia caused by gastrointestinal bleeding," adding: "there is no evidence that she was raped by the Army."

The photograph, widely disseminated in the media at the time, is shocking. It shows a forensic table, a close-up of Ernestina's face, and a Coca-Cola bottle used to collect the thin red stream of blood running from her skull. The dehumanization of the person, the terrible appropriation of the shattered, lifeless body. This is, without a doubt, a leaked photograph that quickly became the center of what I call the "war of the autopsies": the one conducted by local experts and the one later carried out by federal specialists and NHRC officials. The "technical" reports are so distinct that scientific reasoning is called into question, for they are two equivalent discourses in clear conflict—where some see gastritis, others see "presence of whitish vaginal discharge"; some see anemia

due to bleeding, while others diagnose "anal region with erythema, abrasions, and recent lacerations and fresh blood." We are therefore faced with a glaring dilemma: either one side or the other is absolutely incompetent or lying. And the question arises: how can an inert body respond so contradictorily to the questions of "forensic science"? With reports so conflicting, it is no wonder that "public opinion is divided," and once again, the body becomes a source of dispute and political confrontation, and the victim remains fixed in that terrible image, frozen and stripped of her human condition. The photographed, studied, measured, sectioned, weighed, and observed body becomes, in this case, the bearer of clues. In the broken body, the political dispute for the establishment of credible, legitimized, and convenient evidence takes shape. The key to this case and to the image it represents is that the body remains bound to the political "truth" that the sovereign establishes to preserve its own body.

I believe that the examples presented here allow us to state, together with Diego Lizarazo, that "Photography therefore has a structuring principle of events. The purpose of this staging is to frame the interpretation both of the gaze of the one who views the photo and of the one who produces it." The tortured bodies of Abu Ghraib and the inert body of Ernestina become "lives that do not matter," surplus lives, lives that cannot be mourned—operations of meaning through which power casts these bodies into the interpretive void, or rather, places them at the service of an interpretive register anchored in the normalization of the violence inflicted. These bodies become the surface upon which the anomaly is inscribed, an anomaly that would justify or explain what happens to them.

I conclude this section by noting that I will return to the wounded body in the third part of this essay, where I will address the study of networks, data mining, and data visualization.

VIOLENCE, THE ABYSS OF THE ATROCIOUS

In 2009, artist Teresa Margolles and curator Cuauhtémoc Medina presented the work *What else could we talk about?*[1] At the Venice Biennale. It consisted of a series of pieces portraying the atrocity of violence in Mexico: pieces of fabric the artist had retrieved from morgues stained with the blood of execution victims, blankets in which bodies had been delivered, and floors mopped with bodily fluids. These pieces and activations brutally connected spectators with the (real) effects of drug-related violence.

[1] *¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*

Figure 2

Cocaine-cutting dard, by Teresa Margolles

From this series, I am interested in what Margolles called *Cocaine-cutting card*², which involved distributing these rigid plastic cards—like a bank card—bearing the image of a murdered person on one side. A repulsive image, but also recursive in the sense that it forces the audience to recognize their potential participation in the blood economy.

To explain the confrontation with the atrocious that Margolles summons us to with this piece, I want to refer to this quote from Adorno (1984): "in a time of incomprehensible horrors, perhaps only art can satisfy the phrase of Hegel that Brecht chose as his motto: truth is concrete" (p. 33). Truth is brutal, and the work of Margolles and other artists has been essential in making the atrocious speak in a register that is neither one of spectacularization nor of trivialization.

I would like to paraphrase the title of Enrique Díaz Álvarez's extraordinary book (2021): the truth that appears in this work by Margolles displays all its potency, that of the effects of drug-related violence; "it overwhelms, it is remembered, it persists," Díaz Álvarez would say about the word.

The question to be posed is whether this testimony can provoke a transformation in the *sensorium*, in that technosocial sensibility that interested Benjamin in his study of the relationship between technique and aesthetics. Whether testimony can produce reflexivity about what governmental powers silence or render invisible, and what media powers reduce to statistics.

Through many years of research on violence and what I call "counter-machines" in my work (Reguillo, 2011), I can state that art and performance are capable of penetrating areas of experience that traditional journalistic or academic approaches cannot access. I think of Violeta Luna's performance *Requiem for a Lost Land*³, and of the profound impact it had on those of us who lost our condition as spectators and became witnesses to her powerful call for those killed by violence in Mexico.

Luna appears on stage on the floor, surrounded by us who will become her witnesses. Dressed in black, with her hair pulled back and carrying a bag inscribed with "Mexico 2010," she gradually removes the objects she carries: first, gloves; then, white bottles with the Mexican coat of arms, opaque so we cannot guess their contents; a pile of small photographs of people's faces; a white robe; and numbered cards.

The solemnity with which she prepares herself, every small detail in which her entire body is engaged, is striking. First, she puts on her white robe and paints her arms white as well. She loosens her hair and begins to brush it slowly.

Her hair, scattered on the floor, becomes the earth that receives the dead. She places the photographs, making death into a fabric articulated by pain, helplessness, and anger. And in that telluric moment, what Didi-Huberman (2016) calls "sensible knowledge" (p. 32) occurs: the entry of what is seen into an emotional dimension that shocks and transforms. Luna empties two bottles of a blood-red liquid onto her hair, now entangled with photographs.

At that moment, the spectators—now witnesses—burst into diverse emotions: tears, murmurs, and distressed faces. As García Canclini (2010) would say, "art leaves in suspense what it says." A state of suspicion is established; the reality of war contains profound suffering.

DISTORTED SUBJECTIVITY

Beyond art, the chronicle, investigative journalism, and documentary are also capable of producing and reaching sensible knowledge. The urgent need exists for other cartographies that allow us to map the geography of our fears—capable of producing other discourses, other narratives. Grammars of the atrocious which, like medieval maps depicting demons, angels, and cathedrals—that baroque imagination that made the map a place of symbolic representation—can today allow us not only to document tragedy and catastrophe but also to become compasses for finding alternatives.

Figure 3
Medieval map

Note. Public domain image.

Digital cartographies and their challenges: records and algorithms

The technological accelerations we have experienced in recent years, at a frenetic and relentless pace, have redefined virtually every dimension of social life—from scientific knowledge to everyday life. The processes of information, knowledge, communication, and teaching-learning, in the context of an increasingly connected lifeworld and the exponential multiplication of data about the world, the region, and the locality, have not solved the enormous problems society faces, but have created new conditions that make it possible to do so.

Today, the evolution of computer science, the ongoing hybridization between network sciences, data mining, communication theories, and the social and human sciences, builds fruitful and promising connections, increasingly evident in the proliferation of university and citizen laboratories, where curiosity, play, passion, and practice-born knowledge—together with others—intermingle. The DIY (do it yourself) culture, the hacker ethic, and P2P (*peer-to-peer*) production are gaining strength.

Knowledge is increasingly produced online, combining expertise from different areas, grounded in research and in the dissemination of projects guided by forms of experimentation and collaborative learning through various technological tools.

The emergence of social media was pivotal in the reconfiguration of the internet and modes of sociability. Between 2007 and 2009, MySpace, Facebook,

and Twitter appeared, revolutionizing what we now understand as public space, as interaction, as communication, and—especially in my case—how we approach different forms of knowledge production.

In 2016, Signa_Lab, the Technological Innovation and Applied Interdisciplinary Studies Laboratory at ITESO, began its activities, grounded in three areas of knowledge: cybernetics, actor-network theory, and techno-politics. These areas guide the Laboratory's work on the relationship between technology, innovation, and public space.

From cybernetics to technopolitics in a social key

We know that, in an increasingly connected society with an exponential multiplication of data about the world, the region, and the locality, technology and digital dynamics have not solved the enormous problems society faces, but have created new conditions that make it possible to do so.

Actor-network theory

Bruno Latour, one of the most prominent sociologists of contemporary science, proposed in the 1980s, together with other authors such as John Law and Michel Callon, the "actor-network theory" or ANT, which broadly asserts that "the social" is constituted by temporary assemblages of agents/tools/animals that are reconfigured by both internal and external factors. ANT is proposed as a research methodology that considers "sets of associations," which are constantly rearticulated through unifying elements. These sets may be nations, groups, parties, collectives, movements, which, according to ANT, are in themselves empty signifiers that do not explain the elements that shape or modify them.

For Latour and ANT practitioners, research fails when it considers these associations as closed entities. What this approach seeks is to produce explanations—that is, to investigate—the multiple relationships that a "set of associations" weaves with other elements with which it interacts. Thus, process-based research leaves traces of all these movements to understand how a network operates. This is the logic with which we currently analyze conversations on social media.

Latour uses an example of this type of analysis: a group of oyster fishermen. He seeks to demonstrate that, to understand this "social group," it is necessary to understand its relationship with the oyster, as this undoubtedly affects the fishermen's behavior and practices. It is also essential to understand that the tools they use for fishing are, in turn, products of another amalgam of networks that produced them (companies, distributors, etc.). This gives rise to flat networks of relations in which the social group "fishermen" is connected to the oysters, boat manufacturers, net weavers, market vendors, and so on, significantly

expanding the spheres of influence and explanation of what would otherwise be considered a closed social group (Latour, 2008).

The impact of ANT in the fields of social sciences, humanities, and complexity theories was decisive in the transition from partial, self-contained, and complete approaches to an open and necessarily relational mode of thinking. In his book *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory* (2008), Latour clearly demonstrates that what we call "the social" is far from being "homogeneous." For the author, the challenge is to reassemble heterogeneous elements to confront "the disconcerting face of the social." Latour (2008) states:

> A new vaccine is marketed, a new job is offered, a new political movement is created, a new planetary system is discovered, a new law is passed, a new catastrophe occurs. In each case, we have to reorder our conceptions of what was associated, because the previous definition has become, to some extent, irrelevant. (p. 19)

In other words, the underlying premise of these ideas is to assume that this heterogeneity of supposedly irrelevant elements (people posting photos of their faces, people expressing solidarity with the Afghan people and women, people posting the Afghan flag) is precisely the object of research: the analysis of the relationships between these elements. Democracy, feminism, education, learning, human rights, justice, communication, culture, city, technologies, and the public sphere represent, from this perspective, relations that must be reassembled to produce situated knowledge. According to Latour (2008), the scientist's task is not to impose "an order, teach actors what they are, or add reflexivity to their blind practice" (p. 28). On the contrary, it is a matter of following the actors (actants for ANT), paying attention to innovations and, especially, to the connections, in a historical stage of diverse accelerations.

Gabriel Tarde, a very important precursor of ANT or of an alternative sociology, pointed out that Durkheim's mistake was to replace the understanding of social bonds with a political project aimed at social engineering (Vallejos, 2012). Paraphrasing Latour in this debate, it is important to emphasize, for the purposes of this project, that for Tarde, there was no need to separate "the social" from other associations, such as biological organisms; there was no need to break with philosophy or even metaphysics. The social is not a "special domain of reality, but *as a principle of connections.*"

Working with millions of images and emojis, we ask: what is the color of a tragedy? Which emojis accompany an idea, a feeling? Does the tragedy have faces, or are they inanimate planes? We question the data about connections, the

digital not as a special domain of reality, but as a shaper in the social production of meaning: the digital as space, as object, as practice.

Figure 4

These visualizations correspond to the analysis conducted around the 2019 earthquake in Mexico City

I am interested in highlighting the shift in narrative between the initial moments of the catastrophe, when the most tweeted emoji was the call to prayer, and the activation of the #Verificado19S group, when the call to action was crucial. Emojis help capture emotional tones in digital conversations.

Technopolitics

Social life has moved at an accelerated pace toward networked organization; Castells (2009) anticipated this phenomenon at the end of the last century, noting the growing emergence of what he called "mass self-communication," that is, the transition from the one-to-many nature of traditional media and communication forms to "broadcast yourself," made possible by Web 2.0 and the proliferation of networks, platforms, and applications that act in democratizing public space, destabilizing legitimate spaces of enunciation, and altering the rules of content production and communication circulation.

The term Web 2.0 can be used to understand the possibilities offered by new internet services that allow active user participation, moving from mere consumers to producers of a type of content that can be mixed and combined. According to Tim O'Reilly (2007), Web 2.0 platforms allow "building a network based on the architecture of participation." In this sense, different forms of organization multiply and expand through the internet, generating new typologies, techniques, policies, and, above all, new forms of citizen participation.

In the collective book *Tecnopolítica, internet y r-evoluciones sobre la centralidad de redes digitales en el #15M* (2012), in which eight activist-intellectuals of the movement known as #15M (May 15, the date when Plaza del Sol in Madrid

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was occupied) or "the *Indignados*" participated, the following definition of "technopolitics" is proposed:

> The massive reappropriation of corporate social networks and the invention of new free tools, together with large-scale hacktivist strategies for political-viral organization and communication, opened a new field of socio-technical experimentation. This is the area we call "Technopolitics." Technopolitics as the collective capacity to appropriate digital tools for collective action. (Alcazan et al., 2012, p. 8)

Thus, a guiding principle of the Laboratory's work is to analyze and make visible the "social appropriation of technology and its devices." In the face of manipulation and misinformation on social networks, we argue that technopolitics operates as a tool for radical transformation in political cultures, learning, forms of organization, and communication. It breaks the sender-message-receiver scheme and becomes a complex map of connected crowds in constant interaction, where individuals become content producers and information critics. This fosters connectivity and the construction of a collective imagination around those aspects of reality perceived by individuals as common problems—what calls us, concerns us, and challenges us cognitively and emotionally.

As examples, I present two emblematic cases of high density and viralization: the #YoSoy132 movement and the movement surrounding the #Ayotzinapa events (Figures 11 and 12).

Technopolitics is the backbone of the investigation into the (multiple and complex) ways in which today's actors—citizens, youth and adults, students and teachers, specialists, and ordinary people—interact in networked spaces to make visible, discuss, learn, create, and intervene in public space through these connective technologies.

The underlying point is that people today have (in different and unequal ways) new possibilities to engage, participate, and construct spaces for discussion and contrast compared to earlier periods, when information, the possibility of expression, and the capacity to assert one's "point of view" were monopolized by guardians and administrators of public affairs.

In this sense, the emergence of the internet and participation as a connection mechanism ceases to be situated and anchored in a regulated space; the possibilities for participation expand, moving from a single-layer system to a multi-layered system in which "information, attention, and affect are concentrated and channeled through multiple devices and layers of communication, which intertwine with each other" (Toret et al., 2013, p. 136). These relationships expand the possibilities for participation, the physical territory becomes a point

of reference, and digital connections, along with their devices, become entry points to a global space (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5

Graph showing Twitter interactions generated by the #YoSoy132 movement and around it in Mexico and other countries. It displays the relationships between users and hashtags

Note. Data collection period: May–December 2012; nodes: 429,635; edges: 1,373,764; communities: 5,247.

Today, through the so-called network science (Barabási, 2012), *big data* (Magoulas & Lorica, 2009), web epistemologies (Rogers, 2004), and accelerated developments across different disciplines, the questions and possibilities for producing situated, open, and reproducible knowledge have been enhanced. From this perspective, technopolitics constitutes an approach, a mode of engagement, a strategy, and a methodology for producing knowledge, experimenting, and intervening in sensitive and fundamental aspects of reality.

Figure 6

Visualization on the anniversary of the forced disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa students, showing the significant engagement the case generated in digital conversation on Twitter

I return here to the analysis we conducted in the Laboratory of the horrific femicide of Ingrid Escamilla, which we titled, for reasons I will explain later, "*Ingrid Escamilla: Erasing the horror.*" Ingrid was 25 years old when her partner brutally murdered her in Mexico City on February 9, 2020. Photographs of her skinned body were leaked and began circulating widely.

In our real-time monitoring of the case (Figure 7), we observed, through the initial network analysis, that there were two competing narratives: one that sought to dignify Ingrid and frame her case as femicide, and another that mocked and spectacularized her death: "femicide" versus "photos." We were alerted to what was happening with the second narrative. Numerous reports referenced photographs of Ingrid's dismembered body and sought links to view them. The horror.

Figure 7

Semantic analysis and word cloud visualization of the most frequently used terms related to the femicide of Ingrid

Throughout the morning of February 12, we were able to gather empirical digital evidence indicating a morbid and cruel interest in this specific case.

I would like to present a visualization obtained through Google Trends, a tool that allows one to see, measure, and analyze what people "search" for on the Internet via Google, as well as the volume of these searches with different georeferencing parameters. The tool also displays the set of words and the websites most frequently used when performing a specific search.

The result could not be more eloquent in documenting the way in which violence had colonized a large part of the Mexican imagination (Figures 8 and 9).

Figures 8 and 9
Google Trends searches related to the Ingrid Escamilla case

During the final hours of February 11 and the early hours of February 12, when the discussion reached its peak on social networks, the predominant perspective surrounding the femicide of #Ingrid was anchored in the grammars of horror, which I understand as formats of information consumption inherited from "media strategies that tend to dull sensitivity to barbarity" and that incite both media and public to question the ways in which "the victim is constructed" (Reguillo, 2012). In this specific case: the search for images of Ingrid's body. Photographs leaked by the authorities of Mexico City themselves, the exacerbation of the brutality of the femicide as a narrative axis in associated words,

the search for images and videos of the event on websites dedicated to the gore genre, and some of the words most used by the media in its coverage (images, leak[4]) are examples of this.

Figure 10

Analysis of Google Trends searches on the Ingrid Escamilla case

Figure 11

Illustration by Ingrid Escamilla, created by Mónica Vargas for Signa_ Lab

Note. Created by Mónica Vargas for Signa_Lab.

Given the suffocating sensation that arose from witnessing what was happening on social networks, we collectively decided to ask Mónica Vargas, then artist and curator of visual content at the Lab, to create an illustration of Ingrid's face to accompany the report we were preparing.

This "idea" was not exclusively ours: the collective intelligence, especially that of a long-standing digital/presential community of care, which sought to reverse the terrible narrative of our violence, managed to publish and viralize—within a few hours—thousands of images of natural landscapes, sunsets, wildlife, and much more, with tweets invoking the hashtag #IngridEscamilla. The horror was mitigated by light; in a short time, each time the hashtag #fotosIngridEscamilla was searched, thousands of beautiful and loving images appeared (Figure 12).

Collective resistance against the colonization of horror:

Figure 12
Collage of some of the images shared by Twitter users to "turn off the horror."

Note. Image created by Signa_Lab.

COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE AGAINST THE COLONIZATION OF HORROR
COVID-19 Records

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly marked a before and after in the way academic work is conducted. It affected not only what we call fieldwork but also the way continuity in school, university, and academic networks had to be maintained, sometimes in a rather precarious manner.

From March 25 to April 1, 2020, the Zoom application recorded 1.4 million downloads in Brazil and 745,700 downloads in Mexico. It was the second most downloaded app, after TikTok. According to Apptopia, among the ten most downloaded communication apps (iOS and Android) worldwide in 2020, Zoom ranked second, Google Meet fifth, and Microsoft Teams sixth. These figures

provide a modest indicator of the transformations that the lockdown brought, particularly to the academic world.

In response to the pandemic, we adopted an analytical strategy to examine how conversations about the pandemic and its effects on various aspects of life were occurring online, ranging from the most personal to political and workplace implications. We decided to open a section on our website entitled: *Bit_acoras Covid19.*

For this essay, I will focus on the dimensions or emotions mobilized at the start of the pandemic, tracking and analyzing some key terms identified during daily monitoring conducted in the Laboratory.

Thus, #WhenThisIsOver was the hashtag used by thousands of Spanish-speaking users in the first weeks to express their concerns and, in particular, to communicate to other users what they would do when the pandemic ended. The emotions expressed in these conversations were articulated through the expression of desires: visiting parents or grandparents, going to the beach, meeting colleagues again, and so on. This hashtag was linked to another that also mobilized conversation with high traction, as we describe some trends with mobilizing power (organic, that is, not manipulated). This hashtag was #buylocal, which called on people to support small businesses.

Figure 13—already filtered—shows that 6,097 unique tweets were isolated, downloaded in mid-April.

Figure 13

Graph visualizing the behavior of the hashtag #whenthisisover

The next step was to track terms or words with emotional connotations. What we discovered was that conversations around the pandemic generated highly eloquent words to convey what society was experiencing, its concerns, and fears. The so-called "quarantine" became a motive for sharing these concerns.

"Insomnia" was one of the first words associated with the pandemic. "*Did you have insomnia?*" "*Yes, yes, I just can't…*" This indicated an altered emotional state.

We used two ways to visualize the data: a graph and a word cloud, which we created through semantic analysis (Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 14

Visualization of the word "insomnia" associated with "quarantine"

Then, the word "*pesadilla*" (nightmare) emerged. It was not just about sharing nightmares, but about describing the pandemic experience as a nightmare: the death of family and friends, job loss, and difficulties in accessing connectivity for children.

Figure 15

Word cloud for the term "insomnio" (insomnia) on Twitter

Figure 16

Word cloud with the term "pesadilla" linked to "cuarentena"

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Next, "*miedo*" (fear) appeared as a word, a fundamental noun through which people spoke about their own fears in the face of the pandemic. The graph shows how the blue color of the word node "fear" *groups* together several communities or interaction clusters.

Figure 17

Semantic analysis of the Twitter conversation about the pandemic linking the word "fear" to "quarantine"

Fear is followed by sadness. This is a more advanced phase of the pandemic, in which the loss of family and friends and the daily increase in cases have already affected the collective mood. Depression and anxiety became prominent topics. In the case of the word "*tristeza*" (sadness), it is relevant to note the optimistic appeal to collective action in the graph, which may correspond to a technopolitical moment.

We were surprised that the word "*esperanza*" (hope) did not gain algorithmic prominence in the conversation. This leads me to state that the pandemic created a scenario that Baruch Spinoza (1977) would call "*pasiones* tristes" (sad passions: fear, hopelessness, sadness, frustration), triggered by job insecurity or the fear of losing employment, experiences of exclusion, ongoing vulnerability, and especially by the shadows of uncertainty hovering over an uncertain future that shake our thinking.

Figure 18

Word cloud, semantic analysis. Conversation about "tristeza" and "quarentena"

Figure 19

Graph showing relationships between hashtags on Twitter, with the search terms "tristeza" (green community) and "cuarentena" (purple community or cluster)

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Essays on the abyss: politics of the gaze,
violence, technopolitics

The analysis of large volumes of data, in dialogue and productive tension with qualitative approaches, allows us to understand reality from another perspective. Networks operate as transit systems, with open and intersecting pathways.

COVID-19 created a new "*exterior*," in the silence of the streets, in the overcrowding of public transport by those who cannot stop and stay at home, an exterior sustained by precarious employment and the invisibility of what is necessary to keep this "*exterior*" functioning. Yet, when analyzing what is happening on platforms and social networks, downloading hundreds of thousands of tweets and Instagram posts, what emerges is a new "*interior*" in which emotions "pierced us like arrows."

TO CONCLUDE

During the preparation and writing of *Necromáquina: Cuando morir no es suficiente* (Reguillo, 2021), one concept, premise, or idea became a kind of mantra, which I applied to the work of some chroniclers and journalists such as Sergio González Rodríguez, with whom, beyond admiration, I shared a fruitful friendship in which we exchanged similar concerns; we owe the formulation to Simon Critchley (2010), who also titles his powerful book *La demanda infinita: La ética del compromiso y la política de la resistencia*.

Critchley (2010) calls "ethical demand" the moment when the subject encounters a demand that does not correspond to their autonomy; in other words, a demand that transcends them and compels them to accept, or "endorse," as Critchley would say, this demand, in a constant movement that always engages the ethical subject. It is not a single wager.

Through Levinas, Critchley (2010) highlights the moment of asymmetry that arises "with the experience of the infinite demand of the other's face and that defines the ethical subject in relation to a separation between oneself and an exorbitant demand that one can never fulfill: the demand to be infinitely responsible" (p. 59).

This asymmetry has been present in my work for many years, always challenged by the "infinite demand of the other's face," an ethical, academic, social, and aesthetic stance that leads me to assume infinite responsibility for our pains and our pursuits.

To return to the promised articulation among the three axes of my work that I selected for this collaboration with *Encartes*, I will refer to a recent analysis we conducted at Signa_Lab on the assassination of journalist Lourdes Maldonado in Tijuana on January 23, 2022; she was the third journalist murdered in those early days of the year.

One of the central themes in the laboratory's research lines is "violence against journalists and freedom of expression," and monitoring these issues is a daily reality. To digitally honor and simultaneously denounce these events, we created a mural with 283 Instagram posts referencing the journalist, alongside a mural with her image (real) when she went to report that she was being threatened at President López Obrador's morning press conference (Figure 20).

Figure 20

Mosaic made up of 238 Instagram posts that used the hashtag #LourdesMaldonado. Created by Signa_Lab

Note. The topic with this mural and information on violence against journalists appeared on the list of top global tweets on Trendsmap (https://www.trendsmap.com/twitter/tweet/1486152564923977728).

The topic with this mural and information about violence against journalists appeared on Trendsmap's[5] list of the most popular tweets globally. In addition to the impact achieved with this publication, I conclude with it because it allows me to articulate the politics of the gaze, violence, and atrocity, and technicality as a laboratory for analysis and knowledge production.

The assassination of Lourdes Maldonado is atrocious. I believe that the visual representation achieved in these murals (zooming in or enlarging the small images that make up this photograph is essential) evokes a kind of "reaction," an empathy, an emotion derived from what the many images contained in it say, making a person visible, as in the case of Maldonado, or the

[5] Available at: https://www.trendsmap.com/twitter/tweet/1486152564923977728.

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representation of a person, as in the case of the composition with the image of a woman wearing a hijab, when the Taliban entered Kabul in August 2021, with the predictable impact this would have on women and girls.

Thus, the visualization in Figure 21 comes from Instagram and was created with 222 photographs that users of this network, mainly women, posted on their profiles to show solidarity with Afghan women when the Taliban captured Kabul and expelled women from public spaces. When you zoom in on the mosaic, you can see the faces of women wearing veils, with their faces uncovered, and images with the Afghan flag. This is not a neutral or aestheticized representation of the conversation, but rather—as proposed by TAR—a procedural account that leaves traces of how people position themselves in the face of an event.

Seeing and making others see has been a central part of my concerns. With these new tools and possibilities, new ways of mapping old problems or new approaches that intersect with the experience of increasingly connected subjects are opening up—in the articulation of knowledge ranging from anthropology to algorithms, from network science to semiotics, from philosophy to datafication, from communication to mathematics.

Figure 21

Mosaic with the 222 images in Instagram posts mentioning
#AfghanWomen that reached more than 500 likes by August 22, 2021

Paraphrasing Jacques Rancière, it is possible to think of these three universes—visuality, atrocity, and technicality—as strategies to break the policing map of the possible and to redraw the coordinates that must be traversed so that critical knowledge unsettles, shakes, and challenges. ▰

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Brazilian telenovela and "*Deep Brazil*" [a]

Telenovela brasileira e Brasil Profundo

■ M A R I A   I M M A C O L A T A   V A S S A L L O   D E   L O P E S [b]
University of São Paulo. São Paulo – SP, Brazil

ABSTRACT

Since at least the 1990s, I have been progressively working on the epistemological-empirical construction of a new conception of telenovela and, more broadly, of television fiction, through the concepts of *narrative of the nation* (Lopes, 2003) and *communicative resource* (Lopes, 2009). Now, I add a third—*Deep Brazil*, a notion still under development. Present in reports by travelers and discoverers, in chronicles and narratives, it was in this context that the categories of *sertão* and *litoral* were forged, which ended up being appropriated by the media, books, cinema, and, later, television, in order to highlight the contrasts between rural and urban spaces. However, we want to advance a more current proposal of *Deep Brazil*, which affirms more the hybridization of *sertão* and *litoral* than their opposition or complementarity. For this, we will make an approach to the theme followed by an empirical analysis in images from Cinema Novo films and in three television fictions from 2023: *Cangaço novo* (Prime/O2), *Terra e paixão* (TV Globo), and *Vai na Fé* (TV Globo).
Keywords: Telenovela, *Deep Brazil*, backlands-sea, hybridization.

RESUMO

Pelo menos desde a década de 1990, venho trabalhando progressivamente na construção epistemológico-empírica de uma nova concepção de telenovela e, mais amplamente, de ficção televisiva, através dos conceitos *narrativa da nação* (Lopes, 2003) e *recurso comunicativo* (Lopes, 2009). Acrescento agora um terceiro conceito — *Brasil Profundo*, uma noção ainda em desenvolvimento. Presente em relatos de viajantes e descobridores, em crônicas e narrativas, nele se forjaram as categorias *sertão* e *litoral*, que remetem a contrastes entre os espaços rural e urbano e que acabaram sendo apropriadas pelos meios de comunicação, pelo livro, pelo cinema e, depois, pela televisão. No entanto queremos avançar uma proposta mais atual de *Brasil Profundo*, que afirma mais a hibridização sertão/litoral do que sua oposição ou complementaridade. Para isso, faremos uma abordagem da temática, seguida de uma análise empírica em imagens de filmes do Cinema Novo e em três ficções televisivas de 2023: a série *Cangaço novo* (Prime/O2), as telenovelas *Terra e paixão* (TV Globo) e *Vai na fé* (TV Globo).
Palavras-chave: Telenovela, Brasil Profundo, Sertão-Mar, hibridização.

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The Backlands Will Become Sea
and the Sea Will Become Backlands

Corisco
— Sergio Ricardo e Glauber Rocha

We are what we are because we know how to tell
our own story, and this storytelling, the narrative,
is a constitutive part of what we are, of what we can be,
and of what we dream

— Jesús Martín-Barbero

INTRODUCTION

IN WHAT WAYS are imaginaries about who we are constructed in tele-novelas—or, more precisely, where does what is narrated in these fictions come from, narratives that point to the elaboration of identities of communities, regions, and the nation, and that reach wide audiences and resonance? These questions led me to engage with the notion of *Deep Brazil*. They are present in the most recent *Obitel Yearbook* (2024) and can be approached from multiple perspectives: through the rhythm of narration, through what is told, and through the ways in which it is told. Today, there is no longer a single way of telling fiction, whether through structures such as classical melodrama or through diverse sets of possibilities that encompass the very complexity inscribed in fictional narration. In the midst of today's avalanche of screen content, "telling stories is a play of light and shadows, of the visible and the invisible, of proximity and distance," as Han (2023, p. 70) points out. Yet, attempting to answer the complex questions posed above requires going beyond the observation of narrative structures on screen and asking a fundamental question: *which cultural matrices are present in television fiction narratives?*

The concept of *Cultural Matrices* refers to Jesús Martín-Barbero's cartography of mediations, as presented by Lopes (2018). For the purposes of this article—namely, to propose tentative responses to the issues raised in the *Obitel Yearbook 2024*—our focus is on a specific segment of this cartography: the diachronic axis of *Cultural Matrices – Industrial Formats*. This axis will serve as the integrative thread of the reflections developed below, providing the foundation for constructing the notion of *Deep Brazil* within telenovelas. This construction is grounded both in Morin's concept of complex thought—that the whole is present in the part and the part in the whole—and in a transmedia approach, which interconnects literature, cinema, and television. Both perspectives are

directed toward the theoretical question of national identity (as mapped by Martín-Barbero) and toward empirical communicational objects ranging from Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* to films of *Cinema Novo*, from the concept of the popular-massive to recent television fictions. These dimensions of the object are not merely convergent; they are transmedia—extending from literature to cinema to television[1].

[1] This transmedia approach could have encompassed other media, ranging from literature to newspapers, radio, and television—or, alternatively, from newspapers to theater and television.

SITUATING DEEP BRAZIL BETWEEN *CULTURAL MATRICES* AND *INDUSTRIAL FORMATS*

As previously stated (Lopes, 2018), within Martín-Barbero's cartographic method, we can identify the analytical tools through which one gains perspective on the new. These tools are conceptual migration and the construction of metaphors. Conceptual migration involves the transfer of concepts from one domain to another, ensuring the resignification and expansion of notions originally bound to specific disciplines. The construction of metaphors enables non-linear thinking, opening concepts to multiple interpretations or reinterpretations, thereby resonating with the ideas of one's interlocutors. It is worth noting how adequately these tools are transposed to the theoretical-conceptual framework of this article.

Figure 1

Communicative mediations of culture

Note. Jesús Martín-Barbero. De los medios a las mediaciones.
Bogotá: Convenio Andrés Bello, 1998. Adapted by Lopes (2018).

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The cartographic scheme operates along two axes: the diachronic, or long-term historical²—between *Cultural Matrices and Industrial Formats*—and the synchronic axis—between *Logics of Production* and *Competencies of Reception or Consumption*.

The relationship between Cultural Matrices and Industrial Formats refers to the historical transformations in the articulation between social movements and public discourses, and between these discourses and the modes of audience production that shape hegemonic forms of collective communication. One example: initially linked to the social movements of popular sectors at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution and to the emergence of popular mass culture—which simultaneously negates and affirms the popular, thereby transforming its cultural status—the melodrama genre first appeared in theater, later assuming the format of serialized feuilletons or novels in chapters. In this form, popular memory (kinship relations as the central axis of the plot) became intertwined and hybridized with bourgeois imaginaries (the sentimental relations of the couple). From there, melodrama migrated to cinema, particularly in the United States, and in Latin America to radio drama and telenovelas. This history allows us to move beyond the structural Manichaeism that, for a long time, prevented us from recognizing the depth of complicities between hegemonic and subaltern discourses, as well as the constitution—throughout historical processes—of discursive grammars derived from sedimented formats of narrative knowledge, habits, and expressive techniques. (Martín-Barbero, 2001, p. 16–17)

What interests us here is situating, on the temporal axis of the map, the *Cultural Matrices*, where the roots of national identity emerge as expressed in popular culture. Within this cultural framework, *melodrama* has historically been the preeminent narrative form, assuming different formats: itinerant theater (18th century), feuilletons (19th century), cinema (20th century), radio soap operas (20th century), and, finally, the industrial format of the television soap opera (20th and 21st centuries), disseminated through both television and the internet. For this reason, we can affirm, with Bhabha (2013) in *Nations and Narration*, that the imaginary of the nation is always a narrative that gives meaning to life—beginning with the senses of recognition and belonging, and culminating in the *imagined nation* (Anderson, 1991), forged within the social struggles over meaning. Imaginaries are not fixed but mutable, even though the identity metaphor of the "roots" of the nation tends to naturalize them, rendering them seemingly perennial. We therefore prefer the metaphor of the nation as *moving roots*, a perspective that can be discerned in the axis of *Cultural Matrices – Industrial Formats*.

Until recently, to speak of identity was to speak of roots—that is, roots and territory, of long duration and symbolically dense memory. Today, however, to speak of identity also requires—if we are not to relegate it to the limbo of a tradition disconnected from the perceptive and expressive transformations of the present—speaking of migrations and mobilities, of networks and flows, of immediacy and distance.

Deep Brazil is an emerging notion that seeks to adequately address the singularity of the Brazilian nation by starting from the premise that the lived, real, and unique Brazil differs substantially from an "official Brazil," as represented by institutions closely tied to the State and to the dominant segments of Brazilian society. It is therefore necessary to construct analytical frameworks that effectively engage with the national experiences of Brazilians. Such an approach is essential because it enables access to the social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of Brazilian formation. These dimensions correspond to what Fernand Braudel (1965) would call, when referring to certain historical phenomena, the *long duration.*

Historically, since the 19th century, there has been an intense debate concerning the nature of Brazilian national character, carried out by chroniclers, intellectuals, writers, artists, and naturalists[3]. With the turn of the 20th century, debates surrounding *brasilidade* (*Brazilianness*) intensified. In the 1930s, the institutionalization of national affirmation under the Vargas Era—through a nationalist, corporatist, and populist agenda—promoted the officialization of the national, grounded in the consolidation of a collective identity forged through the imaginaries of samba, tropicality, and *mestiçagem* (racial and cultural mixing). During the same decade, analyses also emerged that elevated Brazil to a subject worthy of study within the Human and Social Sciences[4].

From this tradition, and along these lines, we may understand *Deep Brazil* as a notion that encompasses practices and representations of long duration. It applies to individuals socialized within the Brazilian nation-state who reinterpret, translate, and construct new social, cultural, political, and economic articulations. Such actions are possible because this broad spectrum of Brazilians acts by circumventing, traversing, subverting, or overlapping hegemonic institutions, which are generally operated by social groups that hold greater concentrations of economic and/or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2001). *Deep Brazil*, therefore, refers to a matrix of practices that emerge most frequently among the subalternized sectors of the Brazilian working class, but which also extend beyond strict class categorizations. These practices spread as mentalities that influence behaviors in middle-class sectors and, occasionally, even among elites, while also intersecting with other dimensions such as gender, race, and regionality.

[3] Names such as Manoel Bomfim, Capistrano de Abreu, Pedro Américo, José de Alencar, Gonçalves Dias, Carlos Gomes, Machado de Assis, Jean-Baptiste Debret, Euclides da Cunha, among others.

[4] In Sociology, we may highlight the contributions of Gilberto Freyre, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, and Caio Prado Júnior. This tradition continued in Anthropology, with authors such as Roberto DaMatta and Darcy Ribeiro; in Sociology, with Guerreiro Ramos, Florestan Fernandes, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso; in Political Science, with Carlos Nelson Coutinho, Chico de Oliveira, and Francisco Weffort; and in History, with Emília Viotti and Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz. In Economics, Celso Furtado stands out as a key contributor along the same trajectory—these being only a few representative examples.

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A VIRTUOUS TRANSMEDIATION: LITERATURE, CINEMA, TELEVISION

From a transmedia or intersectional perspective, we consider that Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*; the *Cinema Novo* films *Vidas Secas* by Nelson Pereira dos Santos (1963), *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* by Glauber Rocha (1964), and *Os Fuzis* by Ruy Guerra (1964); as well as the articles "*Telenovela como narrativa da nação*" and "*Telenovela como recurso comunicativo*" (Lopes, 2003, 2009), provide a useful framework for clarifying certain aspects of the notion of *Deep Brazil*. We do so with the aim of examining the terms in which the convergence between literary, cinematic, and television dramaturgical languages has been consolidated.

The term *Deep Brazil* is borrowed from Brazilian literature, specifically from Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902), in order to ensure that this expression conveys the singularity of the Brazilian nation. One of Euclides da Cunha's greatest contributions to Brazilian social thought was his transformation of the idea of *sertão* (backlands) into a conceptual tool for understanding national formation, inexorably linking human beings to the environment in which they live. In this sense, transcending a precise spatial delimitation, the backlands became a way of interpreting Brazil itself. The word began to carry a constellation of meanings, capable of producing a new *topos* within Brazilian literary and sociological traditions, enabling subsequent generations of intellectuals and writers to conceive and articulate Brazil through the lens of the backlands.

In Euclides da Cunha's work, the backlands became a key concept, structured around a central theme: the need to discover Brazil from its margins. Two categories emerged—*sertão* and *litoral* (backlands and coast)—simultaneously as opposites and as complements: opposites because one signified the reverse of the other, and complements because, like a play of mirrors, one was constructed in relation to the other. These categories became central to Brazilian social thought, structuring analyses that oscillated between the familiar and the unfamiliar within a single nation, reinforcing the unsettling and persistent observation that "Brazil does not recognize Brazil." While the coast was almost always presumed to be known, the backlands came to embody the object and rationale of a national myth, preserved both in the Brazilian imaginary and in lived experience.

It is worth noting that, at least since Euclides da Cunha, Brazilian cultural imagination has been deeply invested in exploring the backlands as a way of comprehending and representing national formation. More than as an opposition to the coast, the backlands emerged in contrast to the idea of the colonial region: it represented the antithesis of a world ordered by two central institutions of power—the State and the Church.

The writer, even as he constructed the myth of sertanejo[5] Brazilianness, also experienced it in a uniquely dramatic way. While his work symbolically married the notions of Brazil and backlands as nearly synonymous elements, his thought also expressed tensions between the categories of backlands and nation.

It is well known that Euclides da Cunha's worldview, when he arrived in the backlands of Bahia to report for a southern newspaper on the final moments of the massacre of Antônio Conselheiro's followers, was deeply shaped by the assumptions and prejudices of a scientistic creed—namely, evolutionism, climatic and biological determinisms, and, more broadly, positivism.

Yet, *the mythical image of the backlands as a founding element of nationality*—imagined as an earthly paradise, cradle of the nation, and redoubt of the primordial man of Brazilianness—was initially, and in a limited sense, a discursive construction of Romantic literature. In Euclides, this sentiment survived, coexisting with the highest values of scientism.

If, in 1897, Euclides da Cunha arrived in Canudos as just another reporter, bound by the coastal worldview of "civilization" in relation to the backlands, his confrontation with the tragic reality deeply unsettled him, transforming his book into a manifesto in defense of the memory of Conselheiro's heroic followers and affirming the existence of a *sertanejo* Brazilianness as essential to Brazil's historical formation.

The backlands landscape projected in *Os Sertões* was more than an unnamed, unknown land; it was a symbolic construction that offered the stage for martyrdom and, ultimately, redemption: "*The backlander is, above all, strong.*"

According to Oliveira (2002), from the structural opposition between countryside and city arose a perfect example of how meanings of purity and essentiality became tied to the concept of backlands in that period, while coastal cities were imagined as shadowed, degraded, and obstacles to the construction of Brazilianness. Thus, the neglect imposed upon the backlands by the nation was, in a certain sense, paradoxically beneficial: it created the conditions for an original people to be forged under the backlands sun, a people who, in the imagination of an entire generation, came to embody the national soul.

Sixty-two years separate the publication of *Os Sertões* by Euclides da Cunha from the release of Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* in 1964. Between these two works, Brazilian cultural imagination never ceased to appropriate and resignify the idea of the backlands. What had initially arrived as a word was transformed, in the hands of Euclides da Cunha, into a *powerful interpretive key to understanding Brazil.*

Filmmakers of the first phase of the *Cinema Novo* movement drew inspiration from Euclides da Cunha and other canonical authors of Brazilian literature

D in order to devise a new project for the nation's cinema (Queiroz, 2019). Within this framework, three films are recognized as central, composing the so-called "Trilogy of the backlands": *Vidas Secas* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963), *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (Glauber Rocha, 1964), and *Os Fuzis* (Ruy Guerra, 1964). Beyond literature's influence on these films, *Cinema Novo* directors discovered in literature the very impetus for their political militancy: the drive to interpret Brazil, the sensibility to unveil it, and the critical tools to discuss it through film. Above all, it was through dialogue with literature that these directors managed to craft works of great temporal complexity, elaborating images that opened Brazil's historical past in search of references to comprehend the political struggles of the early 1960s. As Ismail Xavier (2001) observes, dialogue with literature enabled *Cinema Novo* "to bring into debate certain themes of Brazilian social science, linked to the question of identity and to the conflicting interpretations of Brazil as a social formation" (p. 18–19). *Cinema Novo* elevated Brazilian cinematography to a new level, both in terms of aesthetic quality and of political and social engagement.

In *Vidas Secas,* what stands out is Nelson Pereira dos Santos's effort to remain faithful to Graciliano Ramos's style: the film is marked by prolonged silences. The backlands is depicted as a space of social displacement, filled with shadows, fissures, and distortions of a nation projected onto empty expanses. It is a territory that reveals the existence of pariahs—migrant families fleeing toward the coast, expelled from the backlands by unrelenting droughts. Characters speak little, as if to avoid any waste of energy. Men and women are immersed in extreme rusticity, inhabiting what one character calls "hell."

In *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, we find what Ivana Bentes (2013) has called "the embryo of revolutionary rage" (p. 83). In a cinematic exercise of revisiting past uprisings, Rocha relentlessly fuses two inseparable concepts: hunger and violence. The backlands emerges as a space of redemption, where the Brazilian people—represented by the figures of the cowhand Manuel and his companion Rosa—walk as though on burning embers of their own history, a past that refuses to disappear and continues to resound in the present.

In *Os Fuzis*, under Ruy Guerra's lens, the gulf between those who starve and those who do not is portrayed with implacable severity. For Guerra, misery is not an aesthetic; it is, above all, an aberration. The State is not merely inefficient, but the principal agent responsible—along with all of us. *Os Fuzis* offers no comfort; it exposes the danger of speaking in the name of the people without belonging to them or being understood by them. Thus, the camera must retreat, adopting an ethical stance before a social universe that remains fundamentally alien to those who have never experienced hunger.

The backlands depicted in *Cinema Novo* films are both real and symbolic territories with profound resonance in the collective imagination. They are crisis-ridden spaces inhabited by powerless or rebellious characters, figures that signal either a revolution to come or a failed modernity. As Bentes (2013) notes, "in the transition from rural to urban Brazil, as thematized in the cinema of the 1960s, the *sertanejos* were transformed into slum dwellers and suburbanites, 'ignorant and depoliticized,' but also primitive rebels and revolutionaries, capable of radical change, as in Glauber's films" (pp. 101–102).

In the same decade that produced the most influential *Cinema Novo* films, the telenovela emerged as a new medium for reflecting on Brazil, gradually becoming a powerful component of the collective imagination (Ferro, 1992).

The history of the telenovela truly began when it developed its language, ultimately becoming a *narrative of the nation.*

The landmark moment, universally recognized, was the telenovela *Beto Rockefeller* (Tupi, 1968), when the narrative became "Brazilianized" or "indigenized" (Buonanno, 2004).

Perhaps the greatest challenge in using the telenovela as a source lies in grappling with its powerful impression of reality, produced by the perceptual richness of recorded material, which creates an effect of naturalness that is at times difficult to contest.

The aim of this discussion is to highlight the role of mass media—specifically television—in shaping cultural identity. As argued here, television constitutes a frontier space where literature, cinema, and television intersect, enabling the development of transdisciplinary studies, to which this article is aligned.

NATIONAL TELEDRAMATURGY, OR "I SEE BRAZIL IN THE SOAP OPERA"

The consolidation of the soap opera as television's most popular and profitable genre is tied to a significant shift in language, embraced by Brazilian writers whose professional backgrounds spanned radio and cinema. The long-standing debate among soap opera professionals, as well as in scholarship and public opinion, revolved around the opposition between realist productions—critical of Brazil's social, cultural, and political realities—and fantastical melodramas, designed primarily to elicit tears.

Beyond this binary, it is important to note that while the fantastical version, also known as the "Mexican" model, deliberately distances itself from social and political commentary and rejects humor, the Brazilian national version—despite

incorporating contemporary social concerns—remains strongly anchored in the serialized, feuilleton-like origins of the genre.

From the late 1960s onward, and following the model introduced by TV Tupi, Globo's soap operas broke with the fantastical style that had dominated earlier produc*tion, proposing instead a realist alternative. The cornerstone of this paradigm was Beto Rockefeller* (Tupi, 1968), which marked the consolidation of the Brazilian soap opera. This new model situated plots in the contemporary urban environment of Brazil's major cities, incorporated outdoor shooting, introduced colloquial language and intelligent humor, imbued characters with ambiguity, and—most importantly—relied on cultural references shared by Brazilians. It resonated with the liberalizing anxieties of a newly urbanized audience, both male and female, who had recently migrated to metropolitan centers in search of education and integration into spaces of urban moderni-zation. This near-obsessive attention to social context was absorbed into the serialized, interactive structure of the feuilleton and drew on melodrama as a *cultural matrix* and communicative device. Soap opera plots are generally propelled by representations of contemporaneity, constantly updated through portrayals of lifestyles, references to current events, and, above all, narratives centered on family and romantic dynamics.

A repertoire of competing meanings is gradually constructed, and these are national repertoires that are current at the time they are broadcast.

Elevated to the status of the flagship product of a vast television industry, the soap opera became one of the most significant arenas for grappling with the complexities of Brazil, spanning from private intimacies to public arenas. This unique capacity to synthesize the public and the private, the political and the domestic, the news and fiction, while constantly renewing images of everyday life, is inscribed in the histories of soap operas. These works combine formal conventions of both documentary and televisual melodrama.

Two structural dimensions most clearly typify the soap opera: the promo-tion of consumption patterns and the production of verisimilitude through storytelling styles that range from *realism* to *naturalism*.

This defining feature of the telenovela becomes more pronounced as it engages with the Other. The subject emerges through the relationship with the Other, distinguishing itself, attributing meaning to its existence, while simul-taneously recognizing or failing to recognize the Other. The dual aspect of this process of identification or identity is discussed by Homi Bhabha (2013), who argues that it also entails a relation of proximity, a desire for the place occupied by that Other. Differentiation, therefore, requires the creation of something

of one's own—individual characteristics—but this only occurs insofar as the relationship with the Other is established.

Through various factors and configurations, identities are gradually shaped. As García Canclini (1995, p. 163) asserts, "identity is a construction that is narrated." For him, starting from "foundational events" such as independence, territorial defense, and struggles against foreigners, groups that coalesce—whether through shared territory, habits, or tastes—order their differences and begin to coexist based on modes of legitimation that establish them as distinct from others. Similarly, in turn, it produces verisimilitude: for a statement to achieve validation, its narration must connect to recognizable points for its audience, sharing common codes that make mutual understanding possible. This helps explain the prominent presence of diversity in contemporary soap operas, as if confirming their communicative function in addressing the *Deep Brazil*—whether in the countryside, in cities, on the peripheries, or in the favelas.

DEEP BRAZIL IN RECENT TELEVISION FICTION

The metaphor of *Deep Brazil*—a powerful interpretive key to the nation—reappeared in 2023 across various formats (telenovelas, series), in original productions, remakes, and reruns. Brazilian television fiction, particularly the soap opera, continues to consolidate itself as both a *national narrative* (Lopes, 2003) and *a communicative resource* (Lopes, 2009). Even in today's era of streaming, it remains a central arena for debating questions of identity and the conflicting interpretations of Brazil as a social formation. Television images are not confined to the present; they embody a complex set of temporal relations, as if the Brazilian nation must be thought of as an encounter of different epochs, spaces, images, and voices.

In travelers' and explorers' accounts, in chronicles, diaries, and various narrative texts, the categories of backlands and coast were forged simultaneously as opposites and complements: opposites because one expressed the inverse of the other, and complements because, like in a hall of mirrors, one was constructed in relation to the other. These categories became central to Brazilian social thought, in analyses that oscillate between the familiar and the unfamiliar within the same country, reiterating the persistent and disquieting observation that "Brazil does not recognize Brazil." Transformed into essential categories for representing the nation, what interests us here is that they were appropriated by the media—through books, cinema, and television—highlighting contrasts between rural and urban settings. However, our aim is to advance the appropriation of the metaphor of *Deep Brazil* toward a more contemporary conception,

Done that emphasizes the hybridization of backlands and coast rather than their opposition or complementarity.

Working in cocoa plantations or with livestock, in heavy industry, performing the basic labor of "ordinary people"—their trajectories encapsulate the reality of a large segment of the Brazilian population, living under constantly unstable labor relations, with no clearly defined boundaries between rural and urban spaces, migrating from one place to another in search of employment. Their lives could serve as a synthesis for analyzing a Brazil that does not respect rigid boundaries between settings and ways of life, which interpenetrate and shape this uniquely Brazilian social formation. *Deep Brazil*, therefore, functions as an analogy for the Brazil where the majority of the population resides, whether in the backlands or on the coast. Throughout history, there has been a silencing of peoples and cultures dominated by capitalism, colonialism, Indigenous genocide, slavery, and corruption. It is not difficult to perceive that, within a hybridized *Deep Brazil*, both the narratives of *Saramandaia, Pantanal,* and *O Rei do Gado and those of Vale Tudo*, *Avenida Brasil*, and *Vai na Fé* can coexist. They are all stories of the imagined nation, encompassing intense similarities and differences, inequalities, and oppressions.

The year 2023 was marked by productions that narrated the hybridized *Deep Brazil* on television and streaming platforms in Brazil, and which, due to narrative and technical quality, garnered both critical acclaim and audience recognition. For our empirical analysis, we consider the series *Cangaço Novo* (Prime Video/O2) and the telenovelas *Terra e Paixão* and *Vai na Fé* (both TV Globo, 2023).

Deep Brazil in Cangaço Novo

Written by Mariana Bardan and Eduardo Melo in a coproduction between Prime Video and the independent production company O2 Filmes, the series premiered in August 2023 and consisted of eight episodes. Its narrative and visual style characterized the series as "modern rural," with inspiration drawn from the *nordestern*[6] genre. Upon its release, it entered the top 10 most-watched series on the platform across 49 countries[7]. The series tells the story of Ubaldo, a banker in São Paulo who, after his father's death, discovers he has an inheritance in a fictional town in the backlands of Ceará. With no memory of his childhood, he reconnects with his sisters and joins one of them, who leads a bank-robbing gang. The drama is driven by intense violence, mysticism, and criticism of local authorities, who are corrupt and exploitative.

We highlight the script, with its complex treatment of characters facing moral and psychological dilemmas; the casting of a predominantly northeastern

[6] The norderstern genre (a term combining Brazil's Northeast with the American Western) gained prominence beginning in 1953 with the film *O Cangaceiro*, directed by Lima Barreto, and is currently represented by the award-winning film *Bacurau* (Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, 2019).

[7] Among the countries where it was most widely viewed are Portugal, Canada, Angola, Mozambique, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Paraguay, and the United Arab Emirates.

ensemble; and the investment in production, which enabled infrastructure and logistics for filming in Paraíba, including numerous action sequences[8]. *Deep Brazil* is revealed through a story that portrays a diverse and complex country, paradoxically both intolerant and compassionate in the face of its challenges.

Deep Brazil in *Terra e Paixão*

Terra e Paixão, a telenovela authored by Walcyr Carrasco and Thelma Guedes, was produced and aired by TV Globo in 221 episodes. It represents another example of "modern rural." Set in the fictional small town of Nova Primavera in Mato Grosso do Sul, the telenovela follows the story of the teacher Aline, whose husband was murdered at the behest of a powerful local landowner. Interested in the widow's land, the agribusinessman pursues her, using his influence to sabotage her and subvert the law, with the complicity of the local police. Ultimately, after long investigations, traumatic family issues, and media scandals, the ruralist loses his power over the town.

As an audiovisual product that engages with the culture of its time, the telenovela updates and introduces new behaviors into the daily lives of its audience, dictates trends, and carries significant educational potential, which, according to Baccega (2011), both reflects and refracts society[9]. By constructing an imagined nation in which viewers recognize themselves through its *communicative function* (Lopes, 2009), the "rural" theme points to a slaveholding past, shaped by the construction of latifundia and the appropriation of public goods for private interests. Central to this narrative are disputes over land and the pursuit of justice in the face of institutional indifference (Hollanda, 1995).

With the naturalistic style characteristic of contemporary telenovelas, *Terra e Paixão* presented a diverse set of stories addressing issues of identity and social rights, including: a Black protagonist and her family fighting for land rights; minority characters, such as the same-sex couple Kelvin and Ramiro, whose storyline generated media attention by challenging "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013); and the trans actress Luana Shine, whose narrative engaged with citizenship issues, advocating for respect for sexuality and gaining access to adult evening education programs. The series also introduced a previously unseen Indigenous storyline, featuring Indigenous actors expressing their culture through song and dance, despite marginalization in the city, yet avoiding mere tokenism or common stereotypes.

Concurrently, and without contradiction, the narrative retained strong melodramatic markers, including the traditional and patriarchal morality of characters, the opposition between good and evil, punitive conclusions for villains, and an emphasis on family relationships—all hallmark elements of the

[8] Filming took place in the region of Campina Grande, in the interior of Paraíba, commonly referred to as the "*Roliúde Brasileira* (Brazilian Hollywood)".

[9] Maria Aparecida Baccega, *VEJA*, Interview, January 24, 1996.

D melodrama genre (Martins & Santos, 2009). *Terra e Paixão* thus presented a version of *Deep Brazil* through its contradictions, offering a televisual experience highlighting themes that resonate in news media and are lived in everyday life across the country.

Deep Brazil in *Vai na Fé*

To address the hypothesis of a hybridized *Deep Brazil*, we selected a work that allows us to present an overview not only of the present but also of the past and future prospects of Brazilian television fiction.

The "urban" telenovela *Vai na Fé*, created and written by Rosane Svartman with artistic direction by Paulo Silvestrin, aired in 179 episodes from January 16 to August 11, 2023, at 7 p.m. It can be considered emblematic—in terms of form, content, and modes of distribution and reception—of current trends in Brazilian television fiction, as this analysis will demonstrate.

The series was led by Sheron Menezzes, a television actress with twenty years of experience, portraying Sol, a Black, evangelical woman focused on her family, who sustains herself by selling prepared meals. Widowed, she begins working as a backing vocalist for singer Lui Lorenzo (José Loreto), which triggers a series of conflicts and reunions with characters from her past, including Benjamin (Samuel de Assis), her great love from youth, now married to Lumiar (Carolina Dieckmann), and Theo (Emílio Dantas), responsible for separating the couple when young.

This core quintet was accompanied by numerous other characters, composing a complex narrative that engaged with socially relevant themes such as gender and sexual violence, racism, social and racial discrimination, smuggling, religiosity, bullying, homophobia, terminal illness, alopecia, same-sex relationships, and ageism—a topic that sparked significant attention through the character Wilma Campos (Renata Sorrah).

Vai na Fé demonstrates strong representativeness of Brazilian social types in each episode, presenting "people like us," a reflection of how the narrative constructs character identity. To achieve this, the writers incorporated social issues intertwined with melodramatic elements such as moral duality, musical elements, and the valorization of family—the institution through which relationships between members establish with the audience a set of pedagogical and identity-based values, as noted by Jesús Martín-Barbero (2001): "The enormous and intricate entanglement of family relations, which serves as infrastructure for the melodrama's plot, is the way in which popular culture is used to understand and express the opacity and complexity underlying new social relations" (p. 166).

Vai na Fé foregrounds LGBTQIA+ representation throughout its narrative. Beyond this, its significant representativeness is also evident in its predominantly Black cast, featuring actors in prominent roles across diverse social strata. Historically, Brazil exploited enslaved, Indigenous, and Black labor, and although 55.5% of the population self-identifies as Black[10], it was only in 2023 that the country witnessed its largest cultural production featuring a majority Black cast. Within the fiction-reality dialectic that characterizes Brazilian telenovelas, *Vai na Fé* reflects and incorporates the struggles and achievements of contemporary Black populations against historical racism.

A metalinguistic operation of considerable impact occurs in the penultimate episode, in which the character Wilma Campos encounters the renowned authors Glória Perez, Walcyr Carrasco, and João Emanuel Carneiro. Addressing the authors directly, she quotes lines from iconic characters they created and proposes a toast to telenovelas. Through this metalinguistic exercise, *Vai na Fé* acknowledges its heritage within Brazilian teledramaturgy and, simultaneously, gestures toward the future, uniting in a single scene authors who have solidified the telenovela as a cultural and popular product. For instance, while Walcyr Carrasco and Glória Perez authored the year's highest-rated primetime telenovelas on broadcast television, João Emanuel Carneiro created the first telenovela entirely produced for the streaming platform Globoplay—*Todas as Flores*—achieving both critical acclaim and popular success[11].

SOME CONCLUSIONS

We positioned the *telenovela as a narrative of the nation* in transmedia dialogue with literature and cinema, introducing the notion of *Deep Brazil*, not confined to specific geographic or symbolic spaces such as the backlands or the coast.

This *Deep Brazil* is manifested in the religiosity expressed through the conversion of the protagonist Benjamin to Candomblé, as well as in the evangelical characters featured in *Vai na Fé*, a motif also present in the series *Cangaço Novo*. This shared religious marker signals the hybridization of the coast and the backlands, central to the contemporary conception of *Deep Brazil*. Furthermore, the regional marker appears both in urban and peripheral settings, as in *Vai na Fé*, and in narratives set in the country's interior, exemplified by telenovelas such as *O Rei do Gado* (Globo, 1996, reprised in 2023), *Terra e Paixão*, and *Travessia*, part of which unfolds in the northeastern interior of Maranhão.

In 2023, this *Deep Brazil* was further highlighted by the unprecedented fact that all TV Globo productions featured Black characters in leading roles. By

[10] 2022 IBGE Census (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). According to the survey, Black identification is based on self-declaration, with the total Black population comprising those who identify as either "black" or "*pardo*".

[11] It should be noted that *Verdades Secretas 2* (Globo, 2021), the first telenovela produced by Globoplay, serves as a continuation of the eponymous telenovela by Walcyr Carrasco, originally broadcast on TV Globo in 2015.

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foregrounding Black protagonists and combining this with traditional formal and thematic melodramatic elements, addressing contemporary issues, and leveraging the spread of content across multiple screens (social media, YouTube channels), these productions contributed to enhancing representativity, reinforcing recognition, and cultivating a sense of belonging, which are normally central to Brazilian telenovelas.

By telling narratives that increasingly center the Brazilian populace, grounded in the naturalistic melodrama genre, we suggest that *Deep Brazil* may serve as a new and valuable conceptual framework for advancing a theory of the telenovela in Brazil.

Finally, the metalinguistic strategies employed in *Vai na Fé* to honor the history of the Brazilian telenovela format and to express its contemporary moment not only aided in addressing the questions posed by the *Anuário Obitel 2024* but also indicated potential pathways for the future of fictional television narratives in Brazil. M

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Will journalism die?

O jornalismo vai morrer?

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the widespread idea that journalism is in crisis or that its way of doing things has been profoundly altered by the emergence of technologies capable of modifying its dynamics and affecting its existence. It proposes that there are seven activities that continue to make journalism an essential professional activity in every type of society.

Keywords: Journalism, technology, crisis.

RESUMO

Este artigo examina a ideia disseminada de que o jornalismo estaria em crise ou que teria sido profundamente alterado em sua forma de fazer pelo surgimento de tecnologias capazes de modificar a sua dinâmica e afetar sua existência. Propõe-se que há sete atividades que continuam a fazer do jornalismo uma atividade profissional essencial a todo tipo de sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo, tecnologia, crise.

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INDICATIONS OF THE CRISIS

EVERYDAY LIFE TENDS to provide clues about what holds social relevance, much like symptoms that compel one to seek the causes of a disease. Accordingly, it is wise to take what circulates widely in public discourse as a cue for reflection, research, and theorization. A notion thrives in the social atmosphere: the crisis of journalism. More than that, journalism is said to be living its final days. In other words, it is agonizing before everyone's eyes, in real time, live. What could have triggered this crisis? The emergence of technologies that allow individuals to perform tasks once reserved for journalists, to have their communication platforms, and to act as broadcasters.

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Journalism appears to be affected in its various dimensions: investigation, packaging or editing, dissemination, medium, and mode of presentation. A maxim emerges as a minimalist headline: when everyone can be a journalist, journalism no longer exists.

What are the symptoms of this disintegration? Downsizing of newsrooms; decline in print newspaper circulation; competition with social networks in gathering and disseminating information; loss of centrality as a news broadcaster; young people's disinterest in entering the profession; radical change in the way media products are packaged and presented; the rise of entertainment as a symbolic commodity of general interest; shrinking television and newscast audiences; devaluation of journalism as a life project, a desired career, and a professional ambition; the rise of other forms of expression as producers of meaning and social prestige—especially influencers on social networks and media platforms; the decline of journalism's foundational "mythologies" (truth, objectivity, impartiality, and commitment to information); and the definitive unmasking of journalism's ideological nature, with the consequent and severe loss of the credibility it once held[1].

The journalism crisis presents itself as a *fait accompli*[2]. Intellectuals have taken up the task of defending the importance of journalism. Rogério Christofoletti (2019), in *A crise do jornalismo tem solução?*, proposes resilience and resistance as the way forward: "flexibility and firmness may seem like contradictory attributes, but they are in fact complementary. The former demands adaptive capacity, and the latter signals tenacity, persistence, and conviction" (Christofoletti, 2019, p. 79). To counter the characteristics of family ownership concentration, predominant commercial mentality, and resistance to new management models within the traditional Brazilian media ecosystem, Christofoletti emphasizes journalistic initiatives detached from such mentalities and guided by ethical, social, and public-minded perspectives. The challenge? Sustainability and survival: "it is essential to help financially support this media through the backing of isolated initiatives, fundraising and donation campaigns, differentiated subscription models, and audience engagement" (Christofoletti, 2019, p. 82).

It is often said that, in the face of fake news, good journalism has never been more crucial. However, the crisis cannot be wished away[3]. The question remains: what is the nature of this global crisis?

MEANS, MODE, AND ACTIVITY

It is worth examining the cited symptoms to determine to what extent they point to an organic cause or are merely the expression of a distorted perception

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[1] As early as 2009, in an article published in *Observatório da Imprensa*, Luís Peazê, commenting on a piece by journalist Alberto Dines, posed the following question: "has journalism died"? And the answer given by Peazê at that time was: "the debate will not cease, journalism will not die, we will not allow it, but there is one point on which we will all agree: even with the traditional loosened tie or the sweaty war vest, the flesh-and-blood being, the journalist, is infinitely fragile in the face of the steamroller that constitutes the technological industry of the internet, telecommunications, lobbying, and stock markets" (Peazê, 2009)

[2] In 19 years, from 2000 to 2019, *The New York Times* saw its revenue decrease by 48%, from USD 3.5 billion to USD 1.8 billion, while Google profited USD 182.5 billion in 2020 (Costa et al., 2021, p. 9), and the *Atlas da Notícia*, by Projor, recorded the shutdown of 535 print media outlets from 2000 to 2024, 79 of them in the past four years (Projor, n.d.).

[3] A French website, addressing the journalism crisis, went straight to the point (King, 2024).

of reality, like a psychosomatic effect of something else. Technology has eliminated functions within journalism, making the profession more demanding for journalists, who are now expected to perform tasks that were once distributed among several individuals: driver, reporter, photographer, subeditor, editor, copy editor, proofreader, etc. In some cases, one person may handle all these roles, even though, in large media outlets, parts of this chain remain. Certainly, there is no longer a need for a proofreader and a copy editor. This reduction in roles—what companies call operational streamlining—does not signify the end of journalism. It may, however, make the profession less appealing to certain professionals. A well-known example is the Caldas Júnior company in Rio Grande do Sul, which at one point in its history published the newspapers *Correio do Povo, Folha da Tarde* e *Folha da Manhã*. It was common for three cars with drivers, photographers, and reporters to be dispatched simultaneously to cover the same story. The new reality overburdens journalists, reduces the number of positions in a media outlet, and, with low salaries, makes the profession more precarious. However, it does not eliminate the activity itself[4].

Will print journalism disappear? Possibly. There is no longer any justification for the existence of print newspapers, which increase costs to deliver today's news only tomorrow. The disappearance of print means cost reduction in machines, paper, transport, and other resources. Print only survives due to generational habits. A generation raised on paper clings to this medium. The end of print eliminates an entire industrial sector of journalism. Functions disappear. But the medium is not journalism. The printed newspaper will end, not journalism itself. There is frequent confusion between the mode of packaging and the means of information.

Philip Meyer (2007) raised this issue two decades ago. Amid the surge of instantaneity and the technological tools available to the media industry in the early 2000s, the journalist and professor at the University of North Carolina—a key figure in precision journalism—published, in 2004, *The vanishing newspaper: Saving journalism in the information age*. His purpose: "journalism is in trouble. This book is an attempt to do something about it" (Meyer, 2007, p. 11). His proposals: to assess what kind of business model newspapers should adopt to become financially self-sustaining, thereby ensuring editorial independence; to strengthen ties with their communities, where social and economic relationships are established. Community is inseparable from the idea of the market. High-quality and ethically sound reporting fosters trust in the media outlet. It is also necessary to understand how consumers/readers assimilate news and to adopt a dot-com, hybrid mindset (Meyer, 2007, p. 17).

[4] M. Silva, in O*bservatório da Imprensa,* in August 2024, speaks of the "journalism crisis": "the journalism crisis is global and multifaceted, encompassing several simultaneous and interwoven aspects: the bankruptcy of media companies, a decrease in job openings, low salaries, limited infrastructure in newsrooms, a decline in the production of in-depth investigative reports, a scarcity of journalistic scoops, and a shrinking readership—now largely accustomed to the free and abundant availability of ephemeral information and opinions on the internet."

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Is the trend to consume information outside fixed schedules? Is the audience that sits down to watch *Jornal Nacional* at 8:30 p.m. continuously shrinking? The available data indicate that it is. Even if access to content is customized, the supply must still exist. The news must be produced, packaged, and distributed so that consumers can access it whenever they wish. Is it a trend that young people get their news only through social media? In general, social media do not produce what they deliver. They are a truck distributing what journalism produces. Those who produce content enter the journalistic dynamic.

If everyone can learn to do it, does that mean everyone is a journalist? Doing something occasionally is one thing; engaging in a production routine is something else entirely—covering the National Congress, the Supreme Federal Court, training sessions of Internacional and Grêmio, the governor's travels, the City Council, etc., on a daily basis. A production routine belongs to the logic of professional activity and, to exist, requires funding. A professional activity is a means to generate a product, a way of life, and an instrument to meet social demand.

Do young people no longer dream of becoming newsroom journalists?[5] Each era frames youth's dreams with different promises. Many desire fame and wealth and find more appealing prospects in other activities, even within the communication field. None of this affects the core of professional journalism, which may increasingly become a way of life for the few. Journalism involves investigating, packaging, and delivering a media product continuously. As in the quote attributed to George Orwell, journalism remains the act of publishing what someone wishes to keep hidden—what needs to be investigated, packaged, and delivered[6]. Or, drawing from the Brazilian journalist Barbosa Lima Sobrinho (1923), in O problema da imprensa, published in 1923, "the newspaper serves as a shield and protection for individual freedoms and as a means of control and boundary for those in power" (p. 160). Someone may engage in journalism due to existential circumstances. The professional journalistic activity entails investigating what is not yet known. Georges Simenon used to say that anyone can write a novel about their own life. But to be a novelist is to write about the lives of others—the fictional lives of those who never existed[7].

Journalism is not defined by its platform, by the number of roles involved, by the fascination it may evoke in youth, or by its format. In the past, television newscasts were formal and heavy. Today, they are lighter and more informal. Some outlets drift toward pure entertainment, based on the notion that everything must be light, fun, short, and upright. However, it is not possible to present rising unemployment with lightness, amusement, and cheerfulness. A media outlet has always been a kind of supermarket with various shelves: news,

[5] Research conducted by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) (Governo Federal, 2023).

[6] The quote, slightly different, is attributed to William Randolph Hearst. See: https://www.boatos.org/entretenimento/frase-atribuida-erradamente-george-orwell-circula-pela-web.html. However, one assertion can be confidently attributed to Orwell (2007): "if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear" (p. 139). This appears in the unpublished preface to the first English edition of *Animal Farm*, from 1945, whose original typescript was found later. The work had been boycotted by some publishers who argued that it alluded to Stalinism, and at the time, the Soviet Union was an important ally of Britain.

[7] Comments collected by Lacassin (n.d.).

opinion, entertainment, analysis, interpretation, etc. Even when a media outlet opts exclusively for entertainment—as is increasingly the case—this does not eliminate the need for journalism: investigation, packaging, and delivery.

Will there no longer be an audience for journalism? Will it no longer be profitable to operate a news outlet? These are real problems. However, nothing suggests the possibility of a democratic society without journalism. A portion of the political left, in its criticism of media manipulation, popularized the idea that truth does not exist and that objectivity, impartiality, neutrality, and fairness are myths—an idea that contributes to the loss of journalism's credibility and transforms every journalist into an activist. Reality shows the media disguising its biases, but it also offers countless examples of professionalism. There is no cognitive limitation proven to prevent someone from recognizing evidence that contradicts their worldview. Are economic and political interests stronger? Not always. Accepting evidence may actually be the stronger economic interest—the one capable of generating profitability, sustainability, and viability for a media outlet.

SEVEN WAYS OF EXISTING PROFESSIONALLY

Media outlets, platforms, technologies, and dissemination methods come and go; journalism remains. Journalism is about investigating and telling the story, regardless of the platform. Print newspapers, radio, television, and the internet do not eliminate the need for investigation. Artificial intelligence now emerges as the new threat. It can write texts in place of people. But can it investigate in the real world, beyond databases and the virtual scope of its existence? Artificial intelligence is not volitional. It does not wake up with the desire to investigate the inner workings of the Presidency of the Republic. It can serve as an investigative tool.

There are many classifications of professional journalistic practices. Below are categories that constitute the core of journalistic production routines: investigative journalism; opinion journalism; editorial journalism (packaging); coverage journalism; presentation journalism; entertainment journalism; and visual journalism. Anyone who practices one of these activities daily, as a way of life or form of expression, is doing journalism. One may do this without pay, driven by a cause or an ideal. However, it is unlikely they will go far without financial resources that allow for full professional dedication. Professional journalism is the routine and paid practice of one of the listed possibilities. Each deserves to be examined.

The foundation of journalism remains investigation. Joseph Pulitzer (2009), in *A Escola de jornalismo na Universidade de Columbia*, a text written in 1904 to justify the existence of the course at that American university, was categorical: "is there anything more useful to the journalist than to know these sure sources of knowledge, to be able to reach them in an instant, and to gather data with absolute confidence and accuracy?" (p. 41). This is the foundation of the reporter's work. Following a story from start to finish in search of elements that unravel a clue and make it possible to package and deliver a report of public interest is a professional journalistic practice that requires financial resources, time, investigative skills, and sources. The professional who dedicates his life to this activity, jumping from one story to another, is still the journalist. It's hard to imagine an entertainment professional dedicated to following up for months on a possible case of corruption in the federal or state governments, or in a town hall.

Opinion journalism, as an exercise in interpretation based on facts, only begins when the fact is made available—when what its protagonist (government, politician, power) did not provide is revealed, offering more than the official information, because it has been investigated by a reporter. The rule of journalism is the pursuit of coherence. If a columnist criticizes A, from one political camp, for failing to fulfill what was promised in education or any other relevant area, they must criticize B, from the opposite camp, if they fall into the same incoherence. Symmetries should be explored. False symmetries cannot be accepted. The difference between the journalist and the activist starts there. The journalist identifies the symmetries and treats them the same. The activist perceives the symmetries and rationalizes them to justify their field. The journalist contextualizes, complicates, and reveals. The activist simulates contextualization, simplifies, and dissimulates. The journalist seeks the possible truth based on shared parameters. The activist works for their cause. They care about the long-term consequences.

Editing journalism is the structured, routine, and professional activity of packaging journalistic products for delivery to recipients. Technological evolution facilitates and modifies the packaging methods. Layout became editorial design. The material is no longer placed on a page using a diagram and a ruler. Even so, it is necessary for the material to be packaged for delivery, whether as video, audio, or text. One professional can investigate and package it for delivery. Artificial intelligence can package the material provided to it. This new situation does not eliminate the need for the material to be packaged as the final product, and a minimal division of tasks enhances the effectiveness of executing each stage. It is rare to find someone who performs all the demands across different phases of the journalistic product preparation process with the

same quality. After all, as Walter Lippmann (2008), author of the precursor and classic *Public opinion* (1922), would succinctly put it: "each newspaper, upon reaching the reader, is the result of a whole series of selections of items to be printed, their position and space to occupy, and the emphasis to be placed on them. There are no objective standards here. There are conventions" (p. 176).

Coverage journalism could be the label for the entire professional activity that involves following an event or occurrence through all its stages—whether a conference, a music festival, a political convention, an election count, or a war. It is impossible to imagine that amateurs could carry out complex coverage simply for the pleasure of gathering the data, packaging it, and sending it. If someone does this for one event, they will not do so for two or many, unless they are doing independent journalism. A generalist journalistic outlet assigns professionals to cover different events or occurrences simultaneously. This simultaneous multiplicity, practicable on a larger or smaller scale depending on the available economic resources, characterizes journalism as a professional activity beyond specific interests.

Presentation journalism. It is possible that the radical change in the way journalistic products are presented, especially in radio, television, and the internet, is confused with a crisis in journalism. Short and light content predominates. Informality dismantles formality. There was a time when showing goals during the break of a game required a presenter with a tie, a pompous voice, and a ceremonial seriousness. Presentations are becoming increasingly colloquial. The presenter participates in editing and even in fact-checking. A lighter presentation does not eliminate the need for investigation, for organizing the edition, for prioritizing issues, and for professionals who dedicate themselves daily to this work, the result of which makes life easier for a recipient who does not want to prepare the meal themselves. A newspaper functions like a restaurant offering a menu to the customer. The logic of supply is based on knowledge of demand.

Entertainment journalism. Here, it might be necessary to talk about entertainment in journalism. For example, in sports journalism, where, since forever, promotion and coverage of the event have been intertwined. In the supermarket that is a media outlet, entertainment grows. Jean Baudrillard (1985), in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (1978), already warned that by offering meaning to the public, "what they want is spectacle" (p. 14). For him, the masses neutralize everything through indifference and equivalence, equating a football game with a war. Eugênio Bucci (2025) directly links entertainment to the existential impasse through which journalism is going: "the current crisis in journalism can only be understood within the broader framework of the epistemic crisis—and this, in turn, is inseparable from the predatory expansion of entertainment,

which has resulted in the agonizing crisis of democratic politics" (p. C7). The factual truth and rational dialogue standards, foundations of journalism aligned with democratic regimes, give way to performative representations and verbal compulsions that captivate audiences. "The marketer has stolen the ideologue's job" (Bucci, 2025, p. C7). However, there are still those who wish to consume information, opinion, and analysis. Will this consumer disappear? There is no evidence to suggest so.

Has the fragile balance between entertainment and journalism been broken due to a lack of demand for the latter? The definitive triumph of entertainment over journalism? Apparently. In practice, it is a rearrangement of parts in the market, which may affect the business of some or favor the investments of others, without, however, eliminating the basic unit of journalism: investigation. One confuses tool with format, medium with activity, and vehicle with purpose. A podcast is still a radio program. The tool is a studio in itself. It is used to produce old radio formats with freedom of style: interviews, debates. Is there something new on the air? Of course. Does this novelty eliminate the need for reporters? Nothing suggests it. Except for a certain technological awe and the old obsession of each generation with new names for old activities. Machado de Assis (1957), in a chronicle from March 25, 1894, ironized:

> Who ignores the new life brought to childhood education by the change from the old "Boys School" sign to the new one "Primary Instruction Externship"? I agree that the scientific aspect of the second form contributes to the result; before it, however, there is the mysterious effect of the simple change. The new name revitalizes the old. (p. 69)

It is possible to think of and propose a seventh category: image journalism. A branch of journalism that demands a professional capable of capturing images for reports or images that themselves constitute reports as revealing narratives. Images are present everywhere, in all environments and bodies, sometimes as simulators of bodies and simulacra of themselves. Iconophagic times: "iconophagy means: bodies devouring images. We live in an era of rampant proliferation and, consequently, great consumption of images" (Guimarães & Serva, 2022, p. 124). Today, what contemplates us are images, seated on their sofas—the screens of any devices—and present in all imaginable and unimaginable places. The image reporter seeks the image someone would like to hide or uncover all that has been intentionally concealed by the image itself.

TOWARD THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

Is journalism in crisis? Or is it undergoing a transformation? There was a time, in the early 1970s, when it was the world that was in crisis, and the press—elated by its central role in the resignation of U.S. President Richard Nixon in 1974 (D. Silva, n.d.)—focused mainly on how the situation impacted the cost of newsprint. The United States would be forced to begin its withdrawal from Vietnam in late 1972, culminating in the melancholic evacuation of American citizens via the rooftop of the U.S. embassy in Saigon, capital of South Vietnam, on April 30, 1975. In retaliation for American and European support for Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries reduced output, drove up the cost of the West's primary energy source, and imposed embargoes. This marked the end of the so-called "economic miracle" of Brazil's military dictatorship. Alberto Dines (1977), in *O papel do jornal: Tendências da comunicação e do jornalismo no mundo em crise*, captured the spirit of that moment succinctly: "newsprint, now a bit scarcer, cannot alter the role of the newspaper, now far more important" (p. 143).

By the mid-1970s, global pressures would force journalism to evolve. In 1976, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) established the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by Irish statesman and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Sean MacBride, who was also executive president of Amnesty International. The goal was to produce a comprehensive report on the state of global communication, characterized by media concentration both nationally—in the form of monopolistic news conglomerates—and internationally, through dominant news agencies and satellite networks controlling the production and distribution of journalistic content.

This was not a new concern. The topic had emerged as early as 1910 during the First Congress of the German Sociological Association in Frankfurt, where, at Max Weber's suggestion (2006, p. 34–44), the role of the press took center stage in academic debate and led to the establishment of a research agenda for the Sociology of the Press. Newspaper consortia, media trusts, and information monopolies—rooted in the 1870 division of European and colonial markets by the cartel of Havas (France), Reuter (UK), and Wolff (Germany) (Mattelart, 1994, p. 28)—all raised the same question: are we promoting choice or shaping public opinion? "The press undoubtedly produces profound shifts in reading habits, thereby provoking powerful changes in how individuals perceive and interpret the external world" (Weber, 2006, p. 43).

The MacBride Report was finalized in 1979 and published the following year under the title *Um mundo e muitas vozes: Comunicação e informação na*

nossa época. It proposed a New World Information and Communication Order. Among its conclusions and recommendations: "journalism must raise its standards of conduct and quality to be recognized everywhere as a true profession," and "to be treated as members of a profession, journalists require a broad general education and specialized professional training" (Unesco, 1983, p. 436).

Fast-forward to the present. The days of the printed newspaper seem numbered. Television journalism is losing ground. Radio, on the other hand, is experiencing a resurgence—no longer dominated by the booming voices of its golden age, but rather embracing a new, lighter tone reminiscent of a "*Bossa Nova*" phase. The job market for journalists has contracted in major newsrooms but expanded elsewhere, particularly in personal internet ventures. The era of the large newsroom may be over. The number of major outlets per city is declining. In contrast, websites, YouTube channels, blogs, podcasts, and other digital platforms are on the rise. Amateurs are entering the journalistic arena—some stay, others vanish quickly. It echoes a time when newspapers would appear and disappear without ever gaining visibility at the newsstand. The struggle for audience and recognition remains unchanged, but now the metrics are immediate and unforgiving. Without clicks or followers, failure quickly overtakes those chasing fame.

In some ways, 21st-century technology has brought us back to a 19th-century model of journalism: a proliferation of small-scale operations, ideologically driven platforms, impassioned voices, and verbal aggression. Sports commentators are now expected to declare their team loyalties to boost engagement. In politics, such declarations can lead to cancellation by the opposing side. Both the left and right assert that objectivity doesn't exist—yet both criticize anyone perceived as biased. The battleground has widened. Unknown individuals, like Cazé, can launch a YouTube channel and compete with Globo's professionals and event coverage.

Being a journalist may no longer hold the same appeal for young people eager to make money and gain fame and influence. Large media corporations are indeed hiring fewer journalists. Many roles will be overtaken by artificial intelligence. None of this, however, eliminates the enduring need for verification, packaging, and distribution. Despite sweeping claims that "no one" watches TV or reads newspapers anymore, these media still command prestige. They help elect politicians and offer a level of global fame that even the biggest social media bubbles cannot provide. Influencers frequently transition from the internet to television. Some may make significant money through social media monetization, but true mainstream fame still originates on TV.

Is it only a matter of time before all of this fades? Possibly. But journalism itself has nothing to do with that. Whether for the few or for the many, it will persist as a professional practice—with routines, norms, and benchmarks—demanding skilled professionals ready to face the challenges of the field. Journalism is not a path to wealth or celebrity. It is a discipline centered on gathering, organizing, packaging, and disseminating information.

The crisis of journalism is one of image, platforms, expectations, recruitment, and the professional market. It does not, however, appear to be a crisis of "nature" or "essence." For now, the bulk of what is consumed daily—namely, what someone would rather keep hidden—is still produced by professionals paid to investigate, verify, shape, and deliver a special, singular, unique product: the journalistic piece. Are journalistic outlets turning into entertainment points of sale? Yes. Companies undergo repositioning. Does the public want journalistic content for free on the internet? There is no such thing as free journalism. Someone always pays the bill.

AN ODE, OR THE SCHOOL OF REPORTING

Reporting is the sap, the stem, the branches, and the canopy of journalism. It is a beacon and a light. Research. Textuality. Knowledge. Intensity, rhythm, space, sequence, and connection. Breadth and depth. The differentiator. The mental arrangement is steeped in the voluptuousness of information and words, the representation of the environment in rhythmic and dense formulations, clear objectives, aligned thinking, and a guiding purpose leading to the domains of clarity, revelation, essence, and unveiling. The hypnotic song of the Phoenix on the journalistic loom. Reporting is the navigation map to weather storms and dock in safe harbors. It is, more often than not, an ideal—because "in a profession like this, if we lose the ability to dream and to be an agent of utopia, it's better to find another line of work" (Kotscho, 1990, p. 93).

Reporting is an adolescent in the history of journalism. It is less than two centuries old. Before that, publicity and its in-depth articles predominated, or, in the words of Honoré de Balzac (2004), in his monograph on the Parisian press, published in 1843, it was the domain of "scribblers who do politics" (p. 31). There existed, to cite just a few publicist categories catalogued by the French writer, the journalist-statesman, the card-carrying publicist, the pamphleteer, the "nothingologist," the monobible writer, and the author of convictions. The second genre, complementary to the first, was the critic: the old-guard aristocratic critic, the young blond critic, the major critic, the feuilletonist, and the class of minor journalists—"about twenty scandal-driven ventures, mockery at

D all costs, printed uproars" (Balzac, 2004, p. 125). Both genres operated under the same axiom: "for the journalist, everything that is probable is true" (Balzac, 2004, p. 164). Reporter? None.

Reporting emerged when the world decided to become aware of itself, and journalism had to adapt to this demand. Language was adapted to suit the rise of industrial society: less pompous and more intelligible. Graphic reformatting became essential to accommodate texts and stories of public interest to a varied readership now eager for all kinds of happenings. Thus, "amid the usual propaganda, real events emerged through reporting" (Lage, 2001, p. 16)—and with them came investigation, editorial agendas, interviews, insight, craft, editing, public interest, and social relevance. In short, reporting: "the reporter is where the reader, listener, or viewer cannot be. They hold a tacit delegation or representation that authorizes them to be the public's ears and eyes, to select and relay what might be of interest" (Lage, 2001, p. 23).

What can be done in the face of a paradox: journalism remains relevant, yet fewer people wish to practice or consume it? If selling journalism is no longer profitable, companies change the product. Could journalism die from a lack of journalists? There was a time when journalism was consumed as entertainment. Learning about a train derailment in India had no bearing on the life of someone in Sant'Ana do Livramento, Brazil, but it entertained. Today, entertainment is consumed as journalism. The narrative that journalism is all narrative, interest, ideology, and spin has convinced the public, which has stopped believing in journalism. If it's entertainment we're after, why not go straight to the source? An *ad hoc* hypothesis arises: what if the crisis of journalism stems from its unbelievable ability to remain essentially the same amid technological revolutions?

Newspapers are in crisis. Journalism education is suffering. What is to be done? Change or perish? Perhaps. And yet journalism perseveres. How so? Simple: replace "journalism" with "reporting" and "journalist" with "reporter," and the issue takes on another dimension. What if, instead of journalism schools and programs, there were schools of reporting and reporter training programs? The reporter is journalism's basic unit. In an extreme scenario, journalism dies, and journalism schools shut down. Everything else is an accessory. After a while, here and there, reporting courses and schools resurface. They announce: reporter training. Specificity within generality, as proposed by the MacBride Report. It gains traction. Eventually, editor, presenter, commentator, image-capturer, and columnist training programs follow—a proliferation of offshoots. Some investigate, others edit; some gather data, others shape it, still others present the packaged material; some opine, comment, interpret the findings, others do satire… so many functions that, after a while, the reporting school seeks a

broader name to reflect its full offering for those interested in practicing these activities professionally—whether they become famous or not, whether to make a living, support a family, and so on.

Someone suggests: the school of journalism. Everything begins again.

This is not a scientific hypothesis. But as Edgar Morin teaches, science is also built on intuition[8]—or at least begins with it.

To paraphrase Millôr Fernandes's famous quote, which needs no formal citation—just as putting a tie on a humorist doesn't change the joke—journalism is investigation; the rest is packaging, presentation, and distribution. **M**

[8] Understanding operates primarily within the realms of the concrete, the analogical, global intuition, and the subjective. Explanation, on the other hand, operates mainly within the realms of the abstract, the logical, the analytical, and the objective: "unlike the antagonistic conception of the relationship between understanding and explanation … explanation and understanding are, and must be, dialogically connected" (Morin, 2015, p. 164–165)

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Dysphoric bodies in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the territorialities constructed by the carioca Ballroom scene

Corpos disfóricos na cidade do Rio de Janeiro nas territorialidades construídas pela cena Ballroom carioca

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ABSTRACT

We sought to analyze the implications of the process of popularization of the carioca Ballroom scene, which began in the second half of the 10s of the 21st century and which has gained more visibility recently in public and hybrid spaces in the city, as being part of a trans movement, which contributes to the construction of a more inclusive and democratic city, even in an adverse context characterized by the expansion of political polarization and misinformation. With the objective of rethinking the relevance of this cultural scene off in the city of Rio de Janeiro, a cartography of sonic-musical controversies was constructed, which involved research in carrying out a bibliographical review and analysis of journalistic material, field observations, interviews and informal conversations, following the tracks of human and non-human actors, as well as tracking their urban tactics and cunning.
Keywords: Communication, culture, gender, city.

RESUMO

Buscou-se analisar as implicações do processo de popularização da cena *Ballroom* carioca, que se iniciou na segunda metade da década de 10 do século XXI e a qual ganha mais visibilidade recentemente em espaços públicos e híbridos da cidade como sendo parte de um movimento trans, que contribui para a construção de uma cidade mais inclusiva e democrática, mesmo em um contexto adverso caracterizado pela ampliação de polarizações políticas e desinformação. Tendo como objetivo repensar a relevância dessa cena cultural *off* na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, construiu-se uma cartografia das controvérsias sônico-musical, a qual implicou na pesquisa na realização

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de revisão bibliográfica e análise de material jornalístico, observações campo, entrevistas e conversas informais, seguindo os rastros dos atores humanos e não humanos, bem como o rastreamento das suas táticas e astúcias urbanas.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação, cultura, gênero, cidade.

INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES the implications of the popularization of the Rio de Janeiro Ballroom scene, which began in the second half of the 2010s and has recently gained visibility in public and hybrid city spaces—such as squares, gardens, museums, universities, and cultural centers—as part of a trans movement that contributes toward building a more inclusive and democratic city, even amid an adverse context marked by growing political polarization and widespread misinformation. Seeking to re-evaluate the relevance of this off-scene cultural movement in Rio de Janeiro, the study constructed a sonic-musical cartography of controversies (Latour, 2012), which entailed performing a literature review and analyzing journalistic materials (including posts promoting houses and collective work online), field observations, interviews, and informal conversations, tracing both human and non-human actors as well as their urban tactics and strategies.

Researchers face numerous challenges, particularly those aligned with Actor-Network Theory (Lemos, 2013), which is founded on the conviction that, to analyze more robustly and in depth the subterranean dynamics of social life—beyond reductive social categories and established worldviews or prejudices (especially those held by researchers studying their subjects)—it is necessary to regularly leave the comfort zones of labs and research offices, thereby generating innovation in knowledge.

Accordingly, the cartographic investigation underpinning the reflections presented here[1] advocates for deceleration—practicing what Latour termed *Slow-ciology*—thus enabling, in some measure, the ability to trace human and non-human actors in their fleeting associations (Latour, 2012)[2]. Latour himself acknowledges the difficulty of implementing the research protocols proposed by Actor-Network Theory, especially because the social bonds studied are typically ephemeral.

> The social, conceived as a solid (as essentialism), loses its capacity to associate. At the same time, conceived as a fluid, it tends to disappear: it flashes briefly in the fleeting moment of associations. Social bonds are only traceable when they are changing, in motion, in aggregations and tensions. … When we inhabit a world

[2] Following the traces of the reaggregations of this scene in recent years, and in the condition of "ant-researchers" aligned with Actor-Network Theory, the intention was to construct a *cartography of controversies* (Latour, 2012; Lemos, 2013), rethinking the articulations and tensions that have continued to intensify in this metropolis in recent years, especially during sound-musical events held in public spaces.

that ceases to be traceable, we risk being seduced by the shortcuts of totalizing categories. (Latour, 2012, p. 230)

Furthermore, beyond the difficulties inherent in "mapping controversies" (Latour, 2012) and tracking the fleeting associations of actors, one must take into account that the low visibility of these research subjects and their initiatives may result from strategic decisions to remain clandestine, alternative, or independent from the local mainstream[3]. Thus, low visibility does not always stem from theoretical-methodological oversight by researchers; it may also result from the "tactics and strategies" (De Certeau, 1998) employed by these actors to continue (re)existing more opaquely (Fernandes et al., 2022; Herschmann & Fernandes, 2023), especially in contexts characterized by political polarization, widespread misinformation, and high levels of violence against minorities. In the investigation of the carioca Ballroom scene, an oscillation was observed between moments when nonbinary bodies sought refuge in opacity (due to everyday social violence) and others when they felt sufficiently safe to emerge into high visibility, engage with diverse audiences, and perform in ways that continue to denaturalize gender (Butler, 2019)[4].

Re-existing in the trouble

In a seminal work written at the height of the COVID 19 pandemic, Preciado identifies a widespread and escalating array of complex processes of dysphoria globally (not merely isolated cases of gender transmogrification). In *Dysphoria Mundi*, the author conceptually analyzes the *devir trans* of the world: in dialogue with Haraway (2020), Mons (2023), and Butler (2019), Preciado highlights the intensifying discomfort and the growth of what he terms "trouble" in contemporary society. These authors argue that we already inhabit the trouble—and must choose to endure it or move forward with it (rather than succumb to a dystopian or bleak perspective). That is, trouble emerges as both a symptom of the crisis of "petrosexoracial capitalism and power" (Preciado, 2023) and as an act of dissidence (Rancière, 1996) against the dying (neo)modern project, which some accelerationist theories have recently revitalized (Danowski & Castro, 2017). For Preciado, *dysphoria mundi* is a kind of rupture between two epistemological regimes: the *petrosexoracial regime* inherited from Western modernity and a nascent alternative regime forged through political critique and disobedience[5].

In a similar vein, Mons asserts that the neomodern world has become denaturalized and is gradually being contaminated by trouble: the most visible indicators are the proliferation of disturbances, differences, and (trans)mutations

[3] The choice for opacity and informality—although it implies significant challenges (the scarcity of permits for various initiatives may lead to recurring tensions with public security agents)—is often understood by the actors as a deliberate choice for freedom (and autonomy), capable of generating sustainability and socioeconomic benefits for those directly and indirectly involved (Cunha, 2006).

[4] Throughout the construction of this cartography of controversies, the researchers involved problematized the ethical necessity of respecting the "right to opacity" of the actors—that is, the need for caution when disclosing certain information about this cultural universe, so as not to put these nonbinary bodies at risk.

[5] Are we living in "Times of Urgencies" (Fernandes et al., 2022) or, rather, as Paul B. Preciado points out, in a deeply deteriorated context: shaped by global extractive capitalism, ecological destruction, sexual and racial violence, forced migration and its criminalization, plastic and radioactive poisoning, and the precarious living conditions that accompany the climate and political crisis (Preciado, 2023).

in everyday life. Many actors seek to escape highly programmed, unequal, and flawed societies, opting instead for "(re)existence" (Fernandes et al., 2022), confronting major challenges or "continuing with the problem" (Haraway, 2020)—challenges that are clearly intensifying today. Both Preciado and Mons identify in the trans becoming processes that articulate living human and nonhuman entities, encompassing species, genders, sexes, and life modalities. In this sense, trouble promotes tensions and transformations that open up possibilities for sensitive reappropriations of the world (Mons, 2023; Preciado, 2023).

Butler (2018, 2019) likewise suggests that, given that the world is clearly threatened with destruction, large portions of the planet's population—and particularly those with precarious bodies—are increasingly organizing broader dissident initiatives that gather marginalized bodies in intersectional alliances, thus forming "levants" (Didi-Huberman, 2017). From another angle, Mons (2023) and Preciado (2023) propose that the *devir trans* can play a transformative and fluid role—capable of contributing to the construction of a possible and heterotopic future world (Harvey, 2004)—than identity based struggles, which tend to fragment vulnerable minorities into numerous groups and agendas, weakening collective resistance to global extractivist capitalism. In other words, these authors suggest that increased recognition and legitimization of trans becoming by actors could foster alliances across different minority groups, forging more resilient dissident fronts.

Thus, in this article, we seek to analyze the growth of the carioca Ballroom "scene" (Straw, 1991), which began in the second half of the 2010s and has recently gained visibility in public and hybrid spaces of the city of Rio (such as squares, gardens, museums, universities, and cultural centers), as part of an emerging *trans movement* that, in a certain way, contributes to the construction of a more inclusive and democratic city—even in a period marked not only by the rise of the far right in Brazil and other parts of the world (Fernandes et al., 2022), but also by the widespread deployment of neoliberal "necropolitics".

> I often say that, in this country with conservative tendencies, I only had the courage to transition because of the strength of the Ballroom Scene. Because we needed to see one another, to be recognized, and to strengthen our practices within institutions. The performances brought visibility to the movement and had not only an educational effect but also altered society's perception in part[6]. (3:57)

As we have pointed out in previous publications (Fernandes et al., 2022; Herschmann & Fernandes, 2023), despite a context marked by a growing atmosphere of fear and hatred, there has also been an intensification of uprisings and

reactions—particularly through cultural activisms or "artivisms." This has become increasingly evident due to the strong presence of resistance movements such as the Rio de Janeiro Trans and Travesti March, Carnalula, Women Against Bolsonaro, Not One Less, and Who Ordered Marielle's Murder, among other progressive initiatives that have mobilized actors in recent years, especially within the queer universe (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2023).

Following the reflections and arguments posed by Butler (2019)—in dialogue with hooks (2009)—we work under the assumption that the Ballroom Scene does not consist of mere processes of reproducing mainstream cultural elements. Indeed, when we observe the cultural practices and performances of trans actors at the events analyzed in this research, we find that they tend to blur the boundaries of establishment culture, just as occurs in other cultural movements and expressions that engage elements of pop culture, usually marked by strong dynamism (though this is often overlooked in overly hasty or schematic evaluations). In other words, these actors also creatively appropriate and strain the codes of more institutionalized spaces, thereby expanding—both directly and indirectly—the perception of *trouble* in the city's everyday life. In this sense, Sá and Paulo (2019) support this interpretation by understanding the production of this scene not merely as imitation or uncritical reproduction of pre-existing performances extracted from media culture, but as the creation of choreographies and cultural assemblages of global elements that engage with local and identity aspects—making it possible to put relevant demands on the public agenda and legitimize values and lifestyles (Herschmann et al., 2016).

In short, we start from the assumption that trans bodies—through their performances—have in recent years significantly contributed to the re-signification of the urban imaginary of Rio de Janeiro, fostering the construction of a more intercultural ambiance. In this regard, what we seek to underscore here are the consequences generated by the presence of these precarious dysphoric bodies in the city of Rio de Janeiro—whose growing performative engagement in public and/or hybrid spaces (whether in central areas such as Praça Mauá and the gardens of Aterro do Flamengo, museums like MAM, MAR, and MUCAB, performance venues, or cultural centers like the Rio de Janeiro City Choreography Center) (Castro, 2023)—have shaped and affected local urban "ambiances" (Thibaud, 2015) and "(multi)territorialities" (Haesbaert, 2010) that are relatively safe (in a highly adverse context)[7], enabling, despite everything, the tentative (re)construction of a more democratic city (Sennett, 2018, p. 10–11):

If we don't have a voice, we're done—we could be dead in the near future. So, we are fighting every day to exist … There was a time when I and several trans colleagues

[7] According to the 2021 report by Transgender Europe, which monitors data globally collected by trans and LGBTQIAPN+ institutions, 70% of all reported murders in the world occurred in South and Central America, with nearly 33% taking place in Brazil (Pinheiro, 2022). The Dossier on *Assassinatos e violências contra travestis e transexuais brasileiras*, released by National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals (Antra), also reported that 131 trans individuals were murdered in Brazil in 2022 (see also Vasconcelos, 2023).

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complained that we couldn't even leave our homes due to so much transphobia.
People didn't understand our issues as nonbinary bodies. Even within the favela,
this still happens. We can't romanticize it because transphobia happens every day
… It's still very hard today, but it must be recognized that some important advances
have occurred, as there is more recognition of our rights[8].

Considering this statement by Lua Brainer, we can make some brief obser-
vations about the history of the trans struggle in the city of Rio. Although Turma
OK (founded in Rio de Janeiro in the 1960s) is the first recorded trans collective in
Brazil's history, it was only in 2004—with the institutionalization of the National
Trans Visibility Day (January 29, 2004)—that dissident groups (movements and
associations) became broadly organized and able to more effectively advocate
for more inclusive public policies[9]. Despite important achievements over the
past decades, the current scenario remains highly adverse (Oliveira, 2018):
according to the National LGBT Union, Brazil is one of the countries with the
highest mortality rates among this segment of the population, with the average
life expectancy of a transgender person still at only 35 years[10]. One could argue
that, after a slow phase of debate in this urban context, there has been a recent
emergence of increased visibility and more vigorous movements defending and
recognizing the rights of trans actors in the country[11]—where the artivism of
the Ballroom Scene plays a significant role, placing "social codes and lifestyles"
on center stage (Herschmann et al., 2016).

Thus, in rethinking the relevance of this underground cultural scene in
the city of Rio de Janeiro, we have constructed a "cartography of controversies"
sensitive to the territorialities (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2023) established by
those directly and indirectly involved with the ballroom cultural universe—rather
than conducting an ethnographic style study (aimed at dense description and
detailed portrayal of this cultural field). This cartography seeks to account not
only for the main controversies surrounding these dysphoric (Preciado, 2018,
2023), precarious, and highly vulnerable bodies (in a context of increasing vio-
lence and conservatism in the country), but also for what Latour called "slow
ciology" (Latour, 2012). Accordingly, we have also sought to follow the traces
with the diligence of ant researchers, tracking the performative "urban tactics
and strategies" (De Certeau, 1998) of these actors, analyzing their capacity to
construct intersectionalities and propose dissidences, thereby generating, in a
certain way, new "partitions of the sensible" (Rancière, 2009) that impact the
imaginary of this locality.

Brief remarks on the trajectory and recent growth of the carioca Ballroom scene

One could view this queer scene as a form of *trouble* that has, in some measure, destabilized dominant notions of gender, sexuality, and even kinship[12]. C As much of the specialized literature on the topic suggests (Bailey, 2013; Berte, 2014; Butler, 2019; Estevam & Geraldes, 2021; Guerra, 2021; Gusmão & Guerra, 2019; hooks, 2009; Pípolos, 2019; Sá & Paulo, 2019; Santos & Scudller, 2020; Teixeira, 2021), this scene began in the 1960s and gained traction in major U.S. cities, following the rise of the counterculture movement and minority struggles throughout the 1970s—when ballroom houses began proliferating in various locations.

> The Ballroom scene provides both knowledge and self-knowledge. Being part of a house that offers care and creates this space for us is essential to ensure the daily survival of people within our community … it is crucial for fostering expressions of trans culture in Brazil[13]. (19:01)

It is also worth highlighting the centrality of the so-called houses in structuring these scenes: indeed, participants in this scene are generally affiliated with houses (that is, alternative family structures), which typically offer support to these precarious trans bodies (although some actors have operated independently). As Bailey (2013) notes, it took several decades for vogue dance and ballroom culture to consolidate in the United States and to expand to various parts of the globe: it was only in the early 1990s that it ceased to be a strictly local underground culture, gaining visibility and reach previously unseen. Several researchers suggest that the turning points for popularization were not only the release of the pop singer Madonna's "Vogue" music video but also the documentary *Paris is Burning* (directed by Jennie Livingston[14]). According to numerous specialists, from that point on, the subversive bodily performances of voguing gained greater media attention, mobilizing a variety of discourses around acceptance as well as social aversion.

In Brazil, the emergence of houses was particularly impactful, with the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Brasília becoming hubs for the country's main scenes. These cities currently host the country's major balls and vogue events. In fact, they are generally more receptive and open to issues affecting these actors, prompting many to migrate from their hometowns, usually in search of greater freedom and acceptance. São Paulo, in particular, is regarded by many long-standing members of the national scene as the primary cultural epicenter and foundational site of this movement in Brazil. Some

associations, the extreme social violence endured—including institutionalized forms—along with major barriers to entering the labor market and/or accessing social and healthcare services, are among the main factors contributing to the community's low life expectancy (see also Pinheiro, 2022).

[11] After a very difficult period during the Temer and Bolsonaro governments, representatives of Antra, responsible for producing a dossier on the living conditions of the country's trans population, have increasingly held regular meetings since 2023 with various authorities (such as the Minister of Racial Equality, Anielle Franco; the National Secretary for LGBTQIA+ Rights, Symmy Larrat; the Minister of Women, Cida Gonçalves; and the Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship, Silvio Almeida). These meetings have marked the resumption of dialogues regarding the need to renew public policies aimed at queer minorities, particularly those designed to address the needs of nonbinary bodies. For more, see: Caixeta (2023).

[12] Some scholars—such as Bailey (2013) and Santos and Scudller (2020)—also emphasize that, although within the context of these competitions (which are central to these cultural scenes) there is an expansion of gender and sexuality categories, normative binarism's and the reproduction of dominant performativity's also operate in these gatherings (which are important references for ball participants). In other words, beyond creativity and innovation, it is often through certain more or less stabilized categories that contestants in these competitions are generally evaluated in their performances (thus, these authors highlight the normative aspects present in such contests between houses)

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accounts attribute the arrival and development of ballroom culture in Brazil not only to choreographer Felix Pimenta but also to nonbinary dancers and São Paulo–based enthusiasts who frequently traveled to New York, bringing back new trends and organizing events[15].

Interviewed actors from the scene suggest that choreographer and dancer Diego Cazul, father of the House of CaZul, played a key role in founding the Rio de Janeiro ballroom scene in the 2010s[16], by organizing its first events.

> Indeed, CaZul was a pioneering house in the Rio de Janeiro scene, and Diego's leadership, along with the efforts of everyone already active in the scene—like Bruxa Cósmica, Lua, Juliette, Luke, and so many others—was immensely important. Without a doubt, they energized the cultural Ballroom scene beyond just vogue dance, also addressing critical social and political issues. Ballroom is a movement that took time to reach its current popularity … A large number of Black and trans people are now engaging with it, which is both powerful and important … It was crucial that we began performing in public squares with accessible and free events because since then, our scene has gained strength and visibility[17]. (13:05)

Currently, the Rio de Janeiro scene[18] includes a growing number of highly active houses, with notable mentions—besides CaZul—going to Império, Candances, Xstravaganza, Mamba Negra, and Cosmos. In 2023, for example, with some support from the municipal government[19], a significant increase in events was observed (more than thirty, some free and others charging partial admission or accepting donations for the houses). These were held in public and hybrid spaces throughout the city and attracted broad public engagement, which is essential for amplifying the visibility of the scene's political agenda. It is worth noting that these gatherings attract not only scene members and non-binary actors from the queer world but also a significant portion of the public who are sympathetic to this cultural movement.

> It is wonderful to witness the growth of the ballroom scene in Rio de Janeiro. We started with very small vogue events, and today we have large-scale parties that draw big crowds … What's great is seeing how many people who previously knew nothing about it now have some access. In a way, more people have started to recognize and embrace the Ballroom cultural movement and vogue more naturally. Of course, Netflix series like *Pose*, *Dancing Queen*, and *RuPaul's* helped us too, but there are still many things that need to be lived and better understood in everyday life[20]. (07:11)

In this sense, even segments of the public previously unfamiliar with the scene have been deeply moved by the performances and presentations of its actors. The following two testimonials were collected from audience members who attended a special night celebrating LGBTQIAPN+ Pride Month during the *Festival Presença* (specifically the *Movimento Transversais* event, held in June 2023 at the venue Circo Voador). They reflect how part of the audience—until recently largely unaware of the political role of these bodies—was sensitized:

> I confess I know almost nothing about Ballroom Culture, but I was fascinated by the performances—both musical and vogue dance—that I saw today at Circo Voador. It's amazing to witness the struggle and solidarity between the houses. It's important to include the trans struggle among the key social demands in building a more democratic society[21]. (04:19)

> I kind of stumbled into this Circo event celebrating cultural and sexual diversity, but I loved watching everyone dance vogue on the runway. The shows by Linn da Quebrada, Johnny Hooker, and Greg Queen were sensational. I also found the audience to be very welcoming and inclusive. Events like this are crucial to raise awareness about the violence faced by non-binary bodies in Brazil[22]. (02:15)

In addition to ballroom events and musical performances (which usually take place in more hybrid or semipublic spaces), the occupation of public spaces (also attended by an audience composed of sympathizers of the scene) has mainly occurred around the routine of voguing dance rehearsals—generally offered by choreographers affiliated with houses—which are usually held weekly in the gardens surrounding the Museum of Modern Art (in Aterro do Flamengo) and at Praça Mauá (near the Museum of Tomorrow), in the city of Rio[23] . In fact, it is worth noting that, in informal conversations with the actors, many of them highlight the fundamental role of dance: mobilizing different audiences and attracting new supporters to this scene.

Sonic-musical territorialities of the Ballroom Scene in Rio de Janeiro

This cartographic investigation observed that the investment in bodily performances, and in the development and legitimation of an urban dance style that would allow greater expressiveness for dissident and diasporic bodies—less masculine and/or departing from a binary referential—seems to have been of great importance for those involved, indicating the centrality of voguing in the development of this cultural scene.

[18] A substantial portion of information regarding the ballroom scene in Rio is organized and made available on the platforms of Ballroomriotv (accessible via: instagram.com/ballroomriotv and youtube.com/@ballroomriotv). There, those interested can find information on events, parties, websites, workshops, and access interviews published by individuals who actively participate in and frequent this cultural sphere.

[19] There is evidence of growing support from municipal public authorities: House Mamba Negra recently secured funding through the FOCA public call issued by the Municipal Department of Culture (Souza, 2023); additionally, Ballroom culture has been incorporated into the city's official programming, with resources allocated to support events not limited to LGBTQIAPN+ Pride Month (see the official government reports: Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro, 2022, 2023).

[20] Interview conducted with Thiago Bassetuda from Casa Império (Ballroom Rio de Janeiro, 2022c).

[21] Interview with José Carlos Castro, conducted by the researchers during the Festival Presença on June 3, 2023. For further information, see also: Pinheiro (2023).

[22] Interview with Carolina Machado, conducted by the researchers during the *Festival Presença* on June 3, 2023.

[23] Naturally, numerous training sessions and instructional classes are also held in enclosed venues, such as the Choreography Center of the City of Rio de Janeiro, the Petite Danse School, among other locations specialized in dance (for more information, check the class announcements at the following link: https://www.instagram.com/ballroomriotv).

The ballroom scene allowed me to become who I am today, because when I began dancing various styles of urban dance, I generally felt uncomfortable. I kept asking myself whether there were other dance styles through which I could express myself better. Many times, people would tell me to dance like a man or express myself with more force, using my body in a more rigid way. The truth is that when I glimpsed the possibility of expressing myself through voguing, I truly found myself. That is, it was how I rediscovered myself, and that's what I want to dance from now on[24]. (09:30)

Therefore, the relevance of the varied performances expressed through runway dance (the catwalk where the competitions take place) is emphasized here: whether in the Old Way, New Way, Vogue Femme, or other categories programmed and usually managed in the competitions held within this scene (Berte, 2014; Santos & Scudler, 2020). Beyond dance movements, voguing performances also include numerous theatrical elements, such as acrobatics and facial expressions with a dramatic profile, in interplay with lighting and choreography integrated with extravagant fashion—frequently curated by the performers themselves, who also use artistic (often more elaborate) makeup. Creativity and originality are highly valued by participants, allowing bodies, in their presentations, to showcase their singularities around certain predefined profiles and styles (whether in the Old Way, New Way, Vogue Femme, Pop, Dip, or Spon categories).

It is also important to highlight that, in these ballrooms, significant spaces of sociability are constructed, where "sonic aspects" (Obici, 2008; Thibaud, 2015)—and not necessarily musical elements, although there is some mechanical music at the events provided by invited DJs—are of extreme relevance. Not only do the emcees (event and ball hosts) play a prominent role, but the audience present at the competitions also does, encouraging the performances of dysphoric bodies with chants and cheers.

Although there is often a script associated with various prize categories (such as "Parisian fashion," "executive style," "sportswear," etc.), the highlight of the so-called balls is the battles between participants, in which performers not only dare to "strike a pose!" but also aim to deliver choreographed steps and sequences, demonstrating greater skill than other contestants, impressing both the audience and the judges, who actively follow the performances. It is worth emphasizing that balls are not merely a series of competitions organized as events, but rather, for those involved, they represent a journey of self-discovery, recognition, and the reclaiming of spaces historically denied to these bodies. The houses, their members, the war cries, and the moments of performance become instruments

[24] Interview conducted with Thiago Bassetuda from Casa Império (Ballroom Rio de Janeiro, 2022c).

of political action, creating a network of support and solidarity that transcends momentary rivalries. Thus, the poses, facial expressions, and acrobatic dance movements are considered fundamental elements of these experiences, which seek to deconstruct what is conventionally regarded as "unacceptable."

Bianchi et al. (2023), when observing the ballroom circuit in Rio, emphasize that every time a house member steps onto the runway, cries erupt from everyone occupying the space in a collective vibration. Echoing what is stated by these authors, we also observed (in the empirical fieldwork conducted) that the sonic experience takes center stage in these moments, revealing the complex articulations and tensions between houses. There are moments when the cries seek to influence the judges to value the performances of certain house members, but there are also situations in which the loudly spoken words become tools of political action, evidencing the existence of a support and solidarity network that transcends the rivalries present in the competitions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With the consolidation and expansion of a ballroom circuit in the city of Rio in recent years, it can be said that a set of powerful "sonic-musical territorialities" (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2014) and "heterotopias" (Harvey, 2004)[25] has emerged, along with processes of resignification of the urban imaginary: by creating a trouble within the regimes of sensibility imposed on normatized bodies in the urban landscape (Rancière, 2009).

As emphasized by Rio de Janeiro State Representative Dani Balbi—who, along with Duda Salabert and Érica Hilton, forms the so-called "trans bench"— the Ballroom scene plays an important role in popularizing the demands of local groups. According to her estimate, there are approximately 15,000 people in the macro-region who self-identify as transgender. She underscores that these individuals have specific demands that must be addressed by public policies. In this regard, Balbi comments on the study she and her advisors have been organizing:

We hope to conduct a qualitatively in-depth mapping of the conditions and main demands of the transgender population in the State of Rio de Janeiro—not just quantitatively—so that we can use it to guide public policies. These policies are essential, particularly those that guarantee access to formal education, since the majority of transgender and transvestite individuals end up dropping out of school. They also feel excluded from the public health system, as the health of transgender

[25] As numerous social science scholars have already pointed out, this is not a matter of relying on the actors' ability to (re)construct a *utopia* or a "traditional spatial utopianism" (Harvey, 2009). Therefore, the notion of *heterotopias* is employed here not exactly in the Foucauldian sense—as a set of practices mostly serving "biopower" (Foucault, 2013)—but rather in the sense proposed by Lefebvre (2004), as powerful and transformative initiatives for social life.

and transvestite individuals is unique and requires specific attention and training from doctors and public servants. (Nitaraha, 2023, p. 1)

We would like to conclude this article by returning to the argument that the presence of the Ballroom Scene—although still insufficiently recognized by the general population and/or supported by the more progressive sectors of this metropolis—has enabled the construction of "sonic-musical territorialities" (Herschmann & Fernandes, 2014) in Rio, which contribute to making the LGBTQIAPN+ agenda and debate in this city more intersectional. In a certain way, this scene has been bringing together different minority groups—thus building a more fluid progressive and libertarian front—and, in doing so, has been making it possible to construct a more inclusive and democratic city, where precarious bodies in alliance (Butler, 2018) playfully challenge the *petrosexoracial* grammar of modern colonial normativities (Preciado, 2023) still in force. ◼

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The secrets of the red pill: machismo and reactionary imagination on the Internet [a]

Os segredos da pílula vermelha: machismo e imaginação reacionária na Internet

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ABSTRACT
The "*red pill*" movement became instantly notorious thanks to a recent episode of public debate on the Internet between the comedian Livia La Gatto and coach Thiago Schultz. Departing from this incident, the goal of this work is to analyze the origins and mythologemes of *red pill* "philosophy", showing that it belongs to a wider neoconservative imaginary, characterized by microfascist notions and practices and by a singular conception of temporality, distended between the remotest past and the most advanced technological future.
Keywords: *Red pill*, neoconservative imaginary, manosphere, digital culture, microfascism.

RESUMO
O movimento "*red pill*" (pílula vermelha) adquiriu celebridade instantânea graças a um episódio recente de discussão pública na internet entre a comediante Livia La Gatto e o coach Thiago Schultz. Partindo desse episódio, o objetivo deste trabalho é analisar a origem e os mitologemas da "filosofia" *red pill*, mostrando seu pertencimento a um imaginário neoconservador mais amplo, caracterizado por noções e práticas microfascistas e por uma singular concepção de temporalidade, distendida entre o passado mais remoto e o futuro mais tecnológico.
Palavras-chave: *Red pill,* imaginário neoconservador, machosfera, cultura digital, microfascismo.

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INTRODUCTION: "LAWSUIT OR BULLET"

ON FEBRUARY 27, 2023, comedian Livia La Gatto publicly exposed the threats she had received from "influencer" and "coach" Thiago Schutz, in response to a satirical video mocking the "red pill philosophy" advocated by the latter. The message from the coach, sent to Livia's private Instagram inbox, read: "You have 24 hours to take down your content about me. After that, it's lawsuit or bullet. You choose[1]." Apparently, Schutz did not appreciate the comedian's characterization, in which she referenced excerpts from his online videos to craft humor laced with sarcasm, such as: "I created MGTOW, 'men going their way… protein,' men going their own way… straight to their mom's house." In fact, the acronym MGTOW is part of a set of propositions and principles tied to red pill ideology and to online communities identifying as the "manosphere"—dedicated to fighting feminism and defending men's rights. In the following days, a search for the term on Google in Portuguese yielded more than 50,000 results. For those familiar with the world of media culture, the red pill evokes the key scene from the Wachowski[2] sisters' film *The Matrix* (1999), in which the protagonist Neo must choose between two options, represented by a blue pill and a red one. While the former serves to preserve his comfortable existence in an illusory world generated by virtual reality, the latter would awaken him from this dream to a harsh reality where human beings are exploited by intelligent machines. But the red pill goes far beyond that. Paraphrasing Morpheus, Neo's mentor and guide in the film, the goal of this paper is precisely to investigate "how far the rabbit hole goes." In other words, the objective is to examine the genesis of the concept and its symbolic articulations with what I define as a vast and complex *postmodern conservative imaginary*[3]. Indeed, the controversy surrounding the dispute between La Gatto and Schutz can only be fully understood within the broader framework of the rise of a neoconservative mindset that takes shape and feeds itself within online territories. In the end, it is suggested that this imaginary is founded upon certain mythical constructions and a singular temporality, stretched between the archaic and the ultra-modern, and expressed through desires and "microfascist" practices (Bratich, 2022) amplified by digital media.

It is important to stress that this essay is a one-off theoretical work and not the result of extensive research based on empirical data collection. Despite the many recent criticisms of the essay format in the field of communication within the Brazilian context[4], the prevalence of theoretical essays in studies from various national contexts (North American, French, German, etc.)[5] demonstrates exhaustively that it is an important and popular format in the most diverse fields of the human sciences, *if not the academic textual form*

[1] See, for instance, the *Folha de S.Paulo* report from February 28, 2023 (Dias, 2023).

[2] The two filmmakers identify as transgender, with Lana (birth name "Laurence") having undergone sex reassignment surgery in 2008. See further details in the section "Sexual Market Value" of this article ("The Watchowskis", 2025).

[3] Here, I follow McManus's (2020) indications, who uses the term to define a singular and contemporary category of conservatism, presenting a set of specific characteristics such as "a disdain for rational standards of interpreting facts and values" and the "appeal to a traditionally powerful identity as a source of truth" (p. 2). Perhaps the most significant trait of this conservatism is the fact that, despite its reactionary nature, postmodern conservatives make use of "hyper-modern media to promote their political ideology" (McManus, 2020, p. 2). This broad category encompasses different strands of current conservatism, from the Alt-right to the neoreactionary movement (NRx). I use the terms "postmodern conservatism" and "neoconservatism" interchangeably.

[4] This critique of the field's "essayism," particularly strong in the early 2000s, becomes concrete in an interview given by Wilson Gomes, who represented the field at Capes between 1999 and 2004, to Sônia Virginia Moreira, in the Intercom journal: "most of the publications by faculty in the field are essays and not articles tied to research data, even if it were speculative research" (Gomes & Moreira, 2000, p. 133). The problem, however, is not the essay form.

par excellence. My aim is simply to situate the ideologemes of the red pill within the broader framework of the neoconservative imaginary, showing how they originate in this context and remain tied to it through a series of important symbolic connections. The working method is, therefore, essentially bibliographic (literature review), as defined by Laville and Dione (2008), who recommend "following information like a detective searches for clues: with imagination and obstinacy" (p. 113). On many occasions, however, imagination ends up weakened by an obstinate desire for scientificity that can easily fall into what Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) denounces as "scientism," that is, "the assertion that science is disinterested and extra-social" and that "truth claims are self-sustaining without reference to broader philosophical assertions" (p. 14). The work of imagination allows for the connection of diverse phenomena, the risk of hypotheses, and the production of philosophical assertions when scientific prudence would simply recommend caution.

It is a fact that there is already today a relative abundance of bibliographic references on the topic[6] but it is the investigator's imagination that may stitch them together in a singular way, offering the possibility of a renewed perspective—albeit almost always a rather modest one. If the number of studies dealing with the manosphere is today staggering (and, for the most part, composed of essays), very few are the works dedicated to mapping the frameworks of red pill philosophy's belonging to the broader phenomenon of neoconservatism. In general, such studies are limited to indicating the evident connection between the two (Vilaça & d'Andrea, 2021; Zuckerberg, 2018)[7] or prefer to focus on exploring internal aspects of the phenomenon, without examining its relation to the broader political-ideological landscape (Ging, 2017). One of the works that most thoroughly delineates such connections is Mike Wendling's book *Alt-Right: From 4chan to the white house* (2018). He even highlights the presence of conspiratorial content about feminism and rape culture in red pill online spaces, but he does not detail how such content engages with far-right obsessions (Wendling, 2018, p. 174), nor does he develop other common mythologemes, such as the idea of "awakening." My contribution here, therefore, lies in outlining the mythical structures that evidence the manosphere's affiliation with postmodern conservatism—for example, the aforementioned conspiracism, the patriarchal worldview, a paradoxical temporality, etc.—ultimately associating it with Bratich's (2022) notion of "microfascism."

We begin with the most immediate and evident point: the dual meaning of the term *red pill*. In the sense in which the *red pill* appears in the controversy described above, it merely functions as the central image that connects the

[5] I will spare the reader from endless and impossible lists, presenting only three examples of relative success: in the German context, there is Cyber.Philosophy by Frank Hartmann (1999); in France, Critique de la communication by Lucien Sfez (1988); in the US, The Interface Effect by Alexander Galloway (2012).

[6] An abundance that prevents any researcher, in fact, from having full command of the bibliography on the topic. To mention just a few examples: a search on the US Amazon using the term "manosphere" yields 76 book titles. On Google Scholar, the same term is associated with more than 5,000 results.

[7] Vilaça and d'Andrea (2021) define the manosphere as "an identity enclave that overlaps and detaches from the politics of the New Right in a cultural war that, today, puts into dispute various agendas such as class, race, sexualities, and gender" (p. 413, italics in the original). Donna Zuckerberg (2018), on the other hand, prefers to use the red pill metaphor as "the broader umbrella" under which different online communities gather, including the "Alt-right" (p. 1).

various sectors and different manifestations of the manosphere (Aikin, 2019, p. 85). It constitutes a kind of call for men to awaken from the dogmatic slumber to which they have been subjected in a society essentially gynecocentric, built upon the desires and projects of women. According to the adherents of this doctrine, often supported by notions borrowed from evolutionary psychology, men would be the victims of a vast biological-social conspiracy, in which they are passive subjects of a millennia-old female empire, hidden under the mantle of today's "politically correct" discourses on machismo and misogyny. In a broader and more structural sense, however, *red pill* is the notion that represents the imperative to awaken from the false reality constructed by modern liberal globalized societies. The entire contemporary political-cultural system would rest on the maintenance of this fantasy, which leads individuals, including, to defend values antithetical to their own well-being. On this symbolic level, we are dealing with a complex and peculiar worldview, which includes its own "organic intellectuals,"[8] manifestos, and philosophical treatises. Curtis Yarvin, an American software engineer who adopted the *nom de plume Mencius Moldbug*, is one of the central figures of this worldview, expressed, for instance, in the many articles published on his blog *Unqualified Reservations.*

> For Moldbug (2018), the cannot yet be consumed by the masses, but is reserved for an enlightened elite (like himself) capable of removing the blinders of illusion imposed by liberal democratic societies. "Our genuine ," he writes, "is the size of a golf ball … and it will burn your throat like live coal. It will leave scars" (Moldbug, cited by Sandifer, 2018, p. 17). In his view, the university, governments, and the media comprise a synergistic structure entirely dedicated to shielding us from the truth of the failure of the democratic model and its disguised authoritarianism. Moldbug defines this structure as "the Cathedral," a term now commonplace in the neoreactionary lexicon—and quite fitting, as the Cathedral would be a kind of state religion devoted to the alienation and mental control of the masses. History, at least since the Enlightenment, is the continuous manifestation of a new foolishness and chaos, which progressively deny any kind of order (a core value for Moldbug) until the complete erosion of the social fabric. As Elizabeth Sandifer (2018) notes, many of Moldbug's arguments about the Cathedral and the suppression of alternative possibilities paradoxically seem to evoke the ghost of Marxism.

> Repeatedly, Moldbug raises questions very similar to those posed by Marx, and his answers begin with many of the same initial observations. But invariably, soon after,

[8] The term "organic intellectual," coined by Antonio Gramsci, is used to identify individuals who act as spokespersons and public representatives of their social class.

he makes ridiculously broad generalizations or fails to consider some obvious alter-
native possibility, and the line of reasoning unravels into characteristic idiocy. (p. 25)

The contradiction between this indirect evocation of Marx and the
defense of an ultra-right-wing political model should not, however, surprise
anyone investigating the postmodern conservative imagination, which, as
will be shown, is full of oxymoronic elaborations. Joshua Tait (2019, p. 189)
insightfully identified some of these contradictions in Moldbug's thought: he
preaches hierarchy but resents cultural elites; defines himself as both futurist
and libertarian, but expresses himself in monarchist and reactionary rhetoric;
claims to pursue the truth, but ironically admits to lying to his readers. These
incongruities, and many others, seem to have taken form in the most famous
and sophisticated intellectual figure of the worldview advocated by Moldbug:
The English philosopher Nick Land.

Previously known for his enigmatic texts aligned with the Marxist tra-
dition and marginal intellectual figures such as Georges Bataille, Land has
more recently come to be seen as one of the most important promoters of the
neoreactionary movement, especially following the publication of his essay
The Dark Enlightenment. Ambiguous and hesitant, the text comments on
Moldbug's ideas and attempts to complement them. His stance seems somewhat
distant when he defines Moldbug as "the Sith Lord of the neoreactionaries"
(Land, 2014, p. 22). On the other hand, he appears to subscribe to at least a
substantial part of Moldbug's theses when he states that the latter understands
the essence of our current dilemma, characterized by the constant expansion
of the State and "the proliferation of spurious positive 'human rights' (claims
on others' resources sustained by coercive bureaucracies) … the Cathedral
has replaced its gospel with everything we've always known" (Land, 2014, p.
23). The conclusion is that, under current liberal democratic governments,
citizens have no real voice.

It would thus be necessary to entirely rethink the figure of the State in
the mold of a corporation, whose goal is to satisfy its consumers[9]. In case of
dissatisfaction, they would, however, have the possibility of withdrawing from
the transaction. That is, they would at least retain a so-called "right of exit." But
fleeing to some wild nature untouched by the claws of corrupt governments,
or performing an "inner exit" by trying to live on the margins of the system,
may not be such a simple option. As Aikin (2018) notes:

if we are given rights of exit instead of voice, the challenge is always to know whe-
ther *rights* of exit translate into *capacities* of exit … [because] … exit rights may

[9] Moldbug even proposed that
Steve Jobs would be the ideal
CEO for this corporate state.
Today, evidently, this would only
be possible through a spiritualist
government intervention.

be too expensive to be exercised by shareholders and consumers, as they may be
unable to bear the cost of moving elsewhere, thereby remaining locked-in. (p. 430,
emphasis in original)

The neoreactionary movement (NRx), of which both Land and Moldbug
are part, constitutes an intellectual system with philosophical pretensions that
ironically references the Enlightenment (hence the idea of *dark enlighten-
ment*) and is based, according to journalist Angela Nagle (2017), on a broad
"suspicion of progress and rejection of the liberal paradigm" (p. 12). As the
journalist observes, it is the most hermetic face of what is now called the
alt-right, the "alternative right," which could not resonate in the cultural
mainstream if it manifested itself only "in the form of long treatises on obscure
blogs" (Nagle, 2017, p. 13). However, the movement provides academically
styled justifications for the alt-right. In Moldbug, for example, one finds a
series of complex tensions and contradictions that at times take the form of
a confused mythical temporality, in which his "political vision is futurist and
libertarian" while simultaneously "expressed in the language of monarchy and
reaction" (Tait, 2019, p. 189). Technophilia, authoritarianism, and dreams
of a monarchical past coexist here in a paradoxical temporality, also present
in the mythologies of the manosphere. This is how history, for instance, is
radically reversed, through the conversion of the patriarchal trajectory of
traditional historiography into a narrative of linear gynocentric domination,
unchanged since the twelfth century (Wright, 2014, p. 100). In other words,
the trajectory of the West would not be marked by male control over female
bodies, but rather the opposite.

RED PILL

In *Red Pill*, a novel by Hari Kunzru (2020), a writer facing the traditio-
nal crisis of creative block receives a literary prize. Committed to producing
a new work as part of a residency program that comes with the prize, the
protagonist remains incapable of writing a single line. Instead, his days at
the Deuter Center for Social and Cultural Research, in Wannsee, Berlin, are
spent watching a violent crime series, the developments of which he follows
religiously, noting in it the strange influence of obscure authors like Joseph
de Maistre. One day, the writer casually meets the show's screenwriter, Anton,
at a party—a figure for whom he develops a relationship of both attraction
and repulsion that eventually leads him to a complete mental breakdown.
Anton takes him, along with a small group of friends, to a popular Turkish

restaurant. "Don't be a sissy … Come in or stay there in the dark." For the writer (who remains unnamed throughout the novel), these words sounded as if Anton were about to "initiate me into a mystery, offer me the red pill" (Kunzru, 2020, p. 171). Successful, ironic, nihilistic, and openly sexist and racist, Anton awakens conflicting feelings in the protagonist, who seems to envy his sense of freedom and curious erudition, while also being horrified by his ideas and bigoted *boutades*.

Anton (2021), for his part, continuously criticizes the hypocrisy of "the believers in progress, the religion of liberals" (Kunzru, 2020, p. 165). His words seem to touch a psychic wound, given that the protagonist suffers from an inability to engage concretely with anything—be it theoretical or practical. "You're always surrounded by people who think exactly like you," says Anton (2021, p. 176). In this way, he suggests, the writer doesn't know how to act when faced with people who aren't intimidated by his accusations. The protagonist's problem, in Anton's view, lies in an empty sentimentalism, rooted in a desire to "help people who are very far away, sympathetic abstract refugees who save him from having to commit to anyone or anything real" (p. 176).

As noted by a reviewer in the *LA Review of Books*, Kunzru had been frequenting online radical spaces—such as 4chan—since 2006, before most people had even heard of them. His journalistic work led him into such explorations and likely provided rich material for crafting his novel (Rosenthal, 2020). In the book's conclusion, the protagonist, still disturbed by his experiences and feelings of paranoia, realizes that politics today is no longer a matter of ideas, "but rather of *feelings, atmospheres, longings*, threats" (Kunzru, 2020, p. 267, ours emphasis). Here we are far from any possible connection between the realm of politics and an Enlightenment based rationality. Essentially, it is what political theorist Chiara Bottici (2019) defines as "imaginal politics": a social situation in which the imaginary—no matter how distant from any supposed reality—structures the political action of a radically mediated culture. Not by chance, Anton conveys his ideas through fanciful television series. What occurs is that adherents of the red pill "philosophy" have perceived that the next major war will be waged in media environments, in narrative contests to capture social imaginaries. This perception is expressed in a term from extremist online communities: "normies" are those people who "engage in uncritical consumption of cultural and political goods offered by the establishment and major media corporations" (Chapelan, 2021, p. 285). In other words, while normies live supported by the comfortable illusions propagated by the media (such as the fanciful success of liberal democracies), those who have taken the red pill find themselves awakened to the bare, raw reality of a

society dominated by global elites who continuously conspire new forms of control and manipulation (Nagle, 2017).

The logic of conspiracism, therefore, dominates the red pill imagination. Naturally, there exist various levels of conspiracies, local or global, general or specific. At a broader level, for example, theories such as the "great replacement" emerge, in which Europe's native populations are alleged to be systematically replaced by immigrants, usually originating from the East. Such ideas were what led Brent Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian, to kill over 50 people in two mosques in New Zealand in March 2019 (BBC, 2020b). A more specific example of conspiracy is the idea that the COVID-19 virus was instrumentalized by global elites as a form of population control or manipulation through the creation of social panic (Chapelan, 2021, p. 292). It is also in this vein that one speaks of a "gynocentric" conspiracy throughout the history of the West, in an odyssey in which women, contrary to biblical principles, "usurped dominion of the head" instead of assuming the "subjection of the heart" that was their divine order (Wright, 2014, p. 99).

SEXUAL MARKET VALUE

If the neoconservative imagination criticizes the liberal democratic project, it must be noted that it does so based on neoliberal visions and perspectives. The idea of the state–as–corporation, operating under principles of profitability and a supposed consumer choice right, underlies these perspectives. For left wing critics like Mark Fisher (2008), the reality of today's liberal democracies under capitalism is, de facto, governance run like a corporation. According to Fisher, over the past thirty years, a business ontology has become entrenched "in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including health and education, must be run like a business" (Fisher, 2008, p. 17, emphasis in original)[10]. This same principle naturally applies to the more limited version of red pill mythologemes—namely, the movement characterized as male liberation from female domination.

Analyzing a Reddit subforum named exactly "The Red Pill," Shawn Van Valkenburgh (2021) observes that its discourses are characterized "by an explicit application of a neoliberal economic ideology to sexual relations" (p. 97). Women are treated as commodities within a capitalist logic in which men are the purchasers of sex. Sexual market value thus depends on a series of different factors: for men, power, money, assertiveness; for women, primarily physical beauty. This market value is clearly expressed in the idea of another red object in the manosphere lexicon: the red flag. Thiago Schultz, mentioned earlier

[10] It is interesting to note that Fisher was a member, along with Land, of the renowned "Cybernetic Culture Research Unit," a theoretical collective formed in the 1990s at the University of Warwick.

in this article, repeatedly enumerates the red flags that should alert men to women unworthy of their attention. One of them is the single mother. Schultz naturally takes care not to generalize: "not that she's necessarily a totally bad woman, damn it" (Inteligência Magnética, 2022, 3:14). Not always bad, but generally so—older women, single mothers, or those who expose themselves unabashedly on social media are deemed low market value and should be avoided. But these red flags can multiply virtually, *ad infinitum*. If a woman does not follow a man back on social media, for example, it is not worth nurturing expectations. After all, as "redpiller" Rafael Aires (n.d.) explains, "most women spend all day on their cell phones" (p. 20)[11], so it would be highly unlikely that she had not noticed notifications—thus manifesting indifference.

In general, as observed in the Reddit forum mentioned above, feminism is viewed as "a collectively produced illusion that empowers women to get whatever they want from sexual relationships and diminishes men's ability to achieve their own desired sexual outcomes" (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, p. 89). It is no coincidence that in one of his frequent interviews on the YouTube channel "Papo Milgrau," Schultz asserts that "because the feminist narrative is being shoved up people's asses nowadays, women have become worse for relationships. With all due respect" (Arte da Sedução, 2023). This kind of statement expresses the rawest face of an imaginary that presents itself with airs of deep philosophy of life, supported, moreover, by supposed scientific data.

Evolutionary psychology—a discipline itself quite controversial—is appropriated by the movement to legitimize its theses. Men and women are said to have evolved over thousands of years to maximize their genetic reproduction, but this purpose manifests differently across genders. Women, for example, allegedly follow the biological imperative to have sex with a certain type of man (adventurous, strong, attractive, capable of providing good genetic material for offspring), while selecting life partners capable of providing security. This idea is "translated" on the forum "The Red Pill" as follows:

> We all know that bitches have a dual mating strategy: they want the dumb Alpha Sperm Donor to inseminate them with a strong baby, but they want a Beta Reliable Cash Dispenser to handle their IKEA domestic instincts. (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, p. 92)[12]

Thus, men are classified, within a kind of sexual hierarchy, as alphas or betas. This explains coach Matheus Donadelli's irritation when called a beta in the comments section of his YouTube channel: "You're in my livestream, with my girl, I'm teaching seduction, man, and you call me a beta? … Do you

[11] This refers to the e-book *O antiotário: Um caminho sem volta*…, a work typeset in oversized characters, likely to make reading easier, in which the coach presents himself as someone who "has contributed to people's lives since 2011 through social media with teachings enlightened by reason and prudence" (Aires, n.d., p. 149). On the e-book's sales website, Aires includes, as a "marketing campaign," a screenshot of a message exchange with the professional who was supposedly going to revise the text: "I was HORRIFIED by the content of this book, I will not be editing it. I processed a refund. I felt sick." Available at: http://www.antiotario.com.br. Accessed on March 6, 2023.

[12] Ikea is a Swedish furniture store chain that is extremely popular in the United States.

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realize how lost you are?" (Peca zagodinho, 2021, 0:43)—and then he takes off his shirt to display his muscular masculinity.

At its most basic level, red pill doctrines could then be defined as a combination of self-help literature, references to media culture, and supposedly scientific hypotheses thrown into a blender and served in homeopathic doses ("pills") to online audiences. *The Matrix*, the film that inspired the movement, may be considered, by Hollywood standards, a rather complex work, despite Žižek's (2001) quip in one of his essays on Lacan and cinema: "when I saw the movie in a local theater in Slovenia, I had the unique opportunity to sit next to the ideal viewer of the work—that is, an idiot" (p. 213)[13]. It cannot be denied, however, that *The Matrix* became a cult classic, a sort of postmodern revision of Plato's cave myth. A significant body of academic literature has been produced around the film. Clearly, the Wachowski sisters, the creators of *The Matrix*, who later publicly identified as transgender, vehemently deny any original association with antifeminist and phallocentric ideas. According to Lilly Wachowski, the film was actually conceived as an allegory for transgender experiences[14].

Nevertheless, the aestheticization of violence, the portrayal of a messianic hero figure, and the view of technology as a *penetrative* apparatus are essential elements of the film and can easily incite militaristic and phallocentric interpretations. In a perceptive online essay published shortly after the film's release, Doug Mann and Heidi Hochenedel (2000) adopt a laudatory tone while also identifying totalitarian and nihilistic undertones in the film. Neo is not only a redeemer, but also a terrorist, since "terrorism is the only effective means of resisting the hegemony of a technologically created hyperreality" (Part I., para. 9). Morpheus and his associates would be a group of religious fanatics committed to awakening people to the presumed reality concealed by the Matrix. One possible interpretation of the Matrix metaphor is that most of us live in a media-colonized world, where no real form of freedom is possible, as the boundaries of reality are determined by this political-economic and technological system. "On the other hand, there is a small fraction of people who, like the Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, have 'escaped' this culture. They live off the land, in isolation, having rejected technology" (Mann & Hochenedel, 2000, Part III, para. 22). The authors thus touch, *avant la lettre*, on the neoreactionary theme of exit. If the Cathedral constitutes a system so cohesive and efficient that only a kind of religious awakening—a *metanoia*— could interrupt its operation at the individual level, how would it be possible to effectively dismantle it? The article's conclusion is therefore revealing: "attempts to transcend the hyperreal are puerile, a fantasy for children, worthy

[13] It was a man who constantly annoyed the other viewers with remarks like "my God, wow, so reality doesn't exist?!" Žižek (2001) adds to the argument: "I definitely prefer such naïve immersion to the pseudo-sophisticated intellectualist readings that project refined philosophical or psychoanalytic conceptual distinctions onto the film" (p. 213).

[14] See the article "The Matrix is a 'trans metaphor', Lilly Wachowski says" (BBC, 2020a).

of comic book characters" (Mann & Hochenedel, 2000, Conclusion, para. 1). In that sense, the true Baudrillardian prophet of the film would be Cypher, the cynical character who betrays the heroes and states that the war has long been over, and that we were the losers.

MICROFASCISM: THE WAR AGAINST WOMEN

Can one argue that the red pill imaginary and the manosphere are peculiar but harmless phenomena in a world shaped by digital technologies and the resurgence of conservative fantasies in confrontation with a constantly shifting and disturbing reality? There are no centralized bodies, institutes, or state entities (at least explicitly) devoted to implementing the policies professed by the manosphere. In the many videos on the topic available across social media, the polite conversation (with the occasional swear word), a veneer of civility, and an endless procession of platitudes and clichés may give the impression that we are merely witnessing another passing trend in digital culture[15]. The appearance of a civil and innocuous discourse can be observed, for instance, in the debate between the "seduction guru" Rafael Albano (known online as "Nerd Sedutor") and Schultz on the YouTube channel Papo Milgrau. Albano criticizes the red pill movement for its inherent misogyny and tries to distance himself from that universe, while Schultz carefully responds by defending his "ideas" and his "work." Amid the repetitive use of the term *B.O.*[16], Schultz claims he has never met a truly "hardcore" feminist woman who was happy, but insists that his personal standard "is to treat women well," and that an important dimension of the red pill is to dismantle the image of "innocence" and "sanctity" that women enjoy in society (?). For some mysterious reason, he believes women will be interested in men whose Instagram circles include "badasses" like himself. On the other side, Albano asserts that women "need to learn" not to fear strong men. In the end, the distinction between the positions dissolves, as women represent, in both cases, a kind of trophy to be won, an index of success and power both in the world of technified seduction and in that of the red pill. In the sexual marketplace of values, the men who stand out are those who manage to project an image of strength and security—whether through natural talent or through the "techniques" taught by seduction coaches.

One could also argue that figures like Thiago Schutz and Rafael Aires represent a kind of "soft version" of the red pill imaginary, given that it is highly unlikely they took the trouble to study the literature on the subject or delve into the "philosophical" foundations of the movement. It is implausible, for example, that Schultz or Aires have endured the 238 pages of *Gynocentrism*

[15] There are no quantitative studies on the penetration of these themes in Brazilian online spaces, but some basic data can at least help us sketch an outline of the movement. While the YouTube channel Thiago Schutz has 49,000 subscribers and his Instagram account has 437,000 followers, the Red Pill Brasil community on Reddit has only 359 members. These numbers are far from impressive for a country like Brazil. It is also important to point out that empirically based Brazilian studies on the red pill and the manosphere are virtually nonexistent. Vilaça and d'Andrea (2021) provide a brief but valuable account of misogynistic acts in Brazil motivated by manosphere communities.

[16] "Boletim de ocorrência": an expression used to generically refer to any kind of trouble, particularly common among young people in the city of São Paulo.

(2014) or the 190 pages of *Red Pill Psychology* (2017) and bravely parsed sentences such as: "many observers today, including feminists like Christina Hoff Sommers, Camille Paglia, Rene Denfeld, Katie Roiphe and others, agree that feminism approaches, or even amounts to, a cult of victimization," or: "psychology adheres to a universal model in which men are incorrigibly flawed and require dismantling of their identities, habits and preferences before being reconstructed according to a feminist model of masculinity" (Wright & Elam, 2017, p. 15–28). But does that truly allow us to treat their online courses and videos as entirely harmless?

Not if we view them as punctual expressions of "microfascism." Drawing on the theses of Deleuze and Guattari, Jack Bratich[17] advocates the need for a new notion of fascism that does not require the presence of institutional components or state organization and is not necessarily based on nationalist aspirations, but rather on cultural and subjective structures. For Bratich (2022), microfascism "inhabits desires that do not always crystallize into nameable groups; … it is pervasive and latent, mingling in our relationships and subjectivities" (p. 13). The manosphere is a perfect example of this form of expression, as it is essentially "connective" and "networked" (characteristics of the Internet itself). Based on abstract notions such as honor and value, the red pill ideology could thus be considered one instance of a *broader war waged against women* (hence the entire military vocabulary)[18]. Indeed, Bratich (2022) continues, "the digital sphere, when penetrated by the autogenetic sovereign subjectivity of masculinity, is the latest manifestation of microfascist production of subjectivity and reality" (p. 77). Taking the red pill, more than merely transferring knowledge, signifies, in this context, a kind of revelation (of an almost religious nature), implying a transformation both of mind and lifestyle (Bratich, 2022, p. 112). Regardless of the rational appeals that this imaginary constantly makes, we are dealing here with a field of affects traversed by *images, feelings*, and *desires.* Online forums and virtual communities, often shielded by anonymity, present themselves as ideal "environments" for sharing these affects. Debbie Ging (2017) even states that "the locus of debate and activism has migrated to the internet and, in particular, the realm of social media" (p. 2). It is in these spaces that different strands of the movement (incels[19], conservatives, *pick up artists*[20], etc.) come together to experiment with a sense of communality. Ging further points out that much of the research on the topic to date has been limited to specific aspects of the manosphere, focusing on specific platforms. What we still lack, then, are "more systematic analyses of the manosphere's categories and the relationships among them" (Ging, 2017, p. 4).

[17] I thank my friend Michael Goddard for the valuable recommendation of the author and his work.

[18] According to Bratich (2022), many studies on fascism have not sufficiently developed an aspect that, in his view, is central to the phenomenon: misogyny. "For what I will be describing as microfascism, patriarchy takes the form of everyday sexism and misogyny as a slow elimination and includes a policing of the boundaries of women's actions through threats, their expulsion from public spaces (whether the streets or the Internet), and the reduction of their capacities through constant friction" (Bratich, 2022, p. 11).

[19] Abbreviation for *involuntarily celibate*: a person who blames women for his inability to engage in sexual relationships.

[20] Or PUAs, men whose primary goal is to succeed in sexual conquests.

In this regard, the category of microfascism proves an insightful analytical tool, as it operates effectively in digital environments, at a molecular level, generating productive assemblages among technology, the imaginary, and the assertion of sovereign subjectivities. There, it exploits the viral potential of these media and sets itself to operate toward colonizing the imaginary. In the case of red pill discourses, it is important to note that even when they appear under a mask of reasonableness or attempt to establish a minimal "civilizational pact" with what seems socially acceptable, it is in moments of carelessness (or, to borrow psychoanalytic terminology, *in slips)* and expression of primal affects that their authoritarian and thanatological elements emerge clearly. Thus, while Schultz projects the image of a cordial, "nice guy," he simultaneously expresses his desire to control the female voice by writing "it's lawsuit or bullet."

However, the distance between virtual desires and their realization in offline life is very short. On May 23, 2014, 22 year old American Elliot Rodger decided to stab and shoot people, killing six and then himself. Rodger (cited by Sugiura, 2021) was part of various misogynistic online communities and declared himself an "incel." Before the attack, he wrote a 141 page manifesto containing phrases like "who's the alpha male now, bitch?" (p. 14). This is just one of many recent cases of violence against women gestated and nourished in social networks and virtual communities. It is important to recall that the red pill is part of a broader ensemble of mythologemes and images that, lacking a better term, we might call a *neoconservative imaginary*—anchored in the dream of return to an idyllic past in which men were noble warrior virile men afraid of God, and women were good homemakers and caregivers. In that imagined past, where the social inconveniences generated by a contemporary globalist and gynocentric machinic system did not yet exist, there was *order* and everything was in its proper place. Cases like Thiago Schulz's represent links in a long chain of episodes highlighted by the notorious "Gamergate" and the support of thousands of 4chan users for the misogynistic, authoritarian candidacy of Donald Trump[21].

CONCLUSION: BETWEEN THE ARCHAIC AND THE MODERN

Red pill coaches sell their "ideas," their pills, as if they represented something innovative, grounded in technological and scientific foundations. Unsurprisingly, their central allegory derives from a film that became one of the key symbols of digital culture. However, the product they sell is, in fact, quite old. In essence, their propositions are traditionalist[22] and can be found

[21] "Gamergate," named after the Watergate scandal, refers to an episode that, under the pretext of preserving ethics in video game journalism, involved massive online harassment of game developer Zoe Quinn, who had allegedly offered sexual favors in exchange for favorable reviews of her games. Mike Wendling (2018) states that the episode "helped develop the rhetorical tactics of the alt-right" (p. 42). The support from 4Chan or Tumblr users for Donald Trump's candidacy is thoroughly documented by Angela Nagle (2017), for whom the alt-right was able to "build a multifaceted alternative online media empire that would dwarf all of the left's efforts in that regard." On the misogyny during Trump's 2016 campaign, see Harp (2018).

[22] On "Traditionalism" and its role in the current far-right political landscape, see the excellent work by Benjamin Teitelbaum (2020).

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in other, more radical and more intellectual guises in the treatises of the new far right, such as *Rupes Nigra*, by Alexander Wolfheze. Among the many ills of modernity pointed out by the author, one is particularly harmful: the destruction of all authentic forms of social identity. This assault would be based on inversions of traditional polarities, such as gender. "The end result of this deliberate inversion," writes Wolfheze (2021), "is anti-social hierarchy and societal chaos: matriarchy … matriarchy amounts to self-annihilation for all peoples that do not exist in the total isolation of the hunter-gatherer tribes that once lived in the jungles of the pre-modern world" (p. 168). The survival of such peoples, he continues, depends on insights from sciences such as evolutionary biology, which demonstrate the need for hierarchies (naturally, those in which the man occupies the positions of command) and for perfect social organization. In this passage, we find the element so typical of this paradoxical combination—a basic feature of the neoconservative imagination—between the old (pre-modern hunter tribes) and the new (evolutionary science). Beyond the conspiratorial mythology, the idea of awakening, and the patriarchal order, red pill philosophy aligns itself with neoconservatism also in its unique temporal outlook. Like neoconservatism, it presents itself as a set of revolutionary life[23] strategies and rules, yet is built on essentially archaic foundations. The following excerpt from a statement by Thiago Schutz in an online interview is revealing:

> Sometimes people would get into red content, right, folks, where the guys expose some bad female behavior, but in a very harsh way … And I kind of understand their language, right? But, man, the red pill is nothing more than showing female behavior, especially how it really is in practice, not how we would like it to be … So, when you go and lay down those truths we call red pill … the guys end up getting sharper, you know? Man, the red pill doesn't threaten women in any way, but it is a 'threat' to women because some of their conveniences become a bit harder, you know? (SuperChaddoFuturo, 2023, 00:01)

Here, the Freudian slip manifests clearly in the phrase "not how we would like it to be." It is not interesting that women behave as they wish, but rather as *we would like* them to behave. And when they do not, it becomes necessary to expose them publicly, to put the warriors on alert regarding the dangerous stratagems of the females. It is unlikely that the coach notices the irony in the contradiction contained in the next sentence. His life philosophy does not *threaten women in any way, but it is a threat to women*. Especially, of course, *when they behave differently from how we would like*. The "truths" of the red

[23] Angela Nagle (2017) points out the curious phenomenon that, today, a large number of young people have come to view being on the right as something "exciting, fun, and brave" (p. 118), associating with it (and no longer with the left) the revolutionary potential typically linked to progressive movements.

pill pertain to a supposedly zero-degree reality, as if, in the human domain, it were possible to establish without hesitation what the world is beyond our representations and interpretations. But, in fact, it is less about discovering how the world really is than about *how we would like it to be*[24]. In the horizon of microfascist desire, the world is constituted as a pre-ordered universe *ad aeternum* (by a deity), structured in clear polarities and hostile to difference and to hybrids. This is fundamentally a world of exclusion and violence, both symbolic and legal (the process) and physical (the bullet). M

[24] This third-person plural naturally refers to followers of the red pill, but also, by extension, to believers in the neoconservative gospel.

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Peer review: lucid opinions and blind comments

Avaliação por pares: pareceres lúcidos e comentários cegos

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ABSTRACT
The academic field requires scholars to carry out, in their *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs, individual or collective research, and present it in officially active journals. These, governed by the rigors of academia, follow similar premises in the evaluation of submitted articles, including double-blind peer review. Supported by the methodology of retextualization—which makes it possible to discuss texts from one sphere (the scientific) through texts from another sphere (the literary, in this case)—, this article gives rise to a reflection, based on the novel *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, by José Saramago, about the insufficiency of opinions and the idiosyncrasy of reviewers.
Keywords: Academic research, scientific journals, evaluation process, retextualization.

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RESUMO
O campo acadêmico exige que os estudiosos realizem, em seus programas de pós-graduação *stricto sensu*, pesquisas individuais ou coletivas e as apresentem em periódicos oficialmente ativos. Estes, regidos pelos rigores da academia, seguem premissas semelhantes nas avaliações dos artigos submetidos, entre as quais a *double-blind peer review*. Apoiado na metodologia de retextualização — que possibilita discutir textos de um âmbito (o científico) por meio de textos de outra esfera (a literária, no caso) —, o presente artigo enseja uma reflexão, a partir do romance *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, de José Saramago, acerca da insuficiência dos pareceres e da idiossincrasia dos pareceristas.
Palavras-chave: Pesquisa acadêmica, periódicos científicos, processo de avaliação, retextualização.

THE AUTHOR, THE RISKS, AND A MESSAGE FOR THE REVIEWERS

THE AUTHOR OF this article, a researcher in one of the country's post-graduate programs in Communication, is well aware of the risks he runs by presenting a text of this nature, which proposes to discuss issues related to the process of evaluating articles in journals in his field, using, from the outset, a narrative focus that positions him, throughout his writing, not as He or We, but as the Author, in a conscious choice, which also extends to the way he models his discussion proposal from the outset in this respect, it doesn't go so far outside the acceptable parameters of the standard that governs (and also imprisons) academic articles, as is the less deviant case discussed by Grave et al. (2023) in *O uso de cartas na apresentação de pesquisa científica como possibilidade de insubordinar-se criativamente* (*The use of letters in the presentation of scientific research as a possibility of creative insubordination*), or more daring examples, such as Carrascoza's (2016), at the national level, with his *Suíte acadêmica —Apontamentos poéticos para elaboração de projetos de pesquisa em Comunicação*, a text in which the items of research projects in Communication were conceptualized through a language of high lyrical voltage, which is why he was fiercely opposed by some of his peers, and defended with the same fervor by others. Or, expanding to the international community, the example of researcher Barbara Adam (2018), from Cardiff University (UK), who published in the journal *Time & Society*, the article *Four meditations on time and future relations* the format of calligrams (visual poems)—which generated, as expected, protests from the academic community, especially from purists. Cases of these, of anomie, a concept proposed by Durkheim (2010), are rare, but no progress can be made in any area of knowledge without occasionally questioning the rigidity of standards. Despite not adopting an explicitly disruptive design for his writing, so as not to upset the Opinion givers straight away—an initial strategy to reduce the chance of his article being rejected (in a way, subjected to the coercion of the academic model itself), the Author, with digressions and investments in metalinguistic resources, is not unaware that he will be walking on dangerous ground, although not in a minefield, nor on the entirely paved road of this journal's guidelines.

The methodology that will guide him is centered on retextualization (Bettetini, 1996) —the way in which it is possible to discuss a subject from the scientific domain—the process of evaluating articles submitted to journals—from the text of another domain, in this case the literary one—precisely the fictional work *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, by José Saramago.

SHORT JOURNEY INTO THE SUBJECT

One of Saramago's most expressive novels, *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* was originally published in 1995 and tells a harrowing story, full of violence and terror, centered on an epidemic of blindness that begins, according to the narrative, with a man in a city, in front of a traffic light, when he suddenly loses his sight and cries out in despair, seeing everything in white. Immediately taken by his wife to an ophthalmologist, the latter cannot find a cause to explain the unexpected and dramatic change. He needs to study the case in depth, which will not be possible because, in a very short time, other people are going blind, including the doctor himself, and the disease is spreading around the world, inevitably reminding this author and his reviewers of the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit humanity everywhere on the planet, more than a quarter of a century after the publication of the aforementioned work. It's not long before the government, as a way of curbing the disease, incarcerates the blind in buildings, and into one of these spaces the ophthalmologist's wife (pretending to be blind to accompany her husband) is taken—and she then becomes the protagonist of the story: without explanation, she remains invulnerable to the disease, an eyewitness, and a lonely one, to the chaos that will ensue within the confines, and also outside, of the four walls in which most of the book's plot unfolds.

The protagonist's condition, the only one who doesn't lose her sight, as opposed to all the other blind characters, prompts the author to point out its similarity to the peer review process of the scientific community, precisely the so-called *single blind peer review*, in which the opinion givers (also called reviewers) know the author of the text being analyzed, but the author doesn't know who is evaluating it. The doctor's wife is in the position of peer reviewer (she sees the movements of the blind) and the blind are, by analogy, in the place of the author (who doesn't know who sees him). It should therefore be mentioned that the submission of articles to congresses in the field of Communication, even some with an international dimension, adopt this form of review. The author doesn't know who is evaluating them, but the opinion giver knows who the author of the text to be reviewed is, the institution to which they belong, the postgraduate program in which they work (sometimes even the quadrennial grade given by Capes), some of their bibliographic data and other metrics that, with their name, it is possible and easy to search for on the Lattes Platform. The author may assume that the coordinator of the WG to which they sent their article is the opinion giver, but they have no way of proving this. What worries the Author is that, like other fields, the academic sphere is an arena of conflict, in which access to so-called "privileged information" can result in benefits for some and harm for others. It is no coincidence that this model, in practice, is

one of the key elements in the production system of predatory journals, which offer, according to the Author's research, endorsed by the research of Andrade *et al.* (2023), almost immediate approval of articles, through a false evaluation process, because, in truth, the reviewers know who the author is (who pays for the publication) of the text, which results in an undeniable weakening of scientific work.

It is for this reason, of course, that the *double-blind peer review* (the author does not know the identity of the reviewers and vice versa) has become an unavoidable guideline for academic journals, as it reduces the possibility of bias in the analysis, due to conflicts of interest, subjectivity and even personal and professional reasons of the reviewers, since internecine disputes are a reality in the circle of science (and in all other circles). Maintaining the confidentiality of an author's gender, race and affiliation is essential to avoid judgments based on the dominant rule or the author's reputation. Only the editor, in this evaluation modality, knows who the author and the opinion givers are and, using the words of Saramago (1995, p. 315), the author states with conviction that it is the editor's responsibility "to have eyes when others have lost them".

As the Author has also been the editor of a scientific journal in the past—and here the opinion givers of this text are called upon to reflect silently, either on their own or as a group, on their dual status (author-opinion giver and opinion giver-editor)—he has no hesitation in saying that he has dealt with disagreements on both sides: authors complaining about indolent and prejudiced opinions, and reviewers (unpaid, as we know) protesting about the short deadline given to them and the need to take the work back for a second reading, due to the changes they requested. Finally, in the precise words of the narrator *of Ensaio sobre a cegueira*: "the sun does not rise at the same time for all blind people, it often depends on the fineness of each person's ear" (Saramago, 1995, p. 195). From this point of view, it is up to the Author, due to his long experience as an Editor, to also remember that, despite the fairness of the evaluation processes of serious journals, sometimes, in the quest for internationalization and a better position in the ranking, editors "covertly" invite foreign researchers to submit articles—and, as we know, if they are not previously approved, they will only undergo a simple revision, usually to adapt them to the journal's standards. In such cases, we have a fake *single blind peer review*, in the name of the distinction and prestige of the invited author. It would be a practice carried out in the dark, or tolerated as a silent trace, in the academic field, of the *habitus*, Bourdieu's concept (2007), to know and remember:

systems of durable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is to say, as a principle of generation and structuring of practices and representations that can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without therefore being the product of obedience to rules. (p. XLI)

Even though it is a reality that is seen but not verbalized, as the doctor's wife does in the novel (she sees, but sometimes she would also like not to see, just like the blind), the editor is always in the middle of the process, and it is their job, obviously in agreement with the members of the editorial board of their vehicle, to maintain or limit this form of contribution. Or is the editor, as the doctor's wife defines herself at one point, "the blindest of them all" (Saramago, 1995, p. 188).

OPINIONS; BETWEEN THE VISIONARY
AND THE ANACHRONISTIC, THE ACCEPTABLE

It is an acknowledged fact that there is a strong dispute between scholars and their postgraduate programs for resources for their research in the face of a limited supply from public funding agencies. Castiel and Sanz-Valero (2007), in their article *Entre fetichismo e sobrevivência: o artigo científico é uma merca-doria acadêmica?*" [Between fetishism and survival: is the scientific article an academic commodity?] clearly point out the situation, which not only persists but has intensified in recent times:

One of the requirements for accessing funding is demonstrating the productivity of research groups, especially in terms of publication in the most reputable academic journals in their respective fields. Thus, the competition extends to the fierce struggle between articles seeking to occupy editorial spaces—the desired outlet for the results of research efforts, but also the need to maintain spheres of prestige and influence. (p. 3042)

Under these circumstances, the evaluation process for journals has become even stricter, and the author, when called upon by journals to issue an opinion, has been instructed to analyze the submission with the maximum voltage of academic rigor. Publishing an article, at or submitting it and waiting sometimes months for the result (when it is not negative), has the connotations of a competition rather than a discussion for the progress of science.

What's even more shocking is that peers, once they're opinion givers, turn out to be not only prejudiced judges, but also anachronistic executioners, as in

the case reported in the general press, beyond academic boundaries, of Professor Maria Carlotto, a professor at UFABC, whose research project to obtain a productivity grant received an opinion that denied it because the researcher and professor had not completed a research internship abroad due to pregnancies that "damaged" her career (Folha de S.Paulo, 2023, p.A3). In fact, two recent texts—one by Patrícia Valim (2023), "*Até quando as pesquisadoras-mães serão desrespeitadas?*" [Until when will researchers-mothers be disrespected?]; and the other, by Reinaldo José Lopes (2024), "*Mais espaço para mulheres na ciência*" [More room for women in science]—problematize the structural inequality when it comes to assessing the productivity of women and mothers. This is an issue that is beyond the scope of this text, but which Author would like to remind you of, since its seriousness demands an urgent resolution, and which could well be addressed in the future by retextualizing this same work by Saramago. Not least because the most terrifying chapters are those in which the blind perpetrate rape, sodomy, beatings, etc. on women blinded by the white epidemic, victims of a long line of perversion. If women were (and are) already harassed, unfairly and sometimes criminally neglected in the most varied social spheres, in the plot of *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* women's dignity is completely buried.

Castiel and Sanz-Valero (2007) go further, examining academic production as a commodity and its authors as professionals seeking distinction:

> A scientific article can be seen from the sociological perspective of the dynamics of communities—as the result of a line of research which, alongside its scientific production, also generates symbolic capital. Continuing this argument, an article can take on certain traits as if it were merchandise that will be available in scientific journals. (p. 3044)

Scientific journals therefore become shelves where the articles, the merchandise that scholars produce to disseminate their research, are placed and, of course, the better this showcase is ranked, the higher the score obtained by the researchers—which also impacts the grade of their postgraduate program in the four-yearly Capes evaluations—and, as a result, the greater the volume of their symbolic capital. And what does the accumulation of symbolic capital mean specifically in the academic field? Burke (2023), in *Ignorância: Uma história global* [Ignorance: A global history], emphasizes that, in the sciences and the arts, there is a small group that, because it has knowledge—and, the author adds, knowledge that results in more symbolic capital or not—keeps another, larger group in ignorance. Of course, it is well known that prominent researchers are heavily involved in the evaluation of articles, having the power of validation or

veto in their hands. To give prominence to their peers or opt for their invisibility. To see them as similar or competitors (even rivals).

The Author cites the example of an article he first submitted to a magazine, discussing consumption, both of material goods and symbolic consumption spread through communication, and non-consumption, based on a short story, a literary work, in which a young couple, due to the temporary suspension of electricity in their home, start to consume other objects and other discursive formations (due to the new themes that emerge in the darkness of the nights), leaving the usual ones aside. The magazine rejected the article on the basis of just one opinion, the text of which stated that the proposal to compare a literary narrative, with a vigorous artistic content, with the phenomenon of contemporary consumption in which two antagonistic forces were opposed (the purchase/seizure and the non-purchase/absence of the object) was fully valid, as it sought and carried out an extremely original interdisciplinary effort. However, he claimed that the lack of approximation and incorporation of contemporary theorists (scholars of these issues) had transformed the work into a long interpretative digression of the text, missing important points.

In the text, the author relied on works by Bauman (2004), Douglas and Isherwood (2006) and Rocha (1990), contemporary theorists with relevant studies on consumption, contrary to what was pointed out by the evaluator.

Saramago's novel once again serves as a guide. Once confined in a building by the government, all those who suddenly suffer from white blindness are dominated by the blind by birth, who are more accustomed to the lack of sight, with their other senses dilated for survival in the dark, when in fact the story becomes terrifying—those who suffer from white blindness are raped in the most infamous ways by the blind. Thus, the author leaves the question for the reviewers to reflect on: don't those who claim to have more knowledge end up (wanting to) heading the discussion spaces, the debate tables, the gaining of resources, as Burke (2023) states?

In an excerpt from this disturbing novel, one of the people born blind, in the process of leading the behavior of his peers in relation to violence directed at the women inmates in the building, fires a shot at the protagonist, who challenges the established order (or rather, disorder), but doesn't hit her, and hears from her, in response, the following sentence: "you didn't catch me, said the doctor's wife, and be careful, if you run out of ammunition, there are others out there who also want to be bosses" (Saramago, 1995, p. 188).

The most serious thing, to return to the example, is that although the journal mentioned *double-blind peer review* in its rules, the name of the reviewer was

not deleted from the document sent to the Author, who was embarrassed to learn who had assessed his text.

The same article was submitted to another journal, in the same position in the Qualis ranking of journals, and approved (regularly) by two anonymous reviewers; and the reviews sent by the editor to the Author pointed out various virtues. In Opinion A, the work submitted should be accepted because it presents a relevant reflection on the centrality of the phenomenon of consumption in the contemporary context. By proposing a discussion on consumption based on lessons learned from literary theory and French discourse analysis, using a short story as the object of analysis, the article had found an unusual, particular and little-explored perspective, which proved to be extremely profitable in its more reflective proposal. The very idea of "non-consumption," derived from theories linked to discourse analysis, was interesting and unusual, but also pertinent for thinking about the role of consumption in contemporary social and cultural dynamics. In Opinion B, although the theme could be seen as timeless, given the link between fictional literature, advertising discourses and consumer habits, the text was current and relevant. There was clarity in the presentation of the objectives, related to the epistemology of consumption—and non-consumption—and its reading in the light of a literary short story. For the textual proposal of understanding consumption (and non-consumption) through literature, the use of literary theory and Discourse Analysis proved to be adequate and sufficient. The theoretical basis dialogued fully with the textual structure, and gave consistency to the reflections brought up in the article. Methodologically, the work carried out a bibliographical review (academic-scientific and literary) and placed them in harmonious conversation. The poetic bias of the writing led to subjective results and reflections that were nevertheless pertinent and intelligible. The closing was restrained, but appropriate to the proposed textual construction. In addition to inviting you to a pleasant and fluid reading, the research was relevant and contributed to the field by highlighting the possibility of using literary works in conjunction with advertising discourses and to understand consumer practices, habits, and behaviors. The text, well-written, was structured in a didactic way, even for wider audiences since it did not adopt an excessively academic bias.

The Author shares a second example with his Opinion Givers (and perhaps with future Readers of this article). He sent an article to one of the most important journals in the field, in which he explored, as in this text, a literary work—a short story in letter format, taken from the work of an American writer, in which she criticizes the verbal and visual information inserted in the packaging of a commodity—in order to discuss the rhetorical tricks of advertising on food

product labels. The first reviewer, in order to reject the submission, argued that the article did not treat the book itself as a commodity, since, in addition to materializing the literary text, it certainly participated in the publishing market (the book used in the article was released in Brazil by Companhia das Letras). It was not understood, even though it was explicit, the method of retextualization adopted by the author, who made the objective of his study clear from the outset. Incidentally, in an excerpt from *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, the quarantined inmates are waiting for their food to be delivered at a certain time and the hungriest ones, when they realize that it has started to rain, burst into tears. The narrator comments:

> Some of these blind people are not only blind in the eyes, they are also blind in the mind, and there is no other way to explain the tortuous reasoning that led them to conclude that the food they wanted would not come when it was raining. There was no way of convincing them that the premise was wrong and that, therefore, the conclusion had to be wrong too. (Saramago, 1995, p. 213)

The second evaluator approved the article and, in his long and exemplary opinion, even noted (the author had made it expressly clear) that the text was part of a larger, kaleidoscopic study, noting that, in terms of the degree of scientific contribution, it was a one-off reflection, but in dialogue with previous research by the same author, according to the references to three previous studies. This was not noticed, despite its repetition, by the third evaluator, who was called in for the tiebreaker; he declared that the text was not the result of research; on the contrary, it resembled a free essay.

The author went on to submit it to another journal, which published it after receiving objective opinions (in one of them, the reviewer asked for adjustments, which were then accepted). But not for this reason, and this is a topic for another time, can he say that reviewers, even if they have approved his texts, are not blind to understanding.

A third example, this time involving the Author and a researcher from his PPGCOM, with whom he co-authored an article (and with whom he invariably talks about the quality of reviews), points to another fundamental point for authors, even in the face of rejected submissions, to improve their texts—no longer generalization, but lack of explanation. In other words, the opinion giver emphasized a weakness, not just mentioning it, but proving it (this is what is expected by the scientific method) in the text. In the article, he and the researcher discussed the temporal aspects exploited by advertising (especially in narratives set in the past, but aimed at a future consumer movement in relation to goods),

based on a classic work of science fiction, whose action took place decades ahead of our historical moment. At the beginning of one of the opinions, which vetoed the text, it was said that the work dealt with an important topic in the field of communication: the discourses surrounding advertising campaigns, taking as its starting point a well-known science fiction book on the occasion of the centenary of its author's birth. However, despite the fact that the comparative analysis of advertising campaigns and the novel presented an interesting proposal for dealing with the subject, the article contained some formal shortcomings that made it impossible to publish.

A question from the Author and the researcher, Co-Author, taking advantage of the reviewer's contribution with a view to improving the text and, in a later submission to another journal, having a better chance of approval: what were the formal shortcomings? Unfortunately, the reviewer then turned to other topics in the evaluation and the Author and the researcher remained in the dark, not knowing what shortcomings he was referring to. At the end of the opinion, the reviewer stated that it made no sense to maintain that fiction and its constitutive elements (narrator, characters, time, etc.) were mobilized by the demand for advertising—when Rocha (1990), Carrascoza (2012), Xavier (2015), Palacios and Terenzzo (2016), among other advertising scholars, had already proven the exact opposite. And it wouldn't be necessary—regardless of whether you're an advertising specialist, an academic, or a copywriter who scripts advertising films, even the average viewer is not unaware that the Bombril Boy and other characters in commercials—whose format mimics stories, i.e. invests in narrative elements—are fictitious.

The second opinion also brought up the issue, already mentioned above, of rejecting articles on the pretext that they were not in line with the journal's editorial line or that they were not the results or parts of research. The opinion giver stated that the text was not in line with the theme and scope of, which is more analytical and methodological in nature, favoring articles that were the result of more in-depth research and not just those that emphasized an isolated theme of more elaborate reflections.

It goes without saying that the text submitted was fully in line with the scope of the journal in question, the field of Communication, and that, years earlier, the author had published the inaugural article of this same research, which was already in its final stage.

In this sense, the author would like to make it clear to his peer reviewers, as this is the appropriate place, although he could have done so in the "introduction", that this article is in line with scope and focus of this journal:

intended for the publication of scientific production whose object of study is communication. It welcomes theoretical works, analytical experiments and conceptual formulations on communicative processes, media, mediations and the emergence of interactions in a contemporary society of generalized information. It aims to publish mature, innovative work that seeks to broaden the state of the art of the themes studied and which can therefore have an impact on the field of knowledge.

In addition, the Author declares that the article is a branch of his larger research. This does not prevent him from highlighting the existence and importance of significant individual articles published by notorious professors (then collateral to his broader research), challenged by urgent issues or epistemological clashes, invited to address the work of classic theorists, obliged to reply, or responding to calls for dossiers, among other legitimate motivations. Luckily, in their evaluation process, the blind of understanding were not at work.

It is also worth considering, however, that all major research, whether individual or part of international networks of researchers, is usually published in the form of articles, in line with the productivistic rules that officially govern the academic field. Some, such as those of Observatório Ibero-americano de Ficção Televisiva, coordinated in Brazil by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, are an exception, resulting in entire works, yearbooks, voluminous collections—and their dimension has never been pressed into the limits of an article, even in the usual configuration, and acceptable in the field, of summarizing, through it, its premises and findings.

The advent of the Jabuti Academic Prize, which was recently announced (Righetti, 2024) and will include books, is an initiative that could bring some encouragement to researchers who want to publish their research in a cohesive, long-form format, capable of properly demonstrating the breadth of their thinking and the scope of their contributions. If one of the evaluation requirements of an academic work is its inclusion and social impact (Capes, 2024)—and if it is not published in all its fullness and rigor, but in slices, transformed into literature for the initiated (the other scholars), a crucial step for society to get to know it is for it to reach them. At the turning point of *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, the people regain their sight and the ophthalmologist, already in his apartment with his wife and others who have followed them, asks: "What's going on outside where you were?" Then, "on the floor below, someone came out onto the landing shouting, I see, I see, from this floor the sun is going to rise over a city in celebration" (Saramago, 1995, p. 309). In the same way, when new knowledge is brought into everyday life, through the dissemination of science, through

publications that impact it, society in general (and the scientific community) will certainly be celebrating.

On another level of the topic in question, associated with the evaluation process, now of professors' projects for their permanence and continuity of studies in their postgraduate programs, the author brings up the case of his current research project, then analyzed by a researcher from outside his PPGCOM, whose opinion underlines these prosaic words: the project "shows very serious gaps, especially considering the institution that houses it". As the gaps are not explicitly pointed out, the Author puts himself in the shoes of the protagonist of the "*ensaio*," lost in the darkness of the confined building. In search of clarity, she suddenly knocks over small boxes while groping around on some shelves:

> The noise they made when they hit the ground almost stopped the doctor's wife's heart, They're matches, she thought. Trembling with excitement, she bent down, ran her hands over the floor, found, this is a smell that can't be confused with any other, and the noise of the sticks when we shake the box, the sliding of the lid, the roughness of the outer sandpaper, where the match is, the scraping of the head of the toothpick, finally the sparking of the small flame, the space around it, a diffuse luminous sphere like a star through the mist, my God, the light exists and I have eyes to see it, praise be to the light. (Saramago, 1995, p. 223)

But to the Author, the opinion giver does not leave a single matchstick on the shelves of unfair reviews, even if it has fallen into some hard-to-find crevice. It is quite possible that, if he did, it would be fried by his subjectivity. At least the reviewer's name was covered in white ink, ironically, as in the book epidemic, with the magic touch of Helios Carbex concealer.

FINALLY, WE CAME TO A DECISION

The Author ends his reflection here, which, in a similar way, connects the reader to the e-mail that researchers receive with the title "Editorial decision" and, once opened, brings the inevitable words:

> We have reached a decision regarding your submission (name of article submitted); Our decision is to: Reject the submission according to the opinions below; or Our decision is to: Approved for publication after corrections.

These opening lines immediately provoke satisfaction or discontent. After reading the opinions, in the event of approval, even if there are requests for

adjustments (sometimes small, sometimes debatable, but which must be met), the author, including the Author, will celebrate the achievement. But when the article is rejected, indignation (fair or not) sets in, especially when the idiosyncrasies of the reviewers are revealed, or the perceived haste, indifference or condescension with which they wrote their reports. Opinion Givers who, everyone in the field knows, have limited time and, among their multiple academic duties (with the addition of bureaucratic ones), also need to do their research, "to score" and remain engaged in their *stricto* sensu programs. And they are also obliged to submit articles to academic journals—experiencing the other side of the game. The following passage from *Essay on Blindness*, the dialog between the doctor's wife and him, fits well with the purpose of this closing:

> Why did we go blind? I don't know, maybe one day we'll find out. Do you want me to tell you what I think? Tell me! I don't think we're blind, I think we're blind. Blind people who see. Blind people who, seeing, don't see. (Saramago, 1995, p. 310)

It is therefore essential that the researcher, both as an author and as a reviewer, knows how to see the other, their peer, as themselves. Similar, at once navigators and castaways. And, not by chance, the author, without wishing to be prescriptive, closes this text with the epigraph that Saramago (1995, p. 9) used to open the novel, from the Book of Advice: "If you can look, look. If you can see, notice." Here, the verb repair is not limited to perceiving what has been seen, but to repairing, recovering, restoring, if only so that, in the night of time, the text that is humanity itself (and, by extension, the work of academics), demonstrates, in its origin, that it can be corrected and improved, as opposed to the persistent white cloud in the system that governs the "scientificity of science" (Targino, 2020).

In convergence with Saramago's work, retextualized here, which forces the reader into an individual imaginative experience, those involved in the peer review process must (including the Author and his peer reviewers) stop, close our eyes and *see*. A *seeing* that, overcoming the dark times that make high productivity a vector for the permanence (or, more precisely, the survival) of researchers in their postgraduate programs, proposes the rescue of lucidity and affection. A way *of seeing* in which the white of the blindness epidemic is an announcement of peace, even though knowledge advances faster when there are disagreements, dissent and nonconformity, like that of the author, who is less concerned about the hypocrisy of the scientific arena than the silence of his peers.

In *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, the blind regains their sight. On the last page of the novel, back at home, the doctor's wife, the only one who has seen all the

horrors experienced by the characters, as well as the touching actions of solidarity in the painful times of the diegesis, at one point goes to the living room window:

> He looked down at the street covered in garbage, at the people shouting and singing. Then she raised her head to the sky and saw it all white, My turn has come, she thought. Sudden fear made her lower her eyes. The city was still there. (Saramago, 1995, p. 310)

The Author draws attention to the adverb "still." As researchers, sometimes also as editors and reviewers, we are still here, doing science. We can still, like the writers, review and repair our humanity. Yes, but how?

In the words of another of his works, Saramago says that we must have "the clear awareness that only by seeing can we see, although we must not forget that even to see requires learning" (Saramago, 2024, p. 223). May we all learn to see together in the field of Communication! M

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Popular communication and alternative and independent media in its original and current nuances

Comunicação popular e a mídia alternativa e independente em seus matizes originários e atuais

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ABSTRACT
This article emphasizes the media that emerge disconnected from the conventional, private, and state media spectrum. The objective is to discuss the nuances that transfer from classical popular communication to new configurations and trends, especially in the field of alternative. Another objective is to observe the reelaborations of alternative media that end up in independent media, both progressive and conservative fascist extremist. Bibliographic and an unsystematic way of assistive observation of social practices in the sector, besides systematizing them in a typology that identifies their original and current aspects. It is concluded that, between permanence and changes, there is a diversity of community media, alternative and independent communication, formed from different political-ideological positions, from civic to anticonstitutional and anticivic.
Keywords: Popular communication, alternative media, independent media, conservatism, fascism.

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RESUMO
Este artigo enfatiza os meios de comunicação que emergem desvinculados do espectro mediático convencional, privado e estatal. O objetivo é discutir os matizes que se transladam da Comunicação Popular clássica para as novas configurações e tendências, especialmente no âmbito do alternativo. Outro objetivo é observar as reelaborações da mídia alternativa que acabam desembocando na mídia independente, tanto de vetor progressista quanto conservador extremista fascista. A abordagem é ensaísta, a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica e observação assistemática das práticas sociais no setor, além de sistematizá-las em uma tipologia que identifica suas vertentes originárias e as atuais. Conclui-se que, entre permanências e alterações, existe uma diversidade de meios

comunitários, alternativos e independentes de comunicação, formados a partir de posições político-ideológicas distintas, das cívicas às anticonstitucionais e anticívicas.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação popular, mídia alternativa, mídia independente, conservadorismo, fascismo.

INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE UNFOLDS analyses on the topic of Popular, Community, and Alternative Communication, understood as a broad category, but one that emphasizes alternative and independent communication media. It begins with a brief historical contextualization of the concepts of "alternative," and then observes their current configurations in a society marked by technological ease in producing, replicating, and disseminating content through media platforms and digital social networks.

The aim is to discuss the nuances[1] that are transposed from classical Popular Communication to new configurations and trends, especially within the alternative sphere. Another objective is to observe the reworkings of alternative media that ultimately culminate in independent media, whether of a progressive vector or a conservative and fascist-extremist one. The central question investigates what differentiates the strands of popular communication from the others, particularly those in the arena of alternative and independent media. The approach is essayistic, based on bibliographic research and unsystematic observation of social practices in the sector, in addition to systematizing them into categories that identify their original and current strands. The bibliographic research enabled the recovery of concepts that underpin the approach through the identification of works related to the subject, from both classical and recent authors, without a specific temporal sampling cut-off[2]. Thus, in light of concepts and configurations of social practices, I identify various strands and propose a typology to distinguish the properties of popular, community, and alternative communication and of independent media that mark their trajectories and the sector's current state, including discussion on those with a conservative fascist-extremist vector.

I adopt the expression Popular, Community, and Alternative Communication—or simply Popular Communication—as an analytical category when referring to the set of communication expressions that occur within social movements, grassroots collectives, and other civic organizations whose activities converge around discontent with the unequal status quo and around leadership in struggles for human, civic, and social rights in the progressive field. This is to distinguish it from media manifestations that fall outside this

category, especially the strands of "independent media" of traditional conservative and fascist-extremist conservative nature. Therefore, I attempt to distinguish, within the array of manifestations in the community field and those labeled as alternative and independent, certain specificities that have been formed depending on the types of emitters, the interests at stake, the political context, the organizational forms, and the production relations in which they are inscribed, as well as the political-ideological positions profiled by their protagonists. This is an attempt at synthesis that respects the typology—categories developed in a previous publication (Peruzzo, 2024)[3]—while also recovering historical concepts of "alternative" and offering new elaborations and interpretations. Publishing as an article aims to ensure scientific dissemination through more agile channels that facilitate public access, such as scientific journals.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA: A DEBATE OF OVER HALF A CENTURY

Alternative communication media, beloved by their protagonists and execrated by the sectors holding the *status quo* in their respective eras, have historically represented dissenting voices that organize themselves and address matters of public interest from perspectives, levels of depth, language, platforms, and political-ideological natures distinct from corporate and state mainstream media.

The phenomenon of alternative press permeates Latin American countries and others across continents. In Latin America, one of the pioneering books on the subject was organized by Máximo Simpson Grinberg, titled *Comunicación alternativa y cambio social: América Latina*, published by the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1981. It features chapters by 15 researchers from various countries, including one on the "*imprensa nanica*" (underground press) in Brazil, written by Gregório Selser. The same editor published a related collection in Brazil in 1987 through Vozes publishing house, titled *Comunicação alternativa na América Latina*, mostly with different texts on diverse experiences, though still addressing the same central theme. From Brazil, Luiz Gonzaga Motta (1981) contributed with "*Brasil: Alternativa popular: comunicação e movimentos sociais*".

Revisiting the concepts discussed in these works, one notes that the predominant view was quite idealized, in the sense of attributing a transformative potential to them, despite acknowledging the challenges in using the term "alternative" to qualify a type of communication, media, or journalism, due to the ambiguity of the term.

There are at least three factors explaining the imprecision of the word, which points to the inconvenience of interpreting it literally—that is, in its dictionary definition. First, if we take the term "alternative" in strict etymological terms,

progressive collectives (Ramalho, 2022); and a fourth discusses the funding of journalism projects by big tech companies, including independent media arrangements (Camargo et al., 2023). On the other hand, there is a presence of three articles on the far right and six others that emphasize Bolsonarism, four of which specifically address the use of digital networks and apps (Facebook, Twitter—now X—and WhatsApp) by Bolsonarist groups to attack vaccines, the left, human rights, and gender issues, as well as to praise Olavo de Carvalho upon his death. These are also useful to our analysis, with illustrative excerpts extracted for exemplification purposes.5,000 results.

[3] Book: *Fundamentos teóricos da comunicação popular, comunitária e alternativa,* especially the chapter entitled *"Matizes da comunicação popular, comunitária e alternativa da atualidade."*

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from the Latin *alternare*, meaning to alternate, replace, or switch, there would not be much to say about the phenomenon, since historical initiatives of alternative communication have not managed—and, in my view, never intended—to replace hegemonic communication systems globally, except in contexts of armed conflict, where this was the aim and, when victorious, indeed resulted in the institution of new communication policies. In general, these initiatives genuinely sought to interfere in the information systems, providing circulation for other readings of reality and alternative critical positions. Therefore, it is more important to understand the processes through which alternative communication is constituted—for it is these processes that carry the properties producing meaning—than to seek universal precision in the terminology.

By taking a step back into the historicity of the phenomenon, one perceives that there was a trend, though not dominant, to understand the "alternative" from the perspective of radical change—that is, with the potential to constitute a new popular power. Indeed, this view is coherent with the context in which alternative communication reached its peak in Latin America—for example, during the revolutionary experiences of Cuba, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, in which radio broadcasters[4] and other communication channels[5] and formats[6] played important roles. Also, with due distinctions, this applied to the communication of social movements during the decline of military regimes in Latin America (1970s and 1980s), especially in Brazil, when these movements were seen, in part, as potentially capable of leading structural changes in society. The vibrancy of popular and participatory communication within social movements, communities, and other sectors mobilized in favor of democratizing society and securing rights stems from that period in various Latin American countries, when it was also referred to as alternative communication. This is because its praxis and political stance diverged from those of mass media, particularly when these were under censorship or complicit with authoritarian military regimes (Peruzzo, 2004). The labor union press and the media organically tied to left-wing political parties (Peruzzo, 2009; Ramalho, 2022) in Brazil were also regarded as part of the alternative communication sphere.

The production of scientific knowledge tends to express the reality from which reflection develops, which helps explain the perception of the combative nature of the alternative press at the time. In this regard, Jesús M. Aguirre (1981) stated, as early as the beginning of the 1980s, that "the term alternative generally refers us to another proposal that must be contradicted, replaced, not only negatively, but rather through overcoming" (p. 23), understanding that it is necessary to take into account the communication system in its various instances, from the infra- to the superstructural level[7].

[4] See also *Radio Rebelde* (Cuba), *Radio Venceremos* (El Salvador), *Radio Sandinista* (Nicaragua), etc. (Peruzzo, 2004).

[5] *Cadernos do Terceiro Mundo,* along with small newspapers produced locally with limited circulation. At that time, there was also an attempt to transform the international information structure through the proposal to create a Nwico (Reyes Matta, 1980), during which the Latin American News Information Agency was even established, although it did not succeed.

[6] *Jornalismo nas Catacumbas*, in Nicaragua, during the Sandinista Revolution.

[7] All citations from other languages were translated by the author.

Diego Portales (1981) noted that the alternative communication of that time sought to "include the realm of communications in the broader projects of collective self-effort, other development, and the new world order[8] proposed in international forums" (p. 65).

Let us pause to emphasize that this notion of a new order was related to the debate then led by the Non-Aligned Movement regarding the need to change the International Economic Order and the International Information Order, as well as the creation of an international economic order and a New World Information and Communication Order (Nwico) (Reyes Matta, 1980). From that era also comes the drafting of the report known as the MacBride Report (Unesco, 1983[9]), which exposed the mechanisms of control over information flows by news agencies and other companies in the sector, including entertainment and advertising firms. The report also proposed changes to promote the democratization of communication within each country and internationally. It was part of a broader historical movement of resistance against the dominant structures of transnational capitalism, aligned with the alternative media experiences in Europe and revolutionary movements in Latin America, as well as the effervescence of grassroots social movements across the continent which, in the case of Brazil (Peruzzo, 2004), came to be seen as new revolutionary forces capable of triggering the structural changes not yet achieved by political parties and labor unions.

At the same time, Armando Cassigoli (1981) stated, for example, that:

> The term "alternative" implies a choice between one thing and another. Therefore, it would refer to something distinct from the "common," the "system," … the ruling class, the "government"; in other words, opposed (in the message, and not merely in its technique) to what we Marxistically understand as ideology, which essentially expresses forms on the plane of dissemination, of class struggle. (p. 30)

Máximo Simpson Grinberg (1987), in turn, recognized the limits of alternative communication but ascribed to it unique importance:

> Alternative media in mass society, important for what they represent as an attempt to break from the status quo, cannot go beyond their context; their stimulating and awareness-raising activity in many aspects occurs—it is obvious to say—within the straitjacket of the global society; their function is sometimes modest and, in many cases, a forerunner of new forms of coexistence, of social relations; they illuminate the path and clash with the reality they face … thus, depending on the circumstances

[8] Refers to the New International Economic Order and Nwico.

[9] In addition to the original English edition, there is also a Spanish edition: MacBride (1987).

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and the degree of actual insertion in social movements, they come to constitute a dual power—as in the paradigmatic case of the Bolivian miners' radios. (p. 33)

It becomes clear, therefore, that although the views on alternative press were highly idealized regarding its revolutionary potential and made sense within the context of the time, the essence of the phenomenon was already being grasped: "the concept seems to refer, albeit imprecisely, both to the need for options originating from the very unidirectional *structure* of the media and from the regime of *ownership* and *control*, that is, from the monopoly exercised over them by those who hold power" (Simpson Grinberg, 1981, p. 111).

The second factor, related to the conceptual controversies over the designation of alternative communication, media, or journalism to characterize this modality of communication among subordinate classes, concerns the diversity of experiences historically encompassed by the concept, which—in its initial moment (the 1970s and 80s)—even included non-media communication initiatives. This helps explain why Popular Communication — and its participatory, dialogical, horizontal derivations—was also considered alternative *communication*. In other words, alternative communication and alternative journalism at that stage referred not only to specific media manifestations used in revolutionary struggles (radio stations, newspapers, videos), to the so-called "*nanica*" or alternative press[10], alternative news agencies, workers' press, and left-wing political-party press, but also to small popular newspapers, loudspeakers, community radio stations, popular videos, Theater of the Oppressed, and so on, as they all fell within the scope of *alternative* communication.

In other words, the theme of alternative *communication* was historically situated both within the scope of the press of revolutionary, dissident, and mobilizing movements, with broader proposals for structural transformations in society—whether in communication, politics, or the economy—and within the communication forms of social movements and organizations dedicated to specific struggles aimed at improving the living conditions of impoverished sectors of Latin American populations.

Therefore, under its umbrella, a wide range of practical manifestations has always existed, which naturally led to different conceptual interpretations.

This observation, based on the Brazilian reality, was also perceived in other contexts by Armando Cassigoli (1981), when he stated:

Both from within the official left and from dissident groups in countries of the so-called "bourgeois democracy," and even in other European countries labeled socialist, an imprecise expression has been taking shape: alternative media. Under

[10] In Brazil, much of this type of press was produced by segments of the petite bourgeoisie and sold at newsstands. Raimundo Rodrigues Pereira (1986, p. 55–56) clarified that "the alternative press [of the 1960s] was an expression of the middle class, the workers, and the petite bourgeoisie; it defended national and popular interests, and therefore, condemned the military regime."

this label, the following means of information and dissemination have been grouped: a) those distinct from official politics; b) proletarian, union, and workers' media; c) media belonging to left-wing political parties or opposition movements in general; d) politically critical artisanal media opposing the capitalist system and bourgeois society; e) clandestine or subversive media; f) anything that, at one time, constituted what the communists of the 1930s called *agitprop* [agitation and propaganda], but modernized. (p. 29–30)

Simpson Grinberg (1981) also referred to this same type of difficulty when he pointed out the ambiguity of the expression and questioned what media this media would be alternative to: would it be in relation to private media, state monopoly, both, or the transnational structure? He concluded, however, by stating that the "option is always in opposition to the groups that benefit, in favor of privileged (economic and political) sectors, from the ownership and control of the means of information" (Simpson Grinberg, 1981, p. 112–113).

There is a third, more complex factor: the existence of communication channels that diverge from the progressive civic-political perspective. Although once placed on the same spectrum (Downing, 2002), they must be understood within historically distinct contexts. In recent years, Brazil has witnessed a rise in conservative and far-right extremist communication channels that initially label themselves as "alternative," possibly because they perceive themselves outside the structure of conventional mainstream media. However, this isolated attribute is insufficient to warrant the historical and transgressive significance of the term.

In summary, a precise characterization of "counter-hegemonic" media phenomena must necessarily refer to their spatial and historical context. In contexts of war or radical social struggles for deep structural change, alternative media and journalism assume a more forceful libertarian character than in moments of natural societal flows, even though they may still carry emancipatory perspectives. Thus, these communicational phenomena transform historically from one specific reality to another, while being interconnected with global factors.

Considering the changes in these media phenomena over recent decades, and despite the comprehensiveness of the term "alternative," it cannot encompass all forms of communication generated by civic forces—from emancipatory to fascist and anti-civic—because their properties and characteristics differ.

To help categorize these different hues, based on the Brazilian reality of the 2020s, I now present several strands that are currently configured, starting from their conceptual origins.

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STRANDS OF POPULAR, ALTERNATIVE, AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA[11]

Popular struggles for justice and civic rights have always involved forms of popular communication—those developed within organized segments of subordinated classes, shaped by context and communicative need. This encompasses printed materials (pamphlets, newsletters, newspapers, magazines), later audio, audiovisual formats, and the internet.

Based on the alternative press in Brazil, the earliest well-documented records date to the early 20th century, linked to the anarchist labor movement (Ferreira, 1988). Thereafter, alternative presses and journalism emerged and receded across fields of social struggle but gained force and specific identity from the 1960s onward (Kucinski, 1991), especially as resistance to the military dictatorship (1964–1985). Nevertheless, popular communication and alternative journalism also existed in artisanal formats within social movement organizing processes and persist in the post-democratic-normality era.

The context was one of social tension, poverty, and the rise of neoliberal policies (Antunes, 2000; Bauman, 1999; Chauí, 2019), alongside strong social effervescence driven by unions, social movements (Gohn, 2021), community associations, Catholic base communities, evangelical actors, and other civil society sectors. Within this dynamic, alternative journalism and Popular Communication—horizontal and participatory, that is, communal—served as the breeding ground for diverse communicational experiences such as community media and other alternative expressions. These evolved into new structural and operational configurations that reflect the conditions of their historical moments. These communications are sometimes conceptualized as counter-hegemonic (Marcos, 2021; Moraes, 2010). While arguments in that vein remain valid—respecting their historical moment—it is essential to track evolving social practices to understand their specificities.

In recent years, community and alternative media have expressed distinct strands, even evolving into independent media. What follows discusses some vectors or categories in this communicational universe, aiming to offer a more didactic reading of the phenomenon.

COMMUNAL-ROOTED POPULAR COMMUNICATION

Social, political, economic, and legal transformations have fostered communicational strains that overflow institutional boundaries (Marí Sáez, 2018)—a hallmark of Popular Communication, here conceived as a broad category encompassing communication produced by social movements, communities, grassroots collectives, and nonprofit organizations. These entities create their

media, representing and articulating the demands and visions of organized, marginalized sectors in their struggles for human rights, social justice, and civic participation. This is the classic category of horizontal, participatory popular communication—the living root communal vector.

It materializes in initiatives with close community ties and emancipatory visions. Thus, this vector includes community media when maintaining organic relationships with communities and is recognized by them for fostering active local participation in organizational processes and in generating and disseminating content.

In short, communication within the communal vector incorporates foundational epistemological dimensions (Beltrán, 1981; Kaplún, 2019; Miani, 2021; Peruzzo, 2004, 2009, 2022, 2024; Suzina, 2018), interconnected with some philosophical and ontological matrices of Freirean thought (Freire, 1976). It is participatory, dialogical communication, led by the communities and social movements themselves—it is carried out by, with, and for the communities, with critical awareness and a combative spirit in the context of struggles for causes and the expansion of respect for human rights and political participation in society.

It is realized through interpersonal and group communication, in addition to artisanal media, but it gradually incorporates the technologies of its time, from print to audiovisual and digital. In its epistemological matrices (Peruzzo, 2024), it carries horizontal and dialogical perspectives and embraces struggles for the transformation of unjust and oppressive structures.

COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY VECTOR AND THE IDENTITY VECTOR

There are communication initiatives whose performance is less communitarian than the one described above, but which are also part of the community communication arena, whether legally—in the case of radio broadcasters—or by possessing certain characteristics of community media, such as local ties, participation, and alignment with reality. However, they deviate from the collective practices of local community associations and social movements, approaching or reproducing strategies typical of private mainstream media in terms of content generation, financial support, and management models (Peruzzo, 2024). They tend to be leadership-centered initiatives (often having "owners"), with a personalist tendency, despite giving voice to individuals, groups, or the audiences they serve or address. Some are linked to churches—particularly Catholic and neopentecostal evangelical churches—as well as to political parties or other local groups. These are important communication media because, in

some regions, they constitute the only or among the few local communication channels (generally radio stations) that speak from underserved or excluded localities (neighborhoods, favelas, and areas of inland municipalities), in both rural and urban settings.

Beyond this strand rooted in geographic territories, there is also a second one: identity-based community media, which sometimes more clearly adopts characteristics of alternative media. They primarily advocate for causes led by marginalized groups suffering discrimination from patriarchal, sexist, xeno-phobic, LGBTQphobic, and other dominant cultures. These groups usually do not belong to traditional neighborhood community associations but rather to specific collectives and organizations, such as women's movements and LGBTQIA+ segments, among others.

Whereas the media in the first strand may be characterized either as small businesses or as altruistic (there are also isolated experiences of citizens operating media to serve their community), those in the second are generally altruistic by nature, driven by volunteers, as they are embedded in struggles for visibility and for changing cultural values and norms. They are identified as community media because they tend to form strong bonds with people within the same spectrum, thereby forming "communities."

COMMUNICATION MEDIA IN THE EMANCIPATORY ALTERNATIVE VECTOR AND IN THE LIBERTARIAN VECTOR

Brazil retains a memory of the alternative press that includes the workers' press of the early 20th century (Ferreira, 1988) and the alternative newspapers of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. The latter fell into three strands (Kucinski, 1991): predominantly political (with leftist ideals), those focused on countercultural themes, and those critical of customs and ideological and cultural norms.

According to Kucinski (1991, p. XIII), "between 1964 and 1980, around 150 [alternative] periodicals were born and died, all of which were marked by uncompromising opposition to the military regime"— also referred to as nanicos (dwarfs). These include *Pif Paf* (1964), *O Pasquim* (1969), *O Bondinho* (1970), *Jornalivro* (1981), *Opinião* (1972), *Em Tempo* (1977), *Amanhã* (1977), *Movimento* (1975), *Brasil Extra* (1984) and *Retrato do Brasil* (1987) (Kucinski, 1991), as well as more segmented alternative outlets, such as the gay press, which is said to have emerged in the 1960s, including O Snob (1963) and O Lampião da Esquina (1978) (Boita, 2022; Silva Jr., 2023), and the lesbian press of the 1980s (Silveira-Barbosa, 2019), such as ChanaComChana (1981) and Iamuricumá (1981).

There are different ways to conceive and express the idea of the "alterna-tive" (Atton, 2002; Barranqueiro; Treré, 2021; Carvalho, 2014; Coelho, 2019; Colodeti, 2016; Downing, 2009; Fernandes, 2019; Fígaro, 2018; Jorge Filho, 2018; Kaplún, 2019; Kucinski, 1991; Marcos, 2021; Meyers, 2008; Peruzzo, 2009, 2024; Silveira-Barbosa, 2019), These perspectives are not so divergent, as they all refer to forms of *alternativity* in relation to the mainstream press and conventional media, among other factors. Such *alternativities* refer especially to "format, language, choice or framing of narratives" (Jorge Filho, 2018, p. 7), as well as to nonhierarchical content production, a leftist political position, and a nonprofit nature.

Initially, these were alternative outlets in the form of small newspapers, tabloids, magazines, pamphlets, fanzines, etc., but more recently, they have adopted various digital formats, such as online newspapers, e-zines, magazi-nes, blogs, collaborative platforms, portals, social media profiles, and YouTube channels, among others.

In the 1990s, aligned with the combative alternative journalism that oppo-sed the dictatorship in previous decades, it was understood—from the radical "alter" of "alternative"—that the press carried at least four essential meanings:

> something not connected to dominant politics; a choice between two mutually
> exclusive options; the only way out of a difficult situation; and, finally, the desire
> of the 1960s and 70s generations to lead the social transformations they advocated.
> (Kucinski, 1991, p. XIII)

In the early 21st century, the following features are attributed to alternative journalism: a) its economic structure differs from that of large media corpora-tions; b) its ideological bias aligns with radical agendas of groups excluded from traditional media; c) a self-perception as different or opposed to mainstream media; d) a challenge to certain values, norms, and practices of mainstream journalism (Meyers, 2008). To fully account for the Brazilian reality, it is also necessary to add political-ideological and economic autonomy from govern-ments and other political forces aligned with dominant classes, along with a self-organized model and sustainable, collaborative production relationships that do not pursue profit.

As previously noted, diversity has been a defining feature of alternative media since its inception. In recent years, however, Brazilian alternative media have taken on even more distinct forms—both within the alternative sphere itself and through their clearer shift toward the independent—due to the political and economic context. This is a period marked by a reduction in journalistic jobs,

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which fuels entrepreneurship, facilitated by technological ease, alongside the consolidation of democratic politics that enables various forms of expression, including anti-democratic ones.

In an attempt to establish distinctions from a didactic perspective, I present below several vectors within the specific alternative segment that can help clarify this multifaceted and evolving phenomenon. Broadly and historically, two main types of media emerge: the emancipatory alternative vector and the libertarian alternative vector, both sharing core traits of alternative media.

The problematic use of the term *alternative* and its derivatives has long been recognized (Simpson Grinberg, 1987) due to its imprecision. Yet the debate is becoming increasingly complex as new social segments appropriate alternative spaces through diverse practices.

Within the alternative sphere, communication initiatives arise from individuals, civic collectives, or social organizations whose media—and the alternative journalism itself—operate in opposition to the conventional media system, whether private media corporations or public sector outlets. These initiatives prioritize counter-information and critical approaches to events and topics of civic public interest. In other words, alternative media are characterized by being outside of mainstream media infrastructure; they generally claim political and economic autonomy from governments and other elite-aligned forces; they adopt a progressive ideological editorial line; and differentiate themselves in their modes of organization for content production and circulation, sustainability, management, and economic support—typically based on voluntary work, donations, crowdfunding, participation in public and private grants, and/or resources from supporting entities. They also differ in ownership forms and levels of civic participation. Thus, a set of factors helps define *alternativity*, not all of which occur simultaneously, and which extend beyond mere platform choice or content type.

Nevertheless, even while distinguishing this vector by its progressive and combative characteristics, it is necessary to deepen understanding, as there are currents that differ at the core of alternative communication, journalism, or media experiences.

The first vector—the emancipatory—encompasses media and journalism of a critically emancipatory nature: resistant in character, providing alternative information to conventional media—not to replace it, obviously, but to pursue civic-humanistic changes demanded by marginalized segments and society at large. Ultimately, they address themes differently than mainstream media, questioning macro-social, economic, political, communicational, and cultural

systems—but stop short of advocating radical structural change to government, legislative bodies, class systems, or capitalist modes of production.

The second vector—the libertarian emancipatory—develops a sharper critical and ideological stance: radical and revolutionary, advocating the use of communication as a form of radical transgression in favor of civism and public interest (Jordan, 2002). In this approach, communication becomes activism aligned with "transgressive movements seeking social change that redefine social structures" (Jordan, 2002, p. 36). Included here are media that operate in contexts of armed conflict or radical change, or are developed by libertarian groups aiming to destabilize dominant systems, denounce perverse situations, and fight for fundamental structural transformations—whether in patriarchal systems, energy policy, land concentration—and in political and economic structures, with a view to forming a new hegemony.

MEDIA IN THE PROGRESSIVE INDEPENDENT VECTOR

There appears to be a certain fracturing within the realm of alternative media, giving rise to a vector that was once considered part of the same segment—and indeed overlaps with the alternative—but has recently acquired distinguishing properties: different economic arrangements (self-management, collaborations, cooperatives, nongovernmental organizations), and in some cases, thematic specialization (e.g. human rights or Black issues[12]). Some even provide content production services for mainstream media outlets, which further differentiates them from traditional alternative media. That said, this depends on each case, as some alternative outlets do indeed offer such services. When alternative media and journalism shift toward or are created for more autonomous purposes and exhibit some market dependence—detaching from the original features of the category despite retaining aspects such as leftist ideology and thematic framing—they fit better within the *progressive independent vector.*

The category of "independent" is just as problematic as that of "alternative," since, similarly, it claims to be politically and economically detached from the forces and logics of the traditional market and from governments. However, there are cases in which some degree of reproduction of these mechanisms and political alignments occurs, which is yet another reason not to generalize, as this independence tends to be relative. These are media outlets linked to collectives of journalists and/or non-journalists, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations serving the public interest, or even microenterprises operating as small units of collaborative production or "businesses" seeking economic and financial sustainability and the remuneration of their members.

[12] An abundance that prevents any researcher, in fact, from having full command of the bibliography on the topic. To mention just a few examples: a search on the US Amazon using the term "manosphere" yields 76 book titles. On Google Scholar, the same term is associated with more than 5,000 results.

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In this context, there are both media outlets that use "alternative" forms of fundraising (service provision, crowdfunding, subscriptions, donations, grants, etc.) and develop collaborative production relations, and others that replicate hierarchical systems and business models in the form of microenterprises—which is not a recent phenomenon—and can be found in digital portals operated by both progressive and conservative sectors.

With regard to financial resources, since all media outlets must be funded, one differentiating factor between alternative outlets and certain types of independent media is whether they raise resources solely for their maintenance or whether they aim for profit with private or corporate ends. On the other hand, as platforms originally created as alternative or independent grow in operational and economic capacity and in audience reach, they tend to become part of the traditional market, regardless of their editorial policy, whether progressive or conservative.

However, the issue of independent media is controversial because, while on one hand they generate innovative initiatives in the practice of journalism with greater freedom—in response to the crisis in journalism and the decline in employability (Bastos, 2021; Fígaro; Nonato, 2017)—on the other, they end up feeding into the neoliberal machinery, given their ties to entrepreneurship.

There is a trend that tends to characterize the experiences of this current—as well as those of alternative outlets—as politically and economically independent, and free from the narrative constraints and operating methods of the traditional oligopolistic media, from the dominant groups in political power, and from dependence on advertising from large corporations (Marcos, 2021), with a "self-centered commitment" to journalistic ethics and a rejection of the "notion of neutrality" so widely championed by the mainstream press (Fígaro, 2018, p. 39).

Ultimately, these alternative and progressive independent journalism do not always present clear distinctions between them, but both contribute to the public debate by offering differentiated and in-depth interpretations of current issues, supplying society with content from contextualized and reality-grounded alternative sources. The intersections between these two currents perhaps help to explain the difficulties (Alves & Santos, 2023) in distinguishing the alternative from the independent.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN THE CONSERVATIVE
AND EXTREME FAR-RIGHT FASCIST VECTOR

Alternative media and independent journalism are not the exclusive domain of progressive sectors. They also exist within the conservative political sphere and compete for space in the public debate, though reflecting distinct positions in terms of political-ideological conceptions. Within this media universe, we find both traditionally conservative outlets and those aligned with an anti-civic, far-right fascist ideology. Far-right fascist, because they aggressively defend and employ fascist tactics. Anti-civic, because they do not respect the Constitution or the law, despite claiming otherwise.

In the context of conflict and political polarization in Brazil—since 2018—media initiatives from extremist sectors have advanced, especially on platforms, digital networks, and apps which, in the Brazilian case, violate constitutional principles safeguarding the Democratic State (through attempts to destabilize institutions) and the principle of equality of all individuals before the law and the Constitution.

I classify media initiatives from this segment as *independent*, particularly in the sense of their disconnection from major media conglomerates, their distinctively biased content profile, and their production routines (sometimes collaborative and less hierarchical). However, this independence does not clearly manifest, ideologically, politically, or economically, in relation to the government of the time or to financial collection methods of the traditional communications market—at least between the years 2019 and 2022[13] in Brazil. These are initiatives created by individuals, groups, or small businesses that use internet portals, content production platforms, websites, blogs, audiovisual channels on YouTube, social media pages, app-based networks, etc., to disseminate content—whether original or repurposed from third parties—of a conservative and/or hate-driven nature, often incompatible with the law and frequently based on false information and fake news[14].

These operations are sustained through personal income or via advertising, subscriptions, paywalls, donations, contributions, monetization through algorithm-driven advertising on the internet[15], among other sources. However, some of these ventures aim for profit beyond mere sustainability, raising substantial sums via monetization generated by direct advertising or programmatic advertising from Google and other digital platforms, based on user access to the distributed content. For example, it was reported that twelve far-right channels that promoted anti-democratic acts received over R$5.6 million from YouTube in two years[16]. Among them, the far-right Bolsonarist channels *Folha Pública* (R$2.5 million), *Foco Brasil* (R$1.55 million), and *Giro de Notícias* (R$1.1 million)

[13] This does not mean that there are no alternative and independent media outlets with direct or indirect political alignment with left-wing governments.

[14] According to the *Gazeta do Povo* portal, based in Curitiba-PR, which has existed for 100 years and is part of this same political-ideological lineage, in 2019 there were 15 "essential" digital platforms in the rise of the new right, among them *Brasil Paralelo* (which even has its streaming platform), *Guerrilha Way, Cedet* — a virtual bookstore —, liberal institutes such as *Millenium, Mises Brasil,* and *Liberal, Centro Dom Bosco, Instituto Borborema*, the *Online Philosophy Course* (Olavo de Carvalho), as well as digital influencers (Desideri, 2022).

[15] I would exclude from this vector, as well as from the alternative -vector, those media outlets that are structured according to business logic, some with high profitability and strong operational capacity, as they are inserted into traditional advertising sales systems and monetized through digital monetization platforms. These would fall under the category of conventional, private media—even if small in scale—but with a traditional or far-right profile.

[16] See also the article from the UOL on the same topic (Mello, 2021).

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received R\$5.6 million between 2018 and 2020, according to the petition submitted by Deputy Prosecutor General Humberto Jacques de Medeiros to the Federal Supreme Court in the inquiry into anti-democratic acts (Carta Capital, 2021)[17]. Monetization is activated by algorithmic systems, and when content is fueled by hate—often leveraging false information, slander, insult, or defamation[18], which are criminal offenses against honor under Articles 138, 139, and 140 of the Brazilian Penal Code—it tends to generate clicks, likes, and shares because it triggers emotional reactions, thus reinforcing the cycle. In these cases, political, ideological, and economic interests converge.

The appropriation of current technological opportunities for content production, replication, dissemination—and monetization—has become possible due to the emergence of digital platforms and social networks that empower various sectors of society, including the right and new right (Chaloub & Perlatto, 2016; Miguel, 2018), or the "brand-new rights" (Rosa et al., 2018), which have gained greater prominence in recent decades, particularly in Brazil during the 2018 electoral campaign and the Bolsonaro administration (2019–2022) (Puglia, 2018).

To better understand the assumptions underlying the visions of these new right-wing trends, it is useful to note, as Luis Felipe Miguel (2018) explains, that the extreme right in Brazil includes three main currents: libertarianism, religious fundamentalism, and a rehashed anti-communism. Libertarianism advocates state reduction, asserting that any market-derived situation is inherently fair, no matter how unequal it appears. It is considered ultra-liberal: "libertarianism begins and ends with the dogma of the sanctity of 'freely' established contracts, reduces all rights to property, and abhors any form of social solidarity" (Miguel, 2018, p. 19). Religious fundamentalism gained momentum in Brazil from the 1990s onward, driven by neopentecostal churches supporting the election of their pastors. It is defined by "the belief in a revealed truth that shuts down any possibility of debate. Active in opposing abortion rights, inclusive understandings of family, anti-homophobia policies, among other issues" (Miguel, 2018, p. 21). The third current recycles anti-communism, which seemed outdated after the Cold War, but took a new form in Latin America and Brazil: the threat became Venezuelan "Bolivarianism" (Miguel, 2018, p. 22).

These three currents intersect, merging anti-communism with moral reactionism and extreme liberalism. They are ultra-conservative viewpoints nostalgic for a mythical past, in contrast to evolving citizenship status. Adherents of this ideological lineage anchor themselves in fundamentalism and in fanciful interpretations of Antonio Gramsci—criticized as "cultural Marxism"—thought to have influenced left-wing movements, but reappropriated by the right to articulate

their political worldview (Felinto, 2020; Miguel, 2018; Puglia, 2018). In the hands of right-wing detractors, these ideas become a "simplistic Machiavellian strategy aimed at undermining consensuses that allow society to function by manipulating minds" (Miguel, 2018, p. 22). In this context, ideas proliferate that the dissolution of conventional sexual morality and patriarchal family (seen as *society's cell*) causes the downfall of society, capitalism, and Western civilization (Miguel, 2018). These premises help explain the far-right's aversion to proposals honoring difference, gender equality, and recognition of diverse family structures[19].

These interpretations, along with other conspiratorial narratives targeting science, scientists, universities, and the left—such as the hypothetical global capitalist plot for a "socialist dictatorship" (Felinto, 2020; Miguel, 2018)—are stereotypes delegitimizing progressive positions. These narratives polarize society into virtuous conservative extremists and enemies—including "communists," "leftists," "*petralhas*"—with figures like Olavo de Carvalho, astrologer and self-styled philosopher, becoming ideological gurus of Brazil's Bolsonarist far right by disseminating his books and courses to ultraconservative followers.

It is against this intellectual backdrop that the progressive appropriation of "independent" digital media by the new right occurs, with media manifestations reflecting these tendencies in two strands: the *traditional conservative right* and the *far-right fascist extremist vector.*

The first—traditional conservative—has always championed liberal capitalism, free enterprise, neoliberalism, cultural-traditional conservatism (patriarchy), and contests space in public debate alongside traditional conservative press and big media conglomerates, with influence from institutes such as the Millennium Institute.

The second shares the same ideological base but adopts extreme positions against the left, supporting traditional conservative moral agendas and employing fascist strategies, thus anti-democratic and anti-civic. Both strands benefit from massive use of digital media platforms, messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram), and a wide network of influencers across YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, etc.

All these channels, whose practices manifest in their content, reflect extremist fascist principles and strategies—hence I classify the second vector as fascist--extremist. Fascism is based on political tactics designed to create consensus around the recovery of a glorious mythical past, the notion of nation, defense of patriarchal hierarchy, ethnic cleansing, propaganda to distort ideas and discredit institutions, cultivation of authoritarian hierarchies, the emergence of a leader, and use of law-and-order narratives to define "us" (the good, honest, virtuous)

no mercado convencional de mídia, como explicamos antes, pois adquirem propriedades empresariais.

[19] Research conducted by Pereira et al. (2024) on 31 Bolsonaro-supporting profiles (users) on Twitter (now X), from January 24 to January 30, 2022, on the occasion of Olavo de Carvalho's death, reveals the exaltation of his persuasive role in strengthening a fundamentalist view within Christian thought, in the use of the anthem and of symbols and colors of the national flag as unifying elements in the name of a "patriotism"—ultimately unpatriotic—in the defense of the traditional family, and in the anti-communist stance, as if this indeed represented a threat to Christian values and democratic freedoms.

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against "them" (seen as lazy, criminal, corrupt, "communists," "leftists," "*petra-lhas*[20]"), attacking universities[21], science, intellectuals, and social welfare policies.

After some time, "with these tactics, fascist politics ends up creating a state of unreality, in which conspiratorial theories and false news replace reasoned debate" (Stanley, 2020, p. 16). Foundational discourse is "replaced by obvious lies repeated," a process by which "fascist politics destroys the space of information" (Stanley, 2020, p. 60)—a phenomenon attempted in Brazil especially from 2018 to 2022, and which persists in the imaginary and practices of right-wing extremism, whether by conviction or opportunistic political-electoral strategy.

During Jair Bolsonaro's administration (2018–2023), various positions publicly expressed corroborated these notions: attempts to distort the history of the military dictatorship in Brazil; the anti-science and anti-vaccine stance during the COVID-19 pandemic; preaching against the Supreme Federal Court; discrediting the electoral system; militant fundamentalism, especially religious; and the discrimination against Black people, Indigenous peoples, quilombola communities, Northeasterners, and empowered women, all aimed at reinforcing the falsehood of white male superiority and the valorization of patriarchy, despite discrimination constituting a crime under the Brazilian Constitution. The encouragement of hatred and violence, following in the wake of racism, homophobia, and misogyny, has led to the polarization of society between "patriots," the "blessed," and the evil—those who do not share the same views and interests and who defend human rights and equality. In this ideological avalanche, there is also preaching against the Republic's institutions, the arts, culture, and universities, whose representatives are branded as troublemakers, drug addicts, and plunderers of public money, using as a "scapegoat" the cultural incentive laws, such as the Rouanet Law (Law 8,313/1991).

In this scenario, fascist disinformation is disseminated through their independent media, as this extremist political-ideological stance is widely promoted by far-right groups on corporate social media platforms and apps, and replicated on websites, blogs, audiovisual channels, podcasts, portals, etc., in addition to paid boosting by bots.

Not to mention that, at times, these anti-civic contents are even replicated by other segments (individuals, groups, and mainstream corporate journalism), generally under the pretext of criticism, but which, in practice, end up amplifying them further. Ultimately, fascist positions are propagated through fake news and other deceptive content, and insults, slander, and defamation have flooded—and continue to flood—the extremist digital networks of the new right. By way of illustration, we can observe some findings from studies conducted on the use of digital networks by this segment.

[20] It is a pejorative and ironic term used to refer to supporters or members of the Workers' Party (PT), a Brazilian political party.

[21] A former Minister of Education at the time stated that federal universities are spaces of disorder, politicking, and ideological indoctrination (see: *Carta Capital*, 2019), in disregard of the work of training human resources and of the development of scientific research carried out by these institutions.

A study conducted in 2019–2020 (Dibai & Dalmonte, 2022) among a Bolsonarist network on Telegram demonstrated that offenses, distortions, and false information—in texts, images, and memes—fueled the posting of content and interactions. Artists not aligned with Bolsonaro are associated with indulgence, immorality, and even criminality:

> Felipe Neto recurrently appears as a pedophile, corrupter of children, and supporter of abortion. … Xuxa is targeted with the same slurs, in addition to being labeled a "person with issues linked to dysfunctionality (a fake woman) who never received love from her father." … On human rights, leftists are portrayed as defenders of pedophiles and criminals. Feminism is redefined as hatred of men, a movement of frustrated and ugly women. … Black and Indigenous struggles are dismissed as divisive agendas, anti-national causes, and reverse prejudice. … In the Bolsonarist view, everything negative is connected to the left, characterized as the great threat to be fought with "all forces." (Dibai & Dalmonte, 2022, p. 159–161)

Another study (Popolin et al., 2024), conducted in Bolsonarist WhatsApp groups in 2021, shows, among other aspects, how gender issues are addressed. They preach that the "ideal woman" or "real woman" is the one who still reproduces patriarchal values. Guaranteeing rights to LGBTQIA+ people "is viewed as a threat to beliefs and to the family. … [There is] repulsion toward everything considered feminist, and antifeminism appears in excerpts such as 'naked feminazis,' 'hairy women defecating in the street,' feminism and machismo are both backward" (Popolin et al., 2024, p. 9).

Ultimately, beyond the distortion and simplification of feminist and LGBT causes, there is

> a normalization of violence against women; they discuss the qualities of the "real woman," even admitting that the perfect woman is … [the one who] washes and irons my clothes, cleans the house and the kitchen. Takes two showers a day, is always fragrant. (Popolin et al., 2024, p. 12).

The authors also show that posts frequently link to websites known for disseminating fake news, such as *Terra Brasil Notícias*, the former *Terça Livre* channel, and *Revista Oeste*.

Thus, within the new right, especially the fascist extremist wing, there has been the growth of independent media—even self-proclaimed alternative[22]—but which, in the classic conceptual sense, are not alternative at all. These outlets align better with the independent category, since they are detached from media

[22] See excerpt from an interview given by former President Bolsonaro, on Oct. 19, 2022, to the *Futbolaço* Podcast, taken from the video "Bolsonaro talks about the importance of alternative media and why politicians lie so much."

conglomerates, large economic groups, and governments—although even this is debatable, as in that period not all such characteristics were confirmed. In practice, the sector is murky, as there are genuinely independent outlets, but also others more characteristic of business ventures. They include profiles and channels on digital media and networks, portals, blogs, newspapers, institutional websites, networks in apps, and platforms managed by digital influencers, which proved politically, ideologically, and economically connected to the government of the time (2019–2022), in addition to having profit-oriented interests and being organized as companies (Peruzzo, 2024).

Therefore, strictly speaking, and considering the conceptual rigor of alternative and independent categories, such initiatives that reproduce capitalist market logics would be better classified within the sphere of the conventional commercial media market. For this reason, it is worth emphasizing the advantage of avoiding permanent generalizations and of monitoring changes, because when an initiative changes its attributes—operational capacity, size, profitability, audience reach, etc.—it also changes its position in the communication system.

Ultimately, this entire movement previously discussed confirms what Rancière (2019) had already stated, albeit in another context: "through the hatred they manifest against democracy, or in its name, and through the amalgams to which they subject its notion, they force us to recover the singular strength proper to it" (p. 121). The strength of Brazilian democracy was demonstrated in the 2022 electoral process, when different sectors came together in favor of changing the course to which the country was being subjected to save democracy, resulting in the election of a president opposed to that process, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Therefore, in a contentious scenario, there also exists the power of counter-information and of unity in defense of democracy—an environment that both conventional media and progressive alternative and independent outlets help to weave.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As observed, there are convergences but also clear distinctions between journalistic manifestations and media channels within this broad segment of communication alternatives. The boundaries are tenuous, and the scenario is dynamic and complex. The categories presented as strands explain a political moment in Brazil and have, above all, a didactic value. It must be taken into account that they may shift, as they follow the social and structural dynamics of society.

Ultimately, the differing political-ideological positions—from civic to unconstitutional and anti-civic—color the mosaic of community, alternative, and independent media in Brazil. It is important to note that, within this latter spectrum, depending on how they are configured—when channels become companies and economic and political independence is no longer observed—they come to be part of the traditional media market.

It can be said that three factors are crucial in differentiating progressive independents from conservative "independent" media: political-ideological positioning (civic dimension[23] versus unconstitutional-fascist), the production relationships in the content generation process (collaborative versus hierarchical), and the mechanisms used for fundraising (alternative versus conventional), which are tied to their purpose—whether nonprofit or aimed at private and corporate profit.

Amid technological changes and reinventions in language and formats, the core character of alternative media and journalism remains: a free and transformative perspective[24]. That is, they are characterized by their detachment from governmental and corporate apparatuses aligned with political-conservative and/or commercial interests. This is why they intersect with other related communicational initiatives led by marginalized sectors of subordinated classes—namely, popular and community communication.

In practice, this is a movement aimed at concrete actions of intervention in the public sphere—debate, the circulation of information, and civic social mobilization—according to each historical context and the interplay of societal interests involved.

Finally, it is worth noting that the categorization presented here is not standard in the current literature. Broadly speaking, it tends not to make these distinctions, instead grouping the various initiatives—regardless of political-ideological orientation—as alternatives (Fernandes, 2019), counter-hegemonic (Marcos, 2021), or even radical (Downing, 2002). However, some distinctions are already being observed, such as that between alternatives and independents (Fígaro, 2018), particularly in a time when new economic arrangements are emerging, and some actors already identify themselves as independent.

It is important to consider possible changes in some media outlets from one moment to the next—for instance, shifting from alternative to independent, or from independent to the conventional market—whether progressive or conservative—as a result of changes in ownership, since they are subject to historical circumstances, whether political, social, or related to sustainability. It is worth remembering that sustainability does not refer solely to economic support, but also encompasses social, organizational, and environmental aspects—that is, a

[23] The civic dimension of citizenship concerns public responsibility toward others, the country, and humanity.

[24] Here, we refer to the free press from the perspective of alternative communication. Therefore, we are not generalizing to other types of free press, which are also possible and desirable, such as major commercial newspapers and other communication channels that exercise freedom of expression, even when they oppose the interests of governments and other political and social forces.

set of conditions that ensure the continuity of their operational approach and
broader viability. ◼

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INTERVIEW

Jean-Claude Bernardet: a tribute [a]

Jean-Claude Bernardet: uma homenagem

Interview with

JEAN-CLAUDE BERNARDET

by FÁBIO ROGÉRIO [b]

ABSTRACT / EDITORS' NOTE

The Editorial Board of *MATRIZes* appreciates when interviews submitted to the journal are conducted with pioneering researchers who have had a strong influence in their field of study, considering that the relatively broad format of this type of text can foster the recapitulation of significant aspects of their trajectories and self-reflective discussions. From this perspective, one name remembered was that of Jean-Claude Bernardet, an author whose contributions have been fundamental to Brazilian film studies. With a personality as multifaceted as that of his mentor, Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, Bernardet passed away on July 12 of this year, leaving an important mark on national culture as a critic, actor, screenwriter, filmmaker, translator, writer, professor, and university researcher at the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo (USP).

As a way of paying posthumous tribute to Bernardet, the journal reached out to people close to him to verify the existence of any unpublished interviews, and came across film-maker Fábio Rogério, who kindly shared some materials that had not yet been released in print. Thus, an interview conducted on December 1, 2019, at the Fest Aruanda Hotel in João Pessoa, Paraíba, was selected and edited, in which Bernardet discusses aspects of his biography and his relationship with Brazilian cinema.

RESUMO / NOTA DOS EDITORES

O Comitê Editorial de *MATRIZes* aprecia quando as entrevistas submetidas à revista são realizadas com pesquisadores pioneiros e com forte influência no campo de estudos, tendo em vista que o formato relati vamente amplo do texto pode favorecer a recapitulação de aspectos significativos de suas trajetórias e discussões de caráter autorreflexivo. Nessa perspectiva, um nome lembrado era o de Jean-Claude Bernardet, autor com contribuições fundamentais aos estudos cinematográficos brasileiros. Com personalidade tão multifacetada quanto a de seu mestre Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, Bernardet faleceu em 12 de julho deste ano, deixando uma marca importante na cultura nacional ao atuar como

crítico, ator, roteirista, cineasta, tradutor, escritor, professor e pesquisador universitário na Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Como forma de prestar uma homenagem póstuma a Bernardet, a revista sondou pessoas próximas a ele para verificar a existência de alguma entrevista inédita, chegando ao cineasta Fábio Rogério, que gentilmente mostrou alguns materiais ainda não publicados na forma impressa. Assim, foi escolhida e editada uma entrevista realizada em 1º de dezembro de 2019, no Hotel do Fest Aruanda, em João Pessoa, na Paraíba, na qual Bernardet explana sobre aspectos de sua biografia e de sua relação com o cinema brasileiro.

MATRIZes: In which city in Belgium were you born?
Jean-Claude Bernardet: Charleroi.

MATRIZes: What do you remember about that city?
JCB: Nothing. I stayed there only for a few months. I was born during a trip in 1936.

MATRIZes: Where did you go after that?
JCB: Paris.

MATRIZes: How long did you stay in Paris?
JCB: Thirteen years.

MATRIZes: What memories do you have of your childhood in Paris?
JCB: The war. Basically, the war. The end of the war. Basically, everything revolves around the war.

MATRIZes: And after Paris, where did you go?
JCB: I went to the south of France, Nice. We stayed there for a few months, and then we came to Brazil.

MATRIZes: Did you come with your family?
JCB: Yes. My father (André Maurice Pierre Bernardet) came first, and we followed him a few months later.

MATRIZes: What is war?
JCB: The fear of bombings, the lack of food, and various episodes. One day, a bomb fragment fell very close to my mother; I didn't see it. She was outside and came back completely terrified, as she could have died—episodes like that. Sirens, running to the basements, the shelters, things like that.

MATRIZes: Did you come to Brazil fleeing the war?

JCB: No, because the war ended in '44. We came to Brazil in '49. So, I started high school in France.

MATRIZes: How was your arrival in Brazil?

JCB: We arrived in São Paulo. The idea of Brazil is an abstract idea, isn't it? Just as it is with any country. Arriving in Campina Grande in 1949, for instance, is arriving in Brazil. Arriving in São Paulo in 1949 is also arriving in Brazil, but it is totally different. So, we arrived in São Paulo, and I don't remember how we got there—I think because we came by ship to Rio. And then I don't know if we took a plane; anyway, one fine day, we were in São Paulo and stayed in a building, a very tall hotel called, if I am not mistaken, Hotel São Paulo. And we had a room on a very high floor. Then my mother (Olga, his stepmother) opened the window and said: "this city frightens me." So, that was the view we had of the city. It is a city—and it still is, by the way—harsh, violent, difficult. In a way, the film I made, entitled *São Paulo: Sinfonia e cacofonia*, expresses this view of São Paulo.

MATRIZes: You have been living in São Paulo for 70 years.

JCB: Seventy years. I have been living in São Paulo for seventy years, with some intervals, because my wife (Lucila Ribeiro Bernardet) and I lived in Brasília during the period of the famous University of Brasília. We arrived there in '65, when the film course was opened, and we stayed—I don't know how many months, but it was a matter of months—because there was the crisis, the dismissal of the teaching staff, which must have happened around November '65. My wife stayed in Brasília to see what would happen politically, and I, shortly after the dismissal, went to Rio to try to find work, because we had absolutely nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing. I stayed a few months in Rio, then my wife came. The story went as follows: there was a publishing house, which still exists, called *Civilização Brasileira*, which published the journal *Revista Civilização Brasileira*, which had an important cinema section. Alex Viany was the person in charge of the cinema section, which was becoming increasingly significant. Then, there was a project to create another journal dedicated to cinema, removing the cinema section from *Civilização Brasileira*. Ênio Silveira had this project, Alex had this project, but the following happened: censorship was not prior; it was after the fact. *Civilização* would publish books and, after they were released in bookstores, the books would be banned. In other words, the financial balance of the publisher was severely compromised. To the point that this journal project was postponed to the following

month. This happened for several months, and at a certain point, my wife and I were at a friend's house. The person asked: "It's not possible to stay here until next month, until next month, is it?". So, we returned to São Paulo. And then I ended up joining USP, after some setbacks, but I ended up joining. So, things stabilized a bit until AI-5, when I was banned by AI-5, and then came another moment of great financial disturbance. In '64, I had already lost everything, because the *Última Hora* journal was no longer running. The Cinematheque— forget it. Those were the two places where I worked. So, I joined a publishing house where I had already worked in the '50s. I joined that publishing house around '56. I had already worked quite a lot. They took me back. And then, after Brasília, a second financial collapse; after AI-5, a third collapse. So, over the years, I would rebuild myself and, after AI-5, already with a daughter (Lígia Ribeiro Bernardet), without resources and with no prospect of obtaining any. So, it was a very difficult moment. Then I went to Chile alone—I mean, I went to a festival in Chile with several Brazilian artists, but without my wife or my daughter. There were already some Brazilians isolated in Chile. I made contact with professors, and one of them, (Fernando) Perrone, told me there might be a chance to find a position, a job at Universidad de Concepción, but he couldn't decide that at the moment. I had to return to Brazil, send all the documentation of what I had done at the Cinematheque, at USP, in Brasília. And that, based on this documentation, there would be a possibility, no certainty. When I returned to São Paulo, still in '69, I made this proposal to my wife—this was during (Salvador) Allende's campaign—and she said to me: "I will not go to Chile because what happened in Brazil will happen there." And, in fact, in '73 there was the coup. She told me she would not go to any African country, nor any Latin American country; if we were to go into exile, it would be Paris, New York… The Czechoslovak consul at the time, the ambassador, I don't know, made me a scholarship offer to go to Prague. I started to think about it, but Czech is a very difficult language; anyway, I started to think about it. And, talking with him, I realized that the scholarship was only for me. I said: "no, wait a minute, I am married, I have a daughter, so, it's not possible." So, I didn't go. Later, I really decided to stay in Brazil, I mean, it was a determination: not to practice self-exile. And then I managed to find some odd jobs. For example, I made two films with João Batista de Andrade (*Paulicéia fantástica* [1970] and Eterna esperança: Sem pressa e sem pausa, como as estrelas [1971]). These films were produced by the State Cinema Commission. Obviously, I couldn't receive money from the State. So, my name was replaced by the name of a friend, who is credited[1]. It was evident that the president of the State Cinema Commission knew about this—in fact, not only did he know, but he was the

one who proposed it. Once that decision was made, it had to remain absolutely hidden. But we were editing the film at a company called Líder. Naturally, I was seen in front of the moviola. Well, this reached certain ears, and one day they told Batista: "if you continue working with him, we will denounce you under the National Security Law." Then Batista went back to Líder and said to me: "look, so-and-so said this, leave immediately. Leave and do not return." That was the third film, so we abandoned it. But, in parallel with this, I was approached by the Goethe-Institute. And I do not speak German, but they were very interested in what I was doing. So, we did two projects with the Institute, mainly the one in Salvador, but also the one in São Paulo. In Salvador, they asked me to teach a film course, an intensive course, a week or fifteen days long, and they paid me regularly for it. This was also arranged with the Goethe. That allowed me to travel quite a lot throughout the Northeast. So, this was a time when I often went to Paraíba, to Campina Grande, where there was—or perhaps still is—the Museum of Modern Art (now the Museum of Art and Science of Campina Grande), where there were people like Bráulio Tavares, Umbelino (Brazil). So, I taught many courses there, and we held film screenings with discussions, etc. I went as far as Fortaleza, Recife, etc. I would go to film clubs, and there were also discussions about how to raise current political issues without provoking actions that could justify any intervention by the police or other institutional bodies. So, I did that for a long time. With the director of the Goethe in Salvador, I went to Germany. He managed to have me serve as a jury member at a German festival. My expenses were covered, and after that festival, which was the Oberhausen Festival, we traveled to several places. In Munich, he obtained 21 hours of Nazi production, Nazi film production. Not from the Nazi era, but produced by the Nazi State. And, of course, all in German, with no subtitles in any language. We returned with that material and held a major seminar called "*Cinema e Política*." We held it in Rio, Brasília, Salvador, São Paulo, and Curitiba, we could not. The Goethe in Porto Alegre said it was not possible to address this theme because of the Nazis who existed there. I stayed at the Goethe with a teacher for quite some time to listen to those recordings and everything the speeches said, in order to prepare for the seminar. So, it was a lengthy job, I used my memory as much as I could, to the point that, in São Paulo, on the first day of the seminar, after screening a Hitler speech, someone, for example, asked me a question in German. Then I said: "but I do not speak German." "No, but you understand German because you said that Hitler had said, etc." Then I said: "no, I only did that because I know the speech by heart." Today I have forgotten that speech. That, in São Paulo, provoked a reaction from conservative Jews, who believed that the Nazis were

much stronger than we were. I mean, showing a screening with critical analysis did not alter anything in the power of the Nazis. Then they spray-painted the Goethe building. Goethe put up a sign on the facade, a notice saying that I was not German, that I was not Jewish, and that I was a film critic. Well, that wasn't very convincing. Then we held a meeting with Jewish intellectuals in São Paulo, professors from USP, a writer, a publisher, etc. These people truly supported me, people like Jacó Guinsburg from (the publisher) *Perspectiva*, Roberto Schwarz, in short, many people who supported Jean-Claude, who had to continue, who could not interrupt this work. That seminar went very well, and later, in São Paulo, with Schwarz, I held two seminars. One was very good, which was about Tiradentes. And what interested me was to present Tiradentes in the various forms of expression that posterity had given him. So, historiography, fictional literature, cinema—obviously cinema, right?—theater too, because there was that play *Arena Conta Tiradentes*, which had been staged in '65, and visual arts, the panel by that famous Brazilian painter…

MATRIZes: Portinari.

JCB: Portinari's panel, and for that, there were several professors specialized in historiography, visual arts, etc. It was very good, really very good. Part of it took place, I don't remember exactly where, I think at the Museum of Image and Sound, and the classes moved around because, for instance, *Arena Conta Tiradentes* had been revived by a group at the time we were holding the seminar. So, there were classes in the theater with the actors, explaining Augusto Boal's dramaturgy; in the visual arts, there were two classes, one in the usual classroom, which was about the iconic evolution of Tiradentes from ensign to his Christ-like representation. And for the panel, the class was held in front of the panel, with the professor showing this and that. So, I can even say it was something brilliant. For me, coming from Brasília, from the University of Brasília, there was a somewhat ideal function there: not to stay only in cinema, only in theater, but to show how culture intersects. All right, there is this film, that moment, that novel, to take the figure of Tiradentes in the diversity of its representations in various languages—all that worked very well. In fact, the seminar lasted four months, and people stayed for the full four months. Later, I did Getúlio Vargas, which was not as successful, but in the same spirit. For some reason, it did not go as well. However, something quite interesting happened. There were many history teachers in the Getúlio Vargas seminar; in Tiradentes, not so much, but in Getúlio, there were many. One day, after the screening of a documentary from the Press and Publicity Department, a teacher said the film showed that Getúlio Vargas had great popular support,

a large popular audience. I asked him to explain. And then, at the moment of the speech, there is a strong reaction of applause, of support. I said to him: "can you explain that to me? Because I did not see that in the film." There are shots of Getúlio at the podium, speaking, and there are shots of the crowd. Did someone tell you that was the same event? Editing exists in cinema, and even if the sentences fall over Getúlio, sound editing also exists. Therefore, through this, you can analyze a propaganda document, but you are not in a position— or at least you would need to conduct a much more complex image study than we can do now—you cannot state that this crowd responds in that way to that speech. So, that was the most important thing that happened in that seminar. It marked the teachers a lot: to have a more critical view of cinematographic documents. Not to see them as the presentation of a truth, but rather as a construction about an event. Therefore, it helps to understand ideology, editing, but not necessarily the event that would supposedly be documented. That was up until around '77, '78. In '78, there were elections. And then… I was doing other things as well with Goethe, but then the German Embassy asked Goethe to cut any ties with me. So, in the middle of a project, they told me: "thank you very much." It is also possible, and even likely—not certain, but likely—that I was not as cautious politically as I should have been and that I may have gone too far at times, but in any case, that happened. In '79 came the Amnesty Law, and USP ended up applying that law—I don't remember exactly if it was in '79 or in '80. Then I returned to USP. My perception at the time, and I still have it, is that I spent 11 years stripped of my political rights, and for me, it was good. It was great. Because if I had stayed at the university, I would have been subjected to all the pressures. At the School of Communications and Arts (ECA)—at the time it was not called ECA, if I am not mistaken—there were internal pressures from committees on students, on professors. I avoided all that and, on the other hand, I did very interesting things.

MATRIZes: And your work as a film critic at the newspaper *Opinião*?
JCB: And, besides those things in the 1970s, I was also a film critic for the newspaper *Opinião*. So, it was a time when I also stopped living in São Paulo because of the newspaper. I lived, and I lived very poorly, and later I ended up living with (Júlio César) Montenegro. Because I used to live in Lapa, in the Lapa hostels. It was really tough as hell. In some hostels, the rooms were cells, practically barred cells, and all, so you wouldn't get robbed or raped. Very violent. One day, I came back to one of those hostels; when I arrived, there was a crowd in front. "What happened?" A guy had been murdered in the hostel. I told Júlio: "this can't go on, let's figure something else out." Because *Opinião*

paid very little, really very little, and then we were in a huge contradiction, because it paid very little, but, on the other hand, we didn't want to go on strike, because our work had a practically national political significance, the newspaper had that reach, and so we were not going to interrupt a political action. And (Fernando) Gasparian, who was the owner of the newspaper, in a way, took advantage of that. Once, I spoke personally with Gasparian because I was really at the breaking point, absolutely at the breaking point. And, on top of that, I also worked at the publishing house, I was a collection editor, and he also didn't pay me there. So, one day I said to Gasparian: "but how do you expect us to live like this?" And he said: "I project your names nationally. You wouldn't have the reputation you have if it weren't for the newspaper." Well, fine. But for me it was really at the limit. And, since I had that cinema collection at (the publishing house) *Paz e Terra*, and since I couldn't get either the newspaper or *Paz e Terra* to pay me, one day I decided to do the following: after several promises that were not honored by Gasparian, I arrived very early at the publishing house, before they opened the doors. Then, when someone arrived, a secretary, I went in and sat on a bench, a sofa right next to the door of Gasparian's office. Then, when Gasparian arrived, I said: "look, here's the thing: you owe me a considerable amount of money—well, 'considerable' is relative. And you promised to pay me, but you didn't. So, here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to occupy your office. I'm going in with you now, and I'll only leave when you've paid me." So, I stayed there, he working. Around eleven o'clock, he said to me: "now I'm going to receive someone. I'd like you not to be here." I said: "fine. I'll leave, sit on the chair next to your door. When your visitor leaves, I'll come back in immediately." I did that. And so we stayed like that for a few hours. Finally, Gasparian calls the secretary and says: "oh, issue his check." The secretary comes back, hands the check to Gasparian and, to me, a receipt, asking me to sign it. I sign the receipt, Gasparian signs the check, the secretary leaves with the receipt, Gasparian hands me the check, and says: "there are no funds." Fine, now I already have the check. And he said: "no, I ask you to wait three days." And indeed, three days later, there were funds, and I deposited the check. But it was a struggle, you know? It was a struggle. So, you see how the 1970s were intense, right?

MATRIZes: How was your return to USP?

JCB: In 1980, when I returned to USP, they asked me to give the inaugural lecture. I gave the inaugural lecture, talked about various things, I don't remember what, but one thing was very clear: when I came back, I found the professors very sad. And in that inaugural lecture, I told the professors: "your

skin is gray. Mine isn't." And that precisely because I hadn't spent that decade under the pressures they suffered, the constraints of all that. I was a person in that decade with many problems. For example, at *Opinião*, the following happened: a censor in the newsroom. A censor banned one of my articles in its entirety. I said to Júlio: "but what's in that article?" Well, the following week, he bans another one entirely. Well, then he said to me: "look, write something really light." So, I wrote, if I'm not mistaken, about women, something like that. And the article was banned. I think I had written about *Tartuffe*. Then we were like, surprised: me, Raimundo (Pereira), Júlio. We concluded that my name had been banned. So, we used a pseudonym. And for a while, the newsroom didn't know, only Raimundo and Júlio. Júlio said to me: "look, now write an article really pushing the limit." And I wrote an article, I don't remember which, maybe about Palestinian cinema, I'm not sure, and then it went through. So, it was proven that the problem was my name. Now, why they banned me at a certain moment was not understood; why didn't they ban me from the start? Now it's coming to me… It's that I had been to Africa, I had been to Algiers for a Third World cinema congress. And that's why I had some knowledge of Palestinian cinema. And if that leaked somehow—because, actually, I didn't go straight to Algiers: I went to Paris, stayed at a film critic's house for a few days, and then went to Algiers. And I didn't return directly, I came back to Paris. I don't know if that information got out, but, in any case, that's it. And that is much better than having stayed at the university. There was a lot of that idea in the so-called progressive field: the situation is terrible, but "better me than a right-wing guy." It was never very clear to me what was genuinely political in that statement and what was just maintaining a situation that brought in money every month, in short, maintaining a certain stability. And that the political motive was often an alibi that allowed one to stay in the position with a good conscience. So, that's how I returned to the university.

MATRIZes: During that period in the 1970s, roughly eleven years of setbacks in your life, did you ever think about moving to France?

JCB: No. What I had done at the beginning of 1964, after the *Cadeia da Legalidade*, was think: since I am a foreigner, something could end up happening to me. So, I applied for Brazilian nationality, which, in an absolutely infernal bureaucratic system, did not come through. But all of that was proceeding slowly, slowly, but it was proceeding in such a way that naturalization was eventually granted during the Castelo Branco government. That gave me a certain security: that I could not be expelled, or at least not so easily, as a foreigner—a Frenchman could be expelled very easily, especially since at that

time I did not yet have a family, I wasn't married. So, I did that. In the 1970s, no. But I never thought about it. Not only did I never think about it, but I thought exactly the opposite. In the sense that no, that's not the way. It was hard many times—having to hide because you don't know what will happen, etc. But I also did not feel in a situation of such importance that I could be a target.

MATRIZes: Weren't you afraid of being arrested during the civil-military dictatorship?

JCB: In 1964, the following happened, for example: on the 31st, we were at the newsroom, at *Última Hora*, and the editor-in-chief, around one o'clock in the morning on the first, said: "the coup has happened. We are leaving and we will not return. I advise the journalists not to come back here." When that happened, I headed toward the *Teatro de Arena*. I was quite involved with the Teatro de Arena, and we started trying to set up an information network. We didn't stay in the theater, because it was somewhat dangerous. So, we circulated through the streets, and when someone had any information, they passed it on to another person circulating, and so on. I did this for I don't know how long, but eventually I thought I needed to take a shower because, strictly speaking, I stank. Then I thought: "well, it's not safe to go to my apartment," I had a small studio somewhere. So, I thought: "I'll go to my father's house to shower." When I got there—because I walked part of the way—I arrived late. My father said to me: "someone just called. You cannot return to the city center. They looked for you in the newspaper, at the theater, at USP, at the Faculty of Letters, it's impossible. I'll hide you." It wasn't that simple; it was much more complicated. My father asked: "now, what are you going to do?" I replied: "I don't know. I simply don't know." He said he would hide me. So, he set up a plan. What happens with my father is that he had been part of the Resistance during the Second World War. So, he had vast experience in clandestine operations. Sabotaging trains, things like that, he knew well. Then he gave me a serious lecture: "you were not trained for clandestinity, you don't know what it means to hide, you have no system." Then he took me to the countryside, to a place he knew, and I asked him to look for some of my friends who were in the same situation. Gianfrancesco Guarnieri had already gone to Bolivia. I didn't know very well what the situation of Cecília Thompson and her children was. So, I asked him to look for Cecília to see if she needed anything, but she came from a good family. So, he searched for these people to see what could be done for them. He did that; he provided great support during the 1960s and later even told me about the things he had done that he had kept secret. So, I went into hiding like this. One fine day, Rudá de Andrade showed

up. Rudá managed to get my father—he was tough—to reveal the place where I was. So, without my knowledge, Rudá appeared one day. Then Rudá told me he didn't know if the police were still looking for me or not. And there was no sign that they continued searching. So, it wasn't feasible to stay in the middle of the woods like that. He then set up a plan to see what the police would do. He scheduled a screening of a film by Sergei Eisenstein—I don't remember which one, it wasn't *Potemkin*—but one of Eisenstein's films, which I would present. This was widely publicized. Rudá handled a lot of press relations, the Cinemateca, and its connections with the press, making contacts with various social columns so that I would be photographed a lot. So, here's what happened: this was at the *Diários Associados* auditorium. I arrived in front of the building in a car, stayed in the car, and the audience was allowed to enter. There were several elevators, and when the room was full, they cut off all elevators—meaning the *Diários Associados* themselves—except one. I went up in that remaining elevator, and then it was cut off; there was no way to reach the floor where I was. I gave this lecture, which must have been the worst lecture of my life, but I delivered it on Eisenstein. When I finished, and just before the film screening, the lights in the room were turned off, and I was made to leave. I went down in another elevator they had connected, got in the car, and returned to the countryside. We waited a few days, including a Saturday and Sunday, when the columns published more photos. Some photos were published, I don't remember. We waited, waited, waited, and the police did not react. It was then agreed that I would return to São Paulo, but that I would not set foot in the Cinemateca. So, I did a series of things. I traveled across the state with an art film festival—this was under the Adhemar de Barros government—but without provocations, even to earn some money. And there was no further provocation from the police. Another thing happened. I don't remember the exact date. In any case, after the dismissal in Brasília, several university architects had found a private college where they set up a projects department. I was approached by one of them, whom I knew from Brasília, evidently. And he said: "look, we ask you to take charge of the department." "but I'm not an architect, how can I?" "yes, but the only solid name we have is yours. And we are not very well-known yet, so it's yours." Well, I did that, and, obviously, I dealt only with absolutely and exclusively administrative matters, meaning I could not intervene in the merit of the projects department. And I had to form the faculty for this department, because the architects from Brasília were not numerous enough—that is, those who adhered to this project. So, we requested CVs, which were sent to a certain person. One day, a CV arrived—no, several arrived—but I saw one that seemed the most solid,

and the architects agreed. So, we held a departmental meeting. The department secretary attended, though I had not invited him. It wasn't so strange. I said to the secretary: "you will prepare the minutes. Summarize what each professor says and make the minutes." Then the professors began to give their praise. I did not ask for votes. I first asked for considerations on the candidate's CV. The considerations were excellent. And it went smoothly… the various professors, I don't know, four or five, I don't remember. In the middle of this round, the secretary said: "I hope you know what you are doing." I replied that I did, but what I was asking him was just to make the minutes. After this first round of considerations, I requested a vote. And unanimously, the architect was accepted. Then the secretary stood up, toward the door, turned to me, and said—I don't remember exactly, but something like: "you shouldn't have done what you did." And I said: "no, I did exactly what I was supposed to do, which was the choice of the professors." He said: "but I don't agree with that. And the police chief doesn't either." Then we thought it was better if I didn't return. So, I spent very little time at this college in the interior of São Paulo; I must have received half a salary at some point, something like that, meaning it didn't resolve the department nor my financial situation.

MATRIZes: What city was this in the interior of São Paulo?
JCB: I don't remember.

MATRIZes: And what city did your father hide you in?
JCB: It wasn't a city. I never knew. It was really a small farm in the middle of the woods. And this, for example, was part of being in hiding: you didn't know where you were. You depended on networks, on information. It was a house; a man worked there, a Spanish laborer, whom my father knew because of that. He worked somewhere—I don't know where—and in that house there was his wife, obviously, and two girls, about eight and ten years old. And these girls went to school in the morning, came back, had lunch, and in the afternoon stayed at home. Since I had nothing to do, I created a small school with them: inventing stories, telling stories, doing arithmetic games, arithmetic play, things like that. And it was very good. They would have lunch, nap a little, take a siesta, and then be eager to start again right away. It was really good.

MATRIZes: How long did that last?
JCB: Not very long, about three months. Already in 1964, when I was being sought, my father made an analysis with me, I mean, he asked a question: "what does the police know?" Because we didn't know, we were really

inexperienced at the time. Then my father said: "well, they probably don't know this." See, my brother Jean-Pierre had recently gotten married and moved house. For example, if they were very informed, they probably didn't have that information yet. Things like that. Later, it was verified that, indeed, they were a bit in the dark. It was later discovered that, according to them, I was considered a link between the Brazilian Communist Party and the French Communist Party. The thing is, I had absolutely no connection. First, I was never a member of the French Communist Party, although I had been politically active. I was in a cell, but I never joined. And the French Communist Party—I got more information about it much later: I returned to France, and then I was taken to visit the Communist Party (French), mostly just to see the building, which is a building by… I don't know if Le Corbusier or Niemeyer, one of the two. It's a fantastic building.

MATRIZes: It's by Niemeyer.

JCB: Yes, it's by Niemeyer, but I had no connection to it. So, that was just a fantasy because of my name. On the other hand, on April 1st, the police came to get me from the newspaper, in the newsroom. Clarice stayed at the paper, Clarice Herzog, Vlado's (Vladimir Herzog's) wife. She stayed in the newsroom and later told me the following: the officers who came looking for me didn't find me—obviously, they didn't find me—but they went to accounting. They asked for information, didn't get the answers they wanted, and asked an employee whether I was a man or a woman. And the person who answered said: "she's a woman." Because of Jean—you understand Jean in French, but Jean is a name…—so that must have been what caused the confusion. But, to tell you, that police force was poorly informed. And then, it seems they eventually found out I wasn't a woman, and on the 2nd, they went back there and arrested the person who had given the wrong information. That's what Clarice said happened; I never had proof of that or anything. In fact, I would have liked to meet the person who protected me. Because no one in the newsroom doubted I was a man, so the information she gave to the police, or the misinformation she gave, was clearly a deliberate act. It's not possible, after more than a year at the paper, that they didn't know. But when I asked Clarice, she said they didn't know who it was. Only within the newspaper did that information circulate, but they didn't know who it was, and that was fine. Better not to know, you understand? Even today, there are some things that a friend—now very old—and I think it's better not to reveal. Even about things from '64.

MATRIZes: Do you see any parallel between the political and social situation in Brazil in '64, before the coup, and today?

JCB: Look, here's the thing: I have a strong resistance to making historical analogies. Part of my work on *Os Inconfidentes*, by Joaquim Pedro (de Andrade), which is an admirable film, is precisely about that. Historical analogy does not work. It means projecting the meanings, the possible meanings of a current situation, onto a historical event. And then there are two problems: the historical event does not accept those meanings, and on the other hand, you miss the opportunity to understand the factors and political forces at play in that past moment, you understand? To the point that *Os Inconfidentes*… a very, very well-known professor—I forgot his name—wrote a book at the time, published in Portugal, about Brazilian uprisings and revolutions. *Os Inconfidentes* has nothing of a popular revolution. It was a revolution of the elite. An elite that already held considerable power, including financial and institutional power, and wanted total power. They did not accept that their power— they were getting richer—would be limited by the Crown. And of course, that does not appear in the film. Because in the film, all the poets, magistrates, etc., are turned into intellectuals of the 1970s. It is a harsh critique that Joaquim makes, but the relationship of those 1970s intellectuals with political action and revolution was obviously not the same as that of the *Inconfidência*. So, to answer your question, I think it is a mistake to make that connection. Or to try to establish a similarity between the situation of '64, or pre-'64, and the current situation. That prevents you from seeing the particularities, the specificity of this moment. Of course, understanding the particularities of the moment is very difficult, but I think it is a completely different moment. I think the civil--military dictatorship was still a dictatorship of a certain nature—neoliberal in character, with developmentalist traits, nationalist traits, etc.—which, obviously, no matter how much Bolsonaro may have claimed to be nationalist—I mean, today he does not pursue that policy, does he? I mean, he was convinced by various military and financial factors not to do that—but there is a sentence that guides me a lot. First, in Bolsonaro's campaign and in this government— this government, I don't know exactly to what extent, but in any case, in the campaign for sure—there is a certain internationalism of the far right, right? Steve Bannon, who is the leader of what is called *The Movement*, the far-right movement, and which includes several other formations besides Brazil and the United States, among them Hungary. Recently, Viktor Orbán gave a speech in which he said the following: "we are building a new society." And in the speech, it is stated—he uses the word democracy—that a democracy is not necessarily liberal. Liberal in the sense, not of neoliberalism, but liberal in the

sense of being open to contradictory opinions, etc. I think this is, for me at least, a fundamental reference. Bolsonaro is building a new society here. This means that we are in a revolutionary period. Revolution is generally considered leftist, so some political analysts prefer to use the word counterrevolution. So, we are in a counterrevolutionary situation that entails a structural change of society. This is happening. And this structural change also implies our extermination. It is not that there is no money—there is no shortage of money, you understand?—but the cutting of universities, etc., is a conscious policy of exterminating our production. But there is another equally serious thing, which is this: the left—I'll put many quotation marks here—has no project. So, the left managed to carry out an operation that is at least surprising, which is to make Bolsonaro not only its main, but its only political reference. That is why we talk so much about Bolsonaro, as if we had no one else to talk about. At home, for example—I say "at home," I live with a guy—we don't talk about Bolsonaro. We don't react, in quotes, even to the nonsense he says, because he does not really say nonsense. And because that is, in a way, internalizing Bolsonaro. When I say political reference, it is a negative reference; but it is still a reference. When Lula, after leaving prison, started declaring—at least I read this, obviously, in a newspaper like *Folha de S.Paulo*, but my secretary selects various texts and blogs, etc.—it is more or less unanimous that he chose Bolsonaro as his focus of attack. By doing this, he renders a great disservice to Brazilian society. Lula's current role seems to me very negative. I have, so to speak, for various circumstances, including cinematographic ones, moved through some peripheral areas, working with filmmakers who make audiovisual works in peripheral neighborhoods. I work with someone from Capão Redondo. So, this is in São Paulo, but we also went recently to Belo Horizonte. We worked in occupations, watching films, showing films, etc. And you do not hear talk of either Bolsonaro or Lula. These people are organizing themselves at various levels of organization. And there are political organizations, yes, social movements that are organized, and smaller organizations, like schools, daycare centers, in occupations, in short, things like that. And this organization is infinitely preferable to cursing Bolsonaro. I spoke at length with a man who is the national president of Unidade Popular. We spoke at length with this man, and there was no reference to Lula, nor… they are not political references for that part of society. So, this man I work with from Capão Redondo, I conducted several interviews with him on various subjects that, little by little, I will publish—I have not yet published them because I am almost blind, my work is very slow. I have a secretary, but I want to see everything and edit. So, it is very difficult, you understand? So I take a long time, you understand? But

I will publish them. And this man, for example, made a film called *Filme dos outros* (by Lincoln Péricles).

> **MATRIZes:** Lincoln Péricles?
> **JCB:** Do you know Lincoln Péricles?

> **MATRIZes:** I know who he is, but I am not friends with him.
> **JCB:** Well, he's a fantastic guy. Have you seen *Filme dos outros*? Do you know how it was produced?

> **MATRIZes:** The footage came from stolen cell phones.
> **JCB:** Yes, exactly. Footage—that's the first part—and then there's the rap. Nowadays, he doesn't like the film that much anymore, because he finds it too repetitive. Some people think that this is a serial device. But when you see it for the first time, it's quite shocking. I wrote a short note about it: the receiver as an artist. *Receiving as an aesthetic act*. I'm really connecting with these people. I did an interview, a few interviews in Belo Horizonte as well, also in the occupations, with very, very active young people.

> **MATRIZes:** The Brazilian left today…
> **JCB:** There is no Brazilian left, there isn't. One of the things that happened—this must have been around 1962, something like that—and, although I wasn't a party member, I used to attend a cell. I don't remember the people who were in that cell, but there were about ten people. Among them—the only one I remember—Paulo José. They practiced what they called vertical democracy, which is Stalinism. Then a guy would come in and tell us how things were, what we were supposed to do. So, you see? That thesis that we were not at the moment of socialist revolution, we were at the moment of the bourgeois revolution, we had to make the bourgeois revolution, which justified any alliance with those bourgeois. Paulo José and I always criticized that. There was even a Bible published in Moscow in Portuguese. So, it had all the information you wanted. And all the necessary truths were in that book. Paulo José and I really would not adhere to it. And we started, unintentionally actually, but anyway, to irritate that guy who couldn't practice vertical democracy, because there were two odd fellows who always asked improper questions. To the point that one day he said that certain people wanted to talk to us, not to the cell, only to Paulo José. And one fine day, then, we were taken to a room at what was then the Faculty of Letters at USP, on Maria Antônia Street. We were taken to a rather grand room, like a room for important ceremonies. There were two

chairs and, in the back, there was a table. All of this was very dark, as I remember. And in the back, there were several people sitting behind a table—one of those imposing tables, with sculptures, lions, whatever. Among those people, my impression is that there were four. In any case, with absolute certainty, there was Mário Schenberg and the architect who designed the building of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism and Design (FAU), right? (Vilanova) Artigas (must have been Carlos Cascaldi). Well, I have these lapses of dimension, really. Then they asked us to sit and they opened the session as follows: "this is not a trial, but we would like to talk to you so you understand." When you hear that it's not a trial, obviously, you are being judged. I mean, there was no punishment, nothing happened. And then Schenberg moved away from the table, came to sit near us, took a chair, sat close to us, and started to talk to tell us how… anyway, to tell us the truth, right? I don't know if you have an image of Schenberg, but Schenberg was quite a fat, heavy man, and he talked non-stop, with his eyes closed. And we listened, in a rather monotonous tone, and we listened—I don't know for how long—to Schenberg. Maybe two hours. I don't know, I don't know. Afterwards, Schenberg asked us to think about what he had said. Well, I don't remember, obviously, what Schenberg said, but I know that what was running through my head was: "what's going to happen to us? Where is this going to lead us?" But afterwards, I don't remember if I went back or not. Recently… well, not recently, some years ago, I asked Paulo José, already quite ill, if he remembered. Then, talking with him, he said yes, he remembered. And this, I was in Rio. Then I asked if he would agree to try to reconstruct the situation we had gone through, and he said yes. But then it didn't happen. I was passing through Rio, for some festival, some screening, whatever. And then I had to go back to São Paulo. Afterwards, I wrote to him a few times, but he didn't follow up or forgot, given the health condition he was in. So, what remains is my memory. But Stalinism is that, and they were all Stalinists: Schenberg, (Oscar) Niemeyer. Niemeyer was terrible. Niemeyer was terrible. In Brasília, with me, he was a horror. I, well, was in the course… does this still interest you?

MATRIZes: Yes, very much.

JCB: I was in the program, as you know, in '65, and I left with a resignation. The resignation was led by the coordinator of Physics, who was (Roberto Aureliano) Salmerón—not exactly that name, or something like that—and some people, some professors, and many teaching assistants were against it. Finally, there was a meeting of the eleven coordinators at the Physics coordinator's house, and, by the end of the night, the vote was in favor of the

resignation. What this Physics coordinator preached was the following: it would be such a strong act that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) would react, and the dictatorship would be forced to reinstate us. And, in fact, Unesco reacted, sending a note: "what a pity, we deeply regret it, something like this shouldn't happen." The reaction did not go much beyond that. In any case, here is what happened: Pompeu de Sousa, who was responsible for the Institute of Communications, Journalism and Cinema—the Institute didn't formally exist yet—arrived on campus soon after, very early. We met on campus, and he told me: "I was outvoted, we resigned." Paulo Emílio (Sales Gomes) was completely against it, and he told me: "no, Paulo Emílio, we resigned. Now, the only person who cannot resign is you. You're going to stay here." "Why should I stay here?" And my situation was as follows: teaching assistants had to pursue graduate studies. So, I had a dissertation ready, which became *Brasil em tempo de cinema*. And Paulo Emílio, who was my advisor, had asked me for other parallel works; I did a paper on literature, etc. The only thing left was to finish a paper on Mário de Andrade, and the defense was scheduled for early December. Pompeu told me: "no, if you resign, you lose everything. All the credits are lost, everything." "I'm not going to stay here for a title. I did this research, fine, but I won't stay for a title." So I resigned. I went to Rio to look for a job. In December, there was in Brasília—I think it was called, at that time, the First Week of Brazilian Cinema, which is the seed of the current Brasília Festival. Then I went back to Brasília for that week, and Pompeu came to me and said: "look, they're speaking very badly of us, saying we're always on strike, that we don't work, that we do nothing. I'm going to ask you to do a mock master's thesis defense." So we did this mock defense with Paulo Emílio, Pompeu, and me at the table—I don't know if there was another, because usually there are three. Then, people in the room spoke up; some people were called upon. The first to speak was (Paulo César) Saraceni, who obviously didn't like the text.

MATRIZes: The text was the one that later became the book *Brasil em tempo de cinema*?

JCB: Yes, with some changes, because the defense was in '65 and the publication in '67. In the changes, *Terra em Transe* (by Glauber Rocha) was included. I don't quite remember if I saw *Terra em Transe* or if I read the script, I don't remember exactly. In any case, I added something about *Terra em Transe*, and later Alex (Viany) and Glauber (Rocha) asked me to remove it because it could give hints to the censorship. The film hadn't been released yet. That could draw the censors' attention and give them arguments. So, I left a small

reference to *Terra em Transe*, but that part of the text was removed. Well, this brings me to another point. I went back to São Paulo and, in '67–'68, the following situation took place: after the departure of the faculty, the university had to quickly rebuild a teaching staff, including at the Central Institute of Art (ICA). The ICA students did not like the new faculty at all. They went on strike, and after about a year, the Rectory gave in and appointed a restructuring commission for the ICA, formed by the Brazilian Lawyers Institute and the architects of Brazil. Three architects came, and this commission was formed, which called professors to recompose curricula, etc. In the field of cinema, there was no cinema program; it had been planned, but it was like at FAU— there were courses in cinema planned. So, they called two people: Maurice Capovilla and me, to work on this restructuring. During this restructuring, the following happened: toward the end of '68, there arose a perception within the commission and among the professors that, if they organized, in addition to the overall restructuring, a very condensed program during the end of '68 and the '69 vacation period, we could achieve a course load that would allow students to lose not two semesters but only one. That was done. There was this restructuring work, and there was teaching work. One day during this period, Niemeyer came to visit the ICA. Niemeyer had been the coordinator until his resignation and had voted in favor of it. The director of the commission, who eventually became the director of the ICA, introduced the team present and introduced me. I already knew Niemeyer, because I had made a film, *Brasília, contradições de uma cidade nova* (Joaquim Pedro de Andrade), and we — Joaquim and I — often went to his house, to Lúcio Costa's house, etc., to talk. He shook hands with several people, and when he got to me, shouting, he said: "you should not be here." Then I understood what was in his head. I began to explain that I had not been called by the Rectory, that I had been called by the commission, and that I came after a year of strike. Therefore, I was part of the students' project and not of the Rectory, but he began to shout so much that no one heard what I was saying, no matter how much I tried to raise my voice, you understand? And well, at some point, he left; I left, you understand? But that was very much Niemeyer: brutal Stalinist, authoritarian, no dialogue. I hadn't switched sides, nor had I ever supported that Rectory at any time. I could do this in Brasília because I was already a professor at USP. USP professors could not leave the state without authorization from the Rectory. USP's Rectory would never give me that authorization. Therefore, Rudá de Andrade, who was head of the department, arranged my teaching hours so that I could be absent for ten or fifteen days. With a holiday here, a weekend there, it gave a good stretch to be able to work in Brasília. So, I was in Brasília in a relatively

continuous manner, and later AI-5 caught me—the so-called 25 from USP—caught me in Brasília. Ah, here's how I found out: one fine day, one fine night, I decided to go to the cinema. At that time, screenings were continuous; you could enter in the middle of a session and catch the beginning of the next. At one point, I entered between the two screenings, the two sessions. There's that glass window, and several professors were signaling to me, I was supposed to meet them, and I signaled no, that I was going to catch the beginning of the session. Finally, I understood that something was happening. I left, and they told me: "look, you've been dismissed. We don't know what's going to happen. All the radio stations are saying it, through USP, etc., all the radio stations are dragging us through the mud, insulting us with swear words, right?" Then one of the guys from the commission told me: "we don't know what's going to happen, so you're not going home now, you're going to… I'll take you somewhere, you're going to hide." No one on the list was arrested, at least, right? So I went back, I went to São Paulo, but I made a route: I went to Belo Horizonte, I went to other places, etc.

MATRIZes: Why is *Brasil em tempo de cinema* dedicated to Antônio das Mortes? (Antônio das Mortes is a character played by Maurício do Valle in the films *Deus e o Diabo na terra do sol* and *O dragão da maldade contra o santo guerreiro*, both directed by Glauber Rocha).

JCB: It is dedicated to Antônio das Mortes with the opening words, or at least with the second: this quasi-autobiographical essay is dedicated to Antônio das Mortes. That is because, on one hand, I identified very much with Antônio das Mortes, with the fact that he is wavering, being on one side and also on the other, etc. I feel that way too, not so much politically, but due to the two cultures that shaped me, the two nationalities, and the fact that I had an unforgettable childhood in France, very marked by the war. Then people say: "ah, but you've been here for 70 years, you are Brazilian." No, it's not like that, it's not about the number of years. I did not complete secondary education—I mean, I completed the course, but I don't have a diploma because I am terrible when it comes to diplomas. And so I failed Philosophy. Philosophy was a subject in which I actually did well; I liked that subject, but I would freeze in front of the exam, so I got a terrible grade. There was a retake, three months later, after the holidays. And then I did the following: I decided to really study a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot. I studied (Jean-Paul) Sartre through an author, a disciple of Sartre, recognized by him, who wrote a popularizing book on his thought. Of course, I wasn't going to understand *Being and Nothingness*. I studied Sartre, then I went to the retake; again, I didn't get a high enough grade, because

Sartre wasn't even in the syllabus, and I think they didn't like him much, right? So I decided that, fine, I wasn't going to continue in that direction. In any case, in this book popularizing Sartre, the author Francis Jeanson lays out the concept of the "bastard" in Sartre's work. I absolutely identified with that concept: the individual who does not identify with anything, who is in several places at once, and has no very clear genealogy. I identified very much with that. That is, the work I did for the retake didn't produce results as a retake, but I learned a lot, and that concept ended up being—I can't say a formative concept, because I was about 19 at the time, I imagine—but a concept that contributed to creating the image I have of myself and the image I try to project publicly.

MATRIZes: What attracts you to contemporary Brazilian cinema today?

JCB: One of the factors I must take into account is the fact that I have a serious eye condition and see the screen blurred, hazy. Sometimes I have to ask the person next to me. As happened yesterday, for example: I was next to Amilton (Pinheiro) and got confused between two actresses, whom I thought were different, but I wasn't quite sure. So, my perception is very impaired. Moreover, after 80, 81, I also began to have hearing problems. Now I'm without hearing aids, but in the cinema and in the theater, I sometimes have a lot of difficulty catching the dialogue. Therefore, it would be false to say that I have a very well-formed opinion. In any case, I have a certain tendency to be very critical of the so-called auteur films, which, in my view, are not always competent and are extremely complacent. That bothers me a lot. Now, if you ask me which film has impressed me the most lately, I can mention *Azougue Nazaré* (by Tiago Melo), *Bacurau* (by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles), maybe another, but the one that really impressed me is a short film titled *Filme dos outros* (by Lincoln Péricles), partly made with material from stolen cell phone memory cards, produced by a filmmaker from Capão Redondo, a peripheral neighborhood of São Paulo, which, at one time, was considered the most violent in the city and was later, more or less, pacified, quieted down by the PCC, which really dominates that region of São Paulo, in many regions, in fact, right? This film, because of its production and device, is truly transgressive, as it starts from an act repudiated by society in general—the theft of an object, in this case, a cell phone—and transforms that act into the raw material of an aesthetic gesture, which I consider an innovation in our cultural milieu. There are many films from the periphery; many of them I like, but let's say they are documentaries or interviews, with interesting situations. In the case of Lincoln's film, there was an aesthetic gesture that stands apart from everything else being made. So, much so that this film by Lincoln circulates a lot, it

even ended up in Germany, if I'm not mistaken. The film, not him. Lincoln has something very interesting: in a way, he engages with the line of thought I have laid out since the 1960s, including in *Brasil em tempo de cinema*, according to which the representation of the people is produced by the middle class. I don't know if I was that clear, I don't know if I am now, but the book somehow exploded and was so rejected because of this central line of thought, even though the concept of the middle class was not very explicitly developed by me. In fact, I didn't know how to do that; the lack of knowledge was not just a matter of misinformation, but also an absence of bibliography. I mean, Brazilian sociology was not interested in intellectuals, in artists, etc. I mean, Sergio Miceli, perhaps, was already beginning to publish those books, but the books of his that were very important, I read later. But there is a film that quite strikingly marks, in my view, these limitations we had in relation to sociological works on the middle class, which is the film by (Arnaldo) Jabor *A opinião pública*, which is a film about the middle class, the somewhat lower middle class, not entirely, but somewhat lower, and which uses the thesis of the white-collar class by (C. Wright) Mills, an American sociologist who had already published several books. And I didn't read that book; I knew about the existence of the white collars, but I didn't use them and ended up confronting the concept on my own. In any case, I was very criticized at the time, very, very, very criticized. In fact, someone told me: "your concept of the middle class has no foundation, no theoretical grounding, nothing." But it turned out it worked. It has worked to this day. In a text about *Bacurau*, written by someone from Unicamp, Fernando Ramos, he revisits *Brasil em tempo de cinema* as a certain matrix of thought. And it is through this matrix that he relates to an aspect of Kleber Mendonça's film. With Lincoln, what happens is this: Lincoln rejects the image of the people constructed by the middle class. I am going to publish an interview with him; we have already had many conversations about this issue. The perspective he has on the periphery and the *quebrada*[2] is not the perspective of the middle class, and the middle class does not see the *quebrada*. It only sees itself. I find this very interesting, and my contact with him is good; I am really taking this line of thought into account. Another person I am relatively close to is Francis Vogner (dos Reis). We have just published a co-authored text. I don't know if it is in that text or in a rather intense correspondence, maybe in an email he sent me; in any case, first, I need to introduce Francis a little. He is from Diadema, an industrial region of São Paulo, and came to Brazilian cinema through *pornochanchada*[3]. I don't remember exactly when he was born, around 1980. When he was a slightly older child and already in adolescence, the *pornochanchada* period in the cinema circuit had already passed; however,

[2] Used as informal slang to refer to a neighborhood, community, or place.

[3] Is a genre of sex comedy films.

television channels used to show *pornochanchada* around eleven at night, 11:00/11:30 p.m., and he and his friends would watch those films because it was their chance to see naked or nearly naked women. That was his gateway to Brazilian cinema, and that shapes a perception totally different from ours. For him, cinema was that. You understand? I mean, the settings, the gestures, the way of speaking, all that was part of his world. Only later did he come to Glauber (Rocha) and Cinema Novo, etc., only later, with some surprise, because that was not his Brazilian cinema. And then he began to study Paulo Emílio (Sales Gomes), Ismael Xavier, me, etc. He has a very interesting reflection on *A marvada carne* (by André Klotzel). *A marvada carne* is a film that aims to be popular, based on popular tales from the countryside of São Paulo, but what he sees is a popular cinema with middle-class mediation. He uses this word: mediation. Whereas *pornochanchada* is popular cinema without mediation, *A marvada carne* cannot rid itself of this mediation, resulting in the fact that it is not popular. It is a reflection that I find very interesting and quite innovative in the conception, in the reflections, or in the history of Brazilian cinema, something that no one had brought up before, right? So, I am identifying more with this group of people. Lincoln, in particular, because he is the response to what I wrote in *Brasil em tempo de cinema*. Among the most striking films for me in recent years is indeed *Filme dos outros* (by Lincoln Péricles).

    MATRIZes: You…

    JCB: Wait a moment, I will add something then in relation to *Brasil em tempo de cinema*. Indeed, for me, Lincoln (Péricles) is a response, half a century later, but it is a response. Now, there is another equally fundamental response for me, which is the response of (Eduardo) Coutinho. In a seminar held around me, Coutinho said that there were many disturbing ideas in my work, but when he entered cinema, there were other things he found very dogmatic, etc. And it is true, I did in the 60s, ah, things like that, perhaps still in the 70s, sometimes quite dogmatic, but at one point he said: "*Cabra marcado para morrer*, the second one, I made for him." Me. You understand? I was in the room and I was like: "pahhh." But interesting, I don't know if he made it for me or not; in any case, when he qualifies himself in the film as an intellectual, the National Student Union going there, in a way, he responds to that, I mean, at least he takes into account ideas that are expressed in *Brasil em tempo de cinema*. So, the two very strong responses were those two. And Coutinho said that not so long ago, well, I don't know, about five years since I saw that seminar. And it was very important for me, also for the following reason: the one who was Coutinho's friend was my wife (Lucila Ribeiro Bernardet). Coutinho, to

me, was always a more distant person. However, it happened that Coutinho called me because of a text, once or twice, but we never had a more familiar contact. I never sat in a bar with him, never drank cachaça or beer with him. However, between him and me, there is a very intense dialogue, and this dialogue takes place through our works. I think he has a lot of intuition, a number of things that I wrote. One thing that marked me a lot is that, when I published the small essay on *Cabra marcado para morrer,* I began with a quote from Elizabeth Teixeira and ended with a quote from Walter Benjamin. Walter Benjamin is not quoted in the film, but I felt the whole issue of the theory of history, the ruins of history; I felt all of that watching the film, I watched that film many times. And then he told me: "look, I was very surprised by the quotation from Walter Benjamin, because during the film I was reading Walter Benjamin. And you noticed." Only at the end of his life did some closeness occur; we traveled together, etc. But this, for me, is very important: to have an approximation to the work, not because I know the filmmaker who told me: "ah, I'm going to make this film, look at this film, ah, I edited it like this." No, but through the work. This is one reason, including, in Rio, when I was living there and working at (jornal) *Opinião*: I did not frequent the bars, the pubs, etc. I did not go. There is a bar where those filmmakers used to gather, which was Antonio's. And one day Gustavo Dahl asked me to go with him to Antonio's. I was very close to Gustavo: "no, Gustavo, I don't go to those places, etc.". Then he told me: "no, come today, because Paulo Francis is there; I would like to introduce you, he wants to meet you, so, let's go." Then I went to meet Paulo Francis at Antonio's, and it was the only time I ever set foot there. And that gave me greater freedom, you understand? Not that I would have stopped writing what I wrote, but I didn't have to say: "oh, so-and-so is my friend, how can I write this? He will get upset." That's more or less how things happen. So, I absolutely wanted to escape that hypocrisy, and I did. For better or worse, anyway, good texts or not, I think I escaped that. That certain worldliness, that environment of bars, of premieres… I rarely go to premieres, it is very rare. I hate it, because after the screening, there will be a big fuss, with music that does not even match, you know? It happened with a certain filmmaker, a very good friend of mine, who praised the film to the director. Then we left, he and I, and I said: "so-and-so, how can one like that film?" He said: "I don't like it. It's terrible." "But you praised it." "but so-and-so is my friend, I will not be rude." I believe I absolutely escaped that.

MATRIZes: How do you deal with finitude, with the idea that life has an end?

JCB: I deal with it well. A series was made about elderly people, with elderly people, by Sergio Rozemblit. And one of the episodes is with me. Sérgio later told me: "look, I am quite detached from death, but I have never seen a person as detached as you." So, I have no problem. The other day, we were working, and someone in the group, looking at the phone, said: "a friend of mine passed away. And he has been a great friend since adolescence, I don't know what." He was quite moved. Then he said: "he was so… he is sort of young, around 40 years old, he had a heart attack." And then I said to Rubens (Rewald): "your friend's death is a death that deserves applause. These sudden deaths are brilliant." Then he said: "no, but he had so many projects." I said: "the dead have no projects." Rubens: "no, but he was going to do this, that." I said: "Rubens, that is not dead people's thinking, that is living people's thinking." The doubt I have is what will happen to get there, I mean, whether I will become dependent, whether I will be paralyzed, or whether I will be in a wheelchair. Therefore, nothing frightens me at all. M

AGENDA

IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Memory literacy: television fiction as a space for shaping politically conscious citizens

Literacia da memória: a ficção televisiva como espaço de formação de cidadãos politicamente conscientes [a]

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ABSTRACT
In contemporary society, television has been replacing a certain bookish culture in the knowledge of the past, which makes it particularly relevant to understand the contribution of audiovisual fiction formats in the creation of social memory, with the aim of building a literacy of memory that allows us to recognize the mechanisms of collective identity construction and the sense of belonging to a particular community. Given the growing consumption of audiovisual fiction, we believe it is important to understand the role that historical and period fiction can play in the discursive revision of the past and the "truth of the past," as well as its relationship with state power and the counterpowers that attempt to influence the construction of national memory.
Keywords: Audiovisual, history, memory, identity.

RESUMO
Na sociedade contemporânea, a televisão tem vindo a substituir-se a uma certa cultura livresca no conhecimento do passado, o que torna particularmente relevante perceber o contributo dos formatos de ficção audiovisual na criação da memória social, com o objectivo de construirmos uma literacia da memória que permita reconhecer os mecanismos de construção da identidade colectiva e do sentido de pertença a uma determinada comunidade. Tendo em conta o consumo crescente de ficção audiovisual, julgamos relevante compreender o papel que a ficção histórica e de época pode ter na revisão discursiva do passado e da "verdade do passado", assim como da sua relação com o poder do Estado e os contrapoderes que tentam influenciar a construção da memória nacional.
Palavras-chave: Audiovisual, história, memória, identidade.

A

INTRODUCTION

FILM LANGUAGE IS a vehicle for communication and learning, and has therefore been used to preserve the facts deemed relevant in a given historical period. It instrumentalizes technology in the service of memory or of the hegemony of a particular vision of the past, regenerating mechanisms of hetero-recognition and self-recognition with the legitimizing support of the State and established powers, but also—inversely—giving voice to those who were silenced and marginalized in dominant discourses (Foucault, 1997).

Memory is a system of representations that constructs an image of the past through the present and its frameworks of meaning (Hall, 2005). This intentional process, which makes it possible to carry the past into the present and project it into the future, maintains a critical distance from the past. In a democratic context, this implies negotiation and conflict among a plurality of social actors.

In contemporary times, fiction has come to present itself as more truthful than historiography (Augé cited in Todorov, 1992), escaping the control of official and political bodies that once held the monopoly over the construction of the past narrative. Fiction often takes shape as a conflicting version or, at least, in dialogue with the official or national narrative. It aligns with the personal memories of its authors and, therefore, establishes itself as an interpretative space shaped by specific emotional experiences and personal expectations.

The audiovisual production of contemporary democratic regimes may be less exposed to the ideological manipulation of dominant elites. However, it continues to be largely endorsed or shaped by them (Fentress & Wickham, 1994), even if the State and its elites must, at times, coexist with and manage varying degrees of conflict with the film and television industry, which finds itself simultaneously inside and outside the system (Ferro, 2017). This does not imply that the fiction presented on screen has become a disengaged or radically alternative vision to the official sources, but it has opened up a network of possibilities, new themes and perspectives—openly recruiting the present in the reconstruction of memories or using the past as a component of present-day struggles.

Artistic activity requires significant financial investment, which subjects it to commitments—not necessarily to institutions, but to the audience—often resulting in the need to accommodate conflicting versions to ensure maximum viewership and return on investment. *Streaming* platforms have thus emerged as a challenge to the traditional narrative discourse constructed by the State and subordinated academic centers. They are powerful economic and cultural engines, deterritorialized and shaped by multiple influences. Transnational media groups operate alongside or, at times, in opposition to the established

vision, which remains heavily marked by the definition of commemorative dates and the promotion of selected figures and events that function as beacons of political rhetoric and of the State's legitimizing discourse based on the past (Fentress & Wickham, 1994).

Nonetheless, power relations are present in various contexts, and the audiovisual industry is not immune to this content hierarchy, with English-language products more easily crossing borders beyond their native territory. Hence, the growing relevance of the relationship being forged between the peripheries and the center—in a world where English is not the native language—and how different marginalized forces have been creating dispersed dynamics that function as spaces of contestation and differentiation, and in some cases, of domestication, by incorporating the dominant discourse in a deradicalized version.

This ongoing research seeks, therefore, to contribute to the creation of a literacy of memory—one that acknowledges the plurality of forces coexisting in society and the tension between the different narratives that are constantly under negotiation.

ACT ONE

Our academic and professional trajectory began with the study and teaching of History and evolved into *Storytelling*, which partly explains our choice of the theme of memory literacy and the multiple discursive reconstructions of the past. Studies developed in Latin America by authors such as Jesús Martín-Barbero and Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes on the theory of mediations were of significant importance in our early work, which focused on the articulation between communication practices and social movements. Many of these studies analyzed the telenovela, a format referred to as the nation's popular narrative, due to its ability to act as an agent of construction and reconstruction of indigenous cultural identities (Appadurai, 2004; Martín-Barbero, 2014). While this is not our current focus, these readings were important in introducing television fiction—particularly the telenovela—as a structuring element in the creation of identity and in the production of a history of the present in countries such as Brazil and many other Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America.

Our path brings us back to our Western matrix, even though European identity is now something else—a recent construction, economic, political, and cultural, that aspires to be both supranational and local. A Europe with fluid borders that collides with recurrent identitarian exaltations.

Faced with growing competition in the construction of memory and the diversification of power centers—increasingly deterritorialized—we cannot help

but question the social function of audiovisual fiction, particularly historical and period genres, in the construction of memory and new mythologies in contemporary society.

This concern was sparked by situations we encountered during the premiere of the series *Glória* (Netflix), a highly personal project that started from factual reality to build a believable fictional narrative, but which, for Portuguese society, became a recovery of a hidden reality, unknown to most Portuguese people and even to the academic community.

The historical series served more than once as an example used by politicians, journalists, and academics from various fields to explain the propaganda and counter-information strategies that existed during the Cold War and that are still employed today by more or less autocratic governments to control the narrative of events—such as the invasion of Ukrainian territory by Russian Federation troops.

A journalist from Radio Free Europe, based in Prague, requested an interview to question the facts portrayed in the series regarding their organization, believing that the presence of spies and sabotage attempts might have been based on secret information unknown even to them, but plausible enough to consider having actually occurred. The journalist's pursuit of truth was driven by the plausibility of the fiction—with historical agents interrogating fiction about the very reality they had experienced. That and other situations led us to reflect on the object of study of the social sciences and humanities, revisiting concepts such as truth-as-adequation and truth-as-unveiling (Todorov, 1992), exploring the notion of collective memory (Halbwachs) and counter-memory (Foucault, 1997), as well as the work developed by Fentress and Wickham (1994), who contrast the concept of social memory by recovering individual thought processes in the construction of group memory.

The areas of specialization associated with Memory Studies have sought to legitimize themselves within historical research. The concept of "spoken documents" has been used by oral history specialists, which equates to transforming memory into text, as if memory were fixed and not a permanent relational construction between present and past. This has raised significant reservations among more orthodox historians.

Audiovisual fiction has contributed to this debate, positioning itself as a cultural document that conveys worldviews, even though the relationship between localized cultures and globalization leads to different interpretations of the same work—and, even within a given community, meaning-making may not be homogeneous.

Without contradicting the existence of an open and sometimes contradictory interpretative space, we believe that the reenacted images of the past in audiovisual fiction increasingly constitute themselves as a narrative or symbolic representation of the nation. In the history of social memory, the *media*—particularly television fiction—has played a relevant role as an alternative form of historical thinking. However, though alternative, it maintains a continuous dialogue with written history and contributes to the same objective, even if at times in the service of different groups: that of giving meaning to the present.

Communication sciences thrive on relationships with different fields, operating within a scattered network shaped by opportunism, borrowing concepts and methodologies. Taxonomies are always constructions that define boundaries between different objects of study, but more importantly, they predefine the theoretical framework the social scientist will use to analyze, describe, and, in some cases, construct theories. Our way of seeing the world is always conditioned, but a deep reflection on those constraints—and the pursuit of a new theoretical framework that repositions us in a different line of analysis—is like learning to walk again: seemingly unnatural until we master the mechanisms that allow us to move forward without major falls or shocks.

For most people—or even all, in their everyday lives filled with very practical concerns and thousands of instant decisions— there is little room for reflection on reality and knowledge, as we tend to take what is real and what we know for granted.

Our unease about the many areas we aim to intersect led us back to the time of the French Revolution and the terminological shift that replaced the designation "Moral and Political Sciences" with "Social Sciences" and "Human Sciences." In a letter from Joseph Garat to the Marquis de Condorcet, the term "Social Sciences" appears for the first time and resurfaces later in Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrés de l'esprit humain* (1795). It is now unquestionable that words carry weight and convey values associated with their history and past uses. The objective, then, was to free the sciences of man from the presence of value judgments—the obscurantism that once shadowed the natural sciences is well known, with Galileo's trial standing as a paradigmatic case[1].

Throughout the 19th century, several authors, such as Arthur de Gobineau and Hippolyte Taine, argued for the need to integrate history into the family of natural sciences. Taine wrote: "It doesn't matter whether facts are physical or moral: all have a cause. There are causes for ambition, courage, and truthfulness just as for digestion, muscular movement, and animal heat. Vice and virtue are products just like vitriol and sugar" (cited by Todorov, 1992, p. 9).

[1] Given the nature of our study, it makes sense to mention that this process was largely narrated through fiction, among which we highlight the text by Bertolt Brecht (1943).

However, it would take until the 20th century for this reflection on the domain of knowledge to gain renewed momentum, no longer through philosophy—which became rooted in ontological questions such as "What is reality?" and "What is the nature of the world?"—but through sociology, particularly what came to be known as the sociology of knowledge. The concept of the sociology of knowledge, developed by Max Scheler and Karl Mannheim, addressed this social construction of reality, acknowledging the relativity of all perspectives on knowledge, and, by extension, the inevitable historicity of human thought.

The epistemological question of how to access the truth of facts—a question underlying much of the sociology of knowledge—revisits a centuries-long debate concerning the conditioned nature of knowledge itself. Auguste Comte wrote, "whether we like it or not, we belong to our century," a phrase later recovered by Edgar Morin (2002) in his seminal work *The Method* to reflect on the degree of dependency of knowledge on cultural, social, and historical context. In the same work, the author adds: "the problem is knowing what those insertions, roots, and dependencies are, and questioning whether—and under what conditions—there can be a certain autonomy and relative emancipation of knowledge and of the idea" (Morin, 2002, p. 15).

Returning to the initial issue, scientific research is a suspicious approach, in which—equipped with a specific theoretical framework—we subject ourselves to a second gaze over a concrete reality, which we seek to artificially isolate through a particular window or frame of analysis in order to better understand it. But does the relevance of a research project become compromised by the way reality is observed and conceived — in other words, by the paradigms that shape and rank the information we work with? If by "compromised" we consider the definition "bound by commitment," then we are indeed affirming, time and again, that any investigation is multifaceted, complex, and ambiguous—just like human experience. Although it is widely accepted that theoretical formulations of reality—whether scientific, philosophical, or even mythological—do not exhaust what is "real," theory may not bring the social scientist closer to the truth or to peer recognition. Edgar Morin (2002) asserts that "*imprinting* and normalization grow alongside culture" (p. 25). By *imprinting*, following Konrad Lorenz's original definition, we understand the mark imposed by our experiences since birth, as well as the formal education we receive throughout life.

As previously discussed, our positionality conditionally frames and delineates research. Karl Mannheim, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, stated that knowledge must always be from a certain positional standpoint (cited by Berger & Luckmann, 1999). This stance purportedly radicalized, with various theoretical standpoints emancipating themselves and producing major research

paradigms exhibiting differing degrees of contradiction. Broadly, these can be grouped—according to Burrell and Morgan (2005)—into four meta-theoretical perspectives offering distinct analyses of social life. Nonetheless, despite the coexistence of these differing approaches, generating diverse worldviews, scientific research remains heavily conditioned, although intellectual liberalism has gradually permitted some form of rebellion.

When positioning ourselves from an ontological standpoint, assuming that reality is a construction in which culture acts as a co-producer, we also define ourselves from an epistemological perspective—that is, how, and to what extent, the world can be known and communicated. Despite the reflective attitude, which is also an ideological stance and compels us to choose the tools with which we will penetrate the universe we intend to study, another battle had already taken place: the effort to ignore what has guided our way of being as learners—namely, the principle of evaluating what is right and wrong, true or false. The transition to a system in which knowledge comes to be described through another dichotomy—as *hard*, when knowledge is considered real, identifiable, and possible to convey in a tangible manner, or *soft*, when it is approached more subjectively, transcendently, and personally—is, in itself, a paradigm shift. Just as in mythology, where the world swings between chaos and order, social theories also move, surprisingly (or not), along that same axis.

SECOND ACT

In contemporary times, oral culture gave rise to a book culture, but the Gutenberg galaxy (McLuhan, 1970) continues to expand, propelled by advancing technology and prompting another paradigm shift. New generations are born into a highly technological and visual world.

Cinema and television have blurred their boundaries—first due to changes in recording media, then through distribution paradigms. Today, distinguishing between pure television and cinematic content is increasingly difficult. The cathode-ray hearth, which for decades brought families together around shared interests, now yields to atomized content consumption—accelerated again by technological transformation—while the media industry redefines "TV" as "Total Video[2]." Images permeate the multiple screens that underpin our information and entertainment. We do not advocate for the disappearance of written culture; rather, different forms now coexist. Books have been dematerialized—consumed on screens or transformed into audiobooks, especially in Anglo-Saxon culture where this trend is growing; podcasts have multiplied by theme and are followed by millions; and social media and streaming platforms have accelerated visual

[2] We do not know the origin of the term, but we came into contact with it for the first time at the *Marché International des Programmes de Télévision in Cannes* in 2016, during a conference by Guillaume de Posch, Co-CEO of the RTL group.

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literacy among new generations, who have created a series-culture and mastered editing language to produce content on YouTube and TikTok.

With the new model of content distribution, our media diet has changed—screen time and fiction consumption have risen markedly. History seems to oppose Fiction, making it difficult to define the boundaries of autonomy and dependence between them (Southgate, 2014). However, the relationship between these narratives and "historical truth"—itself a construction—has been both defining and detracting for each other. This argument has been increasingly challenged in recent decades in the hierarchy placed on narratives of the past, because, "no matter how much research we do, no matter how many archives we visit, no matter how objective we attempt to be, the past never reaches us in a single version of the truth" (Rosenstone, 2018).

Assuming that History and Fiction are two distinct modes of storytelling, it becomes possible to state that History refers to documented past events, whereas Fiction refers to a literary process of creative writing (Rosenstone, 2018). Nevertheless, creative writing does not diminish the fictional narrative's role in memory construction. Like historiography, audiovisual fiction increasingly becomes a space where memory, nostalgia, and oblivion crystallize—at every moment—into a "regime of truth" in our highly mediated society, albeit not in a univocal manner (Foucault, 1997).

Historical and period audiovisual fiction does not claim to provide literal truths about the past, yet it has the capacity to offer metaphorical truths.

Writers, screenwriters, and historians share common objectives, such as the need for coherence in their narratives, though historians often place themselves atop the hierarchy, defending History as a scientific discipline and distancing themselves from the subjectivity, emotions, and all kinds of sentiments inherent in fiction, literature, and film/TV scripts (Southgate, 2014). Nevertheless, image and sound render History communicable—a much more vivid portrait of events and figures, and especially of the complexity of characters that reveal human nature—its moods, contradictions, and arbitrariness (Rosenstone, 2018).

The role of historical and period fiction has been debated for decades. In the 1980s, Hayden White proposed the concept of *historiophoty*, describing it as "the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and film discourse" (White, 2005). The subjective nature of how cinematic versions of history are treated leads to the omission of important facts in favor of theme, dramatization, and narrative (White, 2005).

However, historiography also has limitations—of a different nature—which fiction addresses through verisimilitude, daring to answer questions historiography leaves blank so as not to exceed the bounds imposed by its methodological

practices. Marc Bloch states that the "scholar" must limit himself to observing and explaining, whereas the judge, after interrogation, takes a stance and delivers a judgment that is fundamentally moral. This vision of the historian's vocation is evident in his declaration: "Robespierrists, anti-Robespierrists, have compassion! For pity's sake, simply tell us who Robespierre was" (Bloch, 1993, p. 23). But is it possible to say who Robespierre was without engaging in speculative argumentation—without becoming an active element in that portrait ourselves? (Todorov, 1992).

The figure of the historical consultant can play an extremely important role—becoming a more or less invisible partner within the entire production chain, particularly for the screenwriter and art director—ensuring "whether the reconstruction is well executed, whether the dialogues are plausible, whether the characters do not act anachronistically; in short, whether the televised product can constitute a useful lesson in history" (Burnay & Sardica, 2014, p. 8).

What concerns us in the act of remembering is not the basic psychological process—by which information is retained, encoded, stored, and later retrieved—but rather how this process has been explored through various narrative arts: from poetry to the novel, from comics to the graphic diary, from cinema to audiovisual series—and how all these distinct perspectives contribute to the construction of collective memory.

Personal remembrance occurs within the convergence of a network of solidarities in competition with one another, making it impossible to address the problem of recalling memories without considering the relevant real social frameworks in which we are continually reembedded.

The theme of memory has been present in Western culture since primitive societies, initially as mythological memory from societies without writing, which evoked a cyclical time through oral tradition—a foundation of their social life model. Urban experience has been one of the major drivers of transformation that shifted us from a magical-religious society, replacing cyclical time with linear time—where memory ceased to be recognition of the eternal present and began to appear as a succession of events in time, giving rise to History (Eliade, 2019).

Philosophy—from Descartes, followed by Bacon, Hobbes, Leibniz, and other seventeenth-century empiricists—sought to create a system of logical categories, classifying phenomena and establishing a network of articulated causes. This progressively granted autonomy to knowledge, separating it from the individual with the capacity to know. The epistemological shift devalued images of reality, replacing them with statements about reality. This new mindset labeled sensory memory as subjective and irrational, in contrast to textual

memory—considered objective and rational—when, in fact, writing preserves only words, not the memory of things.

The Industrial Revolution once again altered the physical landscape of cities and definitively changed traditional social structures, uprooting a significant portion of the population and breaking the familial ties that had underpinned Western society—forming new identity groups. The reality born from this change in labor (and landscape) reconfigured frames of reference and sparked new reflection on the subject and their relationships with others. Socially, the society emerging from this transition to a system now fundamentally economic materialized in the formation of new classes, such as the proletariat. It is in this context of change that Maurice Halbwachs's (1990) studies on social memory emerged—marking a new path in attempts to elucidate mnemonic processes and existential reality—a contribution still valid for understanding psychological processes tied to both individual and collective spheres.

For Halbwachs—who was influenced by Émile Durkheim and Henri Bergson, as well as Charles Blondel, yet forging a distinct path—our individual memories are constructed through the relationship between our individual experiences and the referential framework that contextualizes and gives them meaning. "Our most personal feelings and thoughts seek their source in defined social environments and circumstances" (Halbwachs, 1990, p. 36). What we feel and think is deeply anchored in social contexts, but this does not mean memory is built exclusively from the outside with borrowed materials. The existence of an individual memory we can claim as exclusively ours constantly escapes us. Thus, the past is not merely relived but continuously reconstructed under the influence of an invisible web of influences. The impossibility of being alone, and the fact that every sensory experience connects us with an affective community, results in co-dependence—where others' perspectives contribute to constructing our memories. Memory reconstruction, therefore, takes place through shared values, requiring the formation of relationships in which reciprocity becomes essential.

According to Halbwachs, individual memory is a viewpoint on collective memory and depends directly on our place within the group; hence, it is constantly readjusting. Yet common sense makes us believe our memories, feelings, and decisions are independent of any influence—and perhaps we feel this way because they are not exclusively dependent on any single influence, but emerge from a complex and differentiated set of competing ancestries. Halbwachs (1990) distinguishes between individual memory—what we have seen, done, felt, and thought—and historical memory, which pertains to events in which we did not participate directly but learned about, and which occupy a prominent place in the nation's memory. This means that when we evoke a particular event, we rely

exclusively on others' memories. Those events may be imagined, but they are impossible to remember.

The war experienced in mid-twentieth-century Europe would usher in a change of generation and thought. Halbwachs, along with many other European intellectuals, was deported to a concentration camp and died in Buchenwald in 1945. Historian Marc Bloch was executed just one year earlier, in 1944, and Walter Benjamin took his own life—at least according to the official version—on the night of September 26, 1940, in a small hotel in Portbou, Catalonia, while fleeing to Portugal.

World War II and the subsequent division of the world into two ideological blocs dominated by the superpowers—the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—had a profound impact on academia. New approaches to old themes emerged, and in the case of memory, there was a transition from a theory emphasizing the influence of groups on individual memory to one focused on the conscious influence power exerts over the order of discourse, and how different social groups compete to create competing memories or alternative readings of history. In 1964, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was established in Birmingham by Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart, dedicated to studying popular memory and confronting official representations of the past. These spaces of group resistance, rooted in popular and underprivileged groups, challenge the dominant ideology and conceive history within a network that goes beyond the institutional dimension—formed through multiple grassroots and localized layers.

In this regard, in exploring the relationship between power and historical memory, we are also interested in Michel Foucault, who asserted that whoever controls group dynamics also controls their memories—reaffirming the relationship between memory and power. In his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, he spoke of discursive control and the social construction of truth, stating: "in every society, the production of discourse is at the same time controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed through a certain number of procedures" (Foucault, 1997). Recurring discourses that are imbued with truth are social constructions—exposing a conception of memory conditioned by ways of seeing and speaking, and mediated historically by a particular class of subjects. He emphasizes:

> what is education after all if not a ritualization of the word? A qualification and fixation of roles for those who speak? The constitution of at least a diffuse doctrinal group? The distribution and appropriation of discourse with its powers and knowledge? (Foucault, 1997)

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Power controls memory—it selects what should be remembered and forgotten, and is also responsible for manufacturing recollections. Control is indeed one of the mechanisms of power, developed from a specific social, political, economic, and cultural configuration.

The emergence of a new post-war society, where old structures were uprooted to their foundations, served as the basis for the reflections of those authors who perceived a rapidly accelerating world—where capitalist economic organization subordinated all other areas, and where new technologies produced new realities.

The rapid changes across the world led historiography to study not only facts but also social facts, such as the shift in mentalities resulting from social and historical forces in action. Memory can be included among these phenomena, being, in part, a social fact; and if these evolve and change over time, "then memory must have its history" (Fentress & Wickham, 1992, p. 20).

Our recollections are private and personal, yet they are structured "by language, by teaching and observation, by ideas collectively assumed and by experiences shared with others" (Fentress & Wickham, 1992, p. 20).

In the West, memory was increasingly devalued as a source of knowledge, alongside the growing dominance of the written word, becoming ever more confined to the personal plane. Information accumulated initially in books, and later in complex computer systems—within an infrastructure that supports a vast array of data. In this way, the text ceased to be a mere support for memory and became the medium itself—detailed, precise, and coded—replacing memory itself. Libraries became not only repositories of memory but also of forgetting, since books referred to crystallized knowledge, and thus to knowledge of the past. Memory, on the other hand, does not present itself as a simple mechanism that copies and stores information; rather it also acts as a system that retrieves that same information and combines it to generate new ideas.

Social memory can be confronted with documentary sources, although the collective experience of a given group may render evidence unnecessary—such sources are often more important to those outside the group than to the group itself, as has been evident in many contemporary social conflicts, from the Brazilian and U.S. elections to the situations in Ukraine and Palestine.

THIRD ACT

According to Eleftheria Thanouli, following Warren Susman's lead, the relationship between historically based audiovisual fiction and historiography should be investigated through four distinct dimensions: First, audiovisual fiction as a "product" of History—embracing all technological, economic, ideological,

and even moral conditions; second, as a "reflection" of History—i.e., an image that registers specific historical elements, such as discourse, movement, and human behavior; third, as an "interpreter" of History—providing an explanation of historical development as well as analysis of the process of History itself; and finally, films also become "agents" of History, as they exert a powerful impact on the audience's mind, shaping their cultural experience (Thanouli, 2019).

The new dynamic of a networked society—where boundaries blur to form continuous, non-territorial, and virtual spaces—has shaped new patterns for information and content circulation. Deterritorialization coexists with anthropological spaces that mark our historical identity and define a sense of resistance. The coexistence of these two dimensions simultaneously fosters both acceptance of and resistance to the "other" of modernity and globalization within the frame of local tradition, in a hybridized culture. The dissolution of physical and cultural boundaries—caused by greater knowledge of the "other"—leads us to a constantly ambivalent position of knowing who we are and what differentiates us from the "other" (Bhabha, 2006).

In a society where visual culture increasingly gains viewing time—strongly anchored in screen-based technology—and where there is heavy consumption of fictional narratives, historical and period series have become the principal medium for constructing narratives about the past and for disseminating memory, especially among millennials and younger generations (Rosenstone, 2018). This paradigm shift has transformed the perception established by official culture, which now escapes the sphere of the State and is dominated by deterritorialized international corporations of ambiguous positioning—oscillating between an authorial logic that brings a concrete social and political stance (though not always fully acknowledged) and a market logic in its commercial dimension, where the cultural value of the work is reduced to its capacity for monetization—that is, for continuously attracting audiences.

The relationship between History and Fiction has always been tense, albeit undeniably interlinked; it's almost impossible to disentangle one from the other since historians have used writers' and novelists' narrative techniques in efforts to reach broader audiences, and writers and novelists have adopted historians' subject matter as fodder for their fictional works.

The legitimacy of reenacting an event that occurred in another time and space—within a mental world different from ours and to which we can scarcely gain access—has become a question for historiography, but one the entertainment industry has handled without guilt. From the audience's perspective, the act of reenactment or restaging has become the most important extratextual form of communicating and mediating History, yielding proven results with

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Memory literacy: television fiction as a space
for shaping politically conscious citizens

audiences. Given the strong impact these narratives have on public opinion and how people perceive the world, academia can no longer ignore the importance of these products in shaping our relationship with the past and in the collective understanding of historical memory.

What we remember of the past becomes collective memory—but what we remember is selected, deciphered, and amplified by the media. Numerous questions, therefore, arise: how many of these works mirror the past? How many make statements about the present? How many settle scores? How many serve as collective catharses? (Burnay & Sardica, 2014). Fiction shares the same tension with historiography as other, less "orthodox" forms of constructing knowledge about the past. Oral history was—and remains—considered by many as unreliable, yet it has constituted a living archive of testimony, validating voices and figures absent from official records, adding alternative perspectives on certain events.

National narratives—imprinted and disseminated in works deemed autho-ritative—are themselves memories of a group, typically a literate bourgeoisie dominating the realms of economy, politics, and culture in capitalist Western society, which also controls the apparatus of the State and determines what deserves to be remembered. Curiously, rather than giving rise to new memories, States tend toward a perpetual re-analysis of the same episodes—in Portugal's case, the so-called Age of Discoveries. Historiography, despite its legitimate concern for methodological rigor, is not immune to instrumentalization by power for its own legitimizing and preservationist ends. Ultimately, all nations had to be invented, and historians—whether actively cognizant or not—have contributed as partners in constructing a hegemonic memory that excludes alternative memories deemed irrelevant or even illegitimate. The memory that unites a community acquires permanent traits, even as it undergoes constant evolution and change, shaped by present concerns and even by questions regarding the future. As Fentress and Wickham (1994) put it, "we preserve the past at the expense of decontextualizing it and, in part, blurring it" (p. 242). Therefore, we must ask the same question these authors did: "why do different social groups remember this instead of that?" (Fentress & Wickham, 1994, p. 115).

We do not claim that truth is condemned by prejudice, but rather that value judgments—even when they do not intervene in explaining facts—are present in identifying their objects. Thus, there is an inseparable relationship between politics and ethics, without denying our commitment to scientific rules in explaining phenomena. Otherwise, the social sciences and humanities would be left to the arbitrariness and convenience of their conclusions (Todorov, 1992).

However, it is now indisputable that science does not produce truth, but hypotheses about how the world operates. The more radical expression of

constructivist theory holds that our knowledge consists of constructing versions of worlds, since we cannot distinguish between what we call the world and the discourse about the world (Goodman, 1995).

Modernity created formulations that extended the relationship between fiction and truth even further—where the issue isn't being unable to distinguish between them, but rather the existence of a hierarchy, in which "fiction is truer than History" (Todorov, 1992). Marc Augé moves in the same direction, citing praise received by an ethnographic work in the French print press as being "of a truth as striking as a Balzac novel." This is not the only case in which historical facts are submitted to fiction. The academic thesis "*Raret, the Cold War fought from the Charneca Ribatejana*," about Radio Free Europe's presence in Portugal, received public validation through its fictional series—rather than vice versa. Similarly, the Portuguese press discussed the reality of propaganda and counter information using the historical fiction series *Glória* as an example.

These arguments open the door to debates on the role of historically framed audiovisual fiction in constructing a memory that, while not purely factual, aspires to be "the true, slightly detailed" (Stendhal cited by Todorov, 1992, p. 129). In this context, it makes sense to address the concept of truth, since it is this term that has drawn the border between historiography and certain literary, cinematic, and audiovisual narratives.

Todorov (1992) distinguishes two senses of the word: *vérité-adéquation* and *vérité-dés-endettement*—that is, "the first admits only black or white, while the second acknowledges shades of more and less" (p. 128).

The historian often finds themselves at a crossroads: though free to choose their path, they limit themselves to indisputable facts, lest they compromise their credibility. Similarly, writers of historical fiction work with facts but aspire toward *vérité-dés-endettement* and, in doing so, deliberately diverge from natural science methods—because observer and observed are the same: human—and about human nature.

Works produced for cinema and television, like historiography itself, feature varying degrees of the past's presence, constructed hybridity-wise: collaborating with historical consultant teams, while also enjoying scenic freedom in order to pursue other goals, such as building emotional relationships with audiences.

Concerns about the truthfulness of facts—or their manipulation for dramatic effect—remain pertinent issues that often place historical and period fiction in opposition to historiography. Marc Ferro (2017) warns of the problem of "blindness by omission," when presenting a certain angle without context or placing historical characters within a limited frame, thus simplifying complex contexts and influencing how audiences interpret characters and events. But no

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reading is immune to such blindness—not even historiography, which, according to the same author, is far more exposed to ideological manipulation by dominant elites than audiovisual production, as the film and television industry lies simultaneously inside and outside the system.

Diogo Ramada Curto (2013) offers an even more pointed critique:

I am indeed convinced that the institutions responsible for regulating scientific research, in their bureaucratic routines, are today less prepared to engage with debates that mobilize deeper ideas than some media outlets currently undergoing reinvention due to market pressure.

However, academic institutions, whether through the decentralization of power centers or the rise of authors from diverse backgrounds at leading international science hubs, have seen an expansion in themes and methodological approaches. Subaltern Studies, for example, brought attention to groups previously excluded—those without access to writing or who belonged to dominated minorities—demonstrating that the writing of History, through what is remembered and forgotten, is also a domain of domination. This again highlights that the past does not exist apart from the questions we pose to it in our own time (Spivak, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The entertainment industry—particularly cinema—has always been attuned to social movements. In the 1960s, a period of intense challenge to conservatism both ideologically and generationally, narratives emerged that shunned the illusory happy ending, featuring complex protagonists who resisted societal tyranny while remaining true to their ideals, even at the cost of their lives—figures we now call anti-heroes. Contemporary discourse continues to shape generational narratives—sometimes cyclical, like anti-war sentiment, the expansion of civil rights, and sexual freedom—but each generation redefines these contours. Writing about the past or a personality means giving voice to many who have been silenced: "we can hear the voices of those who remained silent for so long—women, subalterns, slaves, workers, farmers, peasants, plebeians, sexual minorities" (Rosenstone, 2018, p. 5).

Movements such as *#MeToo* and *Black Lives Matter* profoundly impacted the film and television community, propelling Subaltern, Post-Colonial, and Feminist Studies from academic isolation into the public sphere and shaping

narratives that finally gave voice to silenced communities, enabling them to tell their stories.

Historical past is constructed within an immensity of relationships—a web of unseen characters and events, inscrutable thoughts, coincidences, fiction, arbitrariness, unrecorded conspiracies, personal fears, and ambitions that defy full capture. Yet, time and again we return to the same events and sources through a new lens—extracting fresh interpretations, sometimes uncovering unpublished documents, applying ideological frameworks that prompt analysis of long cycles of economic change, or reconstructing the psychological complexity of a political figure. The relationship between historians and screenwriters has never been entirely harmonious—and remains complex—because their goals seem at odds, at least in simplified terms of comparison. Unlike historiography, audiovisual fiction can—and should—embrace a personal, committed stance, where its intent extends beyond mere narration of facts. Fiction pursues multiple objectives: many artistic, some political, and nearly all aimed at satisfying the audience. That is why such works "should not be judged on historical detail, but rather for the general sense of the past they convey—rich images and visual metaphors that help us think historically" (Rosenstone, 2018).

This tension may also reflect a clash between the professional, academic historian and the amateur historian—an increasingly uneven competition, as power shifts to new spaces, often the screen. Historical and period fiction challenges "the notion that a truthful past can only be told in words on the page" (Rosenstone, 2012). The assertion that the past can be accessed through different means—albeit not always as rigorously scientific—adds value and significance to audiovisual works, which, even when driven by market logic, still retain cultural worth and contribute to creating collective memory, albeit remediated through personal values and experiences.

The debate is longstanding, having opposed literary fiction to historiography, which led Michel de Certeau to remark that *"fiction is the repressed other of historical discourse"* (White, 2007, p. 147). However, the path of fiction has evolved from the printed word to audiovisual language, where different genres and formats coexist—each contributing to the creation of various images of the past, but also of the present—in a production of meaning that is simultaneously local and global, often imposed from above, as previously mentioned, but which also escapes dominant power, creating a constellation of group visions that compete and influence one another in the search for a space and time of mnemonic affirmation. In this sense, the globalization and mass consumption of fiction, made possible by a paradigm shift in the distribution model that has made vast catalogs of audiovisual production available, justifies a renewed approach to the

relationship between fictional narrative with historical contours—an eminently commercial product—and the writing of History, defined as the science of men in time (Bloch, 1993).

The fact that social memory is selective, distorted, and therefore not very rigorous does not mean that memory does not retain an important function, nor that it should cease to be considered reliable. Memory, being a social fact and not merely a part of our cognitive apparatus, evolves and changes over time; therefore, memory also has its own history. ◼

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Jonathan Crary and the limits of a post-media utopia [a]

Jonathan Crary e os limites de uma utopia pós-mídia

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ABSTRACT

This article, written in the style of a critical essay and theoretical exegesis, aims to dissect the central arguments of Jonathan Crary in *Scorched Earth*, highlighting their limitations and extracting some of their implications and consequences. Two core issues will be brought to the forefront: first, the contemporary subject described as a kind of sleepwalker—numbed, imprisoned, on the verge of awakening—; and second, life in the digital age understood as a process of uprooting from the world and human relationships through technical devices, routinization processes, the spectacle, and the instrumentalization of perception (of the human eye, voice, and face as sources for reading and generating data).

Keywords: Internet complex, environmental depletion, post-capitalism, post-media, Jonathan Crary.

RESUMO

Este artigo, escrito ao modo de um ensaio crítico, uma exegese teórica, pretende esmiuçar os argumentos centrais de Jonathan Crary em *Terra arrasada*, evidenciando os seus limites e extraindo algumas de suas implicações e consequências. Dois núcleos de problematização saltarão à frente: primeiro, o sujeito contemporâneo sendo descrito como um tipo de sonâmbulo — entorpecido, aprisionado, prestes a ser despertado —; e, em seguida, a vida na era digital compreendida como desenraizamento do mundo e das relações humanas por meio de dispositivos técnicos, processos de rotinização, espetacularização e instrumentalização da percepção (do olho, da voz e do rosto humanos como fontes de leitura e geração de dados).

Palavras-chave: Complexo internético, esgotamento ambiental, pós-capitalismo, pós-mídia, Jonathan Crary.

INTRODUCTION

SCORCHED EARTH: BEYOND the digital age to a post-capitalist world, a book by American art theorist and critic Jonathan Crary, translated by Humberto do Amaral and released in February 2023 by Ubu Editora. It arrived in Brazil two years after the Pantanal biome went up in flames. There were many images of flames, trees, and animals consumed by the fire, and kilometers of scorched ground with a perimeter, which made us doubt that nature would ever shine there again. It was a scorched earth that also appeared in other biomes, such as the Amazon, with the conniving destruction and contamination of native peoples and their territories by prospectors. However, the symbolism of the expression "scorched earth," which plunges us into the signs of destruction, could not go unnoticed by Jair Bolsonaro's administration, which has promoted the most nefarious flaying[1] not only in what should be called the "environmental sector," but also in the fields of science, regulatory agencies, institutions, in an extremist and violent policy that culminated in the attacks of January 8, 2023, when all that was left was broken glass, shattered works of art and various kinds of depredations in the Três Poderes Square in Brasilia. Scorched earth after three years of pandemic and seven hundred thousand deaths. A scorched Earth which, as we shall see, also encompasses digital life, as if we were now inhabiting deserted spaces, of informational *bang bang*, loneliness, and lies to exhaustion.

This is a good introduction to the Brazilian context in which the book was published. Our aim here is to delve deeper into *Scorched Earth*, circumscribing important concepts and debates in the field of Communication, without overlooking, of course, its weak and contradictory points. In other words: we need to transcend the book, scrutinize it, giving it a *communicational* perspective and projection, thus addressing it to the strict debate on the media and on certain thematic and epistemic recurrences observed in the area of Communication Theories. From a methodological point of view, we will try to articulate two concomitant actions: first, reading Crary *from the inside*, reviewing the sources he consults, the referential-bibliographical precision he respects, as well as (describing) his argumentative path, the detail of the rhetorical-conceptual engineering he erects; then (or rather: simultaneously), reading Crary *from the outside*, that is, inserting him, as far as possible, in the list of communication problems currently in vogue in our field, in (relative) dialog with authors and the most frequent theoretical contributions in the field of media studies.

What is the "internet complex" of which the author speaks? What does the post-capitalist world he envisions look like? What are the forms of subjectivation brought about by UX design, so widely debated? More than raising more or less

plausible hypothetical answers to these questions, more than examining the very argumentative conditions through which they are expressed, we are interested in understanding the theoretical bases and authors articulated by Crary, as well as how he reads them. After all, the author himself states that his purpose is not to present a strictly theoretical analysis, but rather to affirm: "that forms of radical refusal, rather than adaptation or resignation, are not only possible but necessary" (Crary, 2023, p. 15). As we shall see, however—given his erudition and background references—reading him does require a theoretical effort that encompasses his previous studies on attention and perception (Crary, 2012, 2013), and also, in a broadening of the interpretative arc, the various disciplines and theoretical currents that deal with the media, the world of work, exercises in subjectivation and digital tools.

Jonathan Crary (2023) advocates that the future needs to be imagined in a new way—as if he were rethinking Mark Fisher's well-known claim that "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (p. 8)[2]. To Crary (2023), it would be "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of the internet," since the whole public debate about digital media and social networks is now contaminated by a view that there is no alternative. This is a given condition for our survival. It is irreversible. There is no going back.

Following on from the discussions in *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*, from 2013, Crary (2023) invokes socialist political premises to reorganize a social praxis that would be interpellated/interdicted by large corporations, by monetization flows and by intense processes of individualization, prejudice and exhaustion arising from the permanent "being in a network." At one point, with an obvious dose of irony, Crary (2023) calls these corporations (and those who run them) the "sociopathic billionaire class." He argues that we need to think about other routines and more cooperative, self-sufficient relationships and alliances between subjects that are not so viscerally defined in terms of commercial and economic exchanges.

To the author, since 2020, several events have undermined this stability—we could mention the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The conflict in Ukraine, for example, has managed to disrupt the neoliberal idea of a global village based on full global interconnectivity and tenaciously guided by the rules of the so-called free market. For Crary (2023), however, we already had several harbingers of this harmful (residual and dysfunctional) use of networks: financialization, increased surveillance, data theft, censorship, and algorithmic exclusion, among others.

The author draws attention to the reflection he will present in the third (and, according to him, most important) chapter of the book, in which the idea

[2] The phrase appears as the title of the first chapter of the book *Capitalist Realism*, by English philosopher Mark Fisher (2020), and by editorial decision, has also been added as the subtitle of the book in the Portuguese version

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of *suspension*, contained in *Suspensions of perception: Attention, spectacle, and modern culture*, published in 2000, is taken up again to show how our sensory habits are disorganized or remodelled to meet the attentional demands of the internet complex in deep alliance with financial capitalism. "The omnipresence of the internet inexorably disfigures our perception and the sensory capacities necessary for us to know and connect affectively with other people" (Crary, 2023, p. 11). What happens is a severe obedience: the internalization of a neoliberal docility, he says—reminding us of Foucault (1987), for whom the disciplining of the subject stems from a double formative movement, which consists of making the body obey at the same time as it is conserved/protected, so that it can provide strength (manpower, willingness to work, ability to stay healthy, without spreading disease). This is transposed to the contemporary configuration—the author elaborates—mirroring the lives that hubbub frantically on the networks at the same time as they move their gears. To be docile in order to produce without limits. This is one of Jonathan Crary's main assertions.

THE INTERNET COMPLEX

Crary's (2023) argument has a backbone: he asks, almost at every moment, about the possibilities of imagining a world without the internet, an offline world. Allied to this is his insistent (critical) description of the contemporary digital world, or what he calls the internet complex. The subject that emerges is portrayed as someone in a trance, numb, hooked by "artificially produced appetites," for whom both the grid prevails—what Michel Foucault (1987) would call the scrutiny of the subject—and the perpetuation of 24/7 capitalist temporality, in which production is uninterrupted, with no rest times, no day-and-night alternations (Crary, 2016). "If we're fortunate, a short-lived digital age will have been overtaken by a hybrid material culture based on both old and new ways of living and subsisting cooperatively," he comments (Crary, 2023, p. 13).

Three points should be made at the outset: (1) when we consult scholars of semiotics, discourse or even cultural studies[3], we understand that this hybridity between "the old" and "the new" may not exactly be the result (or even the inducer) of a major qualitative change, after all, any culture feeds back on different practices, times, styles and behaviors—which makes us understand that this building of a "hybrid material culture" can occur regardless of overcoming this "being online in a network."

However, (2) Crary's courage in criticizing such a broad and diverse spectrum of targets, from big tech bosses to so-called progressive personalities, is to be commended. He uses the example of the "green agenda," since such projects

[3] We alluded to the precepts of the Semiotics of Culture from Iuri Lotman (1996), the discourse studies carried out by Bakhtin (1999), focusing on the works of Rabelais and Dostoevsky, in which the strong effervescence and dynamism of culture is demonstrated, and the studies of Martín-Barbero (1997) and Néstor García Canclini (2013), who worked on themes such as recomposition, hybridization and cultural differences in a media-communication key.

and discussions about "change" have little in the way of radicalization and end up—on certain occasions—waning, without going beyond easy, simplistic, inviting discourse, in an undeniable flirtation with the market and the maintenance of old power structures.

On this path, Crary (2023) warns that imagining another world is an arduous task and depends on difficult concessions. "Any possible path to a survivable planet will be far more painful than most recognize or will openly admit" (pp. 16–17). It is as if a smartphone with a low environmental impact or a biodegradable product were enough to make us feel "right," when in fact we are incapable of getting to the heart of the issue of hyper-consumption and the deflation of sensitivity in the face of overexposure on social networks—the same also goes for extractivism, energy and food production.

But Crary (2023) reminds us (3) that it is precisely at moments when the impossible prevails, when nothing else seems sufficient or viable, that forms of contestation emerge and become necessary. The image of ordinary French citizens marching on Versailles in October 1789, in a clear sign of dissatisfaction with the aristocracy (the system in force at the time), can be perfectly replicated in today's scenario, in which loneliness, debt and increasingly precarious living conditions force us to contest, to organize ourselves, compulsorily, to resist and demand a fairer and more egalitarian society. It is as if Crary (2023) is warning us that, at some point, "the rope will break."

Another strand of this fraying rope is the disruption that the environmental crisis is causing to the financialization of the internet and its market. Is the problem turning against its cause? For the author, we can't just read the internet as a tool to be used as we please. We can't see it as something natural, akin to life. And the idea that the web and mobile apps could "change hands," that is, they could serve ecosocialism, post-capitalism, or any other proposal for a break-up put on the table, is false, because such technicalities are dependent on this economic-political system whose fundamental implication is exhaustion, disposal, and dispossession.

> Capitalism has always been a conjunction of an abstract system of value and the physical and human externalizations of that system, but, with contemporary digital networks, there is a more complete integration of the two. (Crary, 2023, p. 18)

That said, the *internet complex* is defined as a large collection, a centralizing amalgam of apparatuses, media, techniques, and economic-capitalist elements from various eras (going back to the pulverization of electrified systems in the 19th century)[4]. Through it, the institution of a global, ubiquitous, and always

[4] The first two chapters of the book, on a hasty reading, sound excessively Luddite, anti-technological, and/or Frankfurtian. The concept of the "internet complex," in this reading, may refer to the conceptualization of the "culture industry". Such correlations, however, cannot be made without greater caution. The contextual, historical, and philosophical nuances of these categories need to be better considered. Even so, the parallel is worth using as a "signpost," as a distant reference for approaching Crary's formulations.

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open market is materialized in the most severe way possible, in which social isolation is intensified as a perpetuation of the fragmentation and inequalities so stimulated by the institutional and economic forces inherent in the productive model.

Thus, the critic adopts an argument very similar to that of Byung-Chul Han (2015), the South Korean philosopher who, in *The Burnout Society*, characterizes the contemporary neoliberal subject as obsessed with the idea of "being an entrepreneur of oneself," being a "self-manager," so that—and Crary emphasizes this point—emotions, friendships, family and other societal bonds are treated as mere online accounts to be managed and monetized. Our value is given through the clicks, followers, and views we count.

Jonathan Crary (2012, 2023), moreover, has been drafting a theory of the media. Paying attention to him is also important for this reason[5]. In *Techniques of the Observer on Visions and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (2012), one of his previous books, we were introduced to a series of optical and pre-media apparatuses—especially those forgotten and discarded throughout the historical process in which we are now culminating—apparatuses that have been domesticating the perceptual routine of subjects, acclimatizing us to the emergence of cinema, television and now, more recently, to the behavior of watching audiovisual products on a smartphone screen. In Scorched Earth, there is a post-apocalyptic exercise in imagining a society with totally different means of communication, with no major similarities with contemporary media—see the radical break he suggests. The author also makes a diagnosis of the present: "media materialities may change, but the same social experiences of separation, disempowerment, and disruption of community not only persist but intensify" (Crary, 2023, p. 21).

Therefore, the role of the media in maintaining the internet complex is at stake—above all because the media act as centralizing forces and pockets of knowledge for a certain hegemonic elite. Minority groups and their more singular media practices and uses—however "innovative" they may be—are always centrifuged, removed from the relevant nuclei of power. In this system, there is a strong process of memory deactivation and a generalized mess in the perception of time. Crary (2023) points out that, instead of being preserved, analogue things are almost always digitized (whether it's a device, a medium, a document, or a film reel)—giving rise to even more losses, conditioned access, and uncomfortable feelings of evanescence and disorientation.

Scorched Earth addresses the disorganization of politics and the false promise that the internet would be a great public sphere adaptable to the full debate of ideas, a forum where everyone could democratically settle in, dialoguing about anything and exposing their interests as appropriate. The very tooling of the

[5] Part of our reading method—the reader can already tell—is the procedure of linking Crary's text to specific lines of research, particular objects of study, and certain theoretical matrices in vogue (and/or traditional) in the current configuration of the field of Communication research. To highlight these connections/pertinences is to: (1) particularize an interpretative direction; (2) transcend the "review level"; and (3) point to a hypothetical field of empirical applications. As we have said, this is an "exegetical effort" that aims to provide a basis and framework for further research.

internet complex—in its operational logic, in its technical structuring—sabotages forms of activism and possibilities for mobilizations or protests to be carried out in the street, physically, face-to-face. The author says that: "limitless digital diversions were a deterrent to the rise of anti-systemic mass movements" (Crary, 2023, p. 26). For Crary (2023), the revolutions and springs stirred up by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other networks in the 2010s are marked by rapid emptying. Part of this weakening is due to the networks themselves, which allow protesters to be at the march(s) and, simultaneously, outside of it, acting as a projection in the virtual world. It's an ambiguous experience: it's about engaging and disengaging. The description contemplates the hatred and phobias exacerbated by reactionary groups increasingly adapted to this internet ecosystem, but focuses critical attention on the "progressive neoliberal elites," who also benefit from the dispersion, sectorization, and generalized fragmentation of political identities.

What Jonathan Crary overlooks, however, is that this anti-system sentiment also emerges in far-right conservative and neoliberal discourses. It's no wonder that Jair Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil in 2018 as an outsider, an anti-system candidate—not least because he only had eight seconds of formal electoral campaign television time (Solano, 2019)[6]. In other words, "obstacles" occur for certain groups and contexts. However, in some cases, the internet complex not only functions as a link between mass movements, but also provides forms of communication, bonding, and attunement that are even more crystallized and efficient than those that occur face-to-face (which, romantically, are defended[7]). Studies on the internet, mobilization, and social movements also contradict Crary's arguments. There are several examples: Castells (2013); Della Porta, (2013); Earl and Kimport (2011); Fuchs (2023). Even Jürgen Habermas (2006, 2022) has already admitted some positive effects of social networks on the public sphere.

Another topic with which Jonathan Crary polemicized is the subject of childhood. Here, too, he makes exaggerated claims, reproduces what has already been said on the subject, and highlights some relevant points to be debated. Let's take a look at the following excerpt: "tech literacy' is a euphemism for shopping, gaming, binge watching, and Other monetized and addictive behaviors" (Crary, 2023, p. 37). At other times, the author contributes to reinforcing the understanding of the use of video games and smartphones as something pernicious. As if the main purpose of this contemporary technical resource was to speed up entry into adulthood, limiting and robbing younger people, above all, of the opportunity to experience friendships, sexuality, and creativity in a fuller, more satisfying, and empathetic way.

[6] Miguel Carreras (2012) shows us that even before social media, Latin America already had its "political outsiders." More on the political and media context of the Bolsonaro government can be found in Rodrigo Nunes' (2022) book, D*o transe à vertigem: Ensaios sobre bolsonarismo e um mundo em transição.*

[7] For an overview of Bolsonaro's forms of communication and the nuances of this way of obtaining and cultivating ties, see works such as Santos et al. (2022).

The contradiction—in which the school institution would be involved—is evident when the Internet discourse is debated as a "human right", giving in to the pressure to "include everyone," as if this would transform, improve or save the lives of these people (the students, in this case), when the purpose, as a hidden intention, would be to catalyze a greater number of consumers, more alienated work and reinforce the inequalities inherent in the capitalist system. It is perfectly conceivable to denounce the fact that the school institution is suffering from the digital discourse—the discourse of the "modern school," the discourse of the "school of the future"—which is aimed, beyond appearances, not at autonomous and citizen training, at getting along well with the city, with people and with the environment, but at a contained and directed student body, more "adaptable" for the idealized job market as a dynamic, digital and hyper-connected space.

Carry's discourse (2023), however, ends up being a victim of the very criticism he makes of post-structuralism, because: (1) he presents us with an extremely passive subject, without a "game of wits," incapable of dealing more freely with the internet complex, without the ability to benefit from it (by tensing it) and to be held responsible for maintaining (as well as for transversal or unusual criticism of) this system. Therefore, they are *always–victim–subjects*.

Furthermore, (2) media and other digital information and communication technologies are always presented in a pessimistic light. So, when talking about "digital literacy," only the negative points are highlighted. In Brazil—as we remember and it seems appropriate to emphasize, as a counterpoint—fields such as Education, Linguistics, and Pedagogy have always been extremely critical of the way information and communication technologies are used in teaching processes, precisely because we represent the Global South, because we are influenced by a Freirian vision of education and because we face various structural and social problems in a country that is still in the process of development. Coming from different fields, an introduction to this debate can be made through Rojo (2013) or Silva et al. (2023)[8].

In addition to these incongruities, (3) Crary's (2023) discourse is totalizing, so that we could think, by way of example, of gaming social spaces—which are, of course, violent, marked by colonialism and so many other -isms—even though they are capable of calling into question the idea that these online communities and relationships do not help to create affections and alternative horizons of existence, including for marginalized groups. The same applies to pop music[9]. In Crary's picture, we see young people always exposed to pornography, addicted to games, wasting entire days watching series on Netflix. This, however, is also a neoliberal view of young people who, invisible to the scrutinizing, less taxing eye,

[8] Research by authors linked to the Communication, Childhood and Adolescence Research Network is also recommended.

[9] In an interview given to Ruan Gabriel (2023), in the newspaper *O Globo*—an interview to which we will return—Jonathan Crary argues that music is one of the few media expressions that actually makes existential experiences possible, because it does without images—always so valued in the dynamics of consumption in the society of the internet complex.

have their practices of resistance and creation—the memes, graffiti, and dance they celebrate—misunderstood, as indeed they seem to be misunderstood here.

It's worth noting that the "radical rupture" position suggested by the author is different from that of many contemporary authors who believe in processes of adaptation and reorganization based on contact and subsequent insertion into the core of the crisis. For Crary, it is not possible to change this system from the inside, for example. For this reason, the author traces elements in Colonialism, Imperialism, and the Cold War that not only sustained or made possible the creation of this internet complex, but were—and are, constantly improved. What prevails—in short, as is implied—is a Western imposition and an American model of technological consumption that flows precisely into a crusade against decolonial processes and de-Westernization[10]: "to suggest that the internet is where indigenous peoples, stateless immigrants, the unemployed and impoverished, and the incarcerated should contest their marginalization and disposability is not just wrong but malevolently irresponsible" (Crary, 2023, p. 44).

As neoliberal capitalism wants to devour everything (Majkowski, 2019), there is a deliberate search for indigenous territories, preserved territories, and peripheral spaces, both to provide them with technological improvements and to extract more resources from these places. If Mark Fisher (2020) searches for the "historical crossroads" from which the path "could have been different"—focusing on the Chilean socialist experience with the project CyberSy[11]—, Jonathan Crary (2023) makes a similar search and points out that the great mistake of the attempts at rupture made in the 20th century was to neglect and ignore the climate issue—not even sparing Fredric Jameson and Jacques Derrida in this respect.

It should be remembered that the original title of Crary's work (2023) is *Scorched Earth*, so the verb *scorch*, in English, etymologically means both "to burn" and "to flay." In a footnote—note 39—the translator explains that the same occurs with the verb "to scorch," which, derived from the Latin *rasus*, can mean that which has been scraped or razed. Therefore, the earth is not a mere figure of speech, a mere metaphor, because the "digital age," despite being associated with the consumption of virtualities and immaterial goods, depends on a materiality that comes in particular from mining and the extraction of natural resources. As these resources are in short supply, they have to be sought out in deeper layers of the earth, in the mountains, in the interior of forests, and in deserts, leading to even more disputes, death, the dumping of toxic waste, and the plundering of peoples, communities, and ecosystems in these regions. A "scraping" of resources, also caused by the "green agenda" itself, which requires chips to manufacture smart homes and wind turbines for "clean energy." In other

[10] It makes sense here, to partly refute Crary's (2023) propositions, to remember Chinese social media (TikTok, WeChat), which do not follow US logic and offer competition to US big techs.

[11] See Medina (2013). See also the interview conducted by Rafael Grohmann with Chilean researcher Eden Medina for *DigiLabour* (2024).

words, it's a devastating impasse: the "solutions" are hastening our demise. The situation is only getting worse.

GLACIERS, FUTUROLOGY AND THE DANTÈS COMPLEX

Another point of note is what Jonathan Crary calls the "objectification of nature," which dates back to the 16th century—the moment when today's legitimized scientificity began to formulate the idea of possession/domination of the natural world. Allied to this was the belief that great transformations would occur slowly, in the midst of a dilated temporality. Resources were abundant. It was unthinkable that glaciers could melt completely, and entire biomes could be wiped out. With the advance of capitalism, however, this crystallization of time disappeared to give way to exhaustion, to the impression of an imminent end, approaching faster and faster, closer and closer, inexorable.

So what does Crary do? He warns us that passivity—the absence of consistent efforts to put the brakes on and/or change course—is humanity's greatest risk. The author argues that capitalism will not last long and that there will come a time when we have nowhere else to extract resources from.

Science fiction continually appears as a motto for problematizing alternatives and new speculative exercises about the future. The futurologists of the early 20th century (by H. G. Wells, for example) were concerned with a less conflictive and more egalitarian world. However, when we look at the futurologists of the 1960s and 1970s, we see that science fiction itself was colonized by the success or failure of post-war economic models. "The buzzwords then were decentralization, networks, non-linear systems, and globalization; but behind the verbiage lay the anti-utopian forecast of a world in which everything was determined by the desultory metamorphoses of the free market" (Crary, 2023, p. 89).

There is, therefore, an interruption/deflation of the ability to imagine possible worlds. This is how the themes of robots, artificial intelligence, augmented realities, and the internet of things, among other paraphernalia, are dealt with. After all, the contemporary imagination is contaminated by this recurring future: metallic, machinic, dated, and non-organic. As Bo Ruberg (2022) reminds us, not even sexuality escapes, with the robot, remodeled from the earliest sex dolls, with its signs of possession, use, and disposal, being publicized as the future of sexual and amorous practices. This future is seen as communion between machines, communication between apparatuses, but without sensitive, affectionate, and binding sharing between the various entities on the planet.

This speculative cut would be aggravated by scientific development itself. "Today we are buried on all sides by exaltations of 'science' and the incontestable

authority of the 'scientists' who will save us from the climate crisis" (Crary, 2023, p. 99). The author reinforces––—by examining the considerations of various current theorists—the conception of science as an accomplice of capitalism, in a complex shuffle in which the former comes to serve the aspirations of the latter. He points to various creations—from plastic to nanotechnology—that have not promoted progress, but rather, as a side effect, a step backwards. Research and the search for eternal life, which is nothing more than a fetish of eccentric billionaires who own the big techs, is an example of scientific subservience and demonstrates, to anyone who wants to see it, a high level of contempt for humanity. Death—so much fought against—is one of the few remnants to tell us that these alliances can't do everything[12].

> Therefore, science as an autonomous field, as a fundamental ethical field, must be the object of criticism and distrust. If the scientist seeks "results," so does the self-manager or entrepreneur. And both merge in the contemporary scenario, imposing various problems on scientific production, such as: academic productivism, scientific fraud, the lack of ethical care and the absence of legal restraints to prevent accidents and socioenvironmental problems, the precariousness of academic work, the search for quick results to better compete for rankings and funding, the use of digital social networks to obtain views, self-promotion and spectacularization of one's image (in the case of scientist influencers)[13].

For those who study disinformation, the disintermediation of the public sphere and the digital transformations of the knowledge order (Neuberger et al., 2023, for example), some of Crary's statements may sound strange, but they are valid, above all, as a provocation and shock strategy. In times of conspiracy theories and fake news—one could argue—science has acquired capital importance. Bruno Latour (2004) has already observed that the post-structuralist understanding of critical inquiry is becoming outdated, since exposing facts as the result of social construction processes based on power structures is (or can become) quite a weapon in the hands of anti-scientific obscurantists.

Modernism—moving on to the next "target"—appears as another driving force in establishing, through paintings, sculptures, and literature, a rejection of the rural world, an aversion to the peripheral. In the 19th and 20th centuries, this kind of repulsion was necessary to promote behavior associated with "being urban" or "being modern." Crary (2023) finds in Rosa Bonheur's painting The Horse Fair, produced between 1852 and 1855 (Figure 1), aspects that could be replicated today and provoke us into other ways of desiring and fabricating, especially cities.

[12] Public curiosity and obsession with advances in cryogenics are illustrative (G1, 2023).

[13] Vaughan (1996) shows how not even the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) escapes making mistakes or ignoring problems due to certain "external" pressures. In addition, Oliveira et al. (2021) give us an overview of the precariousness of scientific work in Brazil.

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Figure 1

The Horse Fair, by Rosa Bonheur (1852-1855)

Note. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Bonheur, 1852–1855).

For him, the painting cannot be translated—and it still is—as emblematic of a "regressive ruralism." It expresses social change and a certain hybridization, through a gaze that transgressed gender norms, even at the time. The lack of contours on the horses, the lack of discernibility between the mounts and their owners, the animals—signs of the countryside—supported by a large block of cobblestones from the modern avenues—all of this is a significant composition of this cultural mix that has been so neglected. "The centripetal whirling of bodies, removed from a human-animal hierarchy, becomes an exuberant, carnival space/time of hybrid vitalities and intensities" (Crary, 2023, p. 116). Therefore, the author claims that it would be urgent to rethink biodiversity in post-capitalism, because we would need a world that reinforces multi-species links and recognizes them. Just as in the painting, horses and humans are interconnected.

We could say that Crary (2023) sees something of a "Dantès complex" in contemporary society. Edmond Dantès is a character from Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846). He wreaks his personal vengeance by enriching himself. It is precisely his wealth that enables the character to assume various identities, including that of an agent of power and, as such, authorizes him to humiliate, transgress, and financialize relationships or attitudes of others in order to take revenge. This feeling of omnipotence would be present in capitalism, as we are inculcated with the assumption that, by getting rich, we can intensify everything—especially what can be intensified even more via networks. Added

to this is the cultural imaginary that "starting from scratch" or "starting from nothing" entails a kind of sacralization for those who achieve "success" (even falsely and fraudulently).

However, this Dantès complex is also present (and even more so) in billionaires, as if they were today's new all-powerful, unattainable, arcane "counts"— when, in fact, their wealth has been built up since the 19th century, with a lot of bloodshed, looting, pillaging, and other iniquities. The standard of living of these billionaires is sold. We are sold on the feeling that one day we will be able to reach their levels of wealth. But Crary (2023) warns that this is just one element of the capitalist mentality, as billionaires not only enjoy a parallel reality, but also rest in the current imaginary world:

> For the elites, the priority is still this: to keep people contained within the confines of the augmented unrealities of the internet complex, within which experience is fragmented into a kaleidoscope of claims of fleeting importance, of endless admonitions about how to conduct our lives or manage our bodies, about what to buy and who to admire or fear. (Crary, 2023, p. 127-128)

ROOTING OUT THE WORLD

Monotony is the keyword for the ordinary experience of digital networks. Jonathan Crary (2023) professes a pessimistic and melancholic view of the digitalization of society—as if this process emptied the senses and made impossible love[14], connections, relationships, and other ways of connecting with the world. For this reason (and, of course, because he is one of Critical Theory's most controversial thinkers), the author revisits Herbert Marcuse, especially the concept of repression— but in a hasty and poorly articulated way, as we have seen. In fact, Marcuse's work gives us a glimpse of how human energies and emotions are pruned, imprisoned, and domesticated. It also criticizes unbridled hyper-consumption. Crary (2023), however, focuses his argument on the 1955 work *Eros and Civilization*, disregarding the fact that Marcuse admits that repression is inherent to this instituted humanity and that, therefore, it would be important to speak of a surplus of these forms of control, which would be called "more-repression"[15].

There are a few points to make here: Marcuse calls into question the very concept of "more repression" from 1966 onwards, in his analysis of a society that is advanced in some respects, as far as individual freedoms are concerned[16]. The theme of repression is diluted throughout his work and is returned to in later texts until his death in 1979. And Marcuse uses the theme of repression

[14] There are empirical studies attesting to the fact that online dating can promote sexual and gender equality, as well as make love life easier for people over 50 (Beasley & Holmes, 2021).

[15] According to Isabel Loureiro (2005), Herbert Marcuse makes a Marxist reading of Freud's works. Herbert Marcuse—Anticapitalism and Emancipation is an important reference for understanding the author's reception in Brazil. The text broadens the debate on some of the basic concepts of Marcuse's work.

[16] See the preface to the 1966 edition.

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to shape a non-repressive utopian society[17]. It seems that it is on this point of "possibilities," of what "could have been different," that Crary cuts into Marcuse's theory. The same happens with Hannah Arendt, who is presented to us as an ardent defender of radicalization in the French Revolution, when, in fact, she has a different vision from Marcuse (Do Valle, 2006), betting on the dialogical solution of conflicts, not on their radicalization[18].

Jonathan Crary (2023) has an enviable erudition and cites other philosophers, researchers, and art critics (Guy Debord, Bernard Stiegler, William James, William Blake, Hanneke Grootenboer). However, certain incongruities end up throwing us into a trap, since we can take (or are induced to take) such refracted readings as a key to already given (sedimented) readings of certain concepts and theories. Going back to the authors used by Crary allows us not only to make this confrontation—a kind of "heuristic check"—but also to expand and reinterpret his thinking.

If Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt are, each in their way, concerned with the uprooting of the world from the industrialized, techno-scientific and capitalist society of the 20th century[19], Crary (2023) tries to elucidate the uprooting of the world in our contemporary digitalized society—therefore, the focal point is in the flight from the sensible, that is, in the way the intimate world, sensations and perception have been transformed and are today forged for (or in favor of) an even greater detachment from tangible contacts.

The image of work colleagues getting together in restaurants, each with their cell phone, and/or the image of entire families who, even in the domestic environment, communicate through messages posted on social networks, are emblems of this lack of communication. Crary (2023) takes up some of the signs of this lack of sensitive interaction that is so exacerbated in contemporary times, such as the increase in proletarianization and the mathematization of human relationships, anchoring his argument in a certain axis constituted by the recurrent thematization of the gaze, the face, and the voice. Interspersed are descriptions of moments, situations and objects that disrupt and fissure the agility, the ephemeral, the quantifiable and other conventions of this hyperconnected world, such as public hearings, face-to-face encounters, the irreproducibility of iris conformation, and that which exacerbates our state of torpor in the face of the internet complex, such as biometrics, user experience (UX) design and infrared light rays. Tributary of Guy Debord's discussions of spectacle, Crary treats the media as an instantaneous illusion of the encounter, as if the dissemination of apparatuses such as television—apparatuses that function as an extension of our psychic apparatus and our societal dynamics—led to a distancing of the subjects,

making it impossible to experience face-to-face sociality—killing what is most special in the common, in sharing and in everyday encounters.

The author says that: "an encounter does not occur in empty space, nor is it bounded by the frame of a screen. It is an immersion, an inhabiting of an atmosphere, affecting every sense, whether consciously or not" (Crary, 2023, p. 139). For Crary (2023), there is a saturation of this process in contemporary times, which could translate into a deliberate action to "weaken" human relationships. And not even social spaces or public spaces escape, now being commodified spaces—serving, above all, as backdrops for Instagram posts.

The body is an object that has undergone a historical process of quantification, and the gaze has also become an action model for providing data. Biometrics, therefore, is the highest degree of colonization of the gaze, as it is no longer just at the service of surveillance but has the objective of providing patterns of behaviour for the "optimization" of digital devices, platforms, and services. The warning left by Crary (2023) is that the gaze is an act wrapped in a mystique, in secrets, sensations, human warmth, and the unspoken. The iris, for example, is impossible to reproduce, as it changes color depending on the angle of the light. There are iridescent mysteries in an exchange of glances between lovers, between friends, or between enemies. This is impossible to record. The eye and all its organicity provide us with a panorama of reality, since its faithful reproduction is impossible due to irregular movements:

> Because only a small central area of the retina registers with acute clarity, most of what our eye sees is indistinct and vague. By constantly shifting that delimited zone of clarity, we synthesize an illusory but coherent picture of an external reality that appears as present to us. Eye movement is the temporal encounter of a body with a world in a state of continual emergence, an encounter in which memory, perception, and other senses seamlessly cooperate. Our eyes skim the surfaces of the world around us, motivated by a welter of interests, expectations, anxieties, and desires. (Crary, 2023, p. 142).

The author thus argues that attention is not synonymous with fixed, still eyes. Attention is not the experience of UX design, but the experience of feeling, of kinesthetic reception, of fear, of thinking without focus, in reverie. And here, Jonathan Crary (2023) fuels the criticism of UX design, which catalogs our lives in interfaces. "The priority is not just to direct a viewer to a particular visual object but also to channel our visual engagement from one fixation to another" (Crary, 2023, p. 148). In this logic, the goal is acceleration and rapid consumption through "browsing" and "surfing," advertised as comfortable

actions for the eyes, but which, in essence, show processes based on training, correcting, and guiding the eyes through repetition, rapid screen swiping, and perceptual automatism.

Therefore, terminal capitalism can't even stand the irregular dance of the pupils, because the gaze, even before experiencing (focusing on a site, for example), has already been anticipated, datified, foreshadowed, and affected by emotional engagement. The eye no longer has contact with the confusing, the grotesque, the disorganized, resulting in an "impairment of our ability or even desire to make perceptual discriminations in real living environments" (Crary, 2023, p. 147). In this system, the eye is seen as prey to be captured, pursued, and violated by infrared rays and their imperceptible wavelength, which makes the eye another of the countless wastelands to be mourned in our perimeter of action. Not even color escapes technocapitalized distortion.

> The ubiquity of electroluminescence has crippled our ability or even motivation to see, in any close or sustained way, the colors of physical reality. Habituation to the glare of digital displays has made our perception of color indifferent and insensitive to the delicate evanescence of living environments. (Crary, 2023, p. 158)

Reading processes have also been extended to the face through facial recognition and smile reading. This data is used to tell "who you are," to assess whether you have purchasing power, whether you are dangerous, and whether you need a certain product. Emotions are tracked through the face, and happiness and asymmetries are standardized. This is also used to give emotions to robots and other paraphernalia. Throughout history, with the emergence of media such as photography, humanity has learned to manage the use of expressions, gestures, smiles, and poses in the social and/or private spheres. However, Crary's (2023) discomfort is with the overvaluation of robotic expression, routine expression (always the same), and the erasure of everything that a face can express humanly (in micro-expressions, for example). The face, therefore, is yet another field that has been devastated: by pornography, by advertising, by digital social networks that monetize the beautiful face (customizable, exaggerated, symmetrical) and the face as an image—masks, appearances, and other products that lead to spectacularization and the desire to become a celebrity. The image is extremely powerful today because the internet complex intensifies its sacralization.

In the end, not even the voice escapes being a stronghold for data extraction. Even speaking is presumed and calculated, so that the signifier is loaded not only with meaning, but also with economic intentions. What to say? How to say it? In what tone? At what speed? In what video quality? All these questions—which

are reminiscent of the questions in a news report—now permeate everything from pornworker performances to AIs like Alexa and Siri. We've even started to change the way we speak in order to be able to search and contact these robots. We've robotized phonetics. However, Crary (2023) doesn't go much further than this robotization and the voice as a datafied field. Other important issues in recent years have not even been mentioned, such as the implications of AIs like ChatGPT, DeepFakes, plagiarism, copying, synthesized and modified voice, the reproduction of the voice of deceased musicians and its commercialization by artificial intelligences and the loss of sensitivity in a society increasingly affected by hearing problems resulting from the massive use of headphones[20].

[20] Some of these "sound" themes can be found in works such as Zhou and Lim (2021) and Prado (2021).

THE LIMITS OF A POST-MEDIA UTOPIA

Compared to the English-speaking world, the impact and repercussions of Jonathan Crary's work in Brazil occurred much later, with a lag of at least two decades. His acclaimed debut book—*Techniques of the Observer on Visions and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, originally published in 1990—was only translated into Brazil in 2012. Echoing the analytical cues and forms of approach of paradigmatic authors—such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Marshall McLuhan, Paul Virilio or Friedrich Kittler—Crary developed a theoretical device for deconstructing and criticizing the processes of sensory standardization, the grammars of use and accommodation of the human sensorium (in particular, what we might call an episteme of vision—i.e. the social ways in which we learn to see): the social forms through which we learn to see, the knowledge inculcated in the way we make use of and dispose of our gaze). A diffuse Marxist orientation and a fine attention to the medial infrastructures and technical devices available in the historical periods under analysis are fundamental beacons that give uniqueness to the author's thinking. *Scorched Earth*, as we have seen, puts this same heuristic machine to work, updating it, testing it, and imposing new challenges on it.

In an interview by Ruan de Souza Gabriel (2023) in the newspaper O Globo, Jonathan Crary said that at no time did he advise people to stop using the internet. He also said that the new generations would need to build ways out of the post-capitalist world. The speech is controversial, because as well as going against the radicalization that Scorched Earth proposes all the time (and there is, in fact, room to say that it does allude to the end of the internet), Crary puts the solution at a generational level, evading the debate and conveying an image of postponing something that should be done now, by everyone.

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There are so many theorists that Jonathan Crary (2023) recalls that (planned as) easy reading ends up becoming dense, which also forces us into a process of "debugging" in order to be able to identify key points and even problematic points. That's what we'll do now, to conclude.

So, let's see: (1) some debates are dated and rehashed (for example, that of science at the service of capitalism); (2) some discussions—although essential—fall short and come in the wake (or shadow) of names such as Donna Haraway, Byung-Chul Han and Mark Fisher (to name just three relevant theorists, who are now very well known), who have delved deeper into the issues of capitalism, psychic exhaustion and multi-species relations; (3) some passages are exaggerated, excessively post-apocalyptic, and others are fragile, easily contradicted—either because Crary (2023) presents us with the regular, well-educated view of a New York citizen, a typified subject, or because, in fact, he is unaware of the subject, framing his criticism at the level of opinionated criticism or the already said (the harm of video games, the educational debate and the reading of Marcuse are good examples); (4) although Latin America and Africa are mentioned as pockets of resistance, the literature used is almost entirely white and Eurocentric or North American-centric (with a timid mention of Roberto Mangabeira Unger)—in other words, the voice that could offer ways out of the post-capitalist world hardly appears at all[21]; (5) the subject of the internet complex is described as a sleepwalker about to be awakened, passive, robotized and numb, as if Crary (2023) were limiting him excessively to the conformity of living in a contemporary world in full exhaustion.

In any case, the reading of *Scorched Earth* cannot be ignored. We never intended to replace it here. Rather, our intention was to instigate it, to refer to it, at the same time as we drew up a first reading itinerary, a cartography of its epistemic recesses and its rebounds or nexuses with pockets of problems and investigative practices that occur currently in the field of Communication. Jonathan Crary (2023) issues an important warning about a "digital age" that feeds back into environmental collapse, criticizing even the progressive camp and "green solutions," which accelerate the living wheel, stimulating the circuit of consumerism, towards the end. Imagining a post-capitalist world is undoubtedly an urgent agenda. However, this imagination will only be possible if it is detached from the robotic and excessively mechanical-organic imaginary that is so widely practiced among us.

Therefore, the qualitative sum of the work lies in a certain diagnosis of the uprooting of the world within our troubled contemporaneity, since affections, perceptions, the attentional regime, loves, desires and fabrications, encounters and other existential gestures have been routinized, militarized, quantified and

[21] According to the latest *Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2023), the use of social media in Latin America is already greater than television viewing. Mitchelstein et al. (2020) provide a good review of the literature on the subject. These are two bibliographic sources that would allow us to contradict Jonathan Crary's slips and more bombastic statements more broadly—if we were interested in going into greater depth on a specific angle.

even monetized—our eyes, our face and our voice now provide data for the anticipation of consumption and for the optimization of services and technical apparatuses. It's a world scrutinized in grids and with no propensity/openness to otherness. Crary says (2023, p. 174): "we are losing the possibility of listening; of encountering, in a tolerant way, a stranger, someone helpless, someone who offers nothing useful to our personal interest."

When we think about the Brazilian scenario, it becomes clear how much we already live in damaged societies, sociopathic republics, of fatigue and loneliness. In Brazil, in 2023, there were three attacks on schools: (1) in the city of São Paulo, in March; (2) in Blumenau, in Santa Catarina, in April; (3) in Cambé, in Paraná, in June. In 2024, Rio Grande do Sul was the scene of one of the biggest natural disasters in Brazil, with floods that completely destroyed cities. In a scenario like this, to conclude, it is urgent to recover affections, empathy, and temporary experiences of social coexistence that do not have as correlates financialized acceleration, the achievement of media success at any price, and the extraction of the planet's natural resources. Amidst mistakes and exaggerations, this is Jonathan Crary's fundamental success. �oxM

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Confined and tuned in: new circuits of Brazilian children's cartoons after the COVID-19 pandemic

Confinados e antenados: novos circuitos do desenho animado infantil brasileiro após a pandemia de covid-19

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ABSTRACT

The proposal of the article is to understand how Brazilian children's cartoons were established after the COVID-19 pandemic. The hypothesis is that Brazil has increased its animation's spread, and this is related to the circulation of the Brazilian cartoons maintained during the pandemic. The article analyzes the strengthening of the sector until 2018, the strategies that producers developed during the pandemic and a brief analysis of the sector in the post-pandemic era. The paper analyzes statistical data and research reports, in addition to interviews conducted with Brazilian producers. The article concludes that Brazilian production increased its spread during the pandemic, and this took into account the strengthening of the cartoon market, the need for exhibitors to offer a greater number of contents and the problems faced in other audiovisual sectors.
Keywords: Brazilian producers, cartoon; animation, COVID-19, children.

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RESUMO

A proposta do artigo é entender como o desenho animado infantil brasileiro tem se instituído após a pandemia de covid-19. A hipótese é de que, apesar da crise sanitária e do baixo investimento estatal enfrentado no período, o Brasil aumentou seu espraiamento, e isso tem relação com a circulação de desenhos mantida na pandemia. O artigo analisa o fortalecimento do setor ocorrido até 2018, as estratégias que as produtoras desenvolveram na pandemia e faz uma breve análise do contexto pós-pandemia. Foram analisados dados e relatórios de pesquisa, além de entrevistas com profissionais de produtoras brasileiras com projeção internacional. O artigo conclui que a produção brasileira aumentou seu espraiamento durante a pandemia, e isso levou em conta o fortalecimento do mercado de desenhos, a necessidade das exibidoras em ofertarem conteúdos e no escaldo dos problemas enfrentados em outros setores audiovisuais.
Palavras-chave: Produtoras brasileiras, desenho animado, animação, covid-19, crianças.

INTRODUCTION

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC brought countless and still poorly understood side effects for everyone, but one group in particular has been largely overlooked in this context: children (Nogrady, 2020). Yet, children were among the groups most directly affected by the pandemic's social consequences, especially because most of them spent long periods confined to their homes and apartments for the sake of social isolation, which, according to science, helped prevent further spread of the virus. In the United States, emergency mental health visits by children and adolescents increased from 24% to 31% during the pandemic (Beers, 2021). Among the most common issues were excessive dependency on parents, anxiety, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, nightmares, distress, and restlessness (Blog Neurológica, n.d.). In Brazil, the School of Medicine at the University of São Paulo conducted a study indicating that one in four children and adolescents showed signs of anxiety and depression during the pandemic. Among the more severe problems, the study found many cases of suicide and "cage syndrome," which is the fear of leaving home (Câmara dos Deputados, 2021).

Although children were the group least affected by the physical effects of the pandemic—at least between 2020 and 2022—many were fully or partially deprived of numerous social practices: they were prohibited from attending schools and daycare centers, visiting relatives and friends, engaging in physical activity, traveling, going to parks and leisure areas, or even playing outdoors. Additionally, many children lost family members to the pandemic or had to witness the suffering of severely ill adults. Finally, many experienced a worsening of toxic situations such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, given that they were left more vulnerable to aggressors when these individuals were part of their household (Unicef, 2020).

In this context, children had few outlets available to them, and one in particular played a significant role in filling the social vacuum created by isolation: audiovisual content. Confined inside their homes, children spent many hours of the day consuming audiovisual productions across various technological platforms—from restricted access to basic smartphones, which limit children's access to certain websites and streaming services, to wealthier settings where children had easy access to tablets, laptops, and smart TVs, sometimes without any adult supervision. There are still few conclusive studies on the impact of children's screen time during the pandemic, but the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics, for instance, recommends that children aged 2 to 5 spend no more than 1 hour per day in front of screens, while children aged 6 to 10 should not exceed 2 hours daily across television, computers, cell phones, and video games (Eisenstein et

al., 2019). Considering the pandemic and the resulting confinement of children to a routine of remote learning and restricted leisure, it is clear that these limits were far from being observed.

This article focuses, in particular, on understanding how Brazilian children's animated content behaved globally during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. In this context, "Brazilian children's animated content" refers to animations developed in Brazil or in partnership with Brazilian producers, intended for an audience up to 12 years old. This production mainly includes animated series and films distributed via television channels, streaming platforms, and movie theaters.

I argue that the substantial increase in children's consumption of animated content, driven by the pandemic, was partially responsible for a reconfiguration of the geopolitical landscape tied to international flows of children's audiovisual products. On one hand, the pandemic hindered mainstream production, mainly shaped by major media conglomerates based in hegemonic centers—especially the United States. On the other hand, it enabled a wider spread and consumption of content produced in Brazil. This reflects a significant shift in the communicative circuit of children's audiovisual content that had been established prior to the pandemic. On one side, international broadcasters and streaming platforms needed to offer a greater volume and variety of children's programming. On the other hand, the global dissemination of Brazilian content also stemmed from the strengthening of Brazil's animation market, which had already been developing strategies to expand into new markets before the pandemic and whose content has now gained increased acceptance and visibility.

To this end, the article is divided into three parts following a chronological structure. In the first, I analyze the pre-pandemic context, focusing on the growth of Brazil's animation market, especially between 2006 and 2018. In the second part, I examine the situation of production companies during the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022) and the strategies these companies adopted to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020. In the third and final section, I provide a brief analysis of the Brazilian animation market after the pandemic officially ended in 2023. Methodologically, the article draws on statistical data and reports published by institutions linked to the audiovisual sector, in combination with in-depth interviews conducted with professionals from four internationally recognized Brazilian production companies: 2D Lab, Combo Studio, Pinguim Content, and Split Studio. The article documents some of the main findings from the project "*Confinados e antenados: Novos circuitos do audiovisual infantil brasileiro na pandemia* (Confined and Connected: New Circuits of Brazilian Children's Audiovisual Content During the Pandemic)",

funded by CNPq, which maps the situation of major Brazilian animation studios in order to understand the strategies for sustaining and globally expanding their children's content.

THE BRAZILIAN ANIMATION MARKET BEFORE THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

Historically, Brazil has never managed to establish a truly systematic market for children's audiovisual content, despite this being one of the most consumed media products since at least the 1970s. In the realm of animated cartoons, 20th-century productions destined for television were by far the most watched by children. Brazil imported most of this content from major media centers—primarily the United States and, to a lesser extent, Japan—and aired the same material exhaustively for over 20 years, until the introduction of cable TV in 1991 (Holzbach, 2022). Although cable TV motivated the emergence of channels entirely dedicated to children, these channels largely originated from international media conglomerates that predominantly aired imported content from US networks. Cartoon Network, Disney Channel, Discovery Kids, and Nickelodeon dominated Brazilian children's cable TV programming until 2012, when Gloob was launched. Although Brazilian, Gloob also belongs to a major conglomerate, Grupo Globo.

This landscape began to shift slowly after the 2000s, driven by a series of initiatives. In 2006, the Audiovisual Sector Fund was created, under the National Culture Fund, dedicated to the audiovisual industry. In 2011, the Cabo Law was enacted, mandating that Brazilian productions be aired in prime time on cable channels daily. This created an urgent demand for Brazilian content among broadcasters, which in turn fostered the emergence of production companies specializing in television content—particularly adult and children's series. According to Ancine (2024), more than 40 cable channels emerged in Brazil between 2015 and 2019, while independent production rose from 10% to 12% of television content. In parallel, organizations such as Brasil Audiovisual Independente (Bravi), now with 675 affiliated production companies, were strengthened.

Between approximately 2006 and 2018, Brazil's animation market underwent a radical transformation, shaped by the rise of multiple specialized production companies and the consolidation of existing producers. Initially, many animated cartoons were created and integrated into Brazilian television schedules. Soon, some of these productions gained international traction. In 2009, *Peixonauta*, by Célia Katunda and Kiko Mistrorigo, premiered on Discovery Kids and

achieved an unprecedented feat: within one week, it became the most-watched children's show across Latin American channels (Queiroz, 2019). Produced by the long-established Pinguim Content (founded in 1989) in partnership with Discovery, the series became one of Brazil's largest television franchises, airing in over 90 countries and on platforms such as YouTube, iTunes, and Netflix. In 2014, the same producer launched *Show de Luna!*, a preschool series that first aired on NBC Sprout in the US before debuting the following month on Brazil's Discovery Kids. *Luna* and her science-themed adventures now air in 120 countries and are among the most internationally recognized Brazilian series—including adult programs.

Among post 2000 production companies, Bromélia Produções was pioneering. Founded in 2006 and focused on a single property—*A Galinha Pintadinha* (for children up to six years old)—Juliano Prado and Marcos Luporini popularized the series outside television, with YouTube serving as its primary platform. It became a true media phenomenon in Brazilian early childhood entertainment, one of the country's strongest licensing brands with over 600 licensed products (Holzbach, 2022). In 2015, the series launched on Netflix in Brazil, the US, and Spanish-speaking countries. Its various YouTube channels (dubbed in Japanese, Korean, French, Italian, and many more languages) have garnered over 33 billion views.

Newer specialized animation studios include Split Studio (founded in 2009, with over 120 employees and contracts with Boomerang, HBO Max, Disney Junior, Cartoon Network, and Canal Futura); Copa Studio (also founded in 2009 and creator of *O Irmão do Jorel*, a globally recognized Brazilian animation in partnership with Cartoon Network and TV Quase); and Combo Studio (launched in 2015), whose major success *O (Sur)real Mundo de Any Malu* airs on Max and Cartoon Network Latin America. These studios typically handle original productions and service contracts for international TV channels, Brazilian advertising, and educational or institutional animations.

The wider national and international dissemination of Brazilian animation at the time prompted two research studies that sought to understand the main characteristics of the country's animated content market while also generating optimistic expectations for the future of the sector: one conducted by the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES), and another by Anima Mundi, which, from 1993 to 2019, was the largest animation festival in Latin America. The BNDES study, titled "*O mercado consumidor de animação no Brasil* (The Consumer Market for Animation in Brazil)", was led by economists Diego Nyko and Patrícia Zendron and published in 2019. Its objective was to estimate the consumer market for such productions, and among the findings, the authors stated that the Brazilian

animation market in 2016 was worth nearly R$4.9 billion. There was still substantial room for growth, especially due to the expansion of streaming platforms and the general strengthening of internet-based entertainment services. Full of impressive figures, the study noted, for instance, that the total number of children's channel subscribers exceeded 140 million and that animated content accounted for 50% of their total broadcast hours. It also highlighted the strong growth potential of Brazilian production in the foreign market, considering "the constant need to renew broadcasting catalogs, the interest in greater cultural diversity, and, above all, the lower local production costs for producers offering globally competitive content" (Nyko & Zendron, 2019, p. 18).

Also in 2019, Anima Mundi conducted the *Mapping of Brazilian Animation*, which resulted in an interactive website containing a vast amount of data on production companies, content, and the animation consumer market. It was an exhaustive project that included an online questionnaire answered by 455 producers, focus groups with professionals from the field, and 18 in-depth interviews with representatives from the entire Brazilian animation production chain. The mapping documented the artistic, technical, economic, and geographic features of the industry and identified the specificities of large, medium, and small production companies, as well as providing highly detailed data on the work carried out by freelance professionals.

THE BRAZILIAN ANIMATION MARKET DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The highly optimistic outlook promoted by institutions such as BNDES and Anima Mundi underwent a major shift in the same year both studies were published. Still in 2019, Anima Mundi faced a severe setback: Petrobras, its main and longstanding sponsor, canceled its sponsorship for that year's festival while it was already being organized (Congresso em Foco, 2019). Lacking the necessary funding, the organizers launched a crowdfunding campaign and, after strong public engagement, managed to get the festival off the ground (Gabriel, 2019). However, as of the writing of this text, five years later, Anima Mundi has not taken place again.

The Petrobras sponsorship cancellation reflected a new political order established in Brazil on January 1, 2019, with the inauguration of President Jair Bolsonaro. The president initiated a series of actions that weakened artistic and cultural institutions across the board. Early in his administration, he abolished the Ministry of Culture, initially transforming it into a Special Secretariat for Culture under the Ministry of Social Development, thereby reducing its political and economic standing. At the end of that same year, the Secretariat lost even more

autonomy when it was transferred to the Ministry of Tourism, which weakened the Brazilian cultural sector on all fronts until the end of Bolsonaro's term in December 2022. The president dismantled several cultural incentive programs, such as *Programa Cultura Viva*[1], stripped powers and resources from the Rouanet Law—one of Brazil's main cultural funding mechanisms since 1991—and cut the cultural budget so drastically that, by 2022, federal investment in the sector had dropped 63% compared to 2018 (Piauí, 2022).

Specifically in the audiovisual sector, the government cut one-third of Ancine's budget, among other reductions. Thus, even before 2020—and therefore shortly before the pandemic began—the previously established positive outlook for the Brazilian animation market had already begun to fade. State decisions taken throughout 2019 were already being felt, especially due to the scarcity of public funding notices, the launch of calls with reduced budgets, and the disappearance of Anima Mundi, which for decades had been the primary showcase for the artistic particularities of Brazilian animation, while also generating opportunities for international dialogue and deal-making.

The COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organization (WHO). Caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the disease infected over 770 million people in 231 countries and claimed more than 7 million lives. Several vaccines were released starting in December 2020, playing a key role in prophylaxis and reducing transmission, but the issue was only declared resolved by the WHO on May 5, 2023. In Brazil, the first case appeared in late February 2020, in São Paulo, and in total, there were more than 37 million infections and 700,000 deaths (Coronavirus Brasil, 2024)—staggering numbers for a population of just over 203 million (IBGE, 2022). Beginning in March 2020, most of the country gradually implemented the health measures recommended by the WHO[2]. At that point, the main preventive strategy was social isolation, meaning people were required to remain at home as much as possible. As a result, countless industrial and commercial establishments were shut down, including educational institutions—which came to be known globally as lockdown.

Initially, Brazilian children saw their classes and extracurricular activities suspended. In the following months, they were then introduced to the previously unfamiliar world of remote learning. It quickly became apparent that healthy children were rarely affected by the physical symptoms of COVID-19, which allows us to infer how their daily lives unfolded over the next two years, albeit to varying degrees: generally speaking, they did not experience the illness firsthand, but were nonetheless forced to distance themselves from school, friends, and family, adapting to routines that were, to a large extent, filled with screens.

[1] The program was created in 2004 to ensure and expand popular access to the means of cultural production, circulation, and enjoyment. In July 2014, Law No. 13.018/2014, the Cultura Viva Law, was enacted, transforming the program into a state policy. The program was resumed under the subsequent government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Iberculturaviva, n.d.).

[2] Even though the then Brazilian president disagreed with many of the measures, which led to a severe health and political crisis in the country throughout the pandemic.

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Whether via computers, smartphones, televisions, tablets, or other audiovisual devices, most of the activities children engaged in during the pandemic were necessarily mediated by screens, serving as the primary interface between them and the outside world. In 2020 alone, around 87% of Brazilian schools adopted digital technologies to deliver lessons, and within the educational sphere, YouTube usage rose by 18% (Silva et al., 2023). As a result, animated shows, which were already a primary form of content consumed by children, became critical tools not only for leisure but also as a pedagogical resource widely used by schools in remote education (Bortolai et al., 2023).

Thus, during the pandemic period, two apparently opposing situations emerged in Brazil. On one hand, animation production companies felt weakened by the political context they were facing; on the other hand, children and educational institutions were eager for children's audiovisual content, due to remote learning imposed by social isolation. This demand permeated the childhood experience in an international context, considering that the suspension of in-person classes was a practice adopted in dozens of countries. This scenario was further complicated by an additional factor: the world's largest audiovisual producers had to suspend their activities due to the pandemic, which gave rise to unprecedented phenomena, such as the global suspension of film, soap opera, and series recordings.

In the very first month of the pandemic, on March 23, 2020, Globo halted the production of soap operas and series (G1, 2021). The same occurred with Record and SBT, a traditional broadcaster of children's content, which suspended the recording of the children's series *As Aventuras de Poliana* and all other ongoing productions (Jornal Extra, 2020). Outside Brazil, the US audiovisual sector strictly suspended or canceled all productions in progress, and activity was completely halted for about six months. California, home to the largest film studios in the United States, was the first state in that country to reach 2 million COVID-19 cases, which led to significant government pressure to stop recordings in Hollywood (O Globo, 2020). With movie theaters closed in much of the world, films with million-dollar budgets that were already completed had their premieres postponed. During this same period, Disney halted the filming of its series and all live-action productions, including *The Little Mermaid*, whose filming was about to begin (Vianna, 2020). On television, ABC, CBS, and NBC—the country's three largest broadcasters—shut down all their studios. The pandemic also affected India, which has the world's largest audiovisual market in terms of volume of productions. The country closed its theaters and suspended recordings and premieres, triggering an unprecedented crisis in the Indian entertainment market (PTI News Agency, 2020).

The general perception was that the pandemic had collapsed the global audiovisual market. Seeking to understand the contextual problems and to develop plans to mitigate the already existing negative effects, in February 2021—during one of the most severe periods of the pandemic—the International Federation of Actors (FIA) published the report *Impacto da pandemia de covid-19 no setor do audiovisual e de espetáculos ao vivo das Américas* (The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Audiovisual and Live Performance Sectors in the Americas), which analyzed the situation in eight countries: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the United States, Mexico, and Uruguay. In all of these countries, the report points to losses, budget cuts, decreases in production volume, and, most notably, job reductions in the audiovisual sector. However, despite this dire scenario, the report also makes it clear that, given their distinct geopolitical and audiovisual cultures, the challenges cannot be homogenized and must be understood in context. It is possible to observe that Brazil, although it has a smaller and economically weaker audiovisual market compared to the hegemonic US market, may have experienced less severe effects from the pandemic than its wealthier neighbor.

First of all, the report is emphatic in stating that, among all audiovisual sectors, the film industry was by far the most impacted by the pandemic, primarily due to the closure of movie theaters. Broadcasting, on the other hand, faced fewer challenges because, although it suspended recordings and reformatted the structure of several programs, it was able to operate with reruns and did not depend on direct financial resources, such as box office revenue. Citing data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the document states that global box office losses "reached 17 billion dollars by the end of May 2020, strongly affecting production and primary distribution in movie theater" (FIA, 2021, p. 9). Among the various tables in the report, the one reproduced below contains the only data that strictly matches between Brazil and the United States, in terms of both metrics and timeframe. It measures the impact on employment, that is, the number of jobs in the audiovisual market in both countries (Table 1).

In addition to the fact that losses during the period were significantly greater in the United States, the report gives little attention to an extremely relevant piece of data: the number of jobs in the Brazilian film market increased in comparison to the pre-pandemic period. This is probably related to a slight recovery the sector may have experienced in response to the shock of 2019, due to government decisions, although this is not mentioned in the report. The document only points to this growth but immediately emphasizes that, in the following months, this market also experienced reductions. That is true, but what

is important to highlight is that, despite both markets having suffered from the pandemic, there is a significant discrepancy between the high percentages seen in the US market and those in the Brazilian market, especially in the case of the film industry. It is important to keep in mind that this is only a single data point and cannot be metonymically expanded to represent the entire Brazilian and US audiovisual markets. Nevertheless, the other figures presented in the document do not allow for direct comparisons due to the subtle or profound differences in the information provided about the two countries. Even so, considering the argument I present in this article, I understand this to be a fundamental starting point for understanding the Brazilian animation market during the pandemic.

Table 1

Impact on employment [in the audiovisual market]. Change in the number of employed individuals between the second quarters of 2019 and 2020

	Brazil	United States
Total Audiovisual	−5%	−32%
Movie Theater	7.3%	−51%
Radiofusion	−8.9%	−10%

Note. Data extracted from the report *Impacto da pandemia da covid-19 no setor do audiovisual e de espetáculos ao vivo das Américas* (The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Audiovisual and Live Performance Sectors in the Americas) (FIA, 2021).

The report also pays little attention to another piece of information that proved decisive for the development of many activities throughout the pandemic, including early childhood education and animated content production: remote work. The document states that this form of labor was the "only" option, especially in the first three months of quarantine, but goes no further. Perhaps the sidelining of the relevance of remote work occurred because the tendency is to prioritize live-action productions, and, in fact, remote work proved ineffective in that domain. However, animated content production can adapt its work routine more flexibly, since it does not require actors on set or large crews on filming locations. It is possible—and relatively simple—to develop various types of animated content by distributing the work among several individuals, who can work independently from home, provided they have computers and the necessary software infrastructure. Remote work was already a viable alternative in the animation field before the pandemic; during the crisis, it was forced to become more effective.

HOW BRAZILIAN ANIMATION STUDIOS DEALT WITH THE PANDEMIC

In this complex scenario, the Brazilian animation market had to adjust to the pandemic reality, and it did so amidst a political context of devaluation of artistic production in general. With this in mind, between March and May 2023, already at the end of the pandemic, my undergraduate research assistant, Jahnavi Devi Farias Dias, and I interviewed directors and owners of four Brazilian animation studios to understand the strategies they adopted to deal with the problems arising from the pandemic. These were: the Executive Director of Combo Studio, Marcelo Pereira; the creator, director, and producer of Pinguim Content, Kiko Mistrorigo; the Executive Director and producer of 2DLab, Andrés Lieban; and three professionals from Split Studio: Cid Makino (Executive Producer and Animation Director), Jonas Brandão (Director, Producer, and Animator), and João Godoy (Scriptwriter)[3]. These studios were selected because they are established in the Brazilian market and also have an international reach. Pinguim Content (1989) and 2DLab (1998) were founded before the 2000s, while Split Studio (2009) and Combo Studio (2015) emerged during the rise of the Brazilian animation market after the 2000s.

All the professionals interviewed reinforced the issues already described in the first part of this article, which arose before the pandemic as a result of government decisions in the cultural sector, but they noted that between 2020 and 2022, there was a significant volume of Brazilian animated productions. Marcelo Pereira, in particular, noted that at Combo Studio, during the pandemic, work came in "*at the same or even greater volume.*" He recalled that the dollar soared during this period, which made it more attractive for international studios to hire Brazilian labor, and that his studio benefited greatly from this. So much so that: "[The years] *2021 and 2022 were the studio's best in terms of workload, revenue, and projects*" (Marcelo Pereira, Combo Studio). "*After the initial shock of the pandemic passed, the tendency was to increase production. Because everything that wasn't filmed turned into animation*" (Cid Makino, Split Studio).

The other professionals also pointed out that, as soon as the pandemic was declared, the volume of work increased significantly. This happened mainly due to two phenomena. First, streaming platforms—especially Netflix—showed strong demand for content due to social isolation and the resulting global increase in the time people spent consuming such media. Added to this was the interruption of live-action productions, which made animated content the main alternative for continuity and premieres in the audiovisual sector. The demand for content at the start of the pandemic was particularly relevant for studios that already had service contracts with the international market, such as Combo Studio and Split Studio.

Secondly, the volume of projects was high during the pandemic because the studios structured themselves to operate remotely in a surprisingly fast manner. All four studios established efficient remote work routines within a few days and thus were able to continue fulfilling existing demands with virtually no interruption.

"*In two days, we decided that everyone would work remotely. Some aspects of the production changed, but, fundamentally, it was already possible to work from home*" (Cid Makino, Split Studio). "*Before* [the pandemic], *there was some resistance to the home-office model, but now it is fully operational. … For the employer, it's easier, since it results in a more flexible work regime*" (Andrés Lieban, 2DLab).

This even enabled them to hire professionals from outside their original locations with relative ease—a practice that may become relevant to geographically diversify this sector, which is still heavily concentrated in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. For instance, Combo Studio's adaptation to remote work was completed in just a few days and allowed the company to expand nationally, with professionals now distributed across various parts of Brazil.

> Combo Studio indeed experienced a significant increase [in workload] during the pandemic. One day we were at the office, and the next we had our computers under our arms. The following week [after the beginning of social isolation], we were already working more or less the same way [as before]. During that period, we had up to 120 collaborators working at the same time. Today, we have a studio that is spread throughout the entire country. (Marcelo Pereira, Combo Studio)

Kiko Mistrorigo recalls that the beginning of social isolation caused "a bit of a rush," but his production company quickly developed strategies to enable remote work. He had to cancel the premiere of the animation *Tarsilinha* (which only hit theaters in 2022), but operations continued with the help of software that allowed professionals to work from home as if they were physically present at the studio:

> You'd go to the studio [during the pandemic] and see a bunch of ghosts: the mouse would be moving by itself because, through the software, the professional was working at the studio, but from home. There was an immediate structural change. There was a lack of contact, of the sense of belonging. But, on the other hand, there was a surprising market opening for animators. A lot of freelance gigs started coming in from abroad. (Kiko Mistrorigo, Pinguim Content)

At the same time, professionals pointed out at least three problems faced during that period, which could generate difficulties after the pandemic. First, they mentioned losing good professionals to foreign markets, as several international studios also adapted to remote work and realized they could hire Brazilian professionals and have them work from Brazil under a home-office model. Second, they understood that they were only able to meet the high demand of that period because of productions that were already underway or had been completed before 2019, as a result of public policies in place at the time and the booming Brazilian animation market until 2018. Lastly, some emphasized that the Brazilian market did grow during that period, but without new original content and driven instead by service demands from international studios. One of them pointed out that international companies exploited Brazilian labor by paying unreasonably low rates, arguing that "the pricing table for Latin America is different"—in other words, they underpaid professionals[4]. Creative work may also have suffered due to the new work dynamics: "*on the other hand,* [remote work] *somewhat impaired communication compared to in-person. … I think the creative side is still suffering today*" (Andrés Lieban, 2DLab).

Despite these problems, the overall outcome for the Brazilian animation market during the COVID-19 pandemic was positive, considering that production continued and there was a reconfiguration of work routines that allowed the market's needs to be met—both domestically and in response to demands from international companies. Remote work, combined with strong engagement from the production companies, managed to keep the entire communication circuit of Brazilian animation active, as well as its international dialogue, even if professionals perceived their reality as negative. This was due both to the lack of state support and, of course, the horrendous conditions of the pandemic itself.

THE BRAZILIAN ANIMATION MARKET IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD

Even before the pandemic was officially declared over by the WHO in May 2023, the Brazilian audiovisual market had already undergone a positive shift. Jair Bolsonaro's presidential term had come to an end, giving way on January 1st, 2023, to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Within days, Lula restructured the cabinet and reactivated the Ministry of Culture. Shortly thereafter, he gradually revived several incentive programs that had been dismantled under the previous administration and announced more robust budgets for public funding calls. On March 23rd, 2023, Minister of Culture Margareth Menezes announced that R\$1 billion would be invested in Brazilian audiovisual productions, with the amount to be released in the following months. At the same time, Ancine regained its

[4] Another important issue was reported in some of the interviews, related to the mental health challenges faced by the professionals. However, this is a point that involves much broader and more complex elements than those that fit within the scope of this article, as they go beyond activities strictly carried out in the professional sphere.

political status and began a more aggressive process of project funding and public calls. Also in March, the Agency announced that R$163 million would be made available through these calls, in addition to R$387 million for the Audiovisual Sector Fund credit line, with an emphasis on independent production and sector infrastructure (Ancine, 2023).

These actions gave an important boost to the Brazilian audiovisual market, which had already been trying to recover throughout 2022. These incentives were coupled with the definitive reopening of movie theaters, the reactivation of studios worldwide, and the return of routine activities for people and companies alike, also on a global scale. Thus, Brazil significantly resumed its film productions and brought audiences back to theaters, but at least until early 2024, the positive figures seen in 2019 had not yet been reached.

Table 2

Revenue and total audience in the Brazilian film sector

Note. The 2024 data refers only to the first few months of the year. Retrieved from Ancine (2024).

Table 2 includes both national and foreign films screened in Brazilian cinemas during the highlighted period, meaning it reflects overall market activity and not the specific growth of audiovisual productions made in Brazil. It shows clear improvement in the sector but also emphasizes that more time and a favorable context are needed for production levels to reach the heights seen in 2019.

In the meantime, while Brazil was developing strategies to benefit the entire audiovisual market in the post-pandemic period, the United States faced a major crisis in the sector, resulting from two related events: on May 2nd, 2023, the writers' strike was launched, followed two months later, on July 14th, by the strike of actors and actresses in the United States. Both strikes were primarily linked to labor disputes and demands for better pay, and were only fully resolved on November 9th, marking one of the longest work stoppages ever experienced in the US industry. This issue may even have had a surprising side effect in Brazil.

UCI Cinemas, for example, stated that Brazilian productions would be essential to maintaining a strong lineup in Brazilian theaters in 2024, considering that the US market would still take time to recover (InfoMoney Business, 2024).

The strikes in the US—especially the writers' strike—paralyzed the entire audiovisual market in that country, including animation production. In contrast, in Brazil, as previously analyzed, there was no interruption in this sector—quite the opposite. Thus, once the harshest effects of the pandemic subsided and government incentives resumed, a promising scenario emerged for the production of Brazilian animated content, not only in terms of volume but also in symbolic capital. All the studios interviewed for this article continued their production activities and have expanded their international reach. Currently, Pinguim Content's productions are present in 120 countries and on various audiovisual platforms. Split Studio has an office in the United States and contracts with Cartoon Network, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon, Disney Jr., Boomerang, Globo, Futura, Record, and Maurício de Sousa Produções. Combo Studio counts among its partners Cartoon Network, Max, Netflix, and Google. 2D Lab has several original productions circulating in Latin America and stands out in events in countries such as Argentina, Chile, China, Côte d'Ivoire, India, and the United States.

It is difficult to measure the symbolic empowerment of Brazilian animated content using closed figures, but it is possible to observe that, based on the argument developed so far, consistency has been securing more space and a certain freedom of choice for production studios. One of the professionals interviewed confided, for example, that he prioritizes original productions and that, during the pandemic, he turned down international contracts because he believed the companies were devaluing the sector by offering payments below those negotiated in wealthier countries. Another professional mentioned that he had to refuse contracts because he was already overwhelmed with work. At the same time, long-running series like *A galinha pintadinha (Lottie Dottie Chicken)* continue to be widely consumed by children around the world. The second music album of this series remained on Netflix's Top 10 list for more than 32 consecutive weeks until early 2024 (Dugaich, 2024). Its YouTube channel has over 40 million subscribers, and its videos collectively boast an astonishing 33 billion views. *A galinha pintadinha* was also the face of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign held in São Paulo in 2022 (Meio & Mensagem, 2022).

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Confined and tuned in: new circuits of Brazilian
children's cartoons after the COVID-19 pandemic

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

I therefore argue that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated an already ongoing process of change in the communicative circuit of Brazilian animated content within a global context. Brazilian production expanded its reach and symbolic capital during the pandemic, and this growth took into account: 1) the strengthening of the Brazilian animation market, which managed to disseminate its products despite the pandemic; 2) the need of audiovisual exhibitors—particularly television networks and streaming platforms—to offer a greater volume of children's content, given the social isolation experienced by children; and finally, 3) the ripple effects of issues faced by other audiovisual sectors in hegemonic contexts, such as the interruption of live-action productions during the pandemic and the writers', actors', and actresses' strikes that followed in the United States.

Brazilian animated content production companies managed to adapt to the difficulties imposed by the pandemic in a way that maintained and even increased the ongoing production. This strengthening is related to the working dynamics of these companies—which developed work routines in which home office naturally became a viable possibility—combined with the global increase in the acceptance of such content, which was already underway and experienced an almost paradoxical acceleration due to the confinement of children during the pandemic. It is important to emphasize that this growth is not linear and does not reach all Brazilian production companies. The sector faces many obstacles that sometimes lead to the weakening or even closure of specific studios. My analysis considered a general context and therefore cannot properly point out individual cases. Furthermore, in many situations, the growth of this market happens due to the provision of services to hegemonic companies that do not always give due importance—nor financial support—to the quality of what is produced in Brazil.

In any case, I understand that there is indeed strengthening, and it cannot be perceived in isolation, but rather as the result of a historical and political process aimed at the empowerment of "peripheral" countries within an international geopolitical context (Carter, 2017, 2020; Lobato, 2016; Steemers, 2014; Thussu, 2007). The Brazilian animation market must be seen as an exemplary case, but one that is part of a geopolitical reordering process—a processual movement whose foundations clearly predate the timeframes discussed in this article. Moreover, if Brazilian productions had no global relevance or were not potentially accepted by children from many different places, the efforts of these production companies would not materialize in all the results analyzed in this

article. These results, therefore, show that children are increasingly receptive to the way our audiovisual production respects and engages with them. M

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Derrida's machines: traces of a deconstructive concept of media [a]

As máquinas de Derrida: traços de um conceito desconstrutivo de mídia

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the relationship between Jacques Derrida's work and Media Theory, based on his assertion that deconstruction would not be possible without the computer. Our hypothesis is that there is a spectral thesis on the mediatic within Derrida's thought, reconstructed in this text from traces scattered throughout his books. We propose to reconstruct this thesis through the presence of four communication media in his work: writing, the typewriter, television, and the computer. We conclude with the existence of a deconstructive concept of media, which understands the technical inscription device not as a mere intermediary of transmission but as a supplementary archive that influences the encoding of messages.
Keywords: Jacques Derrida, deconstruction, Media Theory, archive.

RESUMO
Este artigo explora a relação entre a obra de Jacques Derrida e a Teoria das Mídias, a partir de sua declaração de que a desconstrução não seria possível sem o computador. Nossa hipótese é a de que há uma tese espectral sobre o midiático no pensamento de Derrida, reconstruída neste texto a partir de vestígios dispersos por seus livros. Propomos a reconstrução dessa tese a partir da presença de quatro meios de comunicação em sua obra: escrita, máquina de escrever, televisão e computador. Concluímos pela existência de um conceito desconstrutivo de mídia, que entende o dispositivo técnico de inscrição não como intermediário de transmissão, mas enquanto arquivo suplementar que influencia a codificação das mensagens.
Palavras-chave: Jacques Derrida, desconstrução, Teoria das Mídias, arquivo.

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Derrida's machines: traces of
a deconstructive concept of media

INTRODUCTION: SPECTERS OF AN UNWRITTEN TEXT

"Ghost are always at the other end of the line"
—Kittler, 1992

WHAT CAN BE said when, on the other end of the line, we hear a murmur—something less than a voice, something unnamed, a signal we cannot comprehend? To presume a haunting, of course. Yet we might also understand, by thinking about the very idea of noise, that the specter *may well be the line itself*: that is, the hypothesis that the ghostly is not transmitted through the cables but rather provoked by them, an inevitable part of their operation.

We can begin to better grasp the nuances of this provocation by tracing the origins of the citation that set it in motion. The spectral provocation emerges in an interview given by media theorist Friedrich Kittler to *Artforum* magazine in 1992. Midway through the conversation, amidst reflections on the media genealogy outlined by the German scholar, the interviewer invites him to discuss the influence of deconstruction on his project—an unspoken, spectral allusion to Jacques Derrida's theory, an acknowledged reference in *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900* (Kittler, 1990).

Kittler picks up on the cue and does not shy away from invoking the intercessor; more than that, he responds to the question by appropriating Derrida's own words. He recalls having hosted the French philosopher at an event at the University of Siegen in Germany, a cradle of German media studies. There, Derrida purportedly made the following confession: "If there had been no computer, deconstruction could never have happened" (Kittler, 1992, para. 24).

How might we understand this statement, beyond the mordancy of Kittler's response, which inverts the interviewer's presumptions? Or rather: how might we situate this phrase within Derrida's body of work, comprehending the haunting it introduces into the critical and philosophical project of deconstruction by attributing its very existence to computational processes?

These are questions that Kittler himself grapples with. Continuing his response, he laments that Derrida did not elaborate on this spontaneous reflection in a text, nor document these relations in a full-fledged essay. With such a text in hand, all those who deploy deconstruction as a somnambulistic act (as the German scholar puts it, citing Americans as the chief culprits) might better attend to the *materiality* of the phenomena they investigate. Motivated by similar questions, and within the context of a series of studies aimed at mapping the possible intersections between Derrida's philosophy and Communication

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Theories (Abreu & Silva, 2022; Abreu et al., 2020), we follow Kittler's traces in this essay. Our goal is to demonstrate that Derrida did, in fact, write this text on the collateral influences between the computer and deconstruction—though not in a monographic form.

Our hypothesis is that the philosopher's manifesto for a computational understanding of the deconstructionist project is dispersed throughout his work, readable from the proposition of *Grammatology* in 1967 (Derrida, 1998) to the final interviews given in the early 2000s (Derrida, 2005). *Like a ghost*, then, the computer haunts all of Derrida's texts. Our task here is to reconstruct this spectral text by gathering its fragments and understanding how they reveal a different image of both Derrida's philosophy and the prospects they open for Media Theories.

This is thus both a horizontal and a vertical investigation. From the very inception of the grammatological project, Derrida acknowledged his inspirations in André Leroi-Gourhan's anthropology of technique and Norbert Wiener's developments in cybernetics—dialogues that have already inspired a series of recent investigations tracing the impact of cybernetic and informational thought on what has come to be known as post-structuralism or the philosophy of difference (Geoghegan, 2020, 2022; Lafontaine, 2007).

But beyond these references to a specific intellectual context of technological reflection, there is another path to reconstructing this lost text: the traces left by Derrida's recurring, though always elusive, references to specific media and communication objects. From the tools wielded by the hands of Paleolithic hominins and their "mytographies" (Derrida, 1998, p. 86) to the affectionate metalinguistic comments on "the little portable Macintosh on which I have begun to write" (Derrida, 1996, p. 25), Derrida reveals a fascination with inscription machines and how their actions are decisive in constructing the regime of meaning in which we are immersed. A regime which deconstruction ultimately seeks to expose, question, invert, and destabilize:

> The break with this structure of belonging can be announced only through a *certain* organization, a certain *strategic* arrangement which, within the field of metaphysical opposition, uses the strengths of the field to tum its own stratagems against it, producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction and thoroughly *delimiting it*. (Derrida, 1978, p. 20)

Deconstruction as a strategy, therefore, is a *perspectival instrument*—and it is this very strategy that we will employ in the development of this article, adopting as a methodological principle its tendency to gather traces and reconstruct the

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textual fabric. In our pursuit of the reconstruction of Derrida's computational essay, we will subject his own work to a deconstructive gaze. In doing so, we aim to test the hypothesis that between the two genealogies—of the media and of deconstruction—there exists a specular, parallel evolution, one that we intend to discern precisely at their points of contact.

This text, therefore, is organized around Derrida's mentions of media, opting to divide and categorize these references according to the specificity of each communication technology alluded to—a strategy aligned with the propositions of Media Theories and of Kittler (1999), insofar as it allows us to understand the materiality of each medium and how, in their singularity, they each illuminate a different aspect of Derrida's critical project. These will be: writing, the typewriter, television, and the computer. Ghosts of past, present, and future media; messengers of a thought that is never the same once it passes *through these machines*.

WRITING: EXTERIORIZATION AND SUPPLEMENTARITY IN THE ARCHE-MEDIA

First and foremost, the primary medium: first in the chronology of Derrida's media interests but also the first communication technology, as proposed by the philosopher in the wake of the archaeological anthropology of technology (Derrida, 1998).

All of his philosophy rests on the rehabilitation of the positive sense of writing, which had been downgraded and repressed in the Western philosophical tradition as an a mere technicality devoid of substance, a representation of representations, a poison to "true" cognition (Derrida, 1998). To affirm its positivity, Derrida postulates writing as any and all devices for inscription and the recording of information on material supports—a clearing of the conceptual ground and a historical reappropriation that challenges the Eurocentric history of writing, echoing the findings of French archaeology in the mid-1950s (Pinto-Neto, 2017). The most significant of these, in the interpretation proposed here, is the discussion introduced by André Leroi-Gourhan regarding the *liberation of the hands* of the first bipedal hominins. This idea, elaborated in his paleontological research and reflected in *Gesture and speech* (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993), is a cornerstone for Derridean writing.

Leroi-Gourhan identifies this moment of motor development and the acquisition of hand self-awareness as a decisive stage in human technological development. It is the possibility of manipulating tools that opens the way to an entire chain of inventions—a kind of archaeological update of the Promethean

myth[1]. But what are these tools? Above all, Leroi-Gourhan speculates, and Derrida emphasizes, they are *inscription technologies*: the means of engraving on walls and soil, the inaugural devices of artificial memory storage. This process gradually leads to an expansion of cognition, producing in these pre-linguistic (and even pre-vocal) humans a demand for a symbolic system to signify the ideas they expressed graphically. Leroi-Gourhan (1993, p. 31) notes the physiological alterations wrought by the manipulation of inscription tools, observing that the very possibility of speech arises from this transformation. Thus, he coins the radical statement: "We possess no direct means of studying language before writing" (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993, p. 111).

Closely following this interpretation, captivated by this inversion of the classical archaeology of the logocentric relation (according to which speech precedes and governs writing, understood merely as a phonetic representation), Derrida aligns himself with the view that writing constitutes the gesture that invents the very possibility of communication—a revolutionary invention, from which all others derive: "A writing that breaks with the *phoné* radically is perhaps the most rational and effective of scientific machines" (Derrida, 1998, p. 312)—or, as we should already call it, the most *paradigmatic* of *media*.

An *arche-media*, therefore. We read this in Derrida's reflections, where he establishes a regime of affiliation between those stones used to carve figures and the computing systems emerging in the 1960s, grounded in their operation of language through mediation:

> If the expression ventured by Leroi-Gourhan is accepted, one could speak of a "liberation of memory," of an exteriorization always already begun but always larger than the trace which, beginning from the elementary programs of so-called "instinctive" behavior up to the constitution of electronic card-indexes and reading machines, enlarges différance and the possibility of putting in reserve: it at once and in the same movement constitutes and effaces so-called conscious subjectivity, its logos, and its theological attributes. (Derrida, 1998, p. 84)

The question of "putting into reserve"[2] and the dynamic between creation and erasure enables Derrida to identify two distinctive features of writing that remain fundamental to all later media. First is the already mentioned issue of *exteriorization*: every medium of communication will mediate a relationship between cognition and its *outside*, operating as a passageway (hence the strong sense of "medium") from consciousness to the world. Yet this passage is not merely transmissive, as Derrida repeatedly cautions throughout his work. In

[1] The echo is not lost on other readers, such as Bernard Stiegler, a continuator of Derrida's grammatological project and author of a philosophical history of technics grounded in the dialogue between Leroi-Gourhan's reflections and a deconstruction of the Prometheus myth (Stiegler, 1998). We have already presented direct connections between the place of technology in the philosophies of Derrida and Stiegler in a previous essay (Abreu & Silva, 2022).

[2] The original expression, *mise en réserve*, has in French a common usage within economic language, referring to the withholding or safeguarding of part of a company's revenue—a meaning perhaps better rendered as *accumulation*, a word that also evokes the Marxist resonances of grammatology to which Derrida himself would allude. In the context of the cited passage, and within our argument as well, writing, as archi-medium, inaugurates the possibility of archiving meaning, rendering it no longer immediately accessible, and giving rise to ever more distant and deferred interpretations. There would always be a "value" in the communicative act that cannot be fully retrieved; hence Derrida's emphasis on the communicative value of the very act of accumulation/archiving.

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this citation, we see how storage also acts as erasure, a cognitive reorganization mediated by the possibilities of mediation itself.

This issue relates to the second media characteristic we understand Derrida as outlining: the *prosthetic nature* of every medium of communication. After all, what is a prosthesis if not a technical, fictive body added from outside the "natural" body to fulfill a need or achieve an objective through this exteriorization? This concept arises in the grammatological project motivated by writing; it emerges in Derrida's reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his denunciation of writing as a *dangerous supplement* (Derrida, 1998, p. 141)—that which is necessary for memory and knowledge but also contaminates them. Every prosthesis is both exterior and interior; it is presence, but presence contingent upon absence. This understanding distinguishes the prosthetic notion of media from the concept of media as "extensions of man" prevalent in a certain tradition of media theory (McLuhan, 2005), taking this idea to its extreme: prostheticity is defined by generating the very lack it seeks to compensate[3]. Once the possibility of that fictive action is glimpsed, not only does the natural gesture cease to be so, but it also becomes clear it never was. "But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace." (Derrida, 1998, p. 145).

Rousseau cannot think without being able to write—this is his dilemma, and ours as well, mediated by the very possibility of mediation. Thus, it follows that "If supplementarity is a necessarily indefinite process, writing is the supplement par excellence [...]" (Derrida, 1998, p. 281).

It is from these two characteristics that mediality takes shape, as Derrida (1988, p. 3) succinctly concludes: "*If we take the notion of writing in its currently accepted sense-one which should not-and that is essential-be considered innocent, primitive, or natural, it can only be seen as a means of communication*" Furthermore, it is through this interplay between exterior and interior, between nature and prosthesis, that writing, positioned as the originary technology, is also constitutive of thought itself—and, in this way, also a condition for its deconstruction.

Thus, Derrida will treat writing as a way to overturn the instrumental conceptualizations of media inherited from the Western philosophical tradition: those that rigidly distinguish between *techné* and *epistémé*, subordinating the former to the latter. As he succinctly writes in *Memories for Paul de Man* (1989), a mature work in which we glimpse echoes of the media-deconstructive proposition observed by Kittler:

There is no deconstruction which does not begin by tackling this problematic or by preparing itself to tackle this problematic, and which does not begin by again

[3] McLuhan's theory still bears a theological residue, evident in its insistence on the metaphysical and revelatory nature of media—whereby the coupling of media with subjects becomes a means of granting access to a kind of cognitive essence. Derrida offers only a brief, yet incisive, remark on McLuhan in "Signature, Event, Context" (1988), where he critiques the "ideological" dimension of McLuhan's theory as a longing for transparency and immediacy in human relations (as exemplified by the notion of the Global Village). A more extensive critique of this theological tendency in McLuhan, drawing on Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, can be found in De Marchi (2023).

calling into question the dissociation between thought and technology, especially when it has a hierarchical vocation, however secret, subtle, sublime, or denied it may be. (Derrida, 1989, p. 108)

THE TYPEWRITER: THE ARCHIVE AND THE RECODING OF COGNITION

The direct clash with this hierarchy sets the tone for Derrida's deconstructionist approach to media, most notably in his discussions on another communication technology: the typewriter. Like primary writing, this medium plays a prominent and transversal role in his texts, traceable back to the 1967 essay *Freud and the scene of writing* (Derrida, 1978), in which he revisits the archaic mystic writing pad (*Wunderblock*), a child's toy for inscriptions on waxed paper. This toy serves as a model for psychoanalysis' theory of writing and, by extension, for deconstruction's metonymic opening to the question of machinic codification in inscription.

This framework leads Derrida, for instance, to fondly recall the portable Olivetti machines he carried worldwide between the 1950s and 1980s, marveling at their repetitive and rationalizing character—intensifications, rather than negations, of the "theater of prosthesis" inaugurated by manual writing (Derrida, 2005, p. 20). Contrary to the common perception of mechanization as a move toward greater intelligibility or clarity, Derrida sees it as merely a new "*organology*" (Derrida, 2005, p. 21): a simultaneous and collateral extension of both body and medium.

We can read this in two of Derrida's engagements with thinkers skeptical of the typewriter. The first involves playwright Jean Genet, who resisted the machine, claiming it inflicted violence upon the body of language and disrupted the natural flow of ideas. Derrida, recounting their conversation in an interview (Derrida, 2010) and as revisited by Katie Chenowet (2019), counters that "[...] all writing involves a negotiation between a body and an instrument, that there is always a 'cut' of some kind" (Chenowet, 2019, p. 48).

A similar argument emerges in Derrida's dialogue with Martin Heidegger, who denounced the alienation of the human essence through the loss of manual activities, with handwriting symbolizing this decline. Heidegger's critique reflects the Aristotelian distinction between thought and technique—a dichotomy ripe for deconstruction. Derrida's provocatively titled essay Heidegger's Hand (Derrida, 1987) dismantles this critique, reading it as phonocentric nostalgia rooted in a need to attribute an original purity to meaning. Heidegger's essentialization of the hand blinds him to the manuality inherent in typing—a discretized,

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technological manuality that is all the more "manual" for being technological (Derrida, 1987, p. 169).

This deconstructive provocation reveals that the typewriter does not sever the hand but transforms it, unveiling its originary technicity: "Now, when one writes 'by hand,' one is not on the brink of technique. There is already instrumentalization, regular reproduction, mechanical iterability," Derrida writes—on a typewriter (Derrida, 2005, p. 20). The composition of hand and machine is not merely cooperative, but retroactively critical: the machine reveals previously invisible configurations of the hand. As both medium and deconstructive device, the typewriter also functions as a dispositif of visibility for earlier technical processes, which, upon being exposed, are altered. Hence, the call to compose, with typewriters, "*another history of the hand*" (Derrida, 2005, p. 21).

Through this discretization of writing operations by the typewriter, it becomes clear that a medium does not merely externalize; every medium also internalizes what it externalizes through thought. A striking instance of this process appears in Derridean echoes within Kittler's work (1999), as he recounts Friedrich Nietzsche's fascination with his typewriter, the archaic Malling-Hansen model acquired in 1882 to facilitate writing as his blindness advanced. Nietzsche's struggle with the device's weight and awkward ergonomics led him to compose shorter sentences: what Kittler (1999, p. 203) calls a "telegraphic style," philosophically enshrined as aphoristic writing, now a hallmark of Nietzschean thought. "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts," Nietzsche himself remarked (Kittler, 1999, p. 200).

Working: mediating and deconstructing simultaneously—this is our hypothesis for interpreting these phenomena in light of Derrida's technical archaeology of writing. The consideration of these processes of collateral supplementation between hand and machine reveals that every act of inscription is a medium of communication, and every medium of communication is an *act of archiving* (Derrida, 2005, p. 31).

In Derrida's view (1996), archiving is not merely synonymous with "recording" or "memory." His notion of the archive is suffused with deconstructive critique, demonstrating that every record is inventive, producing the possibility for what is archived to be comprehensible while simultaneously creating a reserve of meaning that renders this comprehensibility legible only within the archive's context. Archiving "conditions not only the form or the structure that prints, but the printed content of the printing" (Derrida, 1996, p. 18). Every archive is both inventive and conservative, a process we can describe in media terms as the codification of information by the medium's technical infrastructure.

This codification encompasses not just information but the entire communicational circuit, including the sender: as Nietzsche's typewriter recoded his way of doing philosophy. A compelling explanation of this process emerges in the following passage:

> This is another way of saying that the archive, as printing, writing, prosthesis, or hypomnesic technique in general is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content ofthe past whichwould exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been. No, the technical structure of thearchiving archive also determines the structure of the archivablecontent even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event. *This is also our political experience of the so-called news media.* (Derrida, 1996, p. 16-17, emphasis added)

THE TELEVISION: ARTIFACTUALITY AS POLITICAL FICTION

The resonance between medium and inscription—a resonance not rooted in determinism but in the recognition of the codifying nature of medial externalization—takes on a distinctly political dimension in Derrida's discussions on television. This medium, initially peripheral to the philosopher's interests, begins to infiltrate his work in the 1980s, eventually becoming the focus of an entire book: *Echographies of Television*, a record of a conversation between Derrida and Bernard Stiegler (1996), his disciple and a key figure who bridges deconstruction and the critique of new media[4].

The dialogue begins by establishing a connection between the television medium and Derrida's understanding that every act of meaning-making is a *tele--technology* (Derrida & Stiegler, 1996, p. 37): a form of communication projected across distance and time through the technical imprint of its trace, independent of context. For Derrida, what distinguishes television as a medium is the paroxysmal acceleration of this characteristic. Satellites and network broadcasting amplify the reach of its inscriptions to an extreme degree while simultaneously concealing the distance it traverses, rendering it deceptively transparent. Hence, the philosophers' discussion centers on the issue of *live transmission*, identified by Derrida as the decisive media shift within the archaeology of these technologies.

In "traditional" media, the moment of inscription of messages was obscured within the very body of the message itself: when reading a book, we access the materiality of its pages and content, but we do not encounter the presence of the author or their hand typing those words. In live television broadcasts, however, what is transmitted is *the act of inscription itself* (Derrida & Stiegler, 1996, p. 40).

[4] A few contextual remarks on the role of Stiegler in media-oriented readings of deconstruction: his philosophical work is driven by the proposal to conceive a philosophical anthropology in which the "being" of the human lies precisely in its lack of essence—a lack that is compensated for through the use of technics (Stiegler, 1998). This reading unfolds primarily through Stiegler's engagement with the ideas of Leroi-Gourhan, Gilbert Simondon, and Derrida. An important synthesis of Stiegler's media theory can be found in De Marchi (2023).

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This new possibility of aligning the moment of inscription with that of diffusion compresses time, but also alters the cognition of the archiving process. When we watch television, we have the impression of witnessing an event—indeed, The Event, given its aspect of irruption and unrepeatability (Derrida, 1996)—even though, on the other hand, we know that "[...] it is being produced by the most powerful, the most sophisticated machines of repetition[5]" (Derrida & Stiegler, 1996, p. 102). This falsification is what Derrida and Stiegler term *artifactuality* (*artefactualité* in the original French), a portmanteau that combines the presumed "factuality" of communicational transmission (that is, the conveyance of objective information meant to be faithfully decoded to restore its proper meaning) with the "artifact" nature of every media product: produced supplementarily, and inherently both codified and codifying. Also containing within itself the word "actuality," the concept draws attention to the performative status of the real (a performance executed by the technical-media gesture, as previously explored in Derrida's reflections on the archive).

Thus, the critique of television emerges as a call for vigilance, since this medium risks reintroducing an idea of presence—suggesting that the medium evolves towards restoring those lost hands, recalling Genet and Heidegger's rejection of the typewriter. Does the "live broadcast" reintroduce the subject? With *artifactuality*, Derrida and Stiegler argue otherwise: in truth, we have never been farther from it. Its simultaneous capture and transmission merely drive its *spectral* condition to an extreme.

The only thing less faithful than an image, Derrida and Stiegler (1996, p. 40) provocatively claim, is the image that believes itself to be a reproduction. Echoing the warning of painter René Magritte—who in his painting *La trahison des images* revealed that not every pipe is a pipe—, the philosophers invite us to consider that not everything a satellite transmits corresponds to what it captures—especially when it so convincingly appears to be. To think about *artifactuality* is to consider the inherent contradiction of all communication media: technologies can never produce a pure testimony, a genuine declaration, or an unmediated discourse—yet every testimony requires a technique of production as well as a technique of dissemination. This is a "contradiction or aporetic tension[6]" (Derrida & Stiegler, 1996, p. 108) at the core of all media, whose very operation attempts to reckon with this *technical fictionalization* intrinsic to communication.

Not every pipe is a pipe, and not every airplane is an airplane: as early as *Ecographies of television*, Derrida and Stiegler discuss the live, chain transmission of the Gulf War in 1990, the first major historical event to unfold almost entirely in real time on television screens. However, some years later, amidst the escalating

[5] In the original: "[...] *cèst produit, nous le savons aussi, d'autre part, par les machines à répétition les plus puissantes, les plus sophistiquées*."

[6] In the original: "[...] *contradiction ou dans cette tension aporétique* [...]".

entanglements of mediatization and globalization, another paradigmatic event of artifactuality as political experience occurred: the broadcast of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. Derrida (2003a, p. 108) reflects on this event in an essay on media and terror, asking, "What would "September 11" have been without television?" Terrorism, he argues, draws attention to the pragmatic aspect of communication, as it does not merely "transmit" through images but is, to a significant extent, created by them. This phenomenon is not modern (Derrida, 2003a, p. 108) or new; it underscores the powerful fictionalizing function of television communication, resisting any relativist conclusions or claims of a purely nihilistic deconstruction, as often misattributed to Derrida. Both the democratic advances of recent decades and the generalized precarization of everyday life owe much to television—not simply as a witness to what has occurred but as an oracle foretelling what might come to pass (Derrida, 2003a, p. 123).

In summary, television, as a metonymy for media deconstruction, reveals that all communication differentiates itself across distance and time, even when these dimensions seem to vanish. By artifactualizing its contents, television operates in close alignment with Derrida's own notion of language, understood as an operation of traces that refer to no external origin (Derrida, 1998). In this movement, television also serves as an analogy for deconstruction itself: it demonstrates how a text or content (such as the images of September 11) is nothing other than the play of its signifiers, without "hidden secrets" lurking behind the weave. The desire for instantaneity in television transmission parallels the performative ideal of the sign in deconstructive reading. And through its clear political ramifications, enabled by satellite diffusion and the medium's infinite and relentless *world-making* capacity, television prompts deconstruction to confront its own dangerous potential. The "*right of inspection*" that Derrida advocates within the televisual communication ecosystem is also aimed toward his own philosophical project. This self-reflection partly accounts for the explicitly political turn in deconstruction during the 1990s, as seen in works such as *Specters of Marx* (1993) and *Rogues* (2003b).

THE COMPUTER: MACHINES OF DIFFERENTIATION

In this partial history of communication machines reconstructed alongside Derrida (with evident echoes of the media-archaeological efforts of authors like Friedrich Kittler), one observes the tendency of technologies to translate one another: each medium reinvents the technique that preceded it, calculating and discretizing its operations. This non-teleological understanding of media

"development" (if that term still holds any relevance here...) is also the impulse behind that curious declaration recalled by the German theorist. The temporal confusion involved in attributing deconstruction to computation is, beyond or beneath the considerations made thus far, a playful necessity to disrupt chronological linearity—an essential gesture for grasping both Derrida's philosophical stance and his communicational position.

The philosopher had already played with this kind of temporal-technological disjunction in *Archive fever* (1996), speculating on what Freudian psychoanalysis might have been like had Freud had access not only to notebooks and mystic writing pads but also to voice recorders, CD-ROMs, emails... Here, Derrida is not interested in speculative science fiction but rather in drawing attention to the fact that, from the moment these recording and transmission technologies are created, it is as if psychoanalysis had always anticipated them in its project of exploring the writing of the unconscious. Not through any clairvoyance in the past, but through the retroactive reworking of its foundations by contemporary thought: "Does it change anything that Freud did not know about the computer?" (Derrida, 1996, p. 26). From the moment computing exists, psychoanalysis is no longer the same, renewed with metaphors and models to understand the workings of the psyche; and if it is capable of accommodating these technological images and logics, is it not as though it had always awaited them??

Thus, in the same text, Derrida (1996, p. 25) feels the need to confess again: "I have spoken to you of my computer, of the little portable Macintosh on which I have begun to write" It is as if he were doing to himself what he sought to do with Freud. What might his own work have become if it had always been composed on computers? We can answer this with greater specificity, as not only did Derrida use such machines, but his use of them has been documented. In a brief yet powerful essay, Alexander Galloway (2021) presents a series of studies conducted on the personal computers left by Derrida after his death, also connecting them to interviews in which the philosopher reflected on his relationship with these new tools for composing his thought.

We see, for instance, the philosopher's amusing account of his experiences using MacWrite, the word processor of his Macintosh. The program's paper-machine interface is, at once, the most transparent writing support—where thought seamlessly becomes text in a continuous act, with an automatism of inscription that radicalizes the real-time immediacy of television—and also the most constraining of media. As he writes in his characteristic style, Derrida finds himself repeatedly interrupted by a pop-up message from the software warning: "This command will make your paragraph too long[7]" (Bennington & Derrida, 1993, p. 35). The philosopher is amused by this alert: rather than seeing it as a sign of

[7] In the original: "*Cette comande va crer um paragrafe trop long*".

a constraint of the human imposed by technology, he embraces this coupling to reflect on a shared foundation between the two—a foundation that is, precisely, *without foundation*. Writing is the construction of a necessarily fictional recipient, and of a sender who exists only insofar as they write, as the very act of inscription itself. The software-as-censor, the manager of this new writing regime, epitomizes the gradual process of the artifactualization of writing (and, consequently, of thought), making mediation increasingly transparent even as it grows more complex. I know well how a pen works, and I have a reasonable understanding of the typewriter. But as for the computer, I remain ignorant of "*how* the internal demon of the apparatus operates." (Derrida, 2005, p. 23).

Faced with this "secret with no mystery," a frequent mark of "our dependence in relation to many instruments of modern technology" (Derrida, 2005, p. 23), what is to be done? Opening the black box would only break it; perhaps all we can do is play with its operation. And to play—beyond any concern for 'utility' or 'efficiency'—might that not be *deconstruction itself*?

A similar conclusion emerges from Galloway's (2021) recovery of the genetic criticism studies conducted on Derrida's Macs, particularly the digital archaeology undertaken by Aurèle Crasson (2019). In the philosopher's memory files (a term that, in itself, would have invited his scrutiny), an apparently anarchic arrangement of text documents was found, organized into folders whose naming strategy was provocatively systematic. Notes for a seminar on the concept of secrecy were dispersed across eleven different folders, labeled progressively: "S," "SE," "SEC," "SECR," "SECRE," "Secret," "SECRETA," "secrétar," "Secrétari," "Secrétaria," and "Secrétariat." This management of the archive as a kind of concrete poem opens new possibilities for reading the texts, generating meaning beyond them. It places "secret" at the center while also linking "SEC"— the acronym for *Signature, événement, contexte* ("Signature, event, context")[8] (Derrida, 1988)—to variations on *secrétaire, secrétariat*, and *bureau*[9] , evoking both secrecy and the administrative apparatus of inscription. As Crasson provocatively suggests, this may signal a reversal: the transformation of computational clarity into the enigma of inscription, where meaning is generated less by transmission than by deciphering:

> But what are secrets to a computer? Can it truly keep them? Nothing is less certain. In that impenetrable space for the technologically uninitiated—who believes that emptying a trash bin erases regrets and mysteries forever—we discover its transformation into a zone of potential revelations for detectives[10]. (Crasson, 2019, Section "*Le lemme, le mot…*")

[8] Not incidentally, this is the essay in which Derrida directly confronts the concept of "communication", opposing all transmissive meanings of the term.

[9] A spectral echo to Kittler's (1999) theory and his reflection on recording machines as technological updates of secretaries and human assistants (along with the power dynamics and gender rules embedded in that relationship).

[10] In the original: "*Mais que sont les secrets pour un ordinateur ? Sait-il les garder ? Rien n'est moins sûr. Dans cet espace impénétrable pour le non-informaticien—qui pense qu'en vidant une corbeille on efface à jamais ses repentirs et ses mystères—, on apprend qu'il constitue une zone de révélations probables pour les investigateurs de criminalistique*".

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Not only that: studies on Derrida's computers reveal that, as a habit, he did not compose his essays and lecture notes in a single document but instead took advantage of the seemingly infinite economy of digital space to fragment his reflections (Galloway, 2021; Crasson, 2019). We can understand this as the philosopher fully liberating himself from any book logic, from the teleological codex format that was the primary target of the deconstructive project (Derrida, 1998). For Derrida, the Book represents the era of theological closure: whether in its formal containment of a beginning, middle, and end, or in its embodiment of metaphysical logic ("this material object exists only as means of access to the singular, unequivocal *truth*")—a notion encapsulated in the metaphor of the "Book of Nature," present in Western thought from Galileo to Descartes (Derrida, 2005, p. 15). The computer, by contrast, neither possesses nor induces singularity, nor does it induce any sense of finality: its content, organized into infinitely duplicable and mobile directories, breaks the physical closure of the Book, while the symbolic closure is eroded by the logic of computer networks and the impossibility of referring to a single node in this web..

Diagnosing "the end of the Book", contrasted with "the beginning of writing" as a system of trace inscription, was the initial philosophical objective of the deconstructive project—hence the title of the first chapter of *Grammatology*. But whereas Derrida once pursued this through critical-philosophical revision, by the 2000s he was doing so by playfully opening new folders on his personal computer. Moreover, these playful gestures reveal that "digital objects" (Hui, 2016)—text documents, organizational folders, electronic programs, and their configurations—are no less material than the walls of prehistoric cave paintings or the keys of a typewriter. Perhaps they are even more material, given their tactility, their nature as a "construction set" that not only permits but actively encourages assembly and reconfiguration. The hard drive is the realization of what Derrida (1994) called the *subjectile* as a synonym for support: a tablet for the experimentation of semantic dispersion, one that makes explicit the peculiar codifications of the very surface of communication. "Neither object or subject, neither screen or projectile, the subjectile can become all that, stabilizing itself in a certain form or moving about in another" (Derrida, 1994, p. 169)—like the screen of the word processor with which Derrida wrestled and upon which he is now inscribed as we compose this very article, marked by Word's suggestions for corrections to the philosopher's citations.

The least docile of supports, of media that no longer "mediate" anything—at least not innocently (despite their apparent transparency)—the computer gathers all previous medialities within itself through its character as a deconstructive *subjectile*. It brings forth, within the materiality of media, the process of a virtual

and virtually infinite construction of writing within the play of its inscription. In a program like MacWrite (or today's Word and Google Docs), text appears at the very moment of inscription, yet also elsewhere, detached from manual materiality, already offered up to fragmentation. The computer delineates media as that upon which something is inscribed, yet always under the condition of language; it encodes writing from within this spacing, which in the philosophy of deconstruction is named *différance* (Derrida, 1982). The concept designates the space of the in-between: between object and representation, between thought and writing, between sign and meaning. (And what is the *in-between* if not the medium—or media itself?).

Both physical and temporal, *différance* extends the instability of meaning: it allows only for play, for inventive modes—that which Derrida (1982) calls dissemination. It is within this space that both communication technologies and deconstruction operate, relying on their particularly disseminative properties: their constitutive supplementarity, which critiques an individualist conception of cognition; their archival recodification of mediation processes; their artifactual fictionalization of events; their material malleability and their invitation to play and to reconfigure meaning. All these characteristics contribute to inhabiting the space of *différance*, expanding it, and transforming it into a space of communication.

FROM A DECONSTRUCTIVE CONCEPT OF MEDIA
TO A MEDIA CONCEPT OF DECONSTRUCTION

Derrida was always reluctant to offer a single or definitive explanation of deconstruction—an attitude that, after all, would be antithetical to deconstructive work itself, an operation that expands meaning rather than enclosing it within a single, fixed interpretation. He always favored traces, impressions, and speech acts that resist enclosing the term within rigid boundaries around the term: more than a concept, deconstruction would be a *strategic disposition* (Derrida, 1978; 1981), a gaze turned toward the most diverse phenomena and inscriptions. Hence, the surprise at the emphasis Derrida placed during his confession to German students: "If there had been no computer, deconstruction could never have happened" (Kittler, 1992, para. 24).

Not that clarity or transparency is to be expected here (after all, we have spent the last fifteen pages attempting to pursue the meaning of this statement...), but such a declaration seems to place an unexpected emphasis on the very reluctance to explain that was so characteristic of Derrida. The understanding of the deconstructive project would be inseparable from an understanding of the

workings of computation, specifically, and of medial operations more broadly. This leads us, then, to the only possible synthesis within a thought grounded in fragmentation: to divide our conclusion into two parts, each one pointing toward the ties that bind these two universes together.

The first involves the task of investigating and interrogating communication technologies—opening their operations—via a *deconstructive concept of media*. This perspective is anti-teleological, understanding the expansion and diffusion of media as a cumulative, translational process: each new communication and information technology incorporates the previous ones, dismantling them even as it pushes to the limit that which once characterized them as singular devices. This opens powerful avenues for a renewed reflection within the field of Communication, as it establishes resonances with key contemporary perspectives, such as the notion of media ecology developed from McLuhan; the hypothesis of remediation advanced by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000); and the debates on mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). All these theories are concerned with understanding the technological ubiquity of the contemporary moment in its diversity, seeking to observe the collateral interactions among the various machines at our disposal. Moreover, the deconstructive notion of media recoverable from Derrida's work insists on the performative aspect of communication—its artifactality. What matters far more than the content being transmitted is the act of transmission itself, capable of formations and deformations that become inseparable from the very "content" of communication.

The history of media thus unfolds as a history of hauntings: each new machine is simultaneously haunted by its predecessors and itself haunts the reality into which it is introduced. A medium is a *frequency of visibility*—precisely the definition that Derrida (1993) gives to the specter, which, not coincidentally, resonates with the projection of light from a cinematograph. The relationship between Derrida and cinema is a fertile one, as another machine powerfully imprints itself upon his thought. From the 1990s onward—precisely the period in which he confesses before Kittler and his students—Derrida also allows himself to be filmed in abundance, becoming the subject of numerous films and documentaries. In one of them, *Derrida* (Dick & Kofman, 2002), when asked directly, "Could you speak a little more about the origins of the idea of deconstruction?" the philosopher responds without hesitation:

> Before responding to this question, I want to make a preliminary remark on the completely artificial character of this situation. I don't know who is going to be watching this. But I want to underline rather than efface the surrounding technical conditions and not feign a "naturality" which does not exist. (Dick & Kofman, 2002, 0:14)

What may seem like evasion is, in fact, one of the most incisive responses. To understand deconstruction, one must understand the media apparatus that interrogates it; to allow oneself to be filmed is, in a way, already to engage in deconstruction, insofar as it is an operation that challenges the natural, the linear, the transparent. It is not only about pointing out constructions and impostures but, without denying them, playing with them—seeking to make them produce something other than the discourse of logos and order. It means to underline distortions rather than effacing or concealing them. In this statement, as in the one given to Kittler's students, Derrida suggests that information and communication technologies constantly put the deconstructive project to the test, deconstructing it in turn, forcing it to the point of paroxysm. And so, we arrive at our second conclusion: from the deconstructive concept of media, we move toward the possibility of a *media concept of deconstruction.*

With its capacity to illuminate the material and codifying condition of inscription supports—its insistence on the need to dismantle and discretize information—media allow us to contest some of the principal critiques leveled against deconstruction: that it is relativistic and abstract[11]. Yet, sitting before the notebook in which we compose this text, copying and pasting citations from other tabs to the point that we sometimes cannot tell whether what we write is paraphrase or personal insight—resorting to Google to recall our own originality—, none of this feels ethereal. Nor did it for Derrida: with his Macintosh, he realized that he was already writing as someone who duplicates folders, or as someone who converses with the MacWrite assistant, even when he was using only pen and paper. Media deconstruct deconstruction from within and, in doing so, offer a new concept of themselves. This allows us to better understand Derrida's seemingly prophetic confession: without the computer, deconstruction would not have been possible. Marked by mediality from the outset, deconstruction emerges as a way of thinking attuned to the process of signification within our communicative techniques. For information and transmission technologies—inscription techniques—are not merely the privileged object of grammatology but also its very vehicle of reflection.

This awareness alters the entire project—not simply updating its foundations but making the update inseparable from the project itself. The concrete experience of our communicative practices is itself deconstruction, which is, quite simply, that *which happens (c'est ce qu'il arrive)*—yet another non-definitive attempt at explanation offered by Derrida (2001). It is not a human action or a conscious act but something that is always already occurring within discourse, inscription, and meaning: because nothing exists without being communicated, and, to be communicated, it must have been processed by some medium—disassembled,

[11] A brief history of the main critiques of deconstruction can be found in *Deconstruction in a nutshell* (Caputo, 1996).

coded, rendered as an artifact, and made available for further processing. It is along these lines that Derrida's critical-philosophical project (and, by extension, that of Kittler and Stiegler), by continually differing from itself, updates itself—like a computer program. Updated, it now presents itself—through the lines of code reconstructed here—as an object of engagement for contemporary Media and Communication Theories. **M**

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Gender memory: decolonial cartography in Martín-Barbero and Ecléa Bosi [a]

Memória de gênero: cartografia decolonial em Martín-Barbero e Ecléa Bosi

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ABSTRACT
This article mobilizes two theoretical-methodological perspectives in the place of enunciation of Latin America: nocturnal maps by Jesús Martín-Barbero and life stories by Ecléa Bosi. These are theoretical-practical perspectives that come close to decolonial translation ethnography, providing opportunities for field research that considers memory in its dialogical function of social mediation in the recognition and resignification of official history. Based on this, we propose a cartography based on women's narratives that configure what we call *gender memory*.
Keywords: Cartography, decoloniality, gender memory, nocturnal maps, life stories.

RESUMO
Este artigo mobiliza dois olhares teórico-metodológicos que se entrecruzam no lugar de enunciação da América Latina: os mapas noturnos de Jesús Martín-Barbero e as histórias de vida de Ecléa Bosi. São perspectivas teórico-práticas que se aproximam da etnografia de tradução decolonial, oportunizando pesquisas de campo que considerem a memória em sua função dialógica de mediação social no reconhecimento e na ressignificação da história oficial. A partir disso, propõe-se uma cartografia sustentada em narrativas de mulheres, que configure o que aqui denominamos de *memória de gênero*.
Palavras-chave: Cartografia, decolonialidade, memória de gênero, mapas noturnos, histórias de vida.

Gender memory: decolonial cartography in Martín-Barbero and Ecléa Bosi

INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE AIMS to present the methodological path for constructing a cartographic map grounded in decolonial translation. To this end, it brings together theoretical-methodological insights from Jesús Martín-Barbero (1997, 2002), through his *nocturnal maps*, and from Ecléa Bosi[1](1994, 2003), through *life stories*. The goal is to demonstrate the counter-hegemonic and resistant stance of these two authors, highlighting their proximity to decolonial epistemology and the power of their convergence in deconstructing silences legitimized by official history. The proposed path unfolds through ethnographic interviews with gender research subjects—in this case, women—revealing the relationship between colonial and patriarchal modes of thought in the construction of individual and collective memory.

[1] To make visible the women authors referenced in this study, their full names will be presented upon first mention throughout the text.

To begin this journey, we must return to the 1980s, when South American countries were still living under the shadow of civil-military dictatorships. During this period, the relationship between freedom and power became even more relevant for communication theories, as censorship plagued both mainstream and alternative media outlets (Chinem, 1995; Kucinski, 2001). However, it was through the media that the totalitarian and dominant discourses of these regimes penetrated various spheres of social life—either through dictatorial pressure or editorial complicity. It was in this context that Colombian scholar Jesús Martín-Barbero published his most celebrated work, which would become a classic in the field of communication and social sciences: *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*, released in 1987.

In this work, Martín-Barbero (1997) proposed nocturnal maps as a method for questioning the relatinship between "three places of mediation: family everyday life, social temporality, and cultural competence" (p. 292). These mediation processes position communication as an object of study in its dialogical relationship with society, culture, and politics. However, in proposing this cartographic method, the author declared he was rowing against the "daytime logic." In other words, rather than producing a map with clear and hegemonic answers, his search would not be guided but groped in the dark of uncertainties, doubts, and multiple questions. A nocturnal quest "to explore that territory at the crossroads formed in Latin America" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 291). To undertake this journey, Martín-Barbero drew on Cultural Studies and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School—which, although of European origin, make significant contributions to the tension between classical Eurocentric theories and the hegemonic values present in colonial discourse across media, cultural industries, and social representations (Martín-Barbero, 1997).

In the legacy constructed by Bosi (1994, 2003), there is a meticulously laid methodological path for social researchers intending to work with the category of life stories, especially when the research subjects—the "*rememberers*", as the author calls them—are elderly people. To this end, Bosi elucidates the ideological baggage of enunciation and interpretation of oral memory, demonstrating how social context and culture operate in the perception and reception of the past during the process of revisiting one's own history. This is the focus of *Memória e sociedade: Lembranças dos velhos* (Memory and Society: Reminiscences of the Elderly), published in 1994, which brings together diverse perspectives to conceptualize memory through theorists such as Maurice Halbwachs, Henri Bergson, Frederic Bartlett, and William Stern—an association that had not previously been made, according to Oliveira (2013), underscoring the originality of the study.

Adding to this are Bosi's contributions to the field of communication and gender studies. Although not explicitly decolonial or feminist, in the early 1970s the author published her doctoral dissertation, the ethnographic study Cultura de massa e cultura popular: *Leituras de operárias* (Mass Culture and Popular Culture: Female Factory Workers' Readings), in which she interviewed 52 women. Researcher Ana Escosteguy (2020) identifies Bosi as "a pioneer in exploring the lived experiences of working-class women and the meanings that culture acquires in an industrial society" (p. 113). Valquíria John (2023), in turn, emphasizes that the work, in addition to being a milestone in Brazilian social psychology, is also a pioneering contribution to media reception studies in the country, already adopting ethnographic interviews as the primary field research technique at that time.

In the cartography of gender memory presented in this article, revisited recollections take on form and life through spoken word, shaped throughout the subject's life by social, ideological, and symbolic mediations—memory is mediated by sociocultural interferences, with the researcher assuming the role of *researcher-mediator*[2]. In this sense, the dialogue between nocturnal maps and life stories guides the methodological path outlined here: the former offers the theory of cultural mediation, presenting communication study objects not only as ideological reproducers but also as translators of individual experiences within their historical time; the latter provides avenues for interpreting and mediating the memory of subjugated beings.

Accordingly, this article is divided into three theoretical-methodological parts. The first, titled "Decolonial Translation as a Methodology for Mediating Memory," introduces elements for understanding the perspective of decolonial ethnographic translation, as well as categories that support the development

[2] Based on Bosi's (1994, 2003) conception of the role of the "researcher-interviewer," we propose here the use of the term researcher-mediator, in reference to the concept of mediation introduced by Martín-Barbero (1997).

of decolonizing methodologies based on epistemic sociogeny (Fanon, 2008; Mignolo, 2013). Next, the section "Decolonial Translation in Martín-Barbero and Ecléa Bosi and the Construction of the Gender Memory Map" explores the relationship between the two authors, showing the proximity of nocturnal maps and life stories to decolonial translation. The subsection "On Translating and Mediating: Traversing the Gender Memory Map" positions the reader in relation to each cartographic and analytical category mobilized here, demonstrating the dialogical continuity between Bosi (1994, 2003) and Martín-Barbero (1997, 2002).

Thus, the *gender memory map* seeks to bring to light silenced stories, promoting recognition and appreciation of the resistances exercised by women in various socio-historical contexts, while also fostering debate about what it means to be a woman within the logic of the modern, colonial, and patriarchal world-system (Lugones, 2014; Wallerstein, 1974). This theoretical-methodological stance brings Jesús Martín-Barbero and Ecléa Bosi closer to the decolonial perspective to foster research focused on local realities, mobilizing the transversal relationship between *mediations, memories, and colonialities*, and problematizing the places assigned to social subjects often marginalized by localized official discourses (Haraway, 2009). In other words, it is a method that can be adapted to different contexts and research loci, as long as it maintains a decolonizing lens as a premise in the pursuit of recognizing women's memory.

DECOLONIAL TRANSLATION AS A METHODOLOGY FOR MEDIATING MEMORY

The post-war period and the instability of the Cold War in Europe, the United States, and Russia echoed differently in South American countries. Amid social, political, economic, and environmental crises, military dictatorships emerged, especially in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. It was in this context of turbulence, questioning, and re-signification, between the 1960s and 1970s, that Latin American sociology developed an original body of work, also represented by dependency theory, liberation philosophy, and the pedagogy of the oppressed—concepts and theoretical perspectives that challenged reductionist notions of underdevelopment and globalization, linking them to relations of domination and (social/territorial) exploitation rooted in colonial practices.

Thus, the decolonial approach—epistemic, analytical, and methodological—aimed at studying the processes of the "decolonization" of being, knowledge, and power (Quijano, 2005), came to be adopted by the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century. In this movement, Peruvian sociologist

Aníbal Quijano and American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein made important contributions: Quijano, part of the group of Latin American thinkers, was one of those responsible for developing dependency theory; Wallerstein, in turn, was one of the founders of the category known as the modern world-system (Castro-Gómez; Grosfoguel, 2007).

Added to this is the provocation brought about by postcolonial studies in South Asia (Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, among others), which gave rise to the Subaltern Studies Group[3] and intensified academic debates on the epistemic/paradigmatic dichotomy that distances West and East, denouncing the former as a result of the interrelation between modernity, coloniality, and capitalism. In this sense, the notion of colonialism as a finished historical phase is challenged, and its enduring effects of domination and power—entwining past and presente—began to be identified and questioned by a group of Marxist, neo-Marxist, and anti-capitalist intellectuals and researchers.

Héctor Alimonda (2011) argues that understanding coloniality as a set of violences, both physical and epistemic, is one of the key foundations of the decolonial turn, an epistemic movement that values diversity and the plurality of sites of scientific enunciation, fostering resistance practices and movements against colonial modernity. As Enrique Dussel (2015) points out, these critiques also invoke the "center and periphery" dichotomy, which addresses the dependency and subordination of Latin American countries, aiming to deconstruct totalitarian discourses around a false globalization, while exposing internal fractures and ongoing colonial practices of domination and exploitation.

Coloniality is characterized above all by practices and violences of domination and colonial power, legitimized by the fanciful idea of modernity as synonymous with salvation, progress, and happiness. This combines with a territorial and imperial epistemology that inferiorizes beings and knowledges—a fictional narrative whose goal is to dominate the "inferiorized" (Mignolo, 2017). For Alimonda (2011), these universalisms also reveal the bias present in the histories of societies, written and interpreted from a Eurocentric perspective that positions Europe as the referential model to be followed, legitimizing hegemonic discourses and paradigms rooted in colonialism. Therefore, to decolonize is to rewrite the "narratives of modernity from another place, revaluing the cultures and peoples that were dominated and their histories of resistance" (Alimonda, 2011, p. 27).

In this way, colonial and modern territoriality has subalternized beings and knowledges, solidifying a hegemonic distance that is not only geographic but above all epistemic. One of the responses or exits to break these silences and inequalities is the *grammar of decoloniality* (Mignolo, 2017), which rejects

[3] Subaltern studies are directly related to the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), one of the key figures responsible for mobilizing the problematization of this category.

the dichotomy of modern thought and "official history", and dialogues with the sociogeny articulated by Frantz Fanon (2008), denouncing and breaking with the segregation of individuals. Thus, "sociogenesis is sustained within border epistemology" (Mignolo, 2013, p. 17). By expressing the encounter between differences that coexist in the process of thinking decolonially and inhabiting the interstices of cultural borders, "sociogenesis incorporates everything: detachment, border thinking, and epistemic disobedience… from the dichotomy of modern territorial thought" (Mignolo, 2013, p. 15).

It is important to note that both terms "decolonial" and "descolonial" are used here, in keeping with the terminology adopted by the authors referenced. However, we understand "decolonial" as the theoretical-political perspective that breaks with classical social science frameworks and proposes a new sociological and philosophical approach, having Latin America as its main locus of enunciation. It problematizes and denounces the consequences of Eurocentric colonialism and coloniality by recognizing their structures of power and domination that segregate beings and knowledges. "To decolonize" thus refers to an awareness and praxis aimed at breaking with and disobeying the normativizing logic of the modern world-system, an attitude that embodies both resistance and (re)existence.

Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves (2010), in turn, invokes a de(s)colonial episteme that emphasizes the voice of the invisibilized, of subaltern groups and their ways of knowing, suggesting the perspective of (re)existence. When the subject resists the logic of coloniality and undergoes decolonization, they exist in their essence, culture, diversity, gender, and knowledge. This existence, resistance, or (re)existence is revealed in the way people interpret and resignify the world in their process of decolonization—which also encompasses communicational mediations, as "more than resistance, what we have is R-Existence, since it is not simply a reaction to someone else's action, but rather something that pre-exists and from this existence one R-Exists. I exist, therefore I resist. R-Exist" (Porto-Gonçalves, 2010, p. 47).

Therefore, decolonizing society and science is an epistemic stance recognized as both a political manifesto and an act of academic resistance, as it offers plural and critical perspectives toward the modern, Eurocentric, and colonial canon. This movement goes against the grain of a model of knowledge that seeks to be universal and hegemonic, instead promoting dialogue among differences and pluriversal cosmologies, giving voice to—and most importantly, listening to—subjugated knowledges, as advocated by decolonial studies and their methodological possibilities. In this sense, the cartographic proposal for field research presented in this article is grounded in the continuous movement between

investigation and translation, an alternative methodology of (co)investigation between the researcher-mediator[4] and women who hold historical memory. However, these women are not categorized as subjects or objects of research, as such an approach distances the researcher from the beings who represent the study's issue, and who must therefore be legitimized as protagonists of their own place of enunciation.

Thus, the women engaged through the cartography proposed here must be referred to as *rememberers*. Bosi (1994) uses this term to refer to interviewees, and in doing so, she provides clues about her recommended methodological approach: a bond of friendship and trust between the researcher and the rememberers. From this, the researcher assumes the role of mediator in translating the memory of the other, a crafted movement that requires sensitivity and respect in the face of the life story being revealed.

In the practice of the researcher–mediator, there are several elements of convergence between Ecléa Bosi's social psychology and the critical posture proposed by decolonial epistemology. This is evident in the author's theoretical--methodological choices, particularly in her attention to recovering marginalized memories, the articulation between collective and individual memory, and the various forms of memory she addresses in contexts marked by segregation and hegemonic invisibility. This highlights the political dimension of memory and the importance of local cultures in shaping the sense of belonging of enunciative subjects (Bosi, 1994). Similar points can also be found in more recent studies in social psychology, such as *Decolonizing Psychology: Globalization, Social Justice, and Indian Youth Identities by Sunil Bhatia* (2017), and *Movimento(s) indígena(s) e psicologia social: Desafios à decolonialidade* by Lucas Luis de Faria and Catia Paranhos Martins (2023).

The contribution of Martín-Barbero in the Latin American context is recognized by various researchers and studies, including the Colombian scholar Erick Torrico Villanueva, whose work offers a theoretical-critical approach to hegemonic communication theories in an effort to deconstruct Eurocentric thinking within media and society. In his article *La comunicación occidental* (Villanueva, 2015), for example, the author draws communication studies closer to the decolonial field, invoking Martín-Barbero's enunciative position in recognizing mediations as communicative and cultural practices, and thus as the enunciation of popular experiences and memories from an anticolonial stance. This is precisely the path proposed in this article: to bring Martín-Barbero, as well as Ecléa Bosi, closer to the nuances of decolonial thought in order to outline methodological possibilities.

[4] Based on Bosi's (1994, 2003) conception of the role of the "researcher-interviewer," this study proposes the use of the term researcher-mediator (in the feminine form), in reference to the concept of mediations introduced by Martín-Barbero (1997).

This perspective follows border thinking in the quest for the decoloniality of knowledge and being, with the aim of constructing new epistemological horizons that do not reproduce coloniality (Pérez *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, there is a dialogue between academic and non-academic knowledge, where theory and orality merge, revealing their coexistence in everyday social life. After all, in social research that aims to develop a methodology of memory:

> oral history broadens our research and knowledge horizons, breaks with the colonial frameworks imposed by official history, clarifies the interaction between the past and present of human societies, and presents itself as a collective effort of misalignment. (Pérez et al., 2019, p. 246)

Thus, decolonial investigation and translation must promote a decentralized perspective, grounded in the diversity of identities and alterity. Costa (2020), in turn, points out that ethnographic practice guided by the politics of translation must arise from pluriversal perspectives, according to which social research must not fall into the traps of language coloniality and colonial translation, as "in translation, there is a moral and political obligation to uproot ourselves, to live, even if only temporarily, without a home so that the other may also inhabit, even if only temporarily, our places" (p. 324).

DECOLONIAL TRANSLATION IN MARTÍN-BARBERO AND ECLÉA BOSI IN THE CREATION OF THE GENDER MEMORY MAP

The intersection proposed here navigates through oral history and memory, where the main locus of the cartography presented in this article corresponds to the mobilization and recognition of women's memories. From this, the aim is to promote a theoretical-methodological dialogue between *mediation, memory and gender*, identifying colonialities and resistances within the oral memories of rememberers who take part in ethnographic research, a movement of cartographic field research shaped by decolonial translation.

In this sense, the path to be followed turns to Ecléa Bosi (1994, 2003) and Jesús Martín-Barbero (1997, 2002). The work of Martín-Barbero contributes to the understanding of the process of cultural mediation experienced by the masses, in which memory and oral narrative are legitimized as categories of enunciation. This is because the author warns that discursive processes of meaning production and reproduction result from practices of domination, since the dynamics of mediation, in its dialogical function with reception and perception, operates in the identification or reproduction of narratives of power. From this

standpoint, he recognizes that mediation flows in Latin America have been permeated by discourses and identities shaped by a Westernized universality, which has affected cultural boundaries and freedoms (Martín-Barbero, 1997).

The relationship between oral history, memory, and narrative appears frequently in communication studies and is articulated with Martín-Barbero's theory of mediations, also surfacing in reception studies. Here, we briefly highlight three examples: the book *TV, família e identidade*, coordinated by Nilda Jacks and Sérgio Capparelli (2006), in which memory and narrative emerge through the ways families interpret and incorporate television content into their life stories; in *Histórias de ouvintes*, Jairo Grisa (2003) shows how radio serves as a space of articulation between memory, orality, and cultural identity; and in *Narrativas como estratégias de comunicabilidade*, Lourdes Pereira Silva and Maria Fontana Baseio (2019) argue that narratives are more than mere accounts, as they represent cultural processes that shape and re-signify collective memory.

With this counter-hegemonic stance, Martín-Barbero (1997) proposed his first nocturnal map in the 1980s. However, as noted by Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (2018), it is not possible to find a single definition for the mediation process in Martín-Barbero's work, since it evolves with the shifting character of society in its relationship with communication and culture. In this regard, Lopes explains that, across the 1987, 1998, and 2010 editions of *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*, one can trace the author's re-readings of his cartography of mediations and identify the re-signification of the first map, arriving at three versions of mediation maps. A fourth methodological map of mediations emerged from an interview Martín-Barbero gave to Omar Rincón in 2019.

It is important to emphasize that one map does not exclude or replace the previous one, "but rather appropriates, reinterprets, and expands on it, in a process that demands increasingly complex thinking" (Lopes, 2021, p. 19). From this perspective, the researcher–mediator may strategically choose which map to use in studies centered on communication and culture, as analyzed through the methodological lens of mediations—which we here align with the decolonial compass. Therefore, before proceeding, we must take a brief look at the Barberian maps.

Recognizing the plurality that constitutes the Latin American locus of enunciation, Martín-Barbero's first map places the mediations of communication in direct relation with culture, achieved through the interrelationship between communication, culture, and politics. Diacronic/historical axes intersect with cultural and industrial matrices, while synchronic axes address forms of production and reception (Lopes, 2021). The second map, published in the late 1990s,

confirms that the theory of mediations goes beyond reception, proposing the study of culture through communication—reconsidered in terms of relational flows and sociocultural mediations (Lopes, 2021). This map thus enables "the analysis of any social phenomenon that relates communication, culture, and politics, asserting itself as a dimension of articulation among producers, media, messages, receivers, and culture" (Lopes, 2021, p. 12).

In the second map, the triad that sustains mediation—culture, communication, and politics—remains. The relationship between the logics of production and consumption, as well as industrial formats and cultural matrices, is also repeated, along with the diacronic and synchronic axes. However, as Lopes (2021) notes, the concepts of sub-mediations or multiple mediations emerge: institutionality, sociability, technicality, and rituality—which may also be recognized as basic mediations. The third map, published in 2010, lists temporalities, spatialities, mobilities, and flows as basic mediations. At this stage, the author is concerned with reflecting on structural transformations in time due to the acceleration of communication processes, which shape the simultaneous character of mediations. There is, therefore, inhabited spatiality, the dynamic nature of territory, and the fluidity of mobility, now also virtual (Lopes, 2021). Special attention is given to the category of technicality, inserted in the production and apprehension of knowledge.

The mobility of the first three maps allows them to be applied across diverse aspects of daily life, underscoring the dynamic nature of the cartography of mediations. When the first map was introduced in the 1980s, interactional flows between society, communication, and culture followed different dynamics. In Martín-Barbero's studies on the communicational and cultural transformations of our time, the fourth map reinforces the relational and theoretical complexity of the mediations of technicality and sensoriality, including the cartographic categories of identities, connections, citizenships, and narratives. It reflects a perspective on technology as engaged in cognitive and dialogical interaction with language and transmedia competences—that is, with the varied modes of appropriating cultural mediation (Rincón, 2019)—which, in turn, is also revealed in the mediation of memory.

Thus, the cartography proposed in this article brings together the theoretical--methodological categories from the third and fourth maps, as presented below:

Figure 1

Joint representation of the third and fourth nocturnal maps of mediations proposed by Martín-Barbero

Note. created by the authors based on Lopes (2021) and Rincón (2019), published in Cardenal (2024).

Accordingly, the *gender memory* outlined here draws from the following Barberian mediations[5]: temporalities; spatialities; technicalities; sensorialities; flows; mobilities; ritualities; cognitivities; identities; narratives; citizenships; and connections. The proposed dialogue with the work of Bosi (1994, 2003), in turn, mobilizes the following categories that guide the field insertion of the researcher-interviewer/mediator, as well as the analysis of the life stories of the rememberers: image-memory; memory-habit; memory-work; curves and detours; silences; family memory; individual history; corporeality; public memory; recollections; living memories of subjugated beings; ideologies. This methodological and conceptual relationship will be presented in the next section.

On translating and mediating: traversing the map of gender memory

To propose a map, one must view cartographic ethnography not only as an analytical, exploratory, or documentary method, but above all as a socio--theoretical approach. In this disobedient and artisanal space, there is room for empiricismo—the same that, as the raw material of ethnography, translates "events, happenings, words, texts, smells, flavors, everything that affects our senses" (Peirano, 2014, p. 380). Thus, it is possible to go beyond verbalized statements, developing sensory, verbal-visual-auditory research, since smell, sight, and touch also have implications that can be analyzed (Ferrara, 2007).

[5] Between the third and fourth Barberian maps, some mediations are repeated and, in the most recent version, reappear in the plural, while others remain in the singular—demonstrating the author's shifting perspective, as he re-signified his theory based on heterogeneity. In this study, we chose to use the mediations present in both maps, presenting all of them in the plural, evoking the gaze toward the diversity of beings and knowledges advocated by the decolonial lens.

A

In *Memória e sociedade: Lembranças dos velhos*, Bosi (1994) records the voice, life, and thoughts of elderly people, showing how collective memory intertwines family experiences with those of groups outside private life, based on the boundary that situates the subject in their place of enunciation—namely, their social function, culture, space, and time. The author points out that while memory represents the conservation of the past, recollection is characterized as its survival.

Although the book's focus is not on gender, Bosi (1994) evokes the visibility of women's experiences, demonstrating the historical silencing of women, especially regarding the historicity present in collective memory, which has traditionally been legitimized by masculine discourses. Through the stories and recollections of Alice, Jovina, Brites, and Risoleta, the author reveals accounts of submission and inequalities in family and work relations, as well as examples of female emancipation (resistance), as follows:

> At the beginning of the century, young girls were raised with domestic skills, to get married, and my father used to say: marriage is not a job. Aunt Brites was one of the first divorced women; that was never spoken of at home, it was very private. When she was left alone, my father encouraged her to study and work, to live on her own. He paid for her education until she graduated in pharmacy and dentistry. (Bosi, 1994, p. 305)

And also:

> Since the age of eight, I worked in a family household, I always had to do everything: set the table, clear the table, wash the dishes, polish that damned cutlery that had to be scrubbed with brick dust and potatoes… I polished everything until it shone and put it out in the sun before storing it. I knew the mistress liked things well done, so I wanted to do them even better. And I had to do it, or else I'd be punished. When I was thirteen, people would ask me on the street: "What do you do?" "I'm a full-time cook."… Until I was 22, I never received a penny for the work I did. (Bosi, 1994, p. 371)

Before turning to categories such as official history, life history, and collective memory, Bosi (1994) introduces the category work-memory. Here, the researcher-mediator, in the face of the woman's act of remembering, must prioritize what is recalled by the rememberer—that is, what the interviewed woman chose to revisit in order to preserve her life story. In dialogue with work-memory are the flows of barberian mediations, which constitute the construction of

meaning that is conventional and reproduced in society—and that, like what is perpetuated by the media, are disseminated en masse. These are "the types of relationships between character and society that help us understand the movement of transformations culminating in mass society" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 59). Thus, what has been normalized in the life stories of the interviewed women and, consequently, recurs in their oral memories, forms the analytical focus of enunciation.

Another important category identified by Bosi (1994, p. 49) is habit-memory, which "is part of all our cultural training" and therefore results from norms, standards, and ideals prescribed by the subject's social context. The search for traces of coloniality, as well as struggles and resistance present in women's narratives, can thus be identified through habit-memories: those that are naturalized, still present in their conventional daily practices, and which can also reveal tensions. Therefore, in order to be constituted, habit-memory must be understood in its dialogical relationship with spatialities—that is, with the subject's territorialities. For Martín-Barbero (1997), the urban physical space is in motion due to "cultural and political fermentations" that give rise to new popular identities, which end up "stitching back together" (p. 269) practices of solidarity and a new popular culture—especially in social contexts that receive migratory flows. However, in this space, although convention prevails, resistance also emerges.

For each memory revisited, there is the image-recollection—and from its most intimate character, emerges the retelling, the remembering in the materiality of memory through oral language. This "pure recollection, when updated as image-recollection, brings to the surface of consciousness a unique, singular, unrepeatable, and irreversible moment" (Bosi, 1994, p. 49). It is a revisiting of the silence of the supposedly forgotten past which, when awakened in the present, reconstructs life and returns to the place of something significant, because "the image-recollection has a precise date: it refers to a defined, individualized situation" (Bosi, 1994, p. 49). The dialogical process that crosses and resignifies recollections also constitutes what Martín-Barbero (1997) calls the narrative industry, in which cultural circulation is materialized in the modes of affirmation and existence—whether through literature, mass media, or stories shared orally across generations. More than just expressions of language, by translating ideologies and social norms, these narratives—intertwining official and individual histories—are revealed in actions and behaviors. After all, beyond narrating their life stories, the rememberers translate normative modes of their gender roles and social spaces, as well as the instabilities encountered in retelling their own histories.

Thus, memory is a key element of oral history for revealing lived experiences of those who shared the same era. It is up to the social scientist to search for common points and markers among the rememberers, for links and affinities that may denote a collective relationship between the life stories revisited (Bosi, 2003). However, the memory network is shaped by ideological representations, which cannot be seen as unilateral versions of a fact or social representation. In the dialogicity between memory and ideology, there are distances between public memory and individual memory—as well as collective and interpretive instances of history, whether official or personal (Bosi, 2003). The author offers the following reflection:

> How can we retrieve from the depths of the ocean of ages a "pure fact" preserved in memory? When we pull in the net, we see how full it is of ideological representations. More than a unilinear document, narrative reveals the complexity of the event. It is the privileged path to reach the point where History articulates with everyday life. Gathering diverse, sometimes opposing, viewpoints is a constant recomposition of data. (Bosi, 2003, pp. 19–20)

To clarify the recognition of public memory, Bosi (2003) notes that although memory operates freely in the recall of events within its own space and time of enunciation, there will always be "common markers"—that is, anything that represents collective meaning. The same occurs in the formation of identities, which, for Martín-Barbero (1997), result from social interaction, as well as the negation or exclusion of certain beings and knowledges—a movement in which sociocultural identities drive the development of (official) history. However, identity is shaped as a responsiveness to both popular and official narratives, as both traverse and create tensions within a given culture. For the author, "the community is defined by the unity of thought and emotion, by the predominance of close and concrete bonds and relationships of solidarity, loyalty, and collective identity" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, pp. 51–52).

Nonetheless, when discussing identity, Martín-Barbero (1997) correlates it to cultural memory, which is sustained by lived experiences and events, and whose function is not only to speak of the past but to "ensure continuity in the ongoing process of constructing collective identity" (p. 255). He further notes that there are specific places for the formation of these identities, which are shaped by the duality between public life (where formal relationships of interaction and work occur) and private life (the familial and domestic sphere). Hence arises the barberian view on the relationship between territorialities and identities, in which the neighborhood, for example, takes on the role of a social space that

catalyzes lived experiences. According to the author, "the neighborhood thus emerges as the great mediator between the private universe of the home and the public world of the city, a space structured around specific forms of sociability" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 274).

Bosi (2003) emphasizes that collective memory guides or influences individual memory—highlighting the relationship between official history and hegemonic history, as shaped by dominant class *ideologies*. There is thus a constant tension, as oral memory is vulnerable to "ideologization." In other words, the memory shared by the rememberer is influenced by the ideologies legitimized in the arena of social life. Bosi (1994) notes the intertwining of recollections, memories, ideas, representations, and ideologies in the process of recalling the past or recognizing the present. In dialogue with ideologies are the networks of collective interaction, which, for Martín-Barbero (1997), weave the fields of social life, shaped by popular sectors—not constrained by the materiality of media that articulate and disseminate official narratives, but instead emerging from processes that sustain expressions of popular culture.

Given the instability of oral memory—which sometimes falters, whether due to tension among conflicting statements or the difficulty of visualizing a recollection as clearly as before—Bosi (2003) points out that within the union of memory and ideology, there are also the bonds that tie public memory to individual memory, which allow one to understand the particularities of each rememberer's lived experience. This *individual history* also reveals itself through ritualities, that is, through the habits and customs that translate everything symbolic and ritualistic in communal life (Martín-Barbero, 1997). These ritualities of living arise in daily life, as well as in the beliefs and narratives that guide the return to the past from the social fields that host the experiences of women.

Thus, in the context of the oral history of elderly women of different ethnicities, classes, and professions, the researcher-mediator must adopt a sensitive and attentive posture, since the act of revisiting the past will never be exact. Therefore, the researcher must remain sensitive to the diachrony of time, because "the oral source suggests more than it affirms; it moves in curves and detours, demanding a subtle and rigorous interpretation" (Bosi, 2003, p. 20). In the avenues of memory travel both recollection and forgetfulness. These curves and detours, which constitute field research investigating the enunciative locus of memory, are confronted by the *mobilities* generated by constant social changes. This moving alternation of perceptions results in complex and nuanced transformations, also shaped by migratory flows: mobility between rural and urban areas, or the integration of people from other countries and cultures into different territories (Martín-Barbero, 1997).

Although, as Bosi (2003) explains, it is impossible to fully grasp or reproduce the past in its entirety, as researchers mediating memory, we must observe *silences*, as well as the responsiveness present in gestures, repetitions, and the absence of words. The author also notes that, just as important as interpreting recollection is considering what is left unsaid, because: "forgetfulness, omissions, the unraveling stretches of narrative are meaningful examples of how historical events impacted people's everyday lives" (Bosi, 2003, p. 18). To this end, the use of field diaries is advised precisely to record "the narrator's hesitations and silences. The slips and uncertainties of the witnesses are the seal of authenticity" (Bosi, 2003, p. 64).

To conduct socially sensitive and empathetic research in relation to the subjects who constitute it—here recognized as rememberers, based on women's stories and memories—it is necessary to mobilize the *sensorialities* of Martín-Barbero, which reject the hegemonic and dualistic model of thought and recognize the construction of new meanings from the massive interweaving of distinct logics of being, living, and feeling; a plural cultural matrix and a *sensorium* "that disgusts the elites" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 297). To mobilize and interpret life stories, therefore, requires moving away from the positivist lens that targets a normative science and claims to offer absolute answers. Here, it is not theory that holds the answers, but rather the oral histories of people—in all their diversity and instability.

The ethnographic gaze at the moment of the interviews must also consider the traces of the rememberers' daily lives or the elements that make up their familiar world—their home. In this sense, Bosi (2003) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and interpreting biographical objects, since they act as familiar references that connect individuals to the past, especially in the case of elderly people revisiting their own history. These often irreplaceable objects also carry stories, as they preserve memories and experiences; they might be a family watch, photographs, a piece of jewelry, among others. This *family memory* connects with *technicalities*, as it represents the crossing between past, present, and future. In this regard, Martín-Barbero (1997) understands technologies as mediations arising from environments that go beyond the notion of electronic media, highlighting that the interferences of everyday technicalities operate in social living spaces, such as schools, churches, workplaces, as well as in cultural productions tied to popular identity—like literature, music, soap operas, the press, among others. However, the author warns of technological colonization, since Latin American societies have been influenced to pursue an ideal of "modernization" imported from Europe and the United States, which has affected habitual ways of collective life, such as "walking through the city,

inhabiting the home, watching television, a style of social exchange, technical inventiveness, and moral resistance" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 115)—that is, it altered the way of being, dwelling, and interacting with the outside world, as well as with the social imaginary.

Therefore, memory and perception (or reception) are not synonymous, since every time memory is recalled and revisited in the present, its interpretation may undergo various interferences. Thus, matter, memory, and recollection interweave: recollection is embedded in the representations of matter and memory (Bosi, 1994), as there is a dialogical process—a mimesis—that links memories to present-day perceptions. However, each time memories surface, they are not necessarily reinterpreted in the same way; hence, as a mediation, recollection is an image (re)constructed in current consciousness.

According to Bosi (1994), while the recollections of elderly people often reflect a social history already developed, the memory of a younger or even adult person mobilizes struggles and contradictions of a present still in construction. Therefore, when mobilized as mediation, recollection returns to a past that reemerges in new versions, which often conflict with the twists of time. This dialogical process also includes the researcher-mediator, who must interpret the memory of the rememberer, becoming both subject and object. "Subject while we asked, tried to know. Object when we listened, recorded, being like an instrument to receive and transmit someone's memory, a means that someone used to share their recollections" (Bosi, 1994, p. 38).

In dialogue with recollections are temporalities, which refer to the ways of narrating everyday life and thus reproducing oral culture, as well as the discursive instabilities that characterize the multiplicity of temporalities of different social groups in their historical spaces and times, enhancing cultural heterogeneity (Martín-Barbero, 1997). This moving and unfinished diversity of cultural plurality is composed of "crossroads societies"[6], in Martín-Barbero's (1997, p. 258) view, who further argues that "the axis of the debate should shift from the media to mediations, that is, to the articulations between communication practices and social movements, to the different temporalities, and to the plurality of cultural matrices" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 258).

After all, *"what do I perceive in myself when I see images of the present or evoke those of the past?"* (Bosi, 1994, p. 44). With this question, Bosi demonstrates the relationship between corporeality, action, and representation, as the researcher, in addition to mediating others' recollections, receiving and transcribing memories, in their ethnographic translation practice, must also know how to measure silences and observe the interviewee's bodily responsivity. Therefore, the sensitivity of ethnographic research that mobilizes women's life

[6] From a decolonial perspective, Martín-Barbero's (1997) idea of crossroads societies resonates with the concept of border articulated by Walter Mignolo (2017, 2013), insofar as the latter argues that it is at the border where differences intersect. In other words, border thinking represents the praxis of thinking decolonially; such awareness must be revealed through the experiences of bodies and knowledges situated at the border.

stories must also attend to bodily singularities—whether through *corporeality* as social performance or in the face of bodily limitations—since the body is a communicative instrument for the rememberer: once agile in the past and, at times, slow in the present, often dictated by trembling fingers, crooked spines, deafness, scars, faded irises, or tears (Bosi, 1994). In this sense, Martín-Barbero (1997) identifies cognitivities as mediations of the body-world or world of the body—experiences that emerge through contact between the body and the outside world—which vary between men and women, rich and poor, white and Black, bourgeois and workers. This topography of the body—shaped by ethnic, racial, gender, and class diversity—also institutes norms and forms of obedience, valuing or devaluing bodies, beings, and knowledges.

Although recollection should not be viewed as absolute or unilateral truth, but rather as a snapshot of space-time (Bosi, 2003), it reveals the enunciative power of the social substance of memory, which manifests in oral memory, operating as a "precious instrument if we wish to constitute a chronicle of everyday life" (Bosi, 2003, p. 15). In this sense, the method contributes to ensuring that those at the margins of society can be heard—on their own terms, under their own conditions and knowledges—and be recognized as protagonists of social research and, above all, of their historical time. Thus, Bosi (2003) emphasizes that official history fails to reveal the individualities of living memories, especially when:

> The elderly, women, Black people, manual laborers—segments of the population excluded from the history taught in schools—speak up. A history based solely on official documents cannot account for the individual passions that lie behind the episodes. (p. 15)

In dialogue with the *living memories of subjugated beings* are the *citizenships* evoked by Martín-Barbero (1997), in which the author refers to the colonization of mediations, as well as the westernization of thought, to point out the limits of citizens freedoms and individual independence. It is worth noting that this is an author who focused his gaze on the communicational, social, and cultural dynamics of Latin America and was equally concerned with reception and the resistance movements of subjects in response to the enunciative and cultural responsivity generated by mediations. Thus, reflections on freedoms, powers, and dominations are central to his work, for:

> The culture of mass mediation is forged in the tension between these two dyna-mics: that of the economic interests of an increasingly monopolistic capitalism, which takes advantage of the weak and functional presence of the State, and that

of a powerful civil society that defends and expands the boundaries of freedom. (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 194)

Faced with the search for narrated autobiographies, Bosi (2003) recommends the use of exploratory questions so that the rememberer can recall moments of their past with greater freedom. In this way, the author encourages the construction of "affective maps" created through the memories of interviewees, respecting the paths they choose to share their recollections. Thus, in the socio-historical context explored by the researcher when gathering and seeking connections between different life stories, it is essential to recognize that the biographical study allows for the subject to be understood within their social field, because:

The more the researcher comes into contact with the precise historical context in which the respondents lived, cross-referencing information and memories from various people, the more clearly the image of the field of signification prefigured in the testimonies takes shape. For testimonies that are autobiographies, it is worth considering that these are, beyond historical testimony, the evolution of the *person* over time… Only through biographical study can we historically perceive the person. (Bosi, 2003, p. 56)

Throughout his work, far beyond relativizing the dialogical relationship between dominant senders and dominated receivers, Martín-Barbero (1997) sought to map contradictions, resistances, and struggles within the mediation process that communication and culture exert in society. Thus, it became necessary to understand communication from the perspective of mediation, rather than media—precisely because it mediates an increasingly plural society, constituted by "true culture", described by the author as the joining of cultural discontinuities where "official" memories and imaginaries merge with the Indigenous, the rural, the urban, and the popular.

However, it is not possible to consider mediations as a cartographic object of study without acknowledging economic, political, and cultural structures. In fact, it is in and through culture that voices and struggles emerge, going against hegemonic impositions and dominations (Martín-Barbero, 2002). Indeed, when speaking of the socio-historical and methodological construction of gender, it also traverses the cultural fabric shaped by the diversity that constitutes Latin America. This view is reinforced by Bosi (2003), who warns that in individual stories, "there is always a privileged collective narrative within a myth or ideology. And this explanatory and legitimizing narrative serves the power that transmits and disseminates it" (pp. 17–18).

Thus, it is important to recognize that collective memory, when revealed in the individual perception of the rememberer, encompasses the interior of a class whose diffusion is translated into images, feelings, ideas, and values (Bosi, 2003)—a locus that may also reproduce social traits of coloniality in its symbology of domination and power. This occurs in the fieldwork of ethnographic social research, through the altruistic and empathetic craftsmanship of the researcher-mediator, who recognizes not only the verbalized recollection but also breaks the Eurocentric veil to identify semiotic reactions that translate the act of remembering, because "the narrator is present beside the listener. Their hands, shaped by work, make gestures that sustain the story, that give wings to the events brought forth by their voice" (Bosi, 1994, p. 90). It is in this movement—of rejecting hegemonic models of thought through the oral histories of those made invisible in their historical space-time—that the union between mediation and memory enables the praxis of decolonial translation through the ethnographic interview.

In this way, the analytical and cartographic categories present in Bosi (1994, 2003) and in Martín-Barbero (1997), through the combination of the third and fourth Barberian maps, reveal twelve dualities (Table 1) that highlight the relational character between mediation studies and memory in life stories. These dualities are: a) narratives and image-memory; b) spatialities and habit-memory; c) flows and work-memory; d) mobilities and curves and detours; e) sensorialities and silences; f) technicalities and family memory; g) ritualities and individual history; h) cognitivities and corporeality; i) identities and public memory; j) temporalities and recollections; k) citizenships and living memories of subjugated beings; l) connections and ideologies.

Table 1

Relationship between the analytical categories of Martín-Barbero (1997), Bosi (1994, 2003), and colonialities of gendered memory

Mediation	Memory	Colonialities and resistances
Nocturnal maps	Life stories	Gendered memory
Narratives	Image-memory	The revisiting of meaningful memories that shaped the life and history of the rememberers.
Spatialities	Habit-memory	Norms and patterns present in the lived experiences of the rememberers.
Flows	Work-memory	A story told repeatedly, with recurrences that reflect values.
Mobilities	Curves and detours	Instabilities in the oral memory of the rememberers.
Sensorialities	Silences	The crafted translation of the researcher–mediator in the face of what is left unsaid.
Technicalities	Family memory	Biographical objects, technologies, and mediations that preserve memories.
Ritualities	Individual history	The manifestation of memories, ideologies, everyday customs, and beliefs.
Cognitivities	Corporeality	The signs of the body-world, perspectives on the identity and territorialities of the rememberers.
Identities	Public memory	Popular culture, official and media narratives.
Temporalities	Recollections	The re-signified memory in the present, narratives about the space-time of memory.
Citizenships	Living memories of subjugated beings	Marginalized histories, freedoms, and powers.
Connections	Ideologies	Tensions between collective and individual memory in the arena of social life.

Note. Compiled by the authors; first version published in Cardenal (2024).

At the center, as categories that traverse the theoretical-methodological perspective evoked here, are: mediations; memory; colonialities; and resistances. These categories are reproduced in a new map, *the map of gendered memory*, based on the interrelationship with the mediations presented in the third and fourth nocturnal maps of Martín-Barbero (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Map of gendered memory, created to chart the relationship between mediations,
memories, colonialities, and resistances

Note. Compiled by the author; published in Cardenal (2024).

Thus, the analytical and cartographic categories are mediations that, throughout the process established in the ethnographic field, unfold into a triadic relationship to constitute a methodological model based on: a) the mediation proposed by the nocturnal maps of Martín-Barbero; b) the dialogue with the unfolding of memory through the ethnography of life stories developed by Bosi (1994, 2003); c) the intersection with the colonialities and resistances of being, knowledge, and power present in women's narratives, in order to identify what we here call gendered memories. This is the notion of complementary and moving dialogicality that we seek to present. However, the way we developed the map should not be interpreted as a fixed model, since its academic and methodological application allows for changes in the relational flow of the categories, creating new associations and versions of the map of gendered memory.

Therefore, in this proposal, the category of resistance assumes importance alongside mediations, memories, and colonialities, as within a decolonial perspective, the search for resistant movements becomes a compass for recognizing subjects subjugated and rendered invisible by official history/narrative. In this sense, we evoke Lugones (2014), when the author points out that women, even within hegemonic and oppressive conditions, also initiate actions of liberation, which may be both adaptive and oppositional. For Lugones (2014), resistance lies in the tension between subjectification—when a woman, even

within normalizing contexts, is constituted by knowledge and information—and active subjectivity—which would be the minimum notion of agency necessary to fracture the relationship between colonial oppression and resistance—both occurring simultaneously. Therefore, there is resistance within domination, and identifying it means enabling the self-recognition of the being as a historical subject, not merely as an object of silencing domination.

Thus, in evoking the role of communication in favor of the decolonization of being and knowing, it is essential to overcome the dualistic relationship between mediation and reception, placing these two phenomenological concepts within their dialogical and constructivist function—active in the consolidation of increasingly hybrid and plural societies, that is, "from mediations and subjects, that is, from the articulations between communication practices and social movements" (Martín-Barbero, 1997, p. 17). Mediations, therefore, must be understood in the plural and in their moving nature, as the result of tensions and cultural transformations exercised by the masses—by those who, in most cases, do not have an active voice in the narratives crystallized by official history. This history, when viewed from the memory of subjugated beings, is questioned and can be rewritten from new terms, places, and perspectives, breaking with universalisms and the hegemonic logic of conceiving the colonial and patriarchal world-system (Segato, 2015). This is the disobedient role of academic practice in favor of the decolonization of the social sciences (Mignolo, 2008, 2017).

PARTIAL CONSIDERATIONS ON A MOVING MAP

Ecléa Bosi (1936–2017) and Jesús Martín-Barbero (1937–2021) share the same enunciative locus, as their lives and works were built within Latin America—she, a Brazilian scholar dedicated to Social Psychology and the memory of elderly people; he, a Spaniard based in Colombia, who contributed to the study of Communication through the lens of Sociology and its intertwining with cultural mediations. In their lifetimes, neither identified themselves as authors of the decolonial perspective; it is we who, in this article, respectfully propose bringing them closer to this enunciative place of resistance and epistemic disobedience.

In doing so, we demonstrate that decolonization has emerged from the contributions of various social researchers, evoking the place of Communication within critical theories aligned with the counter-hegemonic decolonial stance, which challenges us to look at Latin America as a space of diversity, resistance, and disobedience, going against positivist practices standardized by the Eurocentric model of thought that continues to render beings and knowledges invisible, something that also occurs within the social sciences.

A

Gender memory: decolonial cartography
in Martín-Barbero and Ecléa Bosi

To find or develop methodological crossings that engage with or dialogue with decolonial epistemology is a task that requires a craft-like movement on the part of the researcher. Thus, by proposing a cartography that unites Ecléa Bosi and Jesús Martín-Barbero to study the life stories of women—and, from them, to challenge narratives crystallized by official history—we are advocating for academic disobedience and resistance in favor of a decolonized and decolonizing methodology (Castro-Gómez, 2007; Mignolo, 2008).

Since we are dealing with a theoretical-methodological perspective that departs from the universal and totalitarian paradigms of modern science, there is greater freedom to combine and reframe qualitative research practices, especially those of ethnographic nature that do not forgo fieldwork. It was from this provocation that we evoked here the union between nocturnal maps and life stories as a powerful methodological path in the development of a cartography of women's memory.

This, therefore, is what we call a cartography of gendered memory: an ethnographic method grounded in decolonial translation that continuously mobilizes theory and methodology, encouraging field research through the intersection of *mediation* and *translation*. As a method geared toward social research in the development of exploratory studies, it can be adapted to different contexts, as long as its primary interest lies in the life stories of silenced beings, in which their narratives and memories take on an emancipatory role—going far beyond the reductionist dichotomy that separates subject and object. Here, the researcher–mediator is guided by the memory of the rememberers and seeks, above all, to break historical silences and invisibilities. ◼

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Attack as defense: discursive disputes in crisis contexts

O ataque enquanto defesa: disputas discursivas em contextos de crises

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ABSTRACT
The article addresses defensive strategies adopted in crisis scenarios and is based on attacking those who accuse an actor of transgressions. Treating crises as disputes over meaning that threaten reputations, the text develops three movements. In the first, it revisits international contributions on the subject, focusing on the notions of apologia and *kategoria*. In the second, it discusses Mayhew's contributions to the study of influence, betting that the author's ideas about solidarity can assist in investigating strategies of delegitimization of accusers. Finally, it conducts a study on the Heartland Institute's attacks against its critics, critically reflecting on their characteristics and issues related to asymmetries.
Keywords: Crisis communication, discursive attacks, delegitimization, civil surveillance, disputes over meaning.

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RESUMO
O artigo aborda estratégias defensivas adotadas em cenários de crise e pautadas no ataque contra aqueles que acusam um ator de transgressões. Tomando as crises enquanto disputas de sentido que ameaçam reputações, o texto elabora três movimentos. No primeiro, revisita contribuições internacionais sobre o tema, focando nas noções de apologia e *kategoria*. No segundo, aborda as contribuições sobre influência de Leon Mayhew, entendendo que as pretensões de solidariedade pensadas pelo autor podem ajudar na investigação de estratégias focadas na deslegitimação de acusadores. Por fim, realiza um estudo sobre ataques do Heartland Institute contra os acusadores, refletindo criticamente sobre suas características e assimetrias.
Palavras-chave: Comunicação de crise, ataques discursivos, deslegitimação, vigilância civil, disputas de sentido.

INTRODUCTION

WHEN CORNERED, AN animal may sometimes adopt attack as a defense mechanism. This observation may seem trivial, but it has long been incorporated into the popular wisdom of various societies. Nevertheless, it represents a persistent gap in the theoretical body of work on crisis communication management—a literature that, even in its international branch, offers few analytical tools for understanding attack strategies that are at times discursively employed in response to allegations of abusive conduct (Hearit, 1996).

It is important to recognize, from the outset, the imbalance between national and international studies on crisis communication. Based on a comprehensive bibliographic review, Nunes and Oliveira (2023) observe a national scenario characterized by exploratory, speculative, and essentially prescriptive studies. While the authors point out that some of the most influential Brazilian works on the subject display low theoretical-empirical rigor, it should be noted that many of these texts are dominated by normative precepts about the importance of accepting and assuming responsibility, adopting symmetrical communication, issuing quick and truthful statements, and practicing radical transparency that conceals nothing from the public (Bueno, 2009; Forni, 2015; Machado, 2020; Rosa, 2003). In light of such assumptions, practices involving responding to crises through attacks vanish from the discussion, treated as ethical pathologies increasingly less tolerated in a vigilant society (Silva, 2018).

At this point, there is a concerning mismatch between theory and practice regarding crisis communication, as attack strategies feature prominently—albeit in varied forms—within the contemporary political, organizational, and even celebrity repertoires. Responding to a crisis by attacking those who expose abuse is a recurring strategy, regularly encountered by civil watchdog initiatives, social movements, and the press. When Agência Pública, for instance, exposed iFood's attempt to demobilize delivery workers, one of the first responses from those involved was to attack the report, claiming it failed to meet the standards of quality journalism (Levy, 2022). Henriques and Silva (2017a, 2018) suggest that such reactions are not isolated cases, emphasizing the need to recognize the diversity of these attacks, which may even reach the legal sphere.

This article aims to construct theoretical foundations that can support analytical efforts to critically understand discursive attack strategies adopted in crisis scenarios. Addressing this issue requires establishing a few initial guidelines. First, it is necessary to bring to the forefront a notion of meaning dispute that moves away from deterministic and unilateral views of crises, seeing them not as finished and isolated events, but rather as elements shaped

by the actions (and disputes) among multiple actors. Furthermore, this text does not aim to produce a taxonomy of organizational attacks—an inherently incomplete exercise given the communicational nature of the phenomenon. Nor does it operate within a normative or functionalist perspective prescribing how managers should act in ideal scenarios. On the contrary, the intention is to explore the anatomy of concrete strategies, observing the logical elements of the meaning disputes that arise in moments of crisis, with the hope that such analysis may assist in understanding the vulnerabilities of those actors seeking to exercise oversight over abuses of power in the contemporary world (Henriques & Silva, 2014, 2017a, 2018).

Based on this objective, the article unfolds in three main movements. The first consists of a theoretical revisitation of the attack as a discursive strategy in crisis management within international literature, focusing on the notions of *apologia* and *kategoria* (Benoit, 2015; Hearit, 1996, 2006; Ryan, 1982; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013; Ware & Linkugel, 1973), which are key elements in a rhetorical approach to the topic. Acknowledging, in line with Sellnow and Seeger (2013), that studies on the notion of *kategoria* remain scarce, special attention will be given to Hearit's work (1996, 2006), which identifies a practice of *apologia* based on *kategoria*—in other words, a defense grounded in an attack on the one who presents or supports a complaint.

The second movement discusses the theoretical contributions of Leon Mayhew (1997) concerning influence, considering that his reflections on trust credits and claims of solidarity are promising for unveiling the logical elements behind organizational attacks. The argument is that Mayhew's concerns can broaden the analytical scope of reflections on crisis, *apologia*, and *kategoria* by incorporating a relational and communicational view of influence and delegitimization.

The third movement, in turn, attempts to put these theoretical contributions to the test. To that end, the results of a qualitative study on the Heartland Institute and its project "Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change" (NIPCC)—two leading proponents of climate change denial (Silva, 2017)—are presented. Based on content analysis of these organizations' websites and using Mayhew's (1997) and Hearit's (1996) ideas as analytical operators, it was possible to observe how attacks on critics operate in a dual manner: through the reaffirmation and manufacture of trust credits, and through challenges to the critics' or whistleblowers' claims of solidarity. This expands the understanding of how aspects of meaning disputes unfold in scenarios involving crises and allegations. Finally, the article offers considerations on how these theoretical

insights regarding organizational attacks can support future analytical approaches to the subject, particularly in contexts of severe asymmetry.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION: A THEORY OF ATTACK AND DEFENSE

Among the various aspects and concerns shaping the international literature on crisis communication, one of the most traditional branches deals with the discursive strategies adopted by actors during critical moments to minimize damage to their image and reputation (Benoit, 2015; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). According to Sellnow and Seeger (2013), this perspective is strongly grounded in studies on influence and rhetoric, aiming to understand crisis-related actions and statements through these lenses. To grasp these efforts, one must recognize that every crisis is formed by meaning disputes—intrinsically uncertain processes involving interactions among diverse actors, practices, and cultures—making it impossible to prescribe a single correct course of action.

The rhetorical tradition in this field is most evident in the notions of *apologia* and *kategoria*. According to Ware and Linkugel (1973), *apologia* constitutes a distinct form of public action aimed at defending an image or reputation, functioning as a rhetorical genre prevalent in crisis management. Building on their definition, Hearit (2006) reinforces the importance of distinguishing *apologia* from apology, arguing that the former originates from the Greek meaning "speech in defense" and should be understood as "*apologia* is a broad term that means to respond to organizational criticism by offering a vigorous and compelling defense" (p. 4). Applying this notion, Ware and Linkugel (1973) identify different defensive strategies such as denial, differentiation, transcendence, and bolstering.

In his exploration of the topic, Ryan (1982) proposes that *apologia* should not be considered in isolation but in conjunction with *kategoria*. He refers to classical divisions of oratory developed by Plato and Aristotle, both of whom emphasize the rhetorical coexistence of accusation and defense as a fundamental and interrelated aspect. Thus, *kategoria* would be the dialectical counterpart of *apologia*, constituting "discourses of accusation" that present the audience with a pressing problem requiring a response, thereby initiating a process in which the accused employ defensive strategies to protect their reputations (Ryan, 1982).

The reasoning based on *apologia* and *kategoria* is central to Benoit's thinking and his Image Restoration Theory (2015), one of the most robust theoretical frameworks on crisis communication. Aiming to identify strategic categories to adopt during critical moments, Benoit (2015) begins with a fundamental understanding of image crises: they involve, at their core, a situation in which "a person or organization accuses another of wrongdoing, and the accused

produces a message that attempts to repair that image" (p. 13). The author acknowledges that such situations are typically more complex—there may be multiple accusers or accused parties, the victim of wrongdoing may not be the one who raises the issue, and accusations may be more or less explicit, among other variations. Moreover, these accusations and defenses are performed before audiences, engaging in meaning disputes and seeking to persuade the public about the nature of the situation.

Even in the face of such complexity, the understanding of a "basic scenario" provides the analytical seeds for Benoit (2015) to investigate defense strategies. To do so, the author initially focuses on the anatomy of the accusation, noting that every allegation consists of discourses that seek to establish that an act occurred, that it is undesirable/offensive, and that an actor is responsible for that action. In this sense, those seeking to denounce a transgression must convince the public of three basic elements: (1) the occurrence of an action, requiring a broad perspective that includes both the failure to perform expected actions and the execution of undesirable acts; (2) the offensiveness of the action, with discourses demonstrating that the act is inconsistent with moral values and highlighting the harm caused and its negative effects on people's lives; and (3) the responsibility of the accused actor, emphasizing leadership positions or premeditation.

Benoit (2015) argues that defense strategies will largely be attempts to dispute the meanings projected by accusations. The author proposes five general strategic categories, each accompanied by a set of tactics. The first category is "Denial," which involves disputing either the existence of the transgressive act or the actor's authorship. The second is "Evasion of Responsibility," aimed at convincing audiences that the actor should not be held accountable—suggesting, among other tactics, that the actor was provoked, had good intentions, or that the action was accidental. The third category is "Reducing Offensiveness," involving discourses that may minimize the damage caused by the act, highlight previous positive actions as evidence of good behavior, argue that the accused has already made reparations, or even attack the accusers—a tactic to which we will return shortly. The two remaining categories, "Corrective Action" and "Mortification," do not directly challenge the meanings of the accusations (i.e., they do not contest the act, offensiveness, or responsibility), instead aiming to repair the image by demonstrating that the transgression will not recur and by accepting responsibility for it.

Thus, the strategic framework developed by Benoit (2015) provides a general overview of the defensive stances adopted in crisis scenarios. It is important to stress that these categories and tactics should not be considered in isolation.

A

On the contrary, defenses in acute crisis scenarios typically involve combining tactics—for example, attempting to reduce the offensiveness of an act while also suggesting that the actor is not as responsible as the accusation claims. Moreover, accusations and defenses are not static but are continuously reconstructed through interactions with audiences, media systems, and various other actors involved in the controversial setting—changes in accusations entail changes in the defenses adopted, and vice versa.

Hearit (1996) argues that approaches like those of Ware and Linkugel (1973) and Benoit (2015) have contributed effectively to explaining the strategies and stances that constitute defensive discourses. However, he contends that few efforts have been made to understand another possible form of action: counterattack, or defense based on attack. In essence, this action (which the author also refers to as counter-*kategoria*) involves issuing a new set of accusations aimed at those who initially sought to highlight transgressions. The traditional targets of such counterattacks include other organizations, civil watchdog entities, the press, and government agencies. More than simply disputing the meanings embedded in the original allegation, the counter-*kategoria* aims to question the legitimacy and character of the accusers, pointing to ethical failures in their conduct.

Although Benoit (2015) lists attacking the accusers as a tactic within the "Reducing Offensiveness" category, our argument here is that this form of action does not fit that definition. In the context of accusation and defense, questioning the credibility of the one making the allegation functions as a distinct strategy, seeking to suggest to audiences that they should not trust the image initially projected by the accuser's discourse—in other words, it affects not only the offensiveness of the act but also the understanding of the action itself and the accused's responsibility. Convincing the audience that an accuser lacks credibility effectively tarnishes the entire allegation, and it is in this broader sense that this form of action must be understood.

Hearit's (1996) reflections on the topic offer some initial clues to understanding this strategy. Firstly, the author suggests that the attack against accusers promotes an inversion in positions and discursive exchanges. It creates embarrassment for those who bring a transgression to light, usually by formulating a series of questions that must be answered by these actors in order to prove their credibility. It is possible to understand that these questions add new layers to the disputes over meaning that mark the crisis scenario, operating in two aspects. On the one hand, they increase the burden of demands on those who accuse, since their silence in the face of questions about their legitimacy is often not an option (Hearit, 1996). We can speculate that this overload is even more vital when the initial accusers are aggrieved publics or civil vigilance initiatives (Henriques &

Silva, 2017a, 2018), as these collectives often do not have the conditions to cope with the communication demands and the speed with which they are presented in a controversial scenario. On the other hand, these new discursive exchanges end up diverting the public gaze, stressing issues of visibility and attention for the subjects, especially by changing the terms of media reverberation.

Second, this form of defense highlights the ethical terrain. Hearit (1996) notes that there is an expectation that those who bring others' transgressions to light occupy a position of moral superiority, and challenging this status generates multiple tensions. Thus, "in sum, by recasting the charge due to a problem with the initial accuser's tone, motives, truthfulness or legitimacy, a *kategoria*-based response shifts the level of communication to a higher plane" (Hearit, 1996, p. 236). This shift strengthens the possibility of a new stance: the victimization of the initially accused actor. This posture may not only preserve their image but even reinforce it among certain audiences who perceive the attack as unjust.

In short, Hearit (1996) emphasizes the importance of deepening the understanding of this strategic modality, as it can significantly alter the course of meaning disputes that shape a crisis. Nevertheless, Sellnow and Seeger (2013) note that the topic has received little attention since then in the crisis communication literature, particularly in studies focused on understanding risk or more traditional defense strategies—and even Hearit's (1996) investigation remains limited, constituting a single case study.

It is possible to speculate that one of the reasons for such a gap is the lack of analytical foundations to support investigations. Unlike the studies on defense conducted by Ryan (1982) and Benoit (2015), which derive operators from the very accusations that trigger a crisis, in the case of *kategoria* as *apologia*, there is a drastic shift in focus. Beyond the dispute over meanings regarding actions, offensiveness, and responsibility, the strategy here is to question credibility and promote the delegitimization of actors and accusations. Expanding the understanding of these crisis intervention actions, therefore, implies constructing theoretical-methodological frameworks that address trust and reputation. It is in this sense that we believe the thought of sociologist Leon Mayhew (1997), regarding trust credits and claims of solidarity, may constitute promising pillars for unveiling the logical elements behind the anatomy of organizational attacks in crisis scenarios.

INFLUENCE ACCORDING TO MAYHEW: TRUST CREDITS
AND CLAIMS OF SOLIDARITY

Although the notions of influence have become a rarely explored topic in public relations and organizational communication studies (Henriques & Silva, 2020), several authors in the social sciences have reflected on the theme in recent decades. Among them, it is worth highlighting the perspective advocated by sociologist Leon Mayhew in his book *The new public: Professional communications and the means of social influence* (1997), especially due to its proximity to communicative issues and the professionalization of persuasion through the advancement of public relations techniques. The book starts from the observation of how specialized communicators—particularly public relations and political marketing professionals—act decisively to strategically influence public opinion. Prompted by this fact, the author noticed how such practices were widely disseminated and embedded in American society. Nevertheless, Mayhew observed, with astonishment and regret, that a limited number of academic works in sociology, politics, or communication addressed the subject in depth and beyond linear approaches.

The sociologist thus set out to theorize how "a new class of professional experts in the modes of mass rhetoric is seeking more sure control over what passes for public opinion" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 118) operated and were capable of influencing opinions through strategic interventions anchored in a rationalization of persuasion. To this end, the author engaged in a process of reflection on the logics of public opinion, as well as on the role of influence and rhetoric in the constitution of social life, formulating the foundations of what he would call a new paradigm of influence.

Mayhew (1997) anchors his view in a multifaceted understanding of the public. He points out how the recognition of a certain capacity for resistance among collectives in the face of forces that attempt to shape their opinions is a consensus in academic literature, with subjects developing ways of navigating through the appeals of an ultra-rationalized rhetoric. From this perspective, it would be a mistake to judge them as passive poles merely affected by these influences, ignoring how they interact with such forces, modify them, and even appropriate some techniques to craft their tactics.

This observation, however, does not mean that the performance of a class specialized in rhetoric to influence public opinion is fruitless. Its increasingly professionalized action clashes with the very idea of publics capable of resisting attempts to influence their opinions. The central issue, for Mayhew, arises from the recognition that these two sides coexist and interact, with publics that must be understood as relational entities whose opinions are neither completely

malleable nor entirely autonomous, but rather the result of a complex set of constantly disputed influences.

Mayhew (1997) concludes by stating that it is not enough to merely observe whether the public is influenced or resists the forces that try to exert influence over it; it is necessary to recognize that both dimensions occur simultaneously. The correct approach, from his perspective, would be to direct attention toward exploring *how* various influences operate in a pluralistic society. To this end, the author formulates the concept of a system of influences and persuasion, building the foundation of his conceptions by combining Talcott Parsons' ideas on the subject with the critiques and reinterpretations offered by Jürgen Habermas.

Mayhew argues that, when we accept suggestions or advice, or adopt others' opinions without verifying for ourselves whether what is being said is true, thus changing our stance toward the world, we have been influenced. Social life, in this sense, is inconceivable without influence, as individuals do not have the time, knowledge, or experience to investigate every matter before placing trust in others. In modern society—a world in which the body of knowledge far exceeds human capacity to properly keep up with every topic—this idea becomes even more prominent. As a result, in a democratic regime and in a context where private organizations and government powers increasingly rely on the legitimacy of public opinion, progressively rationalized forms of attempting to influence and persuade others become commonplace.

To understand such influence, the author starts from a Parsonian paradigm of persuasion, in which this act is understood as a way to achieve outcomes through interactions and positive sanctions, aiming to affect the viewpoints of other subjects and alter situations. Mayhew (1997) emphasizes that "persuasion is 'positive' in the sense that it seeks to show others that what the persuader wants is, if properly understood, actually good for the person being persuaded" (p. 119). It is from this notion that the author theorizes about what is perhaps his major contribution to the understanding of meaning disputes and public opinion: claims of solidarity.

The author's basic premise is the notion that influence, understood as a positive sanction, involves a presupposition—sometimes even counterfactual—that the influencer and their audience share a common interest. Thus, a discourse grounded in persuasion brings, either implicitly or explicitly, rhetorical appeals affirming the existence of shared interests, pointing toward a common solidarity. This is not, evidently, about the need for all interests to be genuinely mutual, but rather the existence of points of alignment. Without such a presupposition, there is no reason to believe that the persuasive efforts of others constitute positive sanctions.

In reflecting on this feature, Mayhew draws upon the ideas of acceptability conditions for speech acts developed by Habermas (2012)—truth, normative rightness, and the speaker's sincerity—to propose that when actors attempt to alter others' opinions or affect their behaviors through persuasion, another necessary presupposition comes into play: "*speakers warrant that their arguments are predicated on identifiable shared interests* … Employing Habermas' vocabulary and following the general line of his arguments, I will refer to offers of affiliation as *warrants of solidarity*" (Mayhew, 1997, p. 120). Like other validity claims, that of solidarity implies the legitimacy of a speech act and an implicit means to support such a claim, allowing it to be considered valid—and the possibility of validating this claim through *discourse provides* the rationalized grounds to accept the speaker's assertions.

Claims of solidarity bear similarities to Habermas's (2012) claims of sincerity, insofar as both aim to guarantee the representation of the speaker's subjective motivation. At this point, Mayhew highlights the asymmetry in the conditions proposed by Habermas, stressing how the German philosopher himself points out that sincerity—unlike the other conditions—cannot be verified solely through discourse, but rather through consistency between discourse and action. It is precisely in this asymmetry that Mayhew identifies an opening to address reputation, observing that building a track record of consistency between speech and actions is tantamount to building a reputation for sincerity—and he then applies analogous reasoning to claims of solidarity, identifying important foundations for his system of influence, which blends logically and discursively verifiable signals with ideas of shared interests and identities.

Based on this basic characterization of influence and claims of solidarity, Mayhew (1997) proceeds to address trust. According to the author, a constitutive aspect of social life is precisely the trust we place in others regarding the sincerity and solidarity of their actions, making it important to question why we believe others' speech. Reputation itself could be a preliminary answer to this question—we trust the reputation built through a consistent track record of actions. Even this foundation, however, proves problematic and lacking solidity when subjected to rigorous scrutiny, insofar as it is possible for an actor to speak and act reliably for a long time, strategically building a reputation only to later exploit that position—a "confidence trick." At this point, Mayhew (1997) asks: "why, then, do people accept others' representations, despite the fact that to do so involves an element of trust that cannot be fully secured?" (p. 123).

The author emphasizes that the answer, in some way, relates to the absence of fully satisfactory alternatives to this concern. It must be acknowledged that the reality of the world makes it impossible for a person to entirely avoid the act

of placing trust in others. There is no way to escape the fact that we depend on others and on their assertions, yet we do not have access to methods that can offer absolute guarantees about the subjective intentions of these individuals. From this line of reasoning, Mayhew proposes a conceptualization of trust that he believes is capable of capturing the notion that trust necessarily involves dependence in the face of uncertainty. For the author:

> trust is the credit extended to sources that provide representations of information regarding state of affairs (including the intentions and commitments of these sources). When actors rely on such representations in the absence of fully adequate independent knowledge. (Mayhew, 1997, p. 128)

A crucial point in Mayhew's (1997) thought stems from the observation that, although uncertainty is an inherent element of trust, this does not mean that people simply believe in others irrationally. Borrowing certain logics from economic signaling theory, the author argues that individuals navigate the issue of influence through a logic of "credits"—types of signals that are sought and used as indicators of the credibility of statements made by other actors, whether individuals or institutions. Subjects are constantly searching for these signals—a university degree, a track record of actions, a logical argument, public support, an endorsement by a news outlet—to assess whether or not they can trust that actor and the ideas they promote.

To the extent that credits help to explain how individuals trust others, this idea becomes central to understanding social influence. Based on the notion that the existence of certain signals strengthens a statement and makes it more credible, actors seeking to persuade others are faced with the need to create, present, and defend rhetorical appeals that highlight certain attributes and are recognized as trust credits.

This brings us to the familiar terrain of meaning disputes and discursive formations aimed at influencing others' opinions, as well as to the crisis communication strategy addressed in this article. Mayhew's (1997) argument opens new analytical possibilities for both the anatomical and logical elements of discourses that seek to accuse a transgression and those that adopt counterattack as a form of defense—the latter being of particular interest here. At its core, one may consider that such attacks-as-defense operate with the intention of influencing the development of that conflict by mobilizing both trust credits and claims to solidarity. Thus, it is important to further deepen the reflection on these two theoretical contributions suggested by Mayhew.

Regarding credits, Mayhew (1997) departs from a deterministic and linear perspective that would regard such appeals as universal and pre-defined. On the contrary, signals are ultimately attributed by subjects based on their opinions and judgments about the social world. They may be assigned based on logics that escape rationality and direct benefit calculation—whether due to a sense of identification with the source, strong emotional appeal, aesthetic considerations, social relations, or trust in certain daily routines.

It is essential to recognize that rhetorical resources are always reflexive aspects, being products of culture and interactions. A single appeal may have varying impacts across different historical moments, as it is embedded in a continuous process of (re)construction through social interactions. The speech of an actor may achieve great influence at one point and virtually none at another. Mayhew (1997) thus reminds us that the entire logic of trust is permeated by uncertainty, with people and audiences interpreting signals differently, valuing specific attributes, and granting credits in ways that cannot be fully controlled or predicted.

The situational nature of rhetorical appeals creates a scenario that greatly amplifies the strategic dimension inherent to the discursive selection of attributes to be highlighted in a given statement—*influencing subjects, therefore, involves the constant assessment of what they will recognize as signals of trust at a given moment*. This aligns with the Aristotelian idea that the speaker mobilizes a particular ethos based on what they believe will win over the audience, and with Benoit's (2015) view of crisis, in which audiences are central elements in the dispute over actions, their offensiveness, and responsibility. Distinct audiences may value widely differing aspects, making it always necessary, from a rhetorical standpoint, to understand the cultural values and characteristics of those one aims to influence. Furthermore, Mayhew (1997) observes that signals possess different characteristics: some are appeals to discursively verifiable elements, while others are of a different nature and deal primarily with the question of solidarity.

It is at this point that the author inserts the notion of claims to solidarity within the logic of the credit system, emphasizing how certain signs of solidarity are among the strongest and most fundamental appeals in the struggle for influence. Mayhew (1997) thus suggests that people are influenced by others with whom they believe they share bonds of solidarity, with whom they hold similar views. Such bonds are mobilized when attempting to exert influence, which is thus produced through a process of constructing solidarities and identities, based on meanings that are, in turn, created through credible rhetoric.

An interesting example of the possibilities of this reasoning is Lupia's (1994) study on what can be described as a logic of reverse solidarity signals. The researcher analyzed a California election concerning the reform of auto insurance policy guidelines, in which five proposals were on the ballot. His objective was to explore the behavior of individuals lacking specific knowledge on the topic, understanding how they navigated the uncertainty surrounding the issue to vote on one of the presented ideas. Through in-depth interviews with voters after the election, Lupia (1994) observed how a considerable number of individuals decided their vote thanks to a cognitive shortcut, opposing the proposals supported by insurance companies—the fact that those ideas had industry backing was taken by these citizens as a signal indicating that such alternatives should not be trusted.

Based on Mayhew's logic, we may consider that those voters cast their ballots against the insurance companies' proposals, driven by the absence of any intention of shared solidarity with those actors—their judgment was that such organizations defended private interests, rendering those alternatives untrustworthy. On the other hand, some individuals interviewed by Lupia (1994) made their decision upon observing that one of the proposals had been authored by Ralph Nader, known for his advocacy within the consumer rights movement. Even without understanding the content and intricacies of that proposal, these individuals were driven by a belief grounded in solidarity, trusting that proposal because they believed in the shared interests between themselves and its author.

At its extreme, the notion that claims of solidarity are fundamental appeals for influence brings to the forefront the clashes between private and public interests, as well as the strategic need to project common ground among the values and beliefs of individuals, in order to invoke shared identities. The public interest emerges as a trump card, a way of indicating that a certain course of action is geared toward the common good, even though various disputes permeate this idea.

In these terms, signs of solidarity serve as a revealing interpretive key to investigate attacks on the legitimacy of certain actors. In this sense, it is important to consider influence as a contested terrain, marked primarily by the nonlinear confrontation between the actions of different actors, wherein a multiplicity of discourses seeks not only to invoke attributes capable of lending credibility and trust to a given viewpoint, but also to demonstrate that other perspectives and actors are untrustworthy—a pattern that would appear in counterattacks during moments of crisis.

Mayhew (1997) reflects on this aspect through the concept of "competing offers of affiliation" presented by different social actors: statements that go beyond

a mere announcement of the speaker's attributes, mobilizing a range of rhetorical resources to try to establish solidarity with the audience, including accusations and demonstrations of how the opposing sides in a dispute do not share sincere common interests with the audience. Initially observing this dynamic in the context of US presidential elections—and later extending it to various other political and social movements—the author noted how these competing offers transcend the defense of arguments, the demonstration of virtues or flaws in a given proposal, or even affirmations of a candidate or leader's competence. At their core, these offers operate as attempts to signal the existence of shared solidarities and to expose the lack thereof in opponents. As a result, a constant dispute arises among these offers, in such a way that the very forces seeking to influence opinions are themselves influenced at all times, as they search for responses to rival rhetorical appeals.

A particularly recurrent rhetorical element in these discursive efforts is the attempt to expose an opponent's private interests, thereby creating a clear distinction between "us"—speaker and audience—and "them." Mayhew (1997) highlights how this strategy of identification occupies a prominent place in Burke's rhetorical theory and emphasizes how persuasive attempts often seek to project the idea that "we" (placing the persuader and the target audience in a single category, which implies the existence of shared interests) are fighting against some actor, force, or perspective—once again framing the terrain in terms of a dualism between "us" and "them."

At the conclusion of the exploration of Mayhew's thinking on influence, the notions of credibility and claims of solidarity emerge as promising tools for analyzing the discursive logics that shape accusations and counterattacks in crisis scenarios. In particular, these insights prove valuable for highlighting elements of defense strategies based on attack, as previously noted by Hearit (1996), who observed that such strategies function by seeking to delegitimize certain actors. The intention of the following sections is to examine the applicability of these concepts as analytical tools through an exploratory qualitative study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Aiming to analyze organizational discourses that constitute a defense strategy based on attack, the investigation presented here focused on the Heartland Institute and its NIPCC project. Heartland is a nonprofit organization that can be described as an ideological think tank (Silva, 2017)—a group that strategically assumes the format of a research center with the goal of advancing a specific agenda and influencing public opinion. Heartland claims to be one of the global

leaders in conservative thought. According to civil monitoring initiatives focused on abusive communication practices, the group is a leading force in efforts to deny scientific evidence on anthropogenic climate change (Silva, 2017).

Founded in 1984, Heartland consolidated itself—especially after 1997—as the main actor in a network that seeks to deny the existence of global warming and to oppose public policies aimed at restricting carbon emissions. With a global scope, the issue of climate change currently concentrates most of Heartland's attention and investments, particularly through actions such as the *International Conference on Climate Change*, organized by the think tank since 2008, and through the activities of the NIPCC—a project that aims to establish a body of skeptical experts capable of countering the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations (UN) international panel that brings together leading scientists and research on climate change.

Heartland and the NIPCC were selected as the objects of this investigation for two reasons. The first is their very nature as central agents in a network that manufactures uncertainty about the anthropogenic nature of climate change, which gives the group significant international visibility and draws the attention of civil monitoring initiatives focused on this issue (Henriques & Silva, 2017b), making it a recurring target of public denunciations and crises (Hoggan, 2009; Oreskes & Conway, 2010). These watchdog groups particularly highlight how Heartland conceals its private interests and uses various discursive strategies to deny climate change, distorting research, launching media offensives, and employing fake petitions. The second reason is the way the group handles the crises triggered by these denunciations, adopting an increasingly combative and attacking posture as a form of defense (Silva, 2017). This operational mode is so structured that Heartland maintains a dedicated section on its website to provide "responses" to its critics, presenting some data and, generally, many attempts to delegitimize those who accuse the group of misconduct. The same occurs on the NIPCC website, which also features a "response to critics" section. These spaces end up forming a repository that grants easy access to Heartland's reactions to accusations of abuse, making it suitable for the research proposed here.

Thus, the *corpus* of the investigation was delimited to the "Response to Critics" section of the Heartland Institute (2014) and NIPCC (2018) websites, selecting texts that included attacks on those denouncing the group's actions. In total, seven texts were selected from Heartland's website and thirteen from the NIPCC's site. These texts were subjected to qualitative analysis based on two central analytical operators: (a) claims of solidarity and (b) rhetorical mobilization of credibility. In line with a logic of meaning disputes, each of these operators was analyzed from two distinct poles: the positive pole, referring to

Heartland—that is, discursive attempts to (a1) reinforce claims of solidarity and (b1) highlight/manufacture credibility—and the negative pole, which refers to the actors who denounced the institute—that is, discursive moves that attempt to (a2) suggest the accuser does not share claims of solidarity with the reader or (b2) that the accuser lacks credibility. In addition to these two core analytical tools, two observations by Hearit (1996) were incorporated into the analytical model, aiming to observe (c) how attacks on accusers occur through questioning, and (d) evidence of victimization processes by Heartland. It is important to note that, given that this research is aimed at evaluating the relevance of certain theoretical contributions and analytical tools, the intention was not to quantify the frequency with which these appeals appear, especially due to the high rate of repetition of the same appeal across different responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An initial interesting finding regarding claims of solidarity concerns the limited presence of the positive pole (a1) related to Heartland in the analyzed responses. While other sections of the group's website focus on attempts to establish common ground between the institute and its readers—for example, through the notion of the common-sense environmentalist and the pure interest in scientific truth and sound science (Silva, 2017)—such elements appear only modestly in the responses to critics. Among the texts analyzed, only four emphasize Heartland's claims of solidarity, mainly through the idea that the group promotes independent science and believes in the free distribution of knowledge. In a response to a criticism made by three US congressmen, Heartland focuses particularly on the latter point, stating that its actions in schools stem from a shared interest in promoting a vibrant debate in which all sides are considered in order to arrive at the truth. In another response, the emphasis is on the independence of the science conducted by the institute, arguing that emeritus professors—who make up a significant portion of the NIPCC's scientific body—are more interested in the truth because they are not concerned with securing funding for their research; in other words, they would be more independent and objective, sharing public rather than private interests.

On the other hand, a strong predominance of the negative pole (a2), associated with attacks on the solidarity claims of Heartland's accusers, was observed. In this regard, the group's responses follow a relatively well-defined pattern, with statements suggesting that those denouncing the institute and its projects are motivated by private and political interests, lacking any commitment to the public interest. In these terms, Greenpeace is presented as a "radical environmentalist

group," a "global fraud" that seeks to induce people to donate millions of dollars based on false premises. SourceWatch, an initiative of the Center for Media and Democracy, is considered a "partisan advocacy group" that receives large sums of money from progressive foundations. The Union of Concerned Scientists, in turn, is described as an "extreme leftist movement" seeking to raise funds for its private interests. DeSmogBlog is said to be "founded by a convicted criminal" and "by a private public relations firm with several clients in the renewable energy sector," earning money specifically to defame fossil fuels. The National Science Teacher Association is accused of being a leftist group, with Heartland's response questioning whether they are truly educators and why they list the ultra-partisan Environmental Defense Fund as a resource on their website. The IPCC and the scientific consensus on climate change are also attacked, with the texts claiming that this "alleged consensus" stems from committees funded by government agencies whose mission is to find a new problem capable of generating resources to sustain the left and alarmist groups.

It was observed, therefore, that Heartland's responses systematically seek to undermine the claims of solidarity made by groups that carry out surveillance and accuse the institute of engaging in abusive practices, betting on a dispute between public and private interests. According to Mayhew's (1997) logic, this is a strategy aimed at stripping the complaint of its legitimacy by questioning the very common ground and the intentions behind it—which is done through a counter-accusation that a given actor is motivated by unidentified financial interests, thus not siding with the collective interest.

Furthermore, it was possible to identify elements of a pattern concerning who is most frequently targeted by Heartland's attacks: social movements and civil surveillance initiatives, activists, researchers, and specific columnists—in addition to the IPCC. Even when reacting to news published in major newspapers, the journalistic institution itself was not the main target of the attack rhetoric in any of the texts analyzed, and something similar occurred with political institutions. Two reasons may explain this selection. First, monitoring movements and initiatives face a significant challenge regarding their credibility. As Henriques and Silva (2017a) point out, the construction of this attribute usually stems from discourses that seek to highlight how these groups are formed by ordinary citizens defending the public interest—that is, a "we," the public, against "them," groups committing abuses. Heartland's responses suggest the dismantling of this argument by questioning precisely the characteristics of that "we" and the existence of private interests behind those groups—and how can we trust them if they are driven by other private interests that stand to gain financially or politically from such a complaint?

A second reason relates to Hearit's (1996) observation about how this counterattack strategy increases the communication burden on those denouncing a transgression, especially when it presents a series of questions that must be publicly addressed. We observed that Heartland's attacks often begin with the formulation of numerous questions about the operations, positioning, or statements of the actors denouncing the group, some of them quite general. This overload can be imagined as more effective against groups that lack a robust communication infrastructure to respond or even against those unable to easily secure a public platform to disseminate their responses. As for the IPCC, which at first glance would seem more robust due to its affiliation with the UN, it has no history of responding to denialists in mediatized debates—its role is as a specialized scientific panel in which debates occur among scientists during its activities, and whose results are made public.

On the other hand, findings regarding credibility claims point to a reversal of the solidarity claims. While Heartland's responses focus their efforts on the negative pole, questioning the interests of those who denounce abusive practices, in dealing with credibility claims, they mostly focus on the positive pole (b1), highlighting indicators that emphasize the reliability of the institute itself, rather than attacking adversaries (b2). This may stem from the qualification of those who denounce the institute's practices—for example, it is difficult to deny the credentials of scientists affiliated with major universities, making it more feasible to attack their morals and legitimacy. At the same time, the focus appears to fall on reinforcing Heartland's qualifications, even to give more weight to its attacks on solidarity claims—thus, it is common for the texts, even when attacking accusers, to also highlight Heartland's track record, emphasizing the institute's more than thirty years of operation, its number of publications, the qualifications of its team, and its reach.

Specifically regarding the NIPCC, the main credibility claims refer to the number of authors involved in the publications and the qualifications of the chief editors. Fred Singer, one of the editors, is cited as one of the world's most renowned physicists and a leading authority on climate change. Furthermore, the NIPCC would reportedly have a team of fifty scientists with recognized expertise, all holding doctorates in fields related to climatology. Even the length of the publications is frequently cited as a sign of the institute's credibility.

However, the texts go beyond simply invoking credibility, reaching the point of manufacturing new signals that would supposedly attest to the group's trustworthiness, even if these can easily be refuted through superficial research or knowledge of the climate change controversy. An example of the manufacturing of credibility is the statement, present in multiple responses, that the NIPCC's

publications have been cited over a hundred times in articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, which would indicate the theoretical robustness of those works. What these passages conceal is that most of these citations serve to denounce the abusive practices and strategies of skeptical groups like Heartland, which seek to manipulate science and manufacture doubt about climate change (Silva, 2017). Other forms of manufacturing credibility involve the use of fake petitions, also previously observed by Silva (2017).

Finally, eight of the texts analyzed contain indications of a self-victimization stance. A recurring form in which this aspect appears is exemplified by the attack on the National Science Teachers Association. In that text, Heartland repeatedly seeks to assume the position of merely "asking questions" and "protecting science," claiming to be under attack for bringing up common sense or simply "raising issues" before a partisan group. The text ends with the assertion that if the suggestion that "science teachers should teach science" is considered a transgression, then the group is guilty.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article explored a still underdeveloped facet in the literature on crisis communication: the modality of defense based on attack. In general terms, the text begins with the recognition that, in a context of disputed meanings, the strategic choice of attack must be considered alongside defensive modalities, even when these challenge normative and prescriptive ideals. The reasoning developed was anchored in the understanding that every crisis stems from an accusation that seeks to point out the occurrence of an action, its degree of offensiveness, and the responsibility for the given situation (Benoit, 2015). A crisis, in this sense, is a dispute over meanings that starts from this utterance—it grows as audiences begin to share the image projected by the accusation, shaking the reputation of the accused actors and demanding reparations. The traditional defense strategies pointed out in international literature (Benoit, 2015; Sellnow & Seeger, 2013) aim to mitigate people's perceptions of these elements by projecting discourses capable of competing with the meanings suggested by the accusations.

The defense based on attack, on the other hand, does not act directly by denying a fact, trying to reduce its offensiveness, or claiming exemption from responsibility. Instead, it questions the legitimacy and credibility of those making the accusations. If the unfolding of a crisis depends on people believing in and sharing the meanings presented in an accusation, then attacking the author of that accusatory speech should be regarded as a strategic possibility comparable to disputing the facts laid out by that discourse.

The decision to work with Mayhew's theory (1997) allows us to interpret these attacks from a rhetorical basis, bringing to the forefront the notions of claims to solidarity and credibility credits. Applying his theorization as analytical categories in a study of the Heartland Institute, we were able to observe some characteristics of these delegitimization strategies. In this regard, we highlighted that Heartland focuses its attacks on a dual attempt: to suggest that private interests drive surveillance initiatives and individuals who accuse it, and therefore do not share solidarity with the public, while at the same time mobilizing—and ultimately manufacturing—credibility credits aimed at attesting to its reputation as a renowned research institute.

Returning to Benoit's (2015) framework, we may speculate that the strategic modality of defense based on attack is also composed of a few tactics activated situationally, depending on the nature of the original accusation and the institutional characteristics of the parties involved. The most prevalent, according to the study of Heartland, would be the attempt at delegitimization through the contestation of claims to solidarity. A second, more limited, strand would be the attack directed at the credibility and expertise of a given actor. A third tactic would be the attempt to assume a position of victimhood within the framework of meaning, alleging persecution and pointing to perceived injustices.

More than establishing this initial list of tactics, we must move forward in understanding the broader strategy. First, it would be a mistake to assume that this operates in isolation. On the contrary, it should be understood as an element in the arsenal available to those facing crises, and it can be combined with other forms of defense. In Heartland's case, the direct attack on the solidarity claims of its critics occurs in parallel with the adoption of the "bolstering" notion regarding the organization's own credibility credits (Benoit, 2015; Ware & Linkugel, 1973).

Secondly, the analysis made more tangible an aspect theorized by Hearit (1996) about how this form of defense operates by shifting the terrain of the discursive dispute. Ultimately, leveling accusations against those who accuse implies relegating the material elements of the alleged transgressions to the background, shifting the focus to a discussion on reputation, ethics, and legitimacy—constituting, ultimately, a new *kategoria* which, if embraced by audiences, will trigger the need for new *apologia*s, leading to a "game-changer." It is significant, in this sense, that Heartland's responses address the content of the original accusations only superficially or selectively, focusing their efforts on (numerous) ethical questions and judgments about the behavior and actions of its accusers.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this article made no claim to assess the effectiveness or reverberations of these practices—aspects which require renewed empirical research. Based on the theoretical efforts presented here, a promising investigative path is outlined, addressing how this discursive modality operates and what its consequences may be. In this way, the notions of claims to solidarity and credibility credits constitute analytical markers that can assist in studying specific cases of counterattack in crisis scenarios. It remains to be questioned how shifts in the terrain of meaning disputes actually impact the circulation and unfolding of controversies—especially in an accelerated digital environment.

Moreover, the study conducted here shows that one cannot disregard the issue of power asymmetry that underlies these defense strategies based on attack. In particular, this element becomes more evident when observing the actions of civil surveillance initiatives (Henriques & Silva, 2017a) or independent journalism in formulating accusations against large organizations or established politicians—moments in which the differences in institutional structure, prior credibility, and media platform are immeasurable, making such asymmetry a critical vulnerability for these actors.

It makes sense to imagine that, in situations where there is a high asymmetry between accusers and the accused, tactics aimed at undermining and questioning the credibility of initiatives or individuals—as a way to strategically limit the impact of their actions—are more immediate and visceral. At the same time, it is plausible to imagine that counterattacks directed at more institutionalized groups may be more systemic and long-term, as seen in the attempts to delegitimize the Brazilian Supreme Court by far-right politicians after Jair Bolsonaro's defeat in the 2022 elections. At this point, the overload of demands created by this "game-changer," along with new opportunities to assume a victim position through various claims regarding solidarity and ethical grounds, must be critically examined and problematized in future studies. Thus, an interesting field of inquiry is established around this mode of action, with significant importance for expanding our understanding of specific aspects of communication in crisis contexts and the disputes of meaning surrounding them. **M**

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Historical world and speculative emancipation in *Dry ground burning* [a]

Mundo histórico e liberdade especulativa em Mato seco em chamas

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an aesthetic and political analysis of *Dry ground burning* (*Mato seco em chamas*, Adirley Queirós and Joana Pimenta, 2022). It investigates how the film produces speculative forms of emancipation in response to the dynamics of incarceration that permeate the social universe of *Sol Nascente*, a peripheral neighborhood of Brazil's Federal District. In order to comprehend the relationship between the work's fable and its realist attributes, stylistic analysis is combined with an intersectional perspective on power dynamics involving gender, race, and class. The guiding hypothesis is that the film fabulates micropolitics of everyday life through corporeality and practices of collective resistance, which is accomplished by mobilizing a filmic form rooted in procedures of contrast/contradiction, partially in dialogue with Brechtian epic theatre premises.
Keywords: *Dry ground burning*, Brechtian epic theatre, incarceration, micropolitics, quilombismo.

RESUMO

O artigo propõe uma análise estética e política de *Mato seco em chamas* (Adirley Queirós e Joana Pimenta). Investiga-se como a obra produz formas de emancipação especulativas face às dinâmicas de encarceramento que permeiam o universo social do Sol Nascente, periferia do Distrito Federal. Com o objetivo de compreender a relação entre a fábula e os predicados realistas do filme, conjuga-se a análise estilística com uma perspectiva interseccional sobre as dinâmicas de poder envolvendo gênero, raça e classe. A hipótese do artigo é a de que *Mato seco em chamas* fabula micropolíticas do cotidiano a partir da corporeidade e de práticas de resistência coletiva, mobilizando, para tal, uma forma fílmica fincada em procedimentos de contraste/contradição, em parcial diálogo com premissas do teatro épico brechtiano.
Palavras-chave: *Mato seco em chamas*, teatro épico de Brecht, encarceramento, micropolítica, quilombismo.

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Historical world and speculative emancipation in *Dry ground burning*

INTRODUCTION

Incarceration is one of the cornerstones of *Dry ground burning* (*Mato seco em chamas*, 2022) by Joana Pimenta and Adirley Queirós. Its looming presence not only structures the filmic form but also permeates the social universe of the filmed actresses. Yet, rather than merely instrumentalizing the afflictions of the historical world, the film recognizes and interrogates their own limitations. Confronted with the narrowness of the real, practices of freedom are fostered through speculative means. Emancipation is fabulated against, but also within, alongside structures of power. This article sets out to analyze this dynamic. Put differently, it examines how fiction rearranges the signs of the real in service of a commitment grounded in the micropolitics of a speculated everyday life, where ways of life beyond imprisonment dissolve, from parties and festivities to the means of community fruition.

In its fictional vein, *Dry ground* presents a faction of Black women engaged in covert commercial activities within the dystopian territory of Sol Nascente (Federal District), one of Brazil's largest favelas. The group led by Chitara, the "queen of the hood", clandestinely diverts an oil pipeline and commercializes gasoline at prices far below market rates. The film's conception harks back to what the directors describe as the "feeling of incarceration"[1] of the daily life in Sol Nascente. According to Pimenta[2], the presence of the prison system in this territory is more pronounced than that of schools or hospitals, structuring residents' lives into a time cycle of being arrested and released, of visiting detainees and receiving them during temporary prison furloughs. Within the narrative, Chitara's two main associates are former inmates: Andreia, whose political campaign for the Prison People's Party (Partido do Povo Preso, PPP) is financed by the gasoline contravention, and Léa, Chitara's sister, recently released from Colmeia, a women's prison in the Federal District.

Upon being screened and awarded at prestigious festivals such as *Cinéma du Réel* (France), the film continues a relatively recent phenomenon in Brazilian cinema, of which Adirley Queirós himself is one of the pioneers, alongside filmmakers such as Affonso Uchoa and André Novais. From the 2010s onward, for the first time in history, a series of domestic films made in peripheral neighborhoods by their own inhabitants reaches the big screens, renowned festivals, awards ceremonies, and streaming platforms. In other words, this so-called "peripheral" cinema, produced since the 1980s, began to gain ground in the distribution sector. The year 2014 proved paradigmatic, with the release of three landmark works: *White out, Black in* (*Branco sai, preto fica,* Adirley Queirós), *Neighbouring Sounds (A vizinhança do tigre*, Affonso Uchoa), and *She's Back on Thursday* (*Ela volta na quinta*, André Novais).

[1] Adirley Queirós in a panel discussion organized by the Forumdoc Festival in 2022.

[2] This account was likewise shared during the 2022 Forumdoc Festival.

This revitalizing wave in Brazilian cinema now welcomes *Dry ground burning*, a film with an aesthetic composition that recycles much of Adirley Queirós' previous accomplishments: decentralized protagonism (shared between three characters), the combination of fanciful and documental, temporal stratification, the collage of various filmic forms, the improvise, the anchorage on the outskirts of Ceilândia, the fictional political campaign, the visual motive for the fire, rap music, contraptions in the art direction, or even the multiple effects of Brechtian distancing. It also maintains the same production model. A minimal crew assumes multiple functions, in a dynamic of collective creation and filming extended in time. This lengthy procedural nature of the work favors the incorporation of reality's vicissitudes into the fictio as well as the intervention in the life of the participants and of the city. It also provides the conditions for deepening the bonds between those involved in the project.

Yet there are singularities that distinguish themselves from the other films, beginning with the 153-minute runtime and the codirection with Portuguese professor and documentarist Joana Pimenta—previously the cinematographer on *Once there was Brasília* (*Era uma vez Brasília*). Female characters achieve unprecedented prominence here, countering the tendency of peripheral narratives to center exclusively on male subjects, aligning the film with works such as *Baronesa* (director Juliana Antunes, 2017) and *Temporada* (directed and written by André Novais, 2018). Besides this shift in gender, many of the women onscreen are Black, while one of the protagonists, Léa, is bisexual.

Whereas *Is the city only one?* focused on Brasília's territorial politics and *White out, Black in* centred on racism and state violence, *Dry ground burning* positions the incarceration issue at its core—examined against the backdrop of Bolsonarist protofascism—, despite never directly depicting a prison itself. At first glance, the narrative appears to display the opposite of systemic incarceration that afflicts the characters, investing in the vigorous exercise of freedom: Andreia, Léa, and Chitara engage in lengthy conversations, host barbecues, attend concerts by the band Muleka 100 Calcinha (Pantyless Gyal). More significantly, they control certain means of production and are well-armed enough to defend them.

This preliminary study on Pimenta and Queirós' incendiary work adopts an intersectional framework of class, gender, and race. The analysis of the dynamics between imprisonment and freedoms attempts to avoid dichotomous thinking, particularly given *Dry ground's* non-linear, fragmented structure— one that rejects dualistic narratives, teleological trajectories, or rigid categorization. We will work with shifting layers of signification that alternate throughout the film,

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at times between incarceration and emancipatory programs, at others dissolving such polarities through speculative pathways.

Our investigation begins by mapping how the theme of incarceration is established, linking it to stylistic features that touch on Bertolt Brecht's conceptions of epic theatre and, subsequently, to historical-social data concerning imprisonment politics in Brazil. We then interrogate the possible sense of contradiction that enform the film's aesthetic and political complexity. The final sections focus on the fabulation of freedom through everyday micropolitics and peripheral *aquilombamento*.[3]

Throughout the article, we outline brief comparative movements not only between Dry Ground and Queirós' previous work, but also with contemporary Brazilian filmmakers, in order to better place the film in the director's trajectory and that of recent national cinema.

THEMATIC ARC AND BRECHTIAN CORRESPONDENCES

The references evoked by Adirley Queirós to describe the basis of his cinematographic culture, such as George Miller's Mad Max franchise or Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982), are present in *Dry Ground*'s fictional universe through its costumes, motorcycles, gasoline, machinery, and in the lighting. Yet, beyond creatively embracing a certain precariousness, the film's staging radically diverges from these works. A dramatic disinterest permeates *Dry ground burning*. In the opening scenes, as characters are introduced and the theme of incarceration emerges incrementally—like a slowly assembled mosaic—, Chitara commits a cold-blooded murder. The fateful gesture breaks the silence of the night, the victim oblivious to her looming threat. The summary and unsuspecting manner in which the murder takes place repels the building of suspense.[4]

A similar staging structures a later sequence when Chitara and Léa, alone at the gasoline depot, are threatened by invaders, perhaps state agents. The scenario is typical of action movies, with brandished weapons and lines like "Don't move or I'll blow everything sky-high". But the characters' lethargic movements and use of static, prolonged, and generally wide shots, drain the potential tension.

How to interpret the preference for a theatrical mise-en-scène, in which the scene "reports" the action rather than "embodying" it? Confronted with the predominant representational model of classical aesthetics, *Dry ground burning* is, so to speak, an strange work. We intend to clarify, succinctly, part of this strangeness in relation to narrative codes, through the film's correspondences with theatrical premises formulated by Bertolt Brecht.

[3] Quilombos are communities originally formed by Black people fleeing forced labor during the slavery regime in Brazil, which lasted for over three centuries and was officially abolished in 1888. The 1988 Brazilian Constitution recognized the rights of the descendants of these historical Quilombos to claim collective ownership of their ancestral lands. Today, contemporary Quilombos continue to serve as spaces of memory, cultural identity, and resistance for Black communities. The expression aquilombamento, therefore, means to become part of a Quilombo and enact practices based on its principles.

[4] The film's ironic, mocking portrayal of the police, its nominal antagonist, further illustrates the low-voltage suspense in Dry Ground Burning.

The German playwright aims to prevent epic theater from presenting actions as if they spontaneously emerged from characters' wills and decisions in the present time. His approach prioritizes mediating narrative instances—hence the term "epic", which evokes the literary tradition where a narrator presents situations experienced by others, in past times. In a text written in the late 1920s (Brecht, 1967, p. 46), Brecht argues that dramaturgy should introduce "new subjects", contemporary themes (he incidentally mentions gasoline refinement), which in turn will demand new formal elaborations.

Indeed, in his plays, the diegesis relinquishes the autonomy claimed by dramatic theater to constitute itself through friction with the social and historical fabric, reinventing itself through conjunctural themes. The author seeks to undo the primacy of suspense, that governing force of drama, in favor of argumentative elaborations. An admirer of Eisenstein, he also values the juxtaposition of relatively autonomous scenes, countering the principle of narrative linearity, whose dramatic arc is woven through causal relationships. Rather than promoting accession through the illusionist transparency of the so-called fourth wall, it provokes distancing effects designed to "furnish spectators with an examining and critical attitude toward the events presented" (Brecht, 1967, p. 160).

Dry ground burning appears to accede to the elements discussed. Returning to the opening sequence, we observe the first rupture with the regime of fiction. Léa is shown in a domestic, seemingly mundane situation, but soon breaks from the diegesis to deliver testimony directly to the camera. The setting and the type of scene (homely, with oral recounting of lived experiences before the camera) refer to documentary conventions. However, the supposed memories being recalled actually pertain to the fiction itself. The character assumes the role of narrator, contextualizing the fable for the viewer:

> I was just remembering this crazy time I got wrapped up in some wild business with my sister, Chitara. My sister made history in Sol Nascente. I remember it was back around 2019, I'd just gotten out after doing time for a drug dealing charge.

The testimony creates a double "distancing" effect: by revealing a narrative instance and by placing the action in the past relative to the present moment of narration. This positions the viewer in an unstable place between documentarizing and fictionalizing modes of reading (Odin, 2012). While there is no doubt the story about the diverted oil pipelines is fictional, might Léa have actually been recently released from prison?

Fiction and documentary work side by side, scene and world intertwine. The suspension of disbelief that fiction asks of the viewer is persistently "disrupted"

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by the direct dialogue with socio-historical context—ranging from explicit quotations ("Brazil above all, God above everyone"[5]), to strictly documentary scenes or even the elaboration of chronic problems in society (such as marginalization or incarceration), to the imaginative addressing of a counterattack by the oppressed. Without fully abandoning storytelling or audience identification with its protagonists, the film keeps viewers in a state of active reflection—precisely the effect Brecht theorized to ensure that the audience is not "transported into the action", but remains "active", "awake".

In the scene following her "testimony", the prison theme briefly resurfaces when Léa speaks with her mother about her incarcerated son, Guilherme. Returning to the fabulated universe, she visits her brother Cocão, who explains that the entire region where they used to live was converted into federal territory due to construction of a massive prison—built through convict labor under compulsory work programs. It makes evident a vicious cycle of a problem that aggravates as it feeds back on itself.

Presented as a punitive system failing its supposed mission of social rehabilitation, prison begets more crime, more inmates, and consequently more prisons. The editing pointedly intercuts this with shots of Chitara and Andreia working on a rudimentary brick production line, as if they too were inmates constructing the new detention center. This arrangement of scenes suggests that manual labor itself, typically grueling and underpaid, conjures its own form of imprisonment. Such juxtaposition leaves a margin for the viewer to connect the threads, echoing Eisenstein's montage logic that Brecht incorporated into his theater.

The suspicion of a Brechtian legacy finds further justification through contradiction. The playwright himself wrote that he "could not bear anything but contradiction" (Brecht quoted in Pasta, 2010, p. 39). José Antonio Pasta (2010) argues that in Brecht's work, it is fundamental to "borrow from the adversary many characteristics that grant them strength, paradigmatic value, and replacement capacity" (p. 42). Sergio de Carvalho, in turn, observes that:

> in quality epic theater... there is no conventional dramatic opposition between the individual and the pressure of abstract history. It is rather a dialectical relationship, contradictory... one witnesses highly ambiguous relational behaviors on stage, suspensions of the flow of time where contradictions become manifest. (I. Costa, 2008, p. 170)

An assertive position on the film's hypothetical accession to Brecht's dramaturgical principles would require exhaustive examination of both the playwright's

extensive bibliography and his exegetes in film studies. For now, adopting a Brechtian-inspired hermeneutic has enabled a preliminary engagement with the film, revealing the complex narrative strategies of *Dry ground burning*. From this initial approach, we retain the valuation of contradiction, which we will be examine further ahead.

THE NARROWNESS OF THE REAL

Queirós and Pimenta's mise-en-scène tensions the fabulated universe through predicates typically associated with realist aesthetics. They revisit the hybrid documentary-fiction regime seen in Queirós' earlier films—a theme that research has connected to a "global tendency in contemporary fiction cinema: the use of a documentary-inspired realism that accentuates the potential for estrangement in the face of speculative fictions" (Suppia, 2017, p. 13).

However, compared to his previous filmography, *Dry ground burning*'s staging appears to strengthen its realist inflection through the predominance of static long takes, the rarefaction of drama via emphasis on the everyday, and the partial reduction of mobility of the bodies in scene. Through these attributes, the film aligns with works shown in contemporary international festival circuits, particularly those categorized as slow cinema, "an unstructured cinematic movement comprising disparate films and practices that are conceptualized as a group thanks to their comparable style" (De Luca & Barradas Jorge, 2016, p. 4).

Intertwined with the codes of science fiction, the realistic and "slow" nature of the staging heightens the significance of the historical world of the women of Sol Nascente. A sociological analysis might readily suggest a mirroring between *Dry Ground* and historical-social data on female incarceration in Brazil. The profiles of Léa and Andréa, for instance, partially coincide with what is predominant in statistics of the female prison population, evidence of criminal justice's selectivity: Black women and of a low level of education, typically charged with drug trafficking (Infopen, 2017).

Meanwhile, the reiteration of imprisonment in the characters' daily lives indirectly traces back to two factors. One the one hand, to Brazil's soaring female prison population[6], which places the country in the unfortunate third position in the global incarceration ranking (Fair & Walmsley, 2022). On the other hand, to the historical underpinnings of Brazil's racist punitive ideology of the criminal justice system, stretching from the Imperial period[7] to the Republic[8]. This includes all sorts of legal persecution of Black cultural expressions and monetary functions exercised by Black people—such as the one carried out by positivist criminology in the 19th and 20th centuries (Schwarcz, 1993) and by

[6] Over 16 years, Brazil's female prison population surged by 656%, rising from 6,000 in 2000 to 42,000 in 2016. This increase far outpaces the growth in the male incarcerated population, which saw a 293% rise during the same period, from 169,000 in 2000 to 665,000 in 2016 (Infopen, 2017).

[7] Consider Borges' (2019) retrospective on the differential penal treatment of enslaved persons, reduced to private property rather than rights-bearing subjects protected by law.

[8] Santos (2014) examines how the "racial and sexist crimes of our State [which] also relied

the civil-military dictatorship between 1960 and 1980 (Nascimento, 2016). The data postulates criminalization and marginalization supported by legal apparatuses, with incarceration ensuring the justice system reproduces inequalities sustained by markers of race, class, and gender.

Rather than acquiescing to a rigid projection of the aforementioned sociological arsenal onto *Dry Ground*, we are interested in how "the *external* (in this case, the social)… operates not as cause or meaning, but as an element playing a specific role in constituting the structure, thereby becoming *internal*" (Candido, 2006 p. 14). In other words, it is worth assessing the extent to which the film captures the signs of reality, embracing them, refuting them, reconfiguring them under alternate designs, or even dissolving material-world constraints.

At first glance, the socio-historical underpinning of imprisonment appears suggested by the filmic style, "marked by silent contemplation, dedramatization, by time that does not flow smoothly, 'pooling' in each sequence, without precise narrative function" (Mesquita, 2022, p. 107), in an atmosphere of immobility and endlessly renewed waiting. Nevertheless, such argument is subject to an inverse interpretation: one could argue the staging actually grants the characters in scene greater freedom, releasing them from mainstream cinema's narrative imperatives, in which "actors' movements may be rigorously subordinated to narrative economy" (Naremore, 1990, p. 38) or to audiovisual genre codes.

Rather than being captive by dictates of the script, dramaturgy, or production timelines, subject to action, the gasoline women's restrained gestuality and limited mobility, especially Léa's, invites contemplation. The body lends the image a sense of unique presence, immediacy, and concrete duration—akin to what Schoonover (2016) identifies in the corporeality of exponents from the slow cinema, in dialogue with André Bazin and Gilles Deleuze's reflections on modern cinema. Would then filmic form be inherently resistant to the historical world's afflictions?

A defining sequence in *Dry Ground* underscores the film's partial alignment with the aforementioned data. A shot shows the character walking alone at night, drifting through a desolate street in Sol Nascente. Framed at the center of the image, she approaches the camera as it retreats via a tracking shot. Armed, she glances warily from side to side and behind her, on the lookout for an enemy capable of surprising her. Gradually, she nears a spot of darkness (Figure 1); as she enters it, her body converts into silhouette, on the verge of disappearance. A cut follows, and in the next close-up shot, Chitara states: "Léa got locked up again today".

Figure 1

Note. Frames of (left.) and *Seven years in May* (right).

Aligned with other contemporary Brazilian films that employ nighttime temporality as a signifier of social experience, *Dry ground* depicts the character/actress's return to prison through her entry into a penumbral zone (Figure 1, left). This action evokes a cinematographic trope: crossing through shadow alludes to the risk of a character getting lost or to the threat of danger or the supernatural or even death itself (Aumont, 2012). A similar scene of passage through darkness appears in *Seven years in May* (Affonso Uchôa, 2017) (Figure 1, right), when it demarcates the recollection of trauma from an episode of police violence. In it, the character converted into a silhouette indicates a liminal condition, halfway between a material body and a spectral avatar (Costa Junior, 2022), figuring the survivor's state of one who "experienced in their flesh the rupture: a disconnection from family and daily life, a sort of 'living-dead' fate" (Mesquita, 2019, p. 179).

In *Dry ground*, Léa's arrest during filming, annunciated by her conversion into shadow and disappearance into turbid space, equally triggers a return to a traumatic episode. The subsequent scene features actress Joana Darc (breaking character as Chitara) giving testimony about the arrest. Her account of her sister's reincarceration takes on a somber, almost mournful tone. The event reawakens memories of Léa's prior six-year confinement. As Joana's voiceover recounts this period, the images show the actress visiting an abandoned house—likely Léa's—surrounded by tall, dry grass. Signs of absence proliferate, traces left by the subtraction of social life.

The interplay between oral testimony and imagery alludes to the present haunted by the past, as well as the liminal, deathlike state of compulsory disconnection from daily life, to the corrosive effects of Léa's absence from the family. The sequence is tinted with the risk of "social death" (Borges, 2019, p. 22), a situation in which subjects hardly regain their citizenship and return fully to public life due to the stigma left by the experience of incarceration.

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The penal system's overt grip on Sol Nascente's women crystallizes in one of the film's final sequences. A female voice reads the police report while the visual track shows official documents. The authorities' narrative of Léa and Mônica's imprisonment lacks contextualization, social and subjective depth, bereft of any imagination beyond stripping the attached photographs of what images do not always reveal. The text fixates exclusively on bare facts—Léa traded crack doses for deodorants or cellphones—as if these sufficed to comprehend her situation, condemn a person, and deprive her of freedom for years, ignoring seclusion's near-total failure to enable social reintegration. The sequence exposes the judicial system's reductive inefficiency and punitive mindset, long combated by critical criminology.

This stands in stark contrast to the mise-en-scène's prior attentiveness to Léa's physiognomy, gestures, and personal narrative. The sequence effectively establishes a mode of representation in which the photographs, devoid of temporal flow and marked by the typical muteness of archival documents (Leandro, 2016), promote a desubjectification of the character, a reduction of her person to the codes of criminal justice.

While the film never downplays the severity of incarceration and its consequences for the life of Sol Nascente's women, it likewise refuses to settle into a passive, singular critique of Brazil's incarceration politics. The fabulation persistently responds to the narrowness of the real: after the police report sequence, with the petrified and reifying rigidity of visual archives, the editing reserves the film's final scene for the release from prison, with Léa's return to freedom.

CONTRAST AND CONTRADICTION

Since *Is the city only one?* (2011), the elaboration of contrasts has grounded the critical perspective of Adirley Queirós' cinema. In this film, visual and sound archives of Brasília's idolaters are juxtaposed with testimonies, stories, images, and sounds from Ceilândia. The resulting contrasts foreground the satellite city's misfortunes, expose the inconsistency of past governmental promises, and confront the celebratory prism of hegemonic historiography.

The etymology of the verb "to contrast" is eloquent to reflect on the filmmaker's initiative. The term entered Portuguese by derivation of the Italian *contrastare*, formed by the prefix *contra* (against) and the root word *stare* (to stand). In its primary sense, predominant until the 17th century, "to contrast" aligns closely with "to contest". Thus, contrast distinguishes itself from mere difference by inherently implying disagreement and tension.

One of the strategies present in *Is the city only one*? and *Dry ground burning* for accentuating the center-periphery contrast involves seeking or inventing the resonances between the two contexts, points of contact designed to trigger comparison. Tellingly, Dildu, one of the protagonists of *Is the city only one?*, aspires to be a politician, the profession most emblematic of Brasília. One might infer that the comparative effect would be far less pronounced if, say, Dildu were a rapper like other characters in the film. Where difference is extreme, the comparatist gesture may fail to emerge. Hence, the vertex the film creates between the city that embodies national politics and the one forged through political neglect does not promote identification between the two contexts; on the contrary, it emphasizes their distance and engages confrontation.

Popular, peripheral, Black, with casual clothes and a "gangster" political jingle as well as an oratory marked by slang, the candidate Dildu radically deviates from the capital's politician stereotype. His demands are extremely concrete and aimed at the margins (compensation for former Vila do IAPI residents, one-Real movie theater, reduced transport fares...), a fact equally rare in traditional political campaigns. The mockumentary makes evident both the importance and the impossibility of this character's existence within the framework of the current political system, whose very functioning is contested.

Such mechanism appears in varied forms in *Dry ground burning*, through reiterated references to the Brazilian political context following the coup d'état against President Dilma Rousseff and, especially, to the rise of the far right, whose leading figure is Jair Bolsonaro. The numerous evocations of the historical world incite to envision the gasoline women's enterprise as a sort of poetic response to that extra-filmic context.

Once again, points of contact between the set of peripheral characters and certain hegemonic power are enumerated to trigger the contestatory "game". We may cite, as agents of contrast or even of a process of complexification: the fireworks set off both in the capital and in Sol Nascente; the flags raised in Brasília and the banner fluttering atop the observatory of the oil drilling site; the firearms emblazoned on Jair Bolsonaro supporters' t-shirts and wielded by marginalized women; or, further, the religiosity on both sides, in the farcical police's rallying cry ("God above all") and in the long sequence of the evangelical service attended by Andreia. To resume to *Is the city only one?*, Andreia too is engaged with party politics, campaigning through the periphery's streets, just as the capital's public space teems with supporters of a presidential candidate.

Indeed, in Cristina Amaral's editing, the parallels multiply, functioning as a springboard for comparison or even symbolic confrontation. Some of these elements may distill, within the film's experience, a certain sense of contradiction,

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particularly when considering certain agendas of progressive factions that share the film's "adversary". The gasoline women's group sells a polluting product, concentrates power in Chitara's figure, and demonstrates a certain authoritarianism when negotiating the *motoboys*' (delivery riders) commission: "Here's the deal: anyone that don't accept Chitara's offer can walk, got it? She the one who calls the shots here. Take it or leave it"[9].

One might infer, as José Antonio Pasta (2010) writes about Brecht's poetics, that Joana Pimenta and Adirley Queirós seek to "work with instruments produced by the enemy, to get dangerously close to what must be refused, to construct the new under the specter of the old" (p. 42). Thus, "we see that the battle is waged on a knife's edge, in a dangerous balance between the simultaneous and contradictory needs to resemble the enemy and to be different from them" (Pasta, 2010, pp. 42–43).

Yet it is imperative to acknowledge that these evoked contradictions lack nuance. Despite their profit-seeking aims and Léa's claim that they "made a lot of money", the characters' material conditions, visible in their homes and worksite, reveal scarcity. The group's hierarchical structure does not undermine their collectivity; Chitara neither acts as a despot nor exempts herself from manual labor as leader. Dialogue among members remains equitable, free from bossiness.

During negotiations with the delivery riders, Chitara ultimately concedes, settling on a commission rate lower than the initial demand. Here, bargaining space exists, and agreements are reached directly, face-to-face, unlike corporate models or even representative democracies. Even Léa's butch sexuality does not merely replicate heteronormative behavior, since her "masculinity" in a "female body" carries what Butler (2016) theorizes as a condition that destabilizes both identities, "internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled" (p. 214), thus producing and structuring desire in complex ways.

The visual composition itself highlights the disproportion between society's hegemonic structures and the peripheral organization of the gasoline women. One of the ways this takes place is through the figure-background relationship. For instance, when we see just one or two characters in the foreground, in their improvised bunker in the satellite city, while the background stretches toward the horizon, flooded with lights from the capital. In Brasília, countless jubilant fireworks; in Sol Nascente, a single flare signaling merchandise is available; in the capital, excessive green-and-yellow flags, while in the protagonists' domain, a solitary banner guarded by an equally lone sentinel. Even as the film contemplates the grandeur and strength of Black peripheral women, its editing and

visual composition present them as a small island of resistance surrounded by an oceanic oppressive system.

Another type of plasticity provoking a similar effect involves wide general shots in which the characters appear miniaturized within a setting or location that embodies systemic elements of exploitation and marginalization. At least three examples can be evoked: when Chitara and Andreia practically vanish amid stacks of bricks at the precarious brickyard where they work (Figure 2, on the left); the shot framing them surrounded by towering wood piles they must transport using a single small wheelbarrow; or the scene in which Léa and Cocão cross, on a modest motorcycle, the pharaonic yet deserted construction site of the future federal prison (Figure 2, on the right).

Figure 2

Note. Frames of *Dry ground burning.*

In this way, besides the nuances already revealed, the scales are vastly distinct, as are the profiles of the individuals embodying these two opposing poles, rendering them unmistakable. It establishes who is fighting for subsistence, in a dynamic of resistance, and who is operating to preserve historical privileges through punitive logic. Across different levels, then, the apparent contradiction ultimately serves to amplify the film's nuances and complexities.

The composite fabric, grounded in dissensus, suggests that when dealing with hegemonic force that is pro-gun, prejudiced, and protofascist, there may be no alternative but confrontation, as endorsed by the closing rap track ("DF Faroeste" by Mente Consciente): amid the "bang-bang", the "gang wars", "the best defense is attack". We may, therefore, interpret what is stated, declining the meaning of imprisonment as a lack of alternative—if not as a legitimization of the violence of the oppressed against imposed domination. A perspective that, while vaguely reminiscent of an "aesthetic of violence" (Xavier, 2007, p. 183) from Brazilian modern cinema, takes form less through direct class conflict and more through the pursuit of means of survival within contexts of social vulnerability.

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By embracing a certain degree of contradiction, or even moments of mirroring between domination and insubordination, Pimenta and Queirós reject idealization around heroes or facile dramatic simplifications. Bertolt Brecht also did the same, to indicate that certain issues are systemic rather than moral, problems that implicate everyone, including those who combat them, inevitably spawning contradictions. The latter testify the desire to stage historical bodies in full complexity, without "sanitizing" the real to force protagonists into perfect alignment with progressive agendas of their time, though this hardly prevents them from being heroic, legendary. The filmmakers prioritize the speculative articulation of aesthetics and politics (examined later) over rigid leftist political frameworks (eco-sustainability, political correctness, etc.). Ergo, *Dry ground* is absolutely irreducible to what would be a literal response to the context evoked. It generates its own complex, multilayered "universe", which even dialogues with genre cinema codes.

And what if the nationalist slogan "the oil is ours"[10] became "we got the oil", placing the "black gold" under peripheral communities' control? What if Black women united, armed themselves, and seized the means of production? Such were the provocations that fueled the filmmakers' creative process. Through them, and in tension with realist aesthetics, the fable takes hold.

IN THE CRACKS OF DISCIPLINE

As the prison theme is gradually scrutinized (becoming undeniable with the PPP and Léa and Mônica's reimprisonment), the fictional narrative constructs forms of resistance, similar to what takes place in *Once there was Brasília's* (kill the president) and *White out, Black in's* (blow up Brasília). The pulse driving *Dry ground* beats between exposing a dystopian conjuncture and reacting against it, or in other terms, between imprisonment and conjuring. This dynamic is condensely illustrated in the scene where women throw a Brazilian funk party in a bus until, abruptly, the passengers-revelers transform into uniformed inmates, seated and policed. The PPP's formation is indicative—as Brecht would say—that the status quo is not immutable, but transformable through the action of the subjects. While faced with the logic of incarceration, therefore, there is margin for reaction and creation.

But resistance in *Dry ground* does not necessarily emerge as a direct reaction to imprisonment. At times, it manifests in the reclamation of daily life, of a way of life beyond both penal oppression and the stigmas imposed on Sol Nascente's women. Scenes of leisure, conversation, and breaks during shifts at the clandestine oil refinery mark this path in which freedom transcends reactive

10 This popular slogan played a central role in garnering support for the funding of Petrobras, Brazil's state-owned oil company, in 1953.
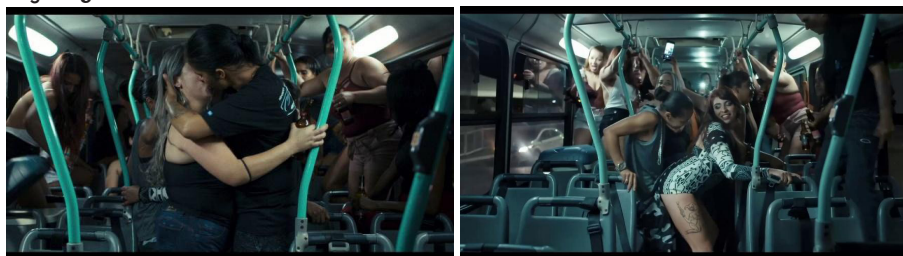
posturing, slipping, however temporarily, beyond the confinement dichotomy, manifesting it in itself. Some sequences exemplify this: the gasoline women's barbecue, the sisters sharing coffee, attending the Muleka 100 Calcinha concert, and the scene of the bus funk party. We will analyze the latter as emblematic of the film's emancipation discourse, operating not at macro-structural levels, but through the particular—that of the lesbian body.

The scene lasts approximately five minutes. In it, Léa smokes, drinks, and dances with other women to the funk song *Helicóptero* by DJ Guuga and MC Pierre. The lyrics depict a sexual encounter in a helicopter between two men (pilot and copilot) and a woman who is forced to decide between sleeping with both or being thrown out. Yet the song's blatant misogyny cannot withstand the women's subversive reception: in this exclusively female space, a collective of lesbians energetically sing and dance to the funk, converting its patriarchal, phallocentric semantics into bodily potential. Like *Helicóptero*, the bus itself seems transformed by their performance. Starting with a frontal wide shot, the decoupage becomes contaminated by what it films: the perspective shifts to close-ups amid the dance floor, though always with a fixed camera. Standing on seats or perched atop chairbacks—rather than seated properly—, the women revel between dance and hookups (Figure 3). In the cramped space, their bodies frequently exceed the frame, heightening the visual chaos, a disorder that turns the bus interior into a nightclub.

Figure 3

Note. Frames from *Dry ground burning*.

The scene analysis can be framed through a specific queer phenomenological lens, with its focus on the interplay between sexuality and how subjects inhabit and are inhabited by space. For Sarah Ahmed (2006), repeated hegemonic gender performances ultimately configure certain spaces as extensions of heteronormativity, rendering deviant sexualities inadmissible or out of place. The tension the author stablishes is with a being-in-the-world queer[11], whose inherent obliquity fosters (dis)orientation, a torsion of culturally straight spaces.

11 The term is used by the author to denote both what is oblique or exists "off line" (spatially or metaphorically) and practices of non-normative sexualities, "which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 161).

More specifically, we draw on her assertion that "lesbian desires create spaces, often temporary spaces that come and go with the coming and going of the bodies that inhabit them." (Ahmed, 2006, p. 106). This occupation engenders different forms of sociability and, through modes of dwelling, spaces where the lesbian body can extend itself, establishing deviant moments via bodily contact, in a daily negotiation that produces fleeting counter-normative existences.

The funk party on the bus, in some measure, evokes this capacity for spatial (dis)orientation through queer bodies. Specifically, it is the "contingency of lesbian desire" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 107) that here carve escape routes, suspending heteronormative disciplinary apparatuses and the broader networks of oppression and imprisonment from these peripheral women's daily lives. Outside this pleasure microcosm, delineated by deviant manner in which the bodies inhabit the space, one of the shots frames the Three Powers Square in Brasília through the bus windows. Facing the nerve center of national political power, the sequence forges a dissident space-time where marginalized ways of life that resist at the edges of the nation's grand interests.

The sequence revisits, through its predominant focus on gender and sexuality, a theme that in *White out, Black in* was primarily framed through race: culture in general, and parties in particular, as spaces of dissidence where peripheral subjects liberate their bodies from state surveillance and discipline. This film's central motif is the police invasion and subsequent massacre at the Quarentão Black dance party in Ceilândia on March 5, 1986. The event is reconstructed through archival photographs (Figure 4), diegetic music, and sounds evoking the police's arrival. These fragments are sutured together through oral narration by the character Marquim. Crucially, beyond trauma, the memory underscores the significance of Black dance parties for peripheral Black communities. In 1980s Brazil, these events were key spaces of cultural reference, social bonding, and the identity affirmation of *negridade* (Blackness) (Nascimento cited in Ratts, 2006). Occasions where, by the gesture, corporeality rejected ancestral scars and present pains.

In *Ôri* (Raquel Gerber, 1989), Beatriz Nascimento discusses how Black dance parties were spaces of intersection between corporeality, memory, and freedom: it was "as if the body itself were the document. No wonder dance represents a moment of liberation for Black people. Black people cannot be free until they've forgotten captivity. Not forgetting in their gestures that they are no longer captives". In this sense, in addition to being a starting point for speculative fiction, *White out, Black in*'s Black dance party becomes the cornerstone of peripheral Black freedom—relentlessly criminalized and punished by repressive state forces.

Figure 4

Note. Still photographs in *White out, Black in*.

Beyond Queirós' work, *Dry ground*'s funk party sequence as an act of dissident joy stands alongside other films in contemporary Brazilian cinematography, particularly queer ones. They feature "peripheral, Black, poor, and deviant bodies, mobilized by dissident desires, constantly moving through daily resistances at the margins, in the grind of everyday life, yet also imbued with reinvention and pleasure" (Sousa & Brandão, 2021, p. 60). A more direct dialogue could be established with *Body Electric* (directed by Marcelo Caetano, 2017), in which workers returning home on a bus after a day of leisure to the sound of *Marrom Bombom*, played by the band Os Morenos. Among a predominantly cis-heterosexual male group, Wellington, a Black, effeminate gay character, takes a pair of soccer shorts and wears it in such a way that it transforms into a dress. This queering of masculine attire and his mocking corporeal performance spark an affective regime of joy that "proficiently dialogues with queer forms of knowing and experiencing the world" (Wlian, 2022, p. 16).

QUILOMBO IN THE HOOD

In dialogue with other contemporary Brazilian films, such as *Bacurau* (directed by Kléber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, 2019) and *Tremor Iê* (directed by Elena Meirelles and Lívia de Paiva, 2019), *Dry ground burning* mobilizes an escape route from hegemonic systems of oppression based on subalternized groups forming alliances and collectives. The gasoline women demarcate a space of autonomy and life-affirmation, advancing ideas of liberation despite Sol Nascente's socioeconomic afflictions. But what if the gregarious inclination of these predominantly Black and Brown women were read through the lens of *aquilombamento*? What if the filmic fable were to channel the incandescent potential envisioned by Quilombola master Antonio Bispo dos Santos (2023), when he considered that: "[o]n the day that Quilombos lose their fear

of favelas, that favelas trust Quilombos and unite with Indigenous villages, all in confluence, the asphalt will melt!" (p. 45)?

If *White out, Black in* mobilizes the imagination of other possible futures for peripheral Black populations through Afrofuturism (Freitas, 2015), we argue that *Dry ground* allows us to articulate a connection between collective action and the practice of *aquilombamento*. In other words, a *Quilombo in the hood*. Here, the goal is not to force an equivalence, nor to claim that Queirós and Pimenta intentionally framed the "gasoline women gang" within the principles of a Quilombo. Instead, the aim is to draw connections between the practices of the fictional universe and a lineage of resistance among Brazil's Black communities, in order to advance the comprehension of a collective organization based on the possibilities of existence beyond the cyclical logic of imprisonment that the criminal justice system imposes on the women of Sol Nascente.

The conception of Quilombo that informs our analysis draws on scholars such as Beatriz Nascimento and Abdias Nascimento. Both redefined Quilombos in Brazil between the 15th and 19th centuries, during the period of enslavement, as models of emancipatory social organization and of the Black population's affirmation of ethnic and cultural bonds. Beatriz, in particular, played a pivotal role in critically reassessing *Quilombola* practices within Brazilian historiography. Among other contributions, she identified a prevailing tendency to analyze Quilombos primarily through the lens of armed resistance against the dominant regime, that is, as insurgent projects. Besides this significance, however, she advocates—and we find this productive for analyzing *Dry ground*—lines of continuity between historical Quilombos and contemporary society.

> What we mean is that the Quilombo officially ended with abolition. But it persists as a resource for resistance and confrontation against the official society that is being established, though no longer under that name nor facing the same form of repression. Given that Black people and other oppressed groups continue to inhabit spaces like *favelas* and peripheral areas of the city, constrained not only by labor marginalization but also by racial marginalization, we can say that the Quilombo, though transformed, endures. (Nascimento, 2021, p. 136)

In the terms Beatriz proposes, the Quilombo can be understood as both a Black existential stance for historical preservation and group survival, in the sense of "a social settlement and organizational form that creates a new internal and structural order" (Nascimento, 2021, p. 124). The understanding of an autonomous social system in face of the dominant regime, which drives Black historical and ethnic consciousness, is further developed by Abdias Nascimento.

Equally attuned to the network of continuities between historical practices and contemporary forms of Black resistance—including those that are socially accepted and the ones that occur on the margins of the law—, the author mobilizes the term *quilombismo* through praxis.

This unity, subject to historical time and geographic context, encompass "human, ethnic, and cultural affirmation, simultaneously integrating liberation practices and taking command of one's own history" (Nascimento, 1980, p. 255). Central to his argument are alternative production relations distinct from those prevalent in the dispossessive labor economy, liberating Black people from the yoke of techno-capitalist exploitation to achieve a true human condition. For ultimately, Quilombo "means fraternal and free assembly, solidarity, communal living, and existential communion" (Nascimento, 1980, p. 263).

Researchers such as Tatiana Costa (2020) have drawn on the notion of *aquilombamento* to reflect on two interconnected dimensions: first, the contexts of film production, curation, criticism, and academic research carried out by Black practitioners in the field cinema; and second, the ethico-aesthetic programs of the filmic works. Regarding this second dimension, Costa builds on what Beatriz Nascimento called "participatory fiction" in her analysis of works from the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theater). These artistic productions reinforced Brazilian nationhood through the participation of Black popular resistance to forms of oppression and "an affirmation of the 'Black person' as a possibility of humanity in the collective imagination" (T. Costa, 2020, p. 227).

If incarceration haunts the lives of women in Sol Nascente, it is in the *Quilombo of the hood* that forms of freedom—and even the right to daily life, to the ordinary—are forged. Thereby, the "gasoline women gang" emerges as an autonomous society confronting a dominant regime. The bonds that tie these women's lives together constitute a collective political lived experience, grounded in an amalgam of economic survival, liberatory struggle, and sisterhood.

The centrality of commercial activity in the film reveals, as both initial impetus and pragmatic basis for the *aquilombamento* of Brown and Black peripheral women, the possibility of dignified livelihoods. The formation of a collective becomes imperative for executing an economic practice structured across multiple stages—from petroleum extraction to gasoline commerce. Their division of tasks rejects employer hierarchies and directly counters dispossessive labor forms, such as those depicted in scenes of Chitara and Andreia's toil at the brickyard. This internally organized, collective production system is even able to guarantee, for instance, the gasoline women's barbecue at shift's end.

A

A second direction is the creation of the PPP, which exposes the limitations of practices based exclusively on illegal economic activity (clandestine gasoline commerce) and, as a corollary, the need to have access to a legal-party context (politics) to secure expanded rights. Here, *aquilombar-se* (to become part of a Quilombo) does not mean retreating into a struggle for mere self-preservation. The PPP's formation points to the existence of an inclusive and convergent political project, to the desire to pave the way to freedom for other subalternized peripheral groups. Such commitment materializes through alliances with the groups of delivery riders, advocating for the legalization of their trade, and achieves its visual crescendo in the film's closing *motociata* (motorcycle parade). With Léa riding pillion on a motorcycle and her brother at the wheel, the long shot gradually fills with riders who enter the scene through side streets and alleys, forming a growing procession that seals the alliances of the hood.

No less crucial to the autonomous organization of Sol Nascente's women is the network of sisterhood they establish between them. Amid the constant vigilance required by the various stages of clandestine oil refining, the barbecue stands out as an emblematic moment of coexistence. As Mesquita (2022) notes, the scene juxtaposes, "without discriminating them, the two main motifs of *Dry ground* (dramaturgical, but not only): the periphery's appropriation of petroleum (the directors' more deliberate fictional element) and memories of crime and prison (rooted in the actresses' lived experience)".

The barbecue, along with party scenes, marks a rare moment of relaxation—including of their bodies—for the women, separate from their constant survival struggle. Even Lea and Andreia's recollections of imprisonment carry a subversive humor toward the prison's discipline network, whether through stories of the days dancing funk inside or Lea's anecdotes about her romantic adventures. It is also during the barbecue that the film deliberately fills the frame with all the women together, creating a visual composition of collectivity woven through exchanged glances and words, softening its inclination towards individual or paired shots.

The hypothesis that the gasoline women's collective political organization, grounded in the triad of survival, liberation, and sisterhood, constitutes an *aquilombamento* warrants a more effective development in future research. For now, it is crucial to shed light on an ethical foundation shared by both groupings: the formation of a collective-autonomous social structure that consolidates Black resistance and confrontation against a dominant order and its dispossessive structure, while pursuing a regime that is dignified and worth living. This reclamation of *aquilombamento* is timely, given the historical foundations of the punitive criminal system and the penal selectivity under the enslavement

mode of production: since mass incarceration politics carry this historical legacy, it is justifiable to reactivate the historical struggles of Black people and their resonances in the present.

The inclusion of *Dry ground burning* as a new piece in the puzzle of recent Brazilian cinema would prompt us to revisit other works through the lens of the imprisonment/freedom dyad. While incarceration is explicitly thematic in films like *Seven years in May* and *Tremor Iê,* a tacit sense of imprisonment also permeates works such as *White out, Black in*, where Black men appear atomized, besieged in their peripheral homes. One could further extrapolate the literal sense of these terms to read incarceration as a threat, the looming horizon for youth in Neighboring Sounds, or the precarious, uprooted condition to which the migrant worker seems doomed to in Araby (João Dumans and Affonso Uchoa, 2017). Lastly, it is significant that both *Neighboring Sounds,* with the scene of skateboarding teens roaming the city, and *Araby*, through its final voice-over monologue, conclude with openings toward a horizon of greater freedom or insubordination. The same thing takes place in *Dry ground burning's*, with the prison letter from Léa to Chitara: "aight, listen up, take over that whole fuckin' system out there and then come bust me out", "next month we gonna roll hard in the streets". ◼

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Paradigms of imaginary in Communication studies

Paradigmas do imaginário nos estudos de Comunicação

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ABSTRACT
The research aims to identify how the concept of the imaginary is defined in Communication studies in Brazil and to determine whether there are paradigmatic models in its approaches. To this end, a *corpus* was established based on the five years preceding the beginning of data collection for the study that gave rise to this work (2021). The texts are analyzed and classified according to the heuristic principles they propose. The study concludes that there is no stable definition of the imaginary, but three paradigmatic groups were identified and labeled as follows: the first, predominant, conceives the imaginary as social representation; the second, intermediate, understands the imaginary as allegorical inversion; and the third, marginal, treats the imaginary as ontological presence.
Keywords: Communication, imaginary, modeling, paradigms.

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RESUMO
A pesquisa tem por objetivo indicar o que se define como imaginário na pesquisa em Comunicação no Brasil e verificar se existem modelos paradigmáticos em suas abordagens. Para tanto, constitui-se um *corpus* considerando os cinco anos anteriores ao início do levantamento de dados da pesquisa que origina o trabalho (2021). Os textos são analisados e classificados de acordo com os princípios heurísticos que postulam. Conclui-se que não há uma definição estável de imaginário, mas há três grupos paradigmáticos, que assim nomeamos: um, predominante, toma o imaginário como representação social; outro, intermediário, entende o imaginário como inversão alegórica; e o terceiro, minoritário, trata o imaginário como presença ontológica.
Palavras-chave: Comunicação, imaginário, modelizações, paradigmas.

INTRODUCTION

THE GROWTH OF interest in studies of the imaginary in Brazil has expanded enormously over the last decade. In June 2010, according to a survey conducted at the time (Barros, 2012), there were 253 research groups registered with the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development that included the term *imaginary* in their name, in their research line, or among the keywords of their research line, considering all major areas of knowledge. In the field of Communication and Information, there were 17 such groups. When the survey was updated in March 2022, 326 groups were found across all major knowledge areas, and 56 in the field of Communication and Information. In other words, while the overall increase across all areas was 29%, the increase within the field of Communication alone was 229%.

However, the numbers alone reveal little beyond the rise of interest in the imaginary within the field; it is not possible to assert that there has been a consequent advancement in knowledge, research strategies, or epistemological reflection. Under what conditions are studies of the *imaginary* conducted in the field of Communication? What are their heuristic choices and the resulting models? What, after all, is understood by imaginary in the field of Communication?

Let us begin by distinguishing between studies *of* the imaginary and studies *on* the imaginary. In the first case, the imaginary is a perspective adopted to study communicational materials, processes, and phenomena. This does not neglect the communicational perspective itself. In the second case, the imaginary constitutes more of a research theme than a perspective. These two approaches can be inferred from the study of various theories related to image, the imaginary, and imagination, and, naturally, give rise to at least two major groups of modeling. However, during the research process—specifically at the data analysis stage—a third group was identified, quite distinct from the others, although partially sharing some common logics, with an emphasis on the imaginary as a theme. Thus, we arrive at three models of the imaginary.

The *model of social representation* assumes the imaginary refers to some material reality, yet it is itself merely a socially constructed mental reality. The imaginary, in this case, may or may not constitute a distortion of reality serving power interests, but it is always delimited by coercive historical, cultural, political, and economic forces, and so on. Frequently (though not necessarily), this approach is identifiable through adjectives that distinguish different types of imaginary (cultural imaginary, social imaginary, technological imaginary, among others), often using the plural accompanied by adjectival phrases that make more explicit the *proprietary* nature of the adjective over the imaginary (e.g., *imaginaries of nature, imaginaries of the feminine*). The model of the imaginary as social representation

employs keys such as *allegorism* and *euhemerism*. Allegory treats the myth, in whole or in part, as a representation of some element of reality—that is, it starts from a literal meaning replaced by a figurative one. Euhemerism relates the gods of myths to historical characters. Thus, this model often resorts to content, discourse, and image analyses, with the notion of *code* being omnipresent, used more or less explicitly. The imaginary is more a theme than a heuristic perspective.

The *model of allegorical inversion* is characterized by a theoretical assertion of the validity of archetypes, images, and myths, combined with the operationalization of research through the concept of social construction. Manifestations of the imaginary in the media—whether through communication products, art, culture, or entertainment—are understood as narratives creatively conceived or historically situated, which conceal ancestral myths, thus inverting the allegorical-euhemerist position. Whereas the social representation model often negatively values the imaginary, the allegorical inversion model does so positively, at least on the surface of the discourse. Here too, the imaginary is more a theme than a research perspective.

The *model of ontological presence* reveals a strong theoretical affiliation with Durand's (1997) *General Theory of the Imaginary* (GTI), from this point on. Works within this approach face enormous challenges because the very act of modeling easily brings about, once again, the codification of the symbolic, an element that is incommensurable with the conceptual definitions of GTI. This theory postulates the radical nature of the imaginary: it is not the result of a cultural, social, or historical phenomenon, but rather its origin. In this heuristic, the constant presence of the imaginary is assumed as a guide for the understanding of phenomena. Its indicators within a model are the assumptions of GTI itself, which are at least implied at the foundation of the text's argumentation and the interpretation of empirical material. We formulate them as follows: 1) the awareness of death is the common basis of human experience, giving rise to the imaginary; 2) the symbol is motivated; 3) archaic myths are prolonged across cultures through time and space; 4) the imaginary is both container and content of human productions.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to present our definition of the imaginary, which undoubtedly guides our research perspective. We adhere to Gilbert Durand's GTI and therefore consider the imaginary as an ontological presence, a founding element of reality. We understand the imaginary as a dynamic system that organizes symbolic images according to the criterion of image homology—that is, their rooting in a common logic (*schématique*[1]), endowed with meaning by the archetype, whose result is the myth, an ordered system that moves from the collective unconscious to social supraconsciousness and vice versa, guiding the forces shared by the *anthropos*[2].

[1] *Schèmes* are a kind of imprint left on the brain by the body's gestural experiences, based on the three dominant reflexes described by Durand (1997), which guide the formation of symbolic images through the tension between certain archetypal drives inherent to the human species and the constraints of both the natural and social environments. There are three major *schématique* logics: one, dualistic, operates by marking differences; another, homogenizing, works by minimizing differences; and a third, which operates through the *coincidentia oppositorum,* recognizes differences without necessarily combating or attempting to dissolve them.

[2] This definition implies the postulate of an anthropological unconscious that encompasses both the unconscious of the species—studied by Durand (1997) in The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary, where the archetypes are located—and the culturalized unconscious. "Since we must not forget that man is never a natural animal; man has always carried his culture with him from the womb" (Durand, 1983, p. 9). The greatest methodological challenges for studies of the imaginary that are affiliated with Durand's theory stem from the postulate concerning the anthropological unconscious.

CORPUS AND KEYWORDS

To outline a response to the question posed in the title of this article, the recent scientific production in the field of Communication was examined to identify what is (implicitly or explicitly) understood by *imaginary*, in order to trace the general contours of this understanding as reflected in relevant research. Documents with scientific validation were selected, consisting of dissertations, theses, conference proceedings, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

The theses and dissertations were sourced from the Capes Open Data Repository; the articles, from the Capes Journal Portal; and the conference papers, from the proceedings of the annual meetings of the National Association of Graduate Programs in Communication (Compós) and the national congresses of the Brazilian Society for Interdisciplinary Studies of Communication (Intercom), the two largest Brazilian events in the field.

In all cases, the publication period considered was limited to the years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 (the five years prior to the year in which this stage of the research was conducted)[3].

In the case of the Capes Open Data Repository and the Capes Journal Portal, the knowledge area filter (Applied Social Sciences—Communication) was applied; in the Capes Journal Portal, the following additional filters were also used: open access, available online, and peer-reviewed. These additional filters are not necessary for the Capes Open Data Repository, as all deposited works are open access and available online, just as the proceedings of Compós and Intercom are. As for peer review, it is conducted during the submission process for both organizations' congresses, and only approved texts are published in the proceedings. In the case of theses and dissertations in the Capes Open Data Repository, prior academic validation through public defenses held at the universities where the research was developed is also a prerequisite for publication.

In all databases, a single search term (*imaginary*) was used in only one field (keywords). This decision is justified by the intention to reduce as much as possible the already highly polysemic vocabulary of studies of the imaginary, which shares terms such as *symbol, image, imagination, myth*, among others, with scientific schools or fields of study that are quite specific (e.g., semiotics, literary theory) and with common sense. Evidently, this choice may exclude works that directly address issues such as myth and motivated symbolic image, which are therefore fully within the focus of research on Communication and the *imaginary*, expressing a very specific concept of imaginary, but that do not include the term among their keywords. However, it was considered that keywords represent (or should represent) a fundamental concept or notion within the work they index. Thus, the assumption is that authors are familiar with the

[3] A longitudinal analysis will certainly prove productive when covering broader timeframes. For now, we consider the findings presented here to be valid, even if dated from four years ago, since our focus lies on the conceptual models employed in the research, which—unlike themes—tend to vary more slowly over time, especially considering the enduring presence of classical authors that underpin the theoretical framework of the studies.

vocabulary about which they write, even if, by choosing *imaginary* as a keyword, they are not necessarily referring to the same notion or concept—the breadth of what is identified as *imaginary* in Communication research in Brazil is precisely one of the guiding threads of this investigation. As for works that effectively deal with the imaginary but do not include the term among their keywords, it is possible to hypothesize anything from a lack of understanding of the role of a keyword in academic writing to a failure to recognize the work itself as part of imaginary studies, with the truth likely lying somewhere between these two situations and perhaps deserving separate examination.

The annual Intercom congresses, until 2021, and the Compós congresses, to this day, have included working groups specifically dedicated to the imaginary in Communication. Although relevant papers on the imaginary can be found in other groups at these congresses, it was decided to search for texts presented only in these two groups, as they already represent a self-selection of research interests.

In the Intercom proceedings, using the keyword *imaginary*, 30 papers were retrieved from the WG *Communication, Image* and *Imaginary*, out of a total of 89; in the Compós proceedings, 26 papers were found in the WG Image and Media Imaginaries, out of a total of 50. From the Capes Open Data Repository, within a universe of 7,281 theses and dissertations defended between 2016 and 2020, 121 were found with the term *imaginary* among their keywords. In the Capes Journal Portal, 41 articles were retrieved, three of which were excluded because they were found to be identical to texts already considered in the event proceedings, resulting in a total of 38 articles.

At first glance, it is evident that the number of articles retrieved from the Capes Journal Portal is significantly lower than the number of works found in the conference proceedings. This is understandable, given that publication in the former is much more restrictive than in the latter: while the latter reflect the general objectives of scientific exchange at conferences, welcoming many studies still in progress, the former are more rigorous with respect to each evaluated criterion, such as problem contextualization, coherence between objectives and methodology, relevance and pertinence of the work to the field, adequacy of the results description to the proposed objective, and so forth. However, the absence in the results of many articles that are known—because they constitute reference material for previous research—to have been produced within the five-year period covered by the data collection, and that fully meet the search criteria was noted. These include articles published in journals that are supposed to be indexed in the Portal's database, including our work as well as that of fellow researchers with notable contributions to the field, such as

Malena Contrera and Juremir Machado da Silva, both previously referenced in this study's introduction. Yet worse than the limitations of the Portal's data extraction would be the arbitrary inclusion of texts not retrieved by the search tool. Thus, it was decided to continue working only with the universe of articles resulting from that search.

After screening the results, the remaining keywords of each work were surveyed in order to identify possible recurrence patterns. Out of a total of 612 different keywords, 522 appeared only once. Naturally, the only term that appeared in every item was "imaginary."

To obtain a more indicative dataset regarding recurrence, a criterion was applied requiring keywords to appear in at least 5% of the items, since this represents the minimum countable index within the *corpus* subset with the fewest items (i.e., articles), equivalent to 1.6. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Keywords occurring in at least 5% of the 215 items

	Absolute	Percentage of 215
Communication	37	17.0%
Image	15	7.0%
Journalism	13	6.0%
Cinema	12	5.6%

Note. Research data.

It is observed that few keywords have significant relative weight in relation to the total number of items, confirming the dispersion of keywords and allowing for the first outlines of an overview of the general meaning of research that includes "imaginary" among its focal points: *communication* indicates that the research firmly identifies itself within the field; *cinema* and *journalism*, already recognized as subfields of Communication, point to an interface in the epistemological construction of imaginary studies; *image* reveals a vocabulary common to studies of the imaginary, a notional precision that distinguishes this term from the term *imaginary* itself.

(SUB)UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE IMAGINARY

To verify the notions of the imaginary with which authors in the field of Communication in Brazil are working, a quantitative-categorical procedure was adopted, aimed at reducing the features of the abstracts from the empirical *corpus* to key elements that would allow for their comparison.

After selecting the texts and mapping the keywords, the abstracts of all items in the empirical *corpus* were read, beginning with the journal articles. In each abstract, indicators were sought that revealed the notion and/or concept of *imaginary* employed by the article, thesis, or dissertation—indicators that would allow for the classification of the analysis units according to the three perspectives described in the previous section: *social representation, allegorical inversion,* and *ontological presence.* Thus, the four categories listed in Table 2 were developed, along with their respective inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 2

Categories, inclusion and exclusion criteria for abstracts

Category name	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Social representation	The imaginary and/or its structuring elements (archetypes, symbols or symbolic images, myths, stereotypes, prejudices) are identified as embodied in media figures and/or events to construct realities, whether through historical distortion, projection of social trends, etc. AND/OR The imaginary is understood as based on fiction or distorted history. AND/OR The representation of the imaginary is made by analogy.	- Explicit or implicit understanding of the studied phenomenon as a manifestation of ancestral contents. AND/OR - Explicit or implicit understanding of the imaginary as foundational to the reality of the studied phenomenon, to some degree.
Allegorical inversion	The imaginary and/or its structuring elements (archetypes, symbols or symbolic images, myths, stereotypes, prejudices) are identified as embodied in media figures and/or events to update timeless myths. AND/OR The imaginary is understood as based on imaginative creation. AND/OR The representation of the imaginary is made by analogy.	- Explicit or implicit understanding of the imaginary as a distortion of the reality of the studied phenomenon, to some degree. OR - Explicit or implicit understanding of the imaginary as foundational to the reality of the studied phenomenon, to some degree.

Category name	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Ontological presence	The imaginary and/or its conscious structuring elements (myths, stereotypes, prejudices) are identified in dynamics that reveal negotiations between logics of the anthropological unconscious and social consciousness. AND The representation of the imaginary is made by homology.	- Explicit or implicit understanding of the imaginary as opposed to reality, truth, and/or rationality. AND/OR - Explicit or implicit understanding of the studied phenomenon as an analogy of ancestral contents.
Other	Insufficient information to classify the work into any of the previous categories.	Sufficient information to classify the work into any of the previous categories OR to identify a different approach than those encompassed, in which case a new category will be created.

Note. Prepared by the author.

The activation of inclusion or exclusion criteria does not rely solely on theoretical affiliations that may appear in the abstracts, since these are not necessarily coherent with what is actually executed in the research. Classification is based on what the statements about objectives, methodological procedures, and results allow one to infer. Indicators of the presence of a given criterion are identified in certain expressions used, such as adjectives qualifying the imaginary, specific syntax (such as the imaginary being subjected to a social or anthropological foundation), or the separation of the imaginary from its structuring elements.

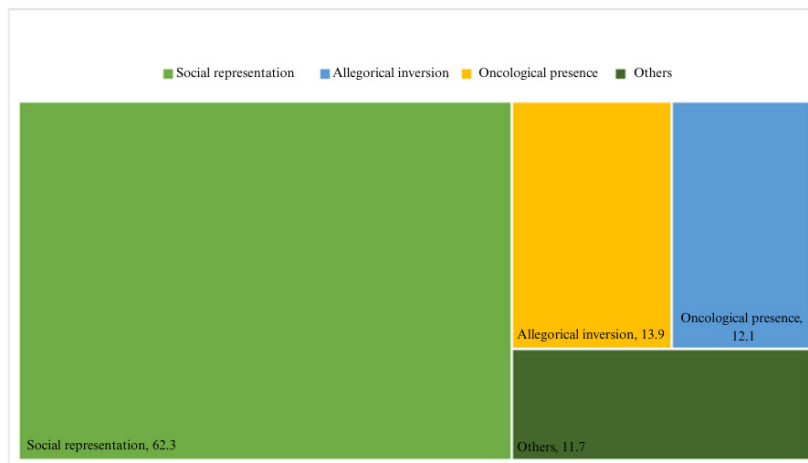However, beyond paying attention to these expressions, it was necessary to observe the *overall idea* of the abstract, since an analysis of isolated content units is insufficient to discern the epistemological positioning of the work.

THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION CONDUCTS RESEARCH ON THE IMAGINARY

The occurrences of the different definitions of the imaginary in the analyzed works are shown in the chart presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Frequency (%) of the occurrences of the different conceptualizations of the imaginary

Note. Prepared by the author.

It is observed that the idea of social representation prevails in the meanings surrounding the word *imaginary* in abstracts of conference proceedings, articles, theses, and dissertations in Brazil from 2016 to 2020[4]. The other three categories occur with more similar frequencies when considering the total *corpus*, as seen above, but this changes slightly when observing each of the three types of texts separately (theses + dissertations; proceedings; articles). We will return to this topic shortly. For now, let us concentrate on the (more implicit than explicit) definitions of the imaginary as articulated in Communication research in Brazil.

Understood impersonally as social representation, the imaginary frequently bears something false, opposing myth and reality, as in the work[5] of Gomes (2016):

> This article starts from the myth of female enmity to investigate why such an idea still persists today and remains part of the construction of cultural identity and the imaginary concerning the feminine, and to what extent *sorority*, a term much in vogue in feminist and gender debates, manages to transcend the myth and be incorporated by groups and individuals, contributing to combat the feminine stigma that, among other effects, devalues women and ascribes to them the incapacity to form alliances with other women. (p. 1)

In this conception, social roles are also referenced to the idea of imaginary, as in the article by Moraes and Martelli (2017, p. 1), which "aims to understand

[4] A concerning finding is the high occupancy of the "other" category in conference proceedings, theses, and dissertations. This may indicate low technical quality of the abstracts, since it was not possible to infer any notion of imaginary from them—whether one of the categories defined in this study or any other that might justify the creation of a new category—despite the term "imaginary" appearing as a keyword in the text.

[5] From this point on, we will refer to texts published in conference proceedings as "work," in contrast to "article" (a term reserved for journal articles), "thesis," and "dissertation."

the notion of gender and the female imaginary in the twentieth century" and concludes that "twentieth century magazines influenced the maintenance of stereotyped behaviors, reaffirming the separation between genders and reinforcing female roles as mother, wife, and lady in society." Likewise, Guimarães and Mendes (2018, p. 569), without clearly defining the term *imaginary* in their article, present it directly related to memory and social representation, as they propose examining the "construction of women's socio discursive imaginaries" and conclude that "the female representation portrays values and ideologies that are deposited in society's collective memory."

In the above passages, adjectives and/or adjectival phrases are seen apposed to the term *imaginary*. This procedure also indicates an understanding based on the idea of social representation, since it is at the social level that symptoms of archetypal, mythic, and symbolic images—anthropologically rooted—emerge. Thus, it is natural that the article by Paiva and Ratts (2016) includes many authors from Sociology and Semiotics and none from the theories of the imaginary, when speaking of *cultural imaginary* linked to social roles:

> To this end, the work takes as its fundamental basis for development Giddens' (2003) theory of structuration, Bourdieu's (2007) theses on taste in *Distinction*, and the formal properties of signs presented by Santaella (2004), in order to show how the media articulates and/or disarticulates the complexity of cultural and social truths produced by memories generated by and generating of the cultural imaginary, which, in turn, seeks to conform the fixity of bodies to specific social roles. (p. 198)

Depending on the adjectival phrase accompanying the noun *imaginary*, the expression may be replaced by another without, apparently, altering the meaning of the text. In the following excerpt, *the imaginary of the villain* could be replaced by *the stereotype of the villain,* and *the technologies of the imaginary* by *the media*:

> This work seeks to reflect on the role of the technologies of the imaginary in the figure of the villain of the 1950 World Cup, held in Brazil. We take as a starting point that the goalkeeper Barbosa centralizes the imaginary of the villain and, from there, the aim is to understand how this scenario came to be and the extent to which the available technologies acted in that direction, focusing the research on issues of *Jornal dos Sports* from 1950, since Brazil lost to Uruguay 2–1 in the decisive match. The work relies on notions of comprehensive sociology and technologies of

the imaginary, as well as aspects related to sports journalism, especially in Brazil. (Rizzatti, 2017, p. 5)

N. Costa's (2019) dissertation clearly demonstrates how the adjectival phrases following the term *imaginary* convey the idea of representation:

This work aims to understand the communication actions developed by black women's organizations: Odara—Institute of Black Women (BA) and Bamidelê—Organization of Black Women of Paraíba (PB), for the implosion of racist imaginaries, and to perceive how these organizations have been using communication tactics to dispute positive references about black women in the collective imaginary. (p. 5)

From a social representation perspective, media imaginaries can direct cultural manifestations, leading one to think that popular culture can, in a way, be deformed by the media:

The present research focuses on the emergence of the media imaginary in one of the most widespread religious celebrations in Brazil: *Folia de Reis*, observed through manifestations present in the regions of Triângulo Mineiro (MG) and northeastern São Paulo (SP), and recorded through photography, a language used as a referential element for identifying the differences between traditional images of the religious context and elements derived from a global media context. (Brandão, 2016, p. 11)

Television series can also *form* imaginaries and change social relations, as indicated by Bazanini (2018) in her thesis:

This research analyzes the *representation* of the father in the media imaginary created by American TV *series*, which, like other *dictates* of cinematic productions originating in the United States, *exert* a strong *influence* over other mediatized Western societies. In line with this assertion, changes in family structures, relationships, and hierarchies resulting from American TV series, especially in the paternal figure, are observed. (p. 7)

Just as there are, within this conception, media imaginaries, there also exist the cultural imaginary, the imaginaries of power, and so forth, without any common foundation in the species' unconscious being evident, as would be sustained by gti (Durand, 1997). Thus, the imaginary is segmented into different types, varying according to cultures that may, for example, adopt certain "cultural signs in the construction of media imaginaries," producing a

"veridictive connotation effect" (Covaleski, 2016), that is, there is an opposition between connotation and reality, and construction is more than a play between drives and coercions, as sustained by Durand (1997). This is how the imaginary as social representation also houses *historically constructed* mythologies (and not ancestrally inherited ones), as seen in the article by Camargo et al. (2020):

> For a long time, the Catholic Church constructed the entity of the Devil as responsible for all the evil in the world. This *representation* endured over the years, changed, and was resignified, reaching today its most recent construction of the Devil through the Netflix series *Lucifer*. In light of this scenario, the objective of this article is to understand *the effects and reasons* for the success of the series. We seek to relate the historical Devil to the character in the series; to identify which characteristics of contemporary society stand out in *Lucifer*; and to analyze the *reconstruction* of the Devil's imaginary. To achieve these goals, we used the case study methodology, conducting an analysis that sought to obtain new perspectives and reflections between the object and theory. (p. 105)

Even in the study of non-fiction products, such as journalistic ones, mythology can be understood as historically constructed, as stated by Ayres Gomes et al. (2018) in their article: "the weekly newspaper reiterates the professional mythology by positioning itself as a neutral instance, mediating facts and the public" (p. 661). In the same work, the authors also argue that journalistic practice produces symbols: "we understand imaginary violence as a symbolic construct resulting from journalistic action upon reality" (Gomes et al., 2018, p. 661). This is a case in which the references listed in the abstract would be affiliated with Durand's TGI (1997), but the text endorses the idea of the imaginary as a falsification of reality.

Indeed, TGI is widely cited, regardless of the categories of the imaginary used, whether explicit or implicit. It is not uncommon to find claims of using TGI that are entirely disjointed from Durand's core postulates, especially regarding the anthropological (rather than social) foundation of the imaginary and the motivated (rather than arbitrary) nature of the symbol. Thus, even while claiming affiliation with TGI, Leal and Lins (2017, p. 41) state in their article: "the *social* imaginary that constructs the world of symbolic feminine representations is *permeated by archetypes* that refer us to *symbols from various types of references*, including negative ones." The authors emphasize that they are:

> based on the theory of the anthropological trajectory of the imaginary, traced by Gilbert Durand, in which [they seek] the symbolic understanding of the imaginary

through two regimes: the Diurnal Regime and the Nocturnal Regime … assuming that all forms of symbolic production in society are reflections of our social imaginary, such as media production, for example. (Leal & Lins, 2017, p. 41)

In fact, studying and declaring a theory as the guiding framework of research does not necessarily imply the adoption of the heuristic principles of that theory. In M. Costa's (2020) dissertation, it is clear from the abstract that there is an evident awareness of the regimes of the imaginary proposed by GTI, but the unconscious nature of certain of its elements is not considered. Instead, a socially rooted product—journalism—is attributed the sole power to direct them, which epistemologically translates as social rootedness:

The imaginary is a river that flows through time, gaining strength, predominance, power, and visibility when it pours abundantly into its tributaries. From this perspective, the present study sought to observe how the connection between journalism and the imaginary occurs. To this end, from a symbolic perspective, we studied the imaginary of drought in the journalistic field, using as the object of analysis the report series "*agreste seco*", published on November 27, 2016, on *JC Online,* the news website of *Jornal do Commercio*, from the state of Pernambuco. From the analysis of the *corpus*—consisting entirely of 25 narratives and 13 images— the research identified how verbal and non-verbal elements function as devices through which the newspaper presents an imaginary of drought to the reader. Regarding the approach, the methodological path adopted in the study is based on the general theory of the imaginary, where we work especially with symbolic hermeneutics (SH), a method through which Gilbert Durand (2001) establishes an anthropological structure to identify the manifestation of imaginary symbols evoked, in this case, in journalistic narrative and image. From the symbology, that is, the symbolic set present in the series, we identified that *JC Online* presents the "tragic imaginary of drought," directing the reader's view toward tragedy, downfall, anguish, hopelessness, sorrow, darkness, painful experiences, chaos, among other sensations that signal the presence of the diurnal regime of the imaginary. (p. 8)

Addressing myth as susceptible to historical manipulation is a strong indication of the representationalist conception of the imaginary, because it positions social and historical action as the birthplace of the phenomenon. Frequently, specific terms from GTI appear in the text, indicating that this theory has already reached the level of academic common sense, with its terms being used unconsciously or, at least, with a different intent than that with which GTI was formulated. Thus, symbols, which were originally motivated, become arbitrary

and subject to resignification; archetypes can be symbolic and represented; myth can be controlled:

> *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is a game set in the near future, in the year 2027, in a dystopian and cyberpunk environment controlled by large corporations, in which the character acquires superhuman abilities through body enhancement technology. The objective of this research is to analyze the manipulated mythologies in the game's narrative, based on the hypothesis that the myth of Icarus offers us a key to interpret the ethical and political dilemmas presented to the player. To that end, we conducted a mythocritical analysis of the re-signified symbols in the narrative of Adam Jensen. As a result, we identified a set of archetypal representations and symbols, finding that the myth was deliberately exploited to construct this fictional world and foster ethical debate on the potential, the limits, and the consequences of the abuse of science. (Schulze, 2020, p. 8)

On the other hand, it is observed that research works that do not offer a definition of the imaginary nor indicate affiliation with any theory of the imaginary tend to conceive it as socially directed, as in the dissertation by Misse Filho (2020):

> With the objective of viewing Guanabara Bay from a communicational perspective, this work first considers the fostering of imaginaries through narratives that addressed the bay in *O Globo* newspaper between 1940 and 2018. From the time when pollution was not a matter of public interest to the consolidation of the bay as a relevant topic in environmental journalism in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil, we go through characters in a story of exaltation, nostalgia, outrage, hope, and disillusionment with the socioenvironmental conditions of one of the country's greatest symbols. (p. 7)

Durand does not emphasize the systematization of his theory, but the little he does in this regard ends up being used as a tool, often without nuance, such as the summary chart he presents at the end of *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*. It seems that from the series of figures that illustrate the logics of the imaginary presented by Durand, an interpretation emerges in which the motivated symbols—organized by the criterion of their common logical rootedness—become arbitrated symbols, organized by analogy, socially agreed upon, as Montassier (2017) does in her dissertation:

The sword is *usually associated* with heroic narratives and, according to Gilbert Durand's anthropology of the imaginary, is linked to the diurnal regime of the image. In the context of contemporary media productions, however, it is possible to observe the presence of narratives that present expanded meanings, and the sword is transfigured into a sign of complexity. In this approach, the sword is not merely a cutting, dividing, excluding, and distinguishing instrument, but harmoniously incorporates opposing meanings, linked to the nocturnal and crepuscular regimes, composed of the mystical and synthetic systems of images. (p. 6)

The GTI, however, appears more frequently in the approach to the imaginary that we propose to call *allegorical inversion*, present in nearly one quarter (23.7%) of the articles, or in 12.1% of all works. If, in allegorism, myth was seen as a metaphor for historical facts, in *allegorical inversion*, historical facts—or more precisely, social, cultural, political, economic, and other coercions—are a metaphor for myth. This understanding, at first, does not intend to devalue myth; on the contrary: it grants it a fundamental role in contemporary life. Nevertheless, its very hypostasis, its indiscriminate trivialization, may ultimately strip it of its power.

In allegorical inversion, what is at issue is also the *representation* of mythical figures and an imaginary segmented according to cultural appropriations, which is reconstructed according to the demands of the historical moment, yet originates in what could be understood as deeply ancestral mythical behavior. According to the allegorical inversion approach, communicational products and phenomena enact the remythologization of the world—in other words, they are not mere *vessels* through which the myth operates, but *protagonists* of its remythologization; they go toward the myth, rather than the myth coming toward them, as would be presumed by the foundational prior existence of the imaginary. Thus, it is not surprising that figures considered both stable and unconscious in the GTI, such as archetypes, appear in this type of study fully visible and modified—or, more frequently, one prefers to say, updated:

Based on Durand's concept of the imaginary, regarded as an anthropological pathway, this article analyzes how the film series "*Star Wars" has contributed to this process of contemporary* remythologization. The thesis advanced is that, *by updating the founding myths and archetypes to construct its mythology, "Star Wars"* has reconnected certain scientific-technological elements, which gradually took part in the Western imaginary since the Enlightenment, with some fantastic and magical ones, which had been relegated to the underground and devalued ever since (Anaz & Ceretta, 2016, p. 130)

A

There is a special case of allegorical inversion, which is the use of the isotopic image classification chart that Durand presents at the end of *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* as an analogical basis for diagnosing imaginary regimes and even archetypes. In this procedure, one takes images crystallized at the surface of phenomena—those most observable and ordinarily used by Communication—to draw conclusions about the deeper logics of the imaginary, when strictly speaking, those deep logics cannot really be inferred from social symptoms. An example is Anaz's (2020) article, which detects, in journalistic photographs

> disseminated globally by journalism predominantly diurnal … images, that is, images that materialize a worldview guided by the logic of combat, cleavage, purification, and hypostasis of existential difficulties, verifying the "redundancy of the archetype of high vs. low opposition." (p. 149)

In Ciquini's (2019) work, allegorical inversion appears to locate, in a contemporary practice, an aspect of a myth narrated in Greek tragedies, but already appropriated by common sense, at least since the invention of photography. The author describes, in his text, "the way in which the media imaginary and the selfie photographic gesture embody and update the mythologeme of the Greek myth of Narcissus" (p. 1). Indeed, quite often, allegorical inversion perceives mythical elements through the analogical procedure customarily adopted by common sense. It is thus that heroes—whose semidivinity is often neglected—resurge embodied in media figures: "as a result, it is understood that Jobs is perceived as a hero, a savior, and a wizard by technophiles, followers of the Apple brand, which implies a contemporary remythologization of the hero's saga" (Torres & Miklos, 2019, p. 1). Thus, although texts that employ allegorical inversion frequently use myths considered archaic—whether they be the well-known Greek ones or, in an approach more concerned with Brazil's direct historical roots, Yoruba or indigenous myths—the procedure does not carry through the consequences implied by the foundational prior existence of the imaginary, because it stops at analogy between mythological and contemporary facts.

Silva's (2020) thesis illustrates how allegorical inversion succeeds in integrating the idea of the manipulation of the imaginary via social coercions. She dedicates her research to "the reverberations of the symbolic mythical content of Greek goddesses in the *construction* of the imaginary of Brazilian digital influencers" (p. 9). In this type of approach, there is the postulate of the authority of instances of social consciousness over elements of the anthropological unconscious, such as the market over archetypes. Thus, to understand "how

influencers *used ancestral archetypes* of Greek goddesses and *reconfigured them as market stereotypes,*" Silva (2020, p. 9) analyzed various channels used by digital influencers and listed "archetypal characteristics of the Greek goddesses Aphrodite and Artemis," finding that "meanings *were appropriated and reduced to an ideological interpretation* to sell products and propagate a discourse about the feminine" (Silva, 2020, p. 9).

It is interesting to note that even with the strong manipulation of the archetypes—to the point that their contents become disfigured in discourses no longer consistent with "mythology nor with studies on cultural imaginary" (Silva, 2020, p. 9)—the study still allows one to conclude that "the enormous success of these digital influencers is due, in part, to the strong presence of symbolic content, more specifically the myths of Greek goddesses" (Silva, 2020, p. 9). That is, even if an archetype loses all its transformative potential—its multiplicity of meanings reduced to rigid, univocal stereotypes—its power remains, generating "easy identification by followers and consequently strong symbolic adherence, later converted into profit" (Silva, 2020, p. 9).

Here we see a foundational epistemological question: how can an archetypal force, which is unconscious and therefore uncontrollable, be manipulated by conscious economic interests—its transformative contents annihilated and/or reduced to stereotypes? How can these stereotypes still promote an identification comparable to that of the archetype itself? What of the archetype remains in the stereotype?

Overall, the approach to the imaginary that we call *ontological presence* occurs with similar frequency to allegorical inversion. These perspectives share the postulate of ancestral myths' continuity in contemporaneity, but differ regarding the foundational prior existence of the imaginary. Even if, on a formal level, allegorical inversion agrees with the existence of archetypal roots in social consciousness, it does not awaken their presence; instead, it asserts their representation—which can therefore be manipulated by instances of power, institutionalized or not.

In contrast, in the approach that posits its ontological presence, the imaginary is a ubiquitous mediator and way of knowing the world, according to Dravet's (2016) work:

> Starting from the hypothesis that the imaginary would be responsible for mediating between physical sensation and language, we laid the foundations for a thought-body, and we concluded, albeit provisionally, that the imaginary can be the object of a third science, one that could account for the third included between body

and mind, between body and spirit—the one responsible for the relationship with otherness within and outside us. (p. 1)

Unconscious motivations are not repressed; rather, they enter into negotiation with the conscious, as demonstrated by Araújo's (2017) thesis, which is dedicated to investigating organizational decision-making dynamics from the symbolic-affective dimension. The author works with GTI to "understand the underlying contents of visible behaviors," relating "the way of perceiving reality, the confrontation of the anguish arising from this process, and the determination of behaviors of search and use of information to support decision-making" (Araújo, 2017, p. 11).

The presence of deeper images of the imaginary can suddenly become imperative, as shown in Torres's (2020) thesis, which analyzes several cases of what, following Jung, is called psychic contagion, consisting of collective psychotic outbreaks:

Mimesis is both product and producer of psychic contagions, the feedback of which causes the bodies of a group to become attuned, generating unified actions. Unlike what 19th- and 20th-century authors discussed, the body is a potentiator of contagion and the lowering of consciousness, but not its cause. With the advent of electronic media and digital social networks, and stemming from overpopulation and a millennia-old Judeo-Christian paradigm that denies the body, the contemporary individual is increasingly in a mass and less in a crowd. The mass is the apathetic state of mind and body. Psychic contagion cannot be found only in outbreaks considered abnormal and isolated, but also in everyday human life and in the present. (p. 7)

When verifying the epistemological assumption of research, it is once again observed that the general idea of the text must prevail over isolated verbal expressions. Nóbrega's (2020, p. 10) thesis uses several expressions that may indicate adherence to the notion of imaginary as social representation ("collective imaginary," "construction of mythologies") or even allegorical inversion (appropriation of the myth of Golem), but presents the imaginary as ontological presence: it is what initiates the phenomenon studied (narratives about robots in science fiction series):

The present research aimed to map the meanings constructed and circulated through narratives about robots in science fiction series over time (1978–2010). The proposed temporal frame refers to what was taken as the empirical object:

the US saga *Battlestar Galactica* due to the consideration of its exemplary charac-
ter in relation to the dialogue with the context of its time, the forms of narrative
construction and understanding activated under the format of seriality, and the
themes of technoscience mobilized. Observing that robot stories have the capacity to
activate the collective imaginary regarding the human condition and offer symbolic
compensation to drives shaped by social coercions, the research analyzes how the
mythology constructed by the work provides an outlet for the need to symbolize
human aspirations and fears. Thus, they articulate creators and the public through
media productions … during this process, the appropriation of the myth of the
Golem in fiction about artificial beings was perceived, its process of stereotyping
with the popularization of the robot figure, and a principle of transformation and
saturation of its metallized representations to make way for more appropriate
representations of new forms of life and subjectivity. (p. 10)

The ontological presence of the imaginary is due to the postulate that symbo-
lic images arise in the human being when they acquire awareness of the passage
of time and the finitude of life. They are thus symbolic (that is, motivated and
not arbitrary) to resist the painful realization. Consequently, apocalyptic myths
are always present. In answering the question "where are we going?", they ener-
gize cultures and societies throughout time, reaching, as Vieira (2018) shows in
his dissertation, the world of video games, stimulating "the entire environment
of this medium." The author analyzes three games (*The legend of Zelda: The
wind waker, Chrono trigger* and *The last of us*) and concludes that they have the
capacity to "reference the eschatological imaginary in their narratives through
intrinsic structural devices" and, through the action of apocalyptic myths, "offer
salvation in the face of the end."

In the ontological-presence approach, myth gains considerable importance
because it is the first form of articulation between conscious contents and the
unconscious. Fernandes (2016) takes this into account in her master's disser-
tation, conducting a mythocritical analysis of the film *2001: A space odyssey*.
Beyond her conclusion about the film's valorization of symbolic images "of
intimacy, descents into the depths, mystery, integration," it is significant that
"the film aligns with the decadentist imaginary" and that "myth does not exist
in contemporary times only as mere reminiscence, but as presence, detectable
in contemporary media practices" (p. 7).

The social representation model of the imaginary allows research about the
imaginary only because it offers no space for adopting the imaginary itself as a
point of view. To research *the* imaginary, one cannot, first and foremost, unders-
tand it as a falsification of reality without incurring intellectual dishonesty. The

model of allegorical inversion appears hesitant between assuming the ontology of the imaginary and seeking the safety of analogies guaranteed by the social-representation model. Thus, allegorical inversion seems to propose imaginary research that ultimately results in research *about* the imaginary.

Although the frequency of occurrence of the conception of the imaginary as allegorical inversion is globally similar to that of the imaginary as ontological presence, there are substantial differences when theses and dissertations, annals, and articles are observed separately. This is what we detail in the following.

INDICATIONS OF BRAZILIAN SCHOOLS OF THE IMAGINARY

The difference in the frequency with which allegorical inversion is employed in theses, dissertations, articles, and conference proceedings is remarkable, even though social representation prevails in all cases, as can be seen in the breakdown of the data from Figure 1, presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of imaginary models stratified by text type

	Articles	Proceedings	Theses + dissertations
Social representation	44,7%	67,8%	65,3%
Allegorical inversion	23,7%	8,9%	9,9%
Ontological presence	7,9%	21,5%	12,4%
Others	23,7%	1,8%	12,4%
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Note. Prepared by the author

This data prompts the question about the reasons for the heterogeneity in the distribution of definitions according to the nature of the work. One possible answer, grounded in the idea of the sociology of science as described by Kuhn (1996), might point to the greater acceptance of what could already be called here the paradigm of *social representation* in comparison to the others. If this seems unambiguous, it is also striking that in conference proceedings the paradigm of *ontological presence* appears much more strongly than in journal articles, while the opposite occurs with the paradigm of allegorical inversion: it is more frequent in articles and less so in proceedings. Once again drawing on the sociology of science, one could argue that conference proceedings are more receptive to less orthodox approaches, whereas journals, due to the demand for tighter alignment with established academic standards, have greater difficulty

accepting research whose postulates refer openly to intangibility[6]. In any case, verifying this possibility does not serve the overall purpose of this research.

The heterogeneity in the frequency of the paradigms of allegorical inversion and ontological presence occurs not only between texts of different types but also among texts of the same type but from different institutional origins: the proceedings of Compós and Intercom. Indeed, there is a significant difference in the proportions of the paradigms of social representation and ontological presence when we look at the sets of texts from the two conferences separately, as shown in Table 4.

[6] A longitudinal analysis will certainly prove productive when covering broader timeframes. For now, we consider the findings presented here to be valid, even if dated from four years ago, since our focus lies on the conceptual models employed in the research, which—unlike themes—tend to vary more slowly over time, especially considering the enduring presence of classical authors that underpin the theoretical framework of the studies.

Table 4

Distribution of imaginary models in the proceedings of Compós and Intercom

	Intercom	Compós
Allegorical inversion	10%	7.7%
Ontological presence	3.3%	42.3%
Social representation	83.4%	50%
Others	3.3%	0%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Note. Prepared by the author.

Indeed, although a definition of the imaginary more connected to social representation remains dominant, its weight is considerably greater in one case than in the other. Furthermore, the second most frequent approach differs between the two conferences: ontological presence in the Compós proceedings and allegorical inversion in those of Intercom.

It is highly likely that the discrepancy between the paradigms can be explained by the institutional origins of the authors in both cases, given that epistemological orientation tends to vary among teaching and research institutions—especially in the social sciences, where paradigms are continually contended, as Kuhn (1996) points out. Kuhn's reminder (1996) is also useful regarding the fact that paradigms are not adopted through argument:

> Individual scientists embrace a new paradigm for all sorts of reasons and usually for several at once. Some of these reasons—for example, the sun worship that helped turn Kepler into a Copernican—lie entirely outside the apparent sphere of science. Other scientists depend on idiosyncrasies of a personal or autobiographical nature. Even the nationality or previous reputation of the innovator and their mentors can sometimes play a significant role. (p. 193)

The 26 papers from Compós come from 12 different institutions, whereas the 30 papers from Intercom originate from 14; the contrast lies in the maximum number of papers from a single institution: 5 out of 26 in Compós (with 19% of the texts from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul) and 11 out of 30 in Intercom (with 37% from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul). It is therefore plausible to suggest that these two Southern Brazilian universities serve as hubs for training researchers of the imaginary across different theoretical strands, given that Intercom exhibits a significantly stronger prevalence of the social representation approach over ontological presence, whereas in Compós, although this approach does not exceed the weight of the other, it comes quite close. Evidently, what matters most is not the geographic location of the school, for many researchers may work at the same institution while thinking differently. What this research really indicates is the existence of different schools of thought regarding the imaginary in Brazil.

DEFINITIONS OF THE UNDEFINITIONS

Prior to this research, one could argue that two formally established schools existed for approaching the imaginary: one positing its social foundation—especially drawing on Castoriadis (1982), but capable of being understood as underlying many other social theories—and the other positing its anthropological foundation, erected by Durand (1997). This remains valid, but the present research indicates more nuanced paradigmatic groups: one dominant, decisively embracing social representation as determinant for what is called the imaginary; a second, minority, asserting the anthropological foundation of the imaginary; a third that appears to draw somewhat from both, albeit with conceptual hesitation.

In the latter case, it is important to emphasize that these are not apparently contradictory concepts that can be reconciled within a logic of *coincidentia oppositorum*; rather, the opposite: apparently reconcilable concepts whose deeper logic is mutually exclusive. This third current, that of allegorical inversion, often implies the understanding of the imaginary as socially established. This understanding thus seems to form part of a kind of common sense in the field, to the extent that, in many cases, it infiltrates the interpretation of a theory that decisively posits an anthropological foundation (GTI). Anthropological foundation is so dear to Gilbert Durand (1983) that, even while endorsing Jung's notion of archetype, he laments Jung's use of the adjective "collective" unconscious because it easily suggests social, leaving space to believe that the anthropological unconscious—common to the human species—can vary according to cultural, historical contexts, etc.

In the texts analyzed, the need to use the adjective "collective" for imaginary implies not only the existence of an individual imaginary, independent of the collective, but also of plural imaginaries, thereby establishing a taxonomy of the imaginary—it varies according to its theme. This plurality implies social construction as the guiding force, even if the basis is the anthropological unconscious, because it is the social that qualifies the imaginary, thereby determining and directing it, devaluing the pulsional element without which response to social coercion would not be possible.

Durand, having dedicated his entire work to his theory of the imaginary, is sometimes regarded as an obligatory reference, despite the very idea of "obligatory reference" being dogmatic and, therefore, unscientific. Durand is consulted in search of a concept of the imaginary when he does not offer one. Nevertheless, we readers tend to find confirmation of what we already think; thus, upon encountering the two lines of the author's preface to the third edition of *The anthropological structures of the imaginary,* it is thought that the problem of the argument from authority has been solved:

> the imaginary, that is, the set of images and relations of images that constitutes Homo sapiens' thought capital—appears to us as the great fundamental denominator where all creations of human thought converge. (Durand, 1997, p. 18)

The notion of the imaginary as a set of images is frequently repeated in works that present themselves as Durandian, but Durand's statement is clearly insufficient. Although it has the advantage of not being sealed as a concept carrying certain paradigm rigidity, it suffers from not aiding the paths of discovery that all research needs to follow, precisely because it is overly broad—the Spanish lodging Thomas (1998) mentions. Thinking of the imaginary as a set of images without specifying what images are seems to lie at the root of adjectival classifications of the imaginary (imaginary of this or that), because it allows for the assumption of the symbol as a general abstract category that groups images by theme—much like image search engines on the internet: type "sunset" into Google Images and you get countless generic figures, with generality even being a condition for monetizing photos on platforms that facilitate it.

The need to thoroughly understand what a theory is to which one intends to adhere includes recognizing the limitations of the texts that present the theory. By not defining the imaginary directly, Durand demands from us the inference of, if not a concept, at least a notion of the imaginary capable of accounting for the postulates he presents in his theory—postulates that are also often diluted or implied in the text. Thus, Durand's readers must not only navigate the complex

texts he has left us but also pay close attention to the heuristic postulates scattered throughout his work, which require further elaboration to ensure that their theoretical consequences are not overlooked.

Beyond the Durandian argument from authority often invoked by studies seeking to offer a definition of the imaginary, the GTI, when applied to any empirical object, runs a significant risk of being arbitrarily instrumentalized, thereby contradicting the epistemological intentions of its founder. Indeed, the GTI presents a substantial challenge by proposing connotation before denotation, homology as the organizing principle of the imaginary, reason as merely one of the possible logics of the imaginary, and the imaginary itself as a logic.

Amid the tangle of ideas Durand presents in *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* and the volume of mythological references—almost all unfamiliar to new readers—the isotopic classification chart of images at the end of the book serves as a lifeline. It is understandable that this chart becomes a guide, perhaps a firmer one than it should be, because our habits of thought demand it. It is as if, after a stormy voyage, we finally arrive at a safe harbor in which we recognize ourselves again. The chart seems to have the power to return the foreigner to familiar references. However, by doing so, we ignore the postulates of the very theory the chart seeks to organize.

The first of these is the procedure by homology rather than by analogy. In the last row of the chart, synthemes abound (erroneously translated as "systems" in Brazilian editions). Precisely because they are merely social symptoms, they are highly visible and lead to easy analogies: thus, for example, when the figure of the sword appears in an empirical object, it is placed in the drawer of the heroic regime; night goes to the mystical regime, even though the chart itself labels these figures as synthemes—that is, social symptoms of the deep logic. Being social, they are highly variable; they cannot be taken as the basis for diagnoses. They do not carry a meaning but a sense, being entirely dependent on the broader contexts in which they appear.

In this text, we undertake the task of verifying the existence of models of the imaginary in Communication research, which we boldly propose to call paradigms. Boldly, because one might easily argue that "paradigms of the imaginary" is a contradiction in terms: while a paradigm is a set of choices within a system, the imaginary would constitute total freedom of choice—without any disciplinary boundaries, if we are speaking of science, or ethical ones, if we are speaking of common sense. However, to affirm the imaginary's independence from any rule is to semantically devalue it and epistemologically misunderstand it.

As we believe we have shown, there is no established or shared understanding of the imaginary within Communication, such that it remains essential for

researchers who use the notion to clarify what they mean by it. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the works examined do not explain the meaning of the term "imaginary," even while listing it as a keyword. Rather than indicating that the paradigm adopted is dominant in the field, this fact points to a common-sense understanding—that is, as a synonym for fantasy—disregarding the fact that there is, indeed, a significant theoretical debate about its meaning.

One can, in fact, say that there are paradigms of the imaginary in research, considering that different sets of fundamental concepts and/or notions are mobilized to make sense of it. These sets of rules guide the research, shaping it. When not formalized, they operate tacitly, constituting an internalized awareness. Even so, they are models. M

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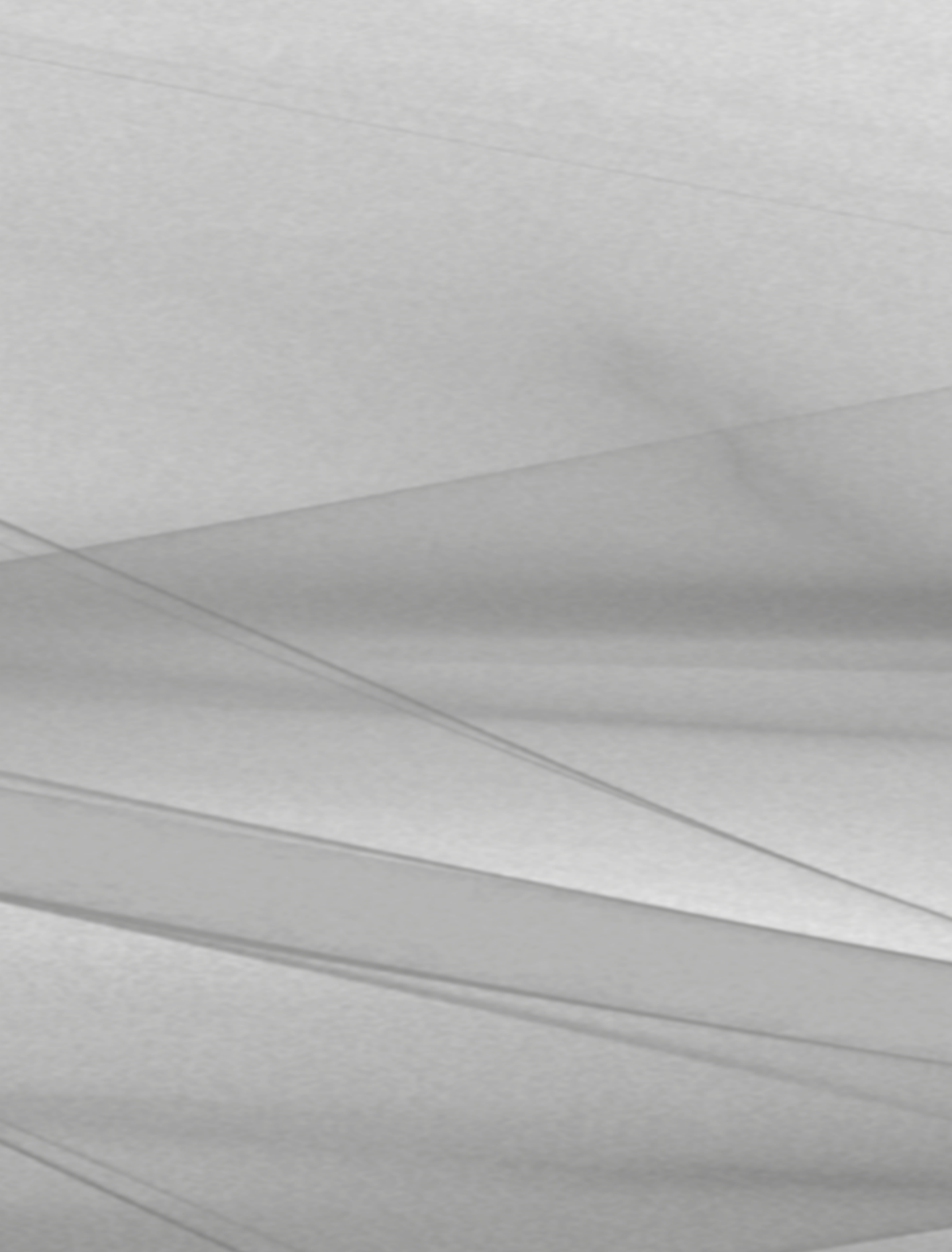
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REVIEW

Conspiracies of the self
in the quasi-world of disinformation

Conspirações do eu
no quase-mundo da desinformação

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ABSTRACT
This review provides a critical assessment of the latest work by Canadian writer, researcher, and socioenvironmental activist Naomi Klein, known for books that condemn disaster capitalism. In *Doppelgänger*, the innovative author starts from a personal dilemma—being systematically confused with a near-homonym on social media, her distorted double—to construct a political narrative about disinformation and denialism, polarization, political extremism, and neoliberalization of sociability. With this, she develops a notion of a mirror world, where the doubles of rationality roam in a disturbing way.
Keywords: Disinformation, conspiracy theory, pandemic, social media, Naomi Wolf.

RESUMO
A resenha traz uma apreciação crítica da última obra da escritora, pesquisadora e ativista socioambiental canadense Naomi Klein, conhecida por livros que condenam o capitalismo de desastre. Em *Doppelgänger*, a autora inova ao partir de um dilema pessoal — ser sistematicamente confundida com uma quase-homônima nas redes sociais, seu duplo distorcido — para construir uma narrativa política sobre desinformação, negacionismo, polarização, extremismos políticos e neoliberalização das sociabilidades. Com isso, ela desenvolve a noção de um mundo-espelho, onde os dublês da racionalidade vagam de forma perturbadora.
Palavras-chave: Desinformação, teoria da conspiração, pandemia, redes sociais, Naomi Wolf.

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IN THE MIRROR-WORLD

THE STORY OF an almost-conspiracy, with an almost-namesake who almost turns into an almost-obsession. A bold and irreverent canvas, painted to address urgent and contemporary phenomena, involving disinformation, the neoliberalization of bodies, the commodification of the self, political extremisms, and ways of being and existing in networks (where is the outside?).

> In my defense, it was never my intention to write this book … I let myself get entangled in all this negligence just to … what? Check her Twitter account, suspended multiple times? Study her appearances on Steve Bannon's livestreams to find revealing clues about the electric chemistry between them? Read or listen to more of her warnings that health measures were, in truth, a secret conspiracy orchestrated by the Chinese Communist Party … My deepest shame lies in the indescribable number of podcasts I consumed voraciously, in the immense volume of lost hours I'll never recover. A quantity of time equivalent to a master's degree. I told myself it was "research." (Klein, 2024, p. 13)

The Canadian writer Naomi Klein brings in *Doppelgänger* (from the German *Doppel*—replica—and *Gänger*—wanderer; more appropriately translated as "double who roams disturbingly") the phenomenon of the duplication of the self—already examined by the psychotherapies of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, portrayed in the literature of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Oscar Wilde, José Saramago—with special reference in this work to Philip Roth—, reaching Alfred Hitchcock's cinema, but now anchored in the contemporary drama of hyper-disinformation. With the Portuguese subtitle "*uma viagem através do mundo-espelho*" ("a trip into the mirror world"), the book was released in Brazil in 2024 by Carambaia publishing house, translated by Renato Marques, and begins with a personal dilemma (just like this review). A critical, almost-feminist exercise in empiricism, were it not for the author's strong Marxist foundation.

On one side, Naomi Klein, professor at the University of British Columbia and co-founder of the Centre for Climate Justice, has already developed notions of political and social relevance in her previous publications, such as *The shock doctrine* (2008) and *No logo* (2002). A highly critical voice regarding financialization and lucid on socioenvironmental issues—hence, someone I've always been very interested in. On the other side, Naomi Wolf, who also figured within my spectrum of interest due to the well-known *The beauty myth* (1992) and *Vagina: A new biography* (2013), which address the bodily standards imposed

on women, despite heteronormativity and the lack of intersection with non-white women. Highly recommended books, even to my advisees, who saw their personal and research struggles represented therein. That was until the COVID-19 pandemic, when I came across Wolf leading the anti-vax movement. And it was precisely in this context that the confusion between the two Naomis grew exponentially in the media ecosystem—for those who don't go beyond the first name—, reaching a certain amalgam that borders on conspiracy: even their partners shared the same name, Avi, all Jewish. Yet another coincidence. Obviously, the coincidences are just comic sprinkles to propel the central thesis of the mirror-world.

Naomi Wolf "became" a phenomenon to be studied: an anti-vaccine denialist, partner of Steve Bannon on his radio show, and frequent guest on the shameful Fox. "One of the most effective creators and disseminators of disinformation and fraudulent information about many of our most urgent crises" (Klein, 2024, p. 14). The list of disinformation and delusions is extensive and dispersed throughout the book's pages. It includes the more sophisticated ones, such as framing the pandemic as a genocidal experiment to turn people into techno slaves who give up their freedom and help extinguish the US Constitution; or campaigning to separate the waste of vaccinated individuals to avoid biological risk; down to the more familiar ones, like the vaccine being used to harvest DNA, sterilize the population, or transmit diseases. "Too ridiculous to take seriously and too serious to be ridiculous," writes the author (Klein, 2024, p. 97), paraphrasing Roth. Information that circulated almost freely during the pandemic, with occasional interruptions (which would no longer occur today, 2025, the new Trump era), on what was then Twitter, with nearly 200,000 followers.

From these absurdities, many attributed to herself, Naomi—Klein—begins her personal–academic–scientific–political and activist journey. First, to try to combat the confusion with the Other Naomi, as she calls her, raising existentially destabilizing questions. Then, to understand her own *Doppelgänger* and the instant-technological context that is reshaping sociability. Conceptually, nothing particularly new is brought forth; the Brazilian researcher Letícia Cesarino (2022) develops these same issues, drawing from Gregory Bateson, in a far more complex manner. But Klein is redeemed by the perspective (and repertoire) of the affected, and by the well-crafted, subjective narrative that turns into a political form of writing—albeit somewhat naïve in its propositions. The more than 400 pages are divided into four parts: "Double Life," "Mirror World," "Shadowlands," and "Facing the Real," wholly disproportionate even within the thematic scope of the work; making it difficult to review in just a few pages or even linearly. The choice here is to piece together fragments from the

Klein–Wolf mirror-world, highlighting the debates that seemed most relevant to the field of Communication.

Before that, it is worth remembering: in 1992, Naomi—Wolf—wrote: "the beauty myth, in the form it has reemerged in the last generation, had to resort to greater technological sophistication and more fervent reactionary spirit than ever before" (p. 20), and continues with her strong criticism of the spread of standardized images, denouncing the political fear of male-dominated institutions threatened by women's freedom. Not long after, she crosses into the mirror-world. Where does such skill in repositioning come from? Klein provides a direct (though perhaps not exact) equation toward the end of the book, but I will anticipate it here: narcissism + social media addiction + midlife crisis/public humiliation = collapse to the right, factoring in the variable of the attention economy. It's a marketable conspiracy, on various levels, that Communication cannot afford to ignore.

"If Naomi is a Wolf, I'd say you're in trouble"

> That's how machine learning works—the algorithm mimics, learning from patterns, so if my name is repeatedly confused with Wolf's, my name starts being suggested in place of hers, which results in even more confusion,

writes Klein (2024, p. 54), when recounting how, after confronting a person who attributed to her a recent paranoia of the Other, he responded: "damn Twitter autocomplete." This is the conveyor belt of algorithmic cognition, well discussed by Cesarino (2022).

This passage raises a first premise that interests me in the book: the (dys)function of platforms as modern plantations for data harvesting, which reduce us to what is assimilable and sellable—which, as the author notes, makes it "easier to be confused with a flattened and reduced version of someone else" (Klein, 2024, p. 56). Included in this bundle is the promise of personal branding, of the limited liability self—a theme already familiar in Klein's work—which, in the era of digital influencers and viral narratives, only heightens the demand to sustain another self.

Two reflections emerge here and are addressed peripherally by the author. The first concerns the omnipresence of the internet, which does not always allow us to deal with so many fantasies, but rather forces us to confront the materiality of life entangled in the networks; the corporate self merges with the personal self in an unhealthy dynamic of "who is the avatar?" The other question is about the imperative to be and remain on social media as a means of social and financial

survival—nearly a class marker—which has already been sparking debates about the privilege of those who can simply exit these networks.

In this flattened space designed to fit everyone, we find the formation of the so-called mirror-world—a notion very close to the "upside-down world" (Cesarino, 2022). Naomi Klein places her work more specifically within the pandemic, a moment when political maps were redrawn across the globe, creating what the author describes as a global diagonal meridian that blurred political boundaries—or the old right–left axis. In Cesarino's (2022) words, to whom I refer: "the hierarchies that structured the global shape of the system become destabilized, and the poles begin to form new combinations" (p. 67). This also ties into the horseshoe hypothesis, echoed by both authors, in which political opposites curve until they almost touch. That's how similar discourses between conservatives and supposedly progressive groups start to make sense—with all proportions guarded—, the "only we know what they don't want you to hear" can come from *The Intercept, Brasil Paralelo,* or even Nikolas Ferreira. Klein (2024) herself reveals that when Steve Bannon takes a stance against Big Pharma, "it sounds to me like Noam Chomsky" (p. 155). Diagonalism, horseshoe, upside-down, and mirror—in practice.

The materialization of these ambivalences—apolitical groups taking to the streets, progressives adopting conspiratorial behaviors, alternative health subcultures flirting with neo-Nazism, beliefs in holism and spirituality shaped by individual freedom—composes the distorted reflections of the mirror-world, "mimicking the hegemonic forms they claim to oppose" (Cesarino, 2022 p. 133).

Klein traces the origins of the anti-vax movement, for instance, and goes back to a fascist/fitness/new age alliance that disintegrated after World War II, giving way to a more mellow hippie-environmentalist era, which now returns to what the author calls supremacist roots—blending ecofascist beliefs that proliferated during the pandemic, such as: "we are the virus, so why vaccines?" An ontological tone that extends to religion: "God's will be done." The trap is that this discourse also finds a home in the neoliberal doctrine—of hyperindividualism: my workout, my rules, my faith—which bleeds into the Other Naomi. "Wolf was not interested in taking down elite power—she wanted to be part of it," Klein notes (2024, p. 35), highlighting the tendency of the distorted doubles of the mirror-world to invest in conspiratorial narratives, pathologize failures, and hijack causes, rather than articulating necessary structural critiques of capitalism.

More than that, it integrates a professional disinformation logic that caught my attention. In the *Disinformation Dozen* list published by the Center for Countering Digital Hate in 2021, one finds chiropractors, osteopaths, supplement business owners, essential oil sellers, superfood gurus, and sacred/holistic women's

wellness influencers—"card-carrying citizens of the mirror-world" (Klein, 2024, p. 209). In other words, market-oriented charlatanism with a gendered lens was responsible for 65% of the false news (sic) about vaccines that year.

The crack into the mirror-world occurs within the scope of polarization—or calcification, as is already being discussed in Brazil (Nunes & Trauman, 2023)—which causes important debates to be dismissed simply because they belong to the opposing camp, as the author rightly points out: "this is the problem with the mirror-world: there's always some truth mixed in with the lies; there's always some devastating collective failure that the mirror-world identifies and opportunistically exploits" (Klein, 2024, p. 215). One example is the hypothesis that COVID-19 originated from a lab leak—now strongly considered—but which was vehemently rejected by educated sectors as part of the conspiracist atmosphere that dominated the health crisis period. Even today, it remains risky for segments of the left to criticize science, journalism, and other expert systems that were once so dialectically challenged.

Among so many familiar yet still distressing issues in the book, the author manages to preach calm as a form of resistance to shock—a way to avoid being numbed by astonishment. And she proposes a few solutions, in the spirit of an ongoing debate: what kind of internet do we want? On the concave side of the mirror, Naomi Klein suggests being gentle with people and tough on the system, which must be properly named: capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, multibillionaires funding disinformation networks—and note that she herself criticizes the so-called woke culture—, proposing a new group identity that can reassemble the fragments of the mirror. On the convex side, she advocates for legal measures, with direct state intervention to *deprivatize* the platforms, treating them as essential services that should be under democratic control.

Those who are neither concave nor convex, I finally see in this work by a Canadian author in conflict with a quasi–compatriot, that there are transnational patterns. It doesn't matter the HDI, the level of education, or the media literacy projects: we are flooded by disinformation, polarization, ideological radicalization, obsessions with rigged elections, discourses of unrestrained freedom and war against communism, and the rise of the far right (which also tripled its votes in Canadian territory). This mirror-world, as conceptualized by the author, renders us unable to recognize others, our peers, and sometimes even ourselves. "The dark tyrant who lives in all of us and lurks in every nation" (Klein, 2024, p. 261). M

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Disinformation systems:
thoughts in dialogue

Sistemas desinformativos:
pensamentos em diálogo

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ABSTRACT
This review addresses the complexity of contemporary disinformation through Raquel Recuero's book, *A rede da desinformação: Sistemas, estruturas e dinâmicas nas plataformas de mídias sociais*, published in 2024. The text argues that, although deception is ancient, its current dimension is reconfigured by digital platforms. Recuero proposes disinformation in three dimensions—object, process, and effect—advocating the thesis of a systemic problem. While maintaining the centrality of the reviewed work, the text dialogues with Byung-Chul Han on the critique of infocracy and digital sovereignty. It also engages with Judith Butler, who offers lenses to understand polarization and denialism in public debates, such as on gender issues, which hinder informed deliberation and the pursuit of truth.
Keywords: Disinformation, systems, digital platforms, sovereignty, gender.

RESUMO
Esta resenha aborda a complexidade da desinformação contemporânea através do livro *A rede da desinformação: Sistemas, estruturas e dinâmicas nas plataformas de mídias sociais*, de Raquel Recuero, lançado em 2024. O texto argumenta que, embora o engano seja antigo, sua dimensão atual é reconfigurada pelas plataformas digitais. Recuero propõe a desinformação em três dimensões — objeto, processo e efeito —, defendendo a tese de um problema sistêmico. Mantendo a centralidade da obra resenhada, o texto dialoga com Byung-Chul Han sobre a crítica à infocracia e à soberania na era digital. Também com Judith Butler, que oferece lentes para entender a polarização e o negacionismo em debates públicos, como na questão de gênero, os quais impedem a deliberação informada e a busca pela verdade.
Palavras-chave: Desinformação, sistemas, plataformas digitais, soberania, gênero.

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INTRODUCTION

A REDE DA DESINFORMAÇÃO: Sistemas, estruturas e dinâmicas nas plataformas de mídias sociais is the title of the most recent and relevant book by Raquel Recuero, published in 2024 by Editora Sulina. Recuero is a professor and researcher affiliated with the Federal University of Pelotas and the Graduate Program in Communication at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, establishing herself as a prominent name in the research field on disinformation in Brazil, with an extensive body of work on the topic. The book is the result of a discussion proposed by the author, based on more than seven years of research on the circulation of problematic content on social media platforms in Brazil.

Recuero (2024) begins her analysis with a local experience in Rio Grande do Sul, revisiting the climate disasters that affected nearly 70% of the state's municipalities in May 2024. In addition to the urban impacts of the floods, society also had to contend with the intense circulation of "problematic content," which further worsened the situation. This narrative, which serves as a starting point for a critical reading of the disinformation network, is not limited to a specific location or period. In this context, Recuero (2024) asks: if disinformation is not a new phenomenon, why has it gained so much prominence in public and academic debate today?

To answer this question, the researcher teaches us that, although lies and deception have always existed, disinformation "takes on a new dimension with social media platforms, which complexify and scale the phenomenon to levels we have never seen before" (Recuero, 2024, p. 20). Contemporary disinformation, intensified by digital platforms, gains a propagation speed and mass reach. In this environment, deception is amplified, no longer limited to an isolated act, but becoming part of a system with unprecedented dynamics and impacts.

To deepen this understanding, Recuero (2024) proposes a multidimensional approach to disinformation. From her perspective, disinformation does not always boil down to a false or misleading piece of content that is directly identifiable by individuals. She argues that, to grasp the phenomenon, it is necessary to go beyond the mere materiality of the content and understand its constitution, its process, and the effects it generates on social systems. Therefore, this broader view is central to developing effective public policies against the problem. It is essential to understand it in its various aspects.

The central thesis of the book is that "disinformation, as we understand it today, is a systemic problem and, as such, cannot be understood merely as a material object or addressed by a single strategy" (Recuero, 2024, p. 16). This systemic understanding implies that disinformation must be viewed as part of

a complex disinformative system that is intrinsically constituted by and coupled with both social systems and the systems of social media platforms. Thus, the author redefines disinformation not as mere noise, but as something that, by damaging information, creates an effect of disorganization and chaos, impacting the stability of the social system.

To elaborate on the analysis of disinformation, Recuero (2024) adopts the perspective of Michael K. Buckland (1991), who proposes three ways of understanding information, and applies this framework to the phenomenon of disinformation. According to the author, these approaches are applicable because disinformation can be seen as a "thing" (for example, a deceptive video circulating on WhatsApp); it can be a process, such as a group's operation to influence public opinion (which misleads, confuses, and deceives people); and it can be a lack of knowledge about something (the effect of the process).

This perspective—that disinformation is a systemic and complex problem, whose dynamics, in conjunction with platforms and social networks, create conditions conducive to the devaluation of objective truth—supports the idea that, in this scenario, a space for debate is built where rationality, science, and evidence are replaced by opinions and emotions. The result is a debate driven by disinformation and based on emotion and belief, rather than facts.

It is within this systemic context of disinformation that the thought of Byung-Chul Han (2022), especially in *Infocracy*, intersects with Recuero's (2024) analyses. Han (2022) argues that, in the information society, true freedom belongs to networked information, and sovereignty is exercised by those who control that data. This perspective resonates with Recuero's (2024) concern about the power of large digital platforms. The author questions to which entities these corporations—such as Meta, with data stored on global servers and internationally coordinated teams—are accountable.

Recuero (2024) points out that, traditionally, a State exercises its authority and sovereignty over a defined territory and population. However, digital platforms, with their transnational operations, function as true "states apart," independent of the nations where their social networks are used. For the author, the central issue is that "without ways to establish their sovereignty over these platforms, States and their social systems are at the mercy, precisely, of the platforms' own decisions, which operate as independent nations. Thus, there is a sovereignty problem" (Recuero, 2024, p. 71).

Han (2022), in his critique of the "information society," points out that within it, "anything can be asserted at will," which opens the door to disinformation. Recuero (2024) complements this view by demonstrating how disinformation can lead to profound crises, manifesting in phenomena such as denialism and

increased violence. Faced with this scenario, which demands confrontation, it is essential to analyze the primary targets of disinformation. In this regard, authors such as Leandro Karnal and Luiz Estevam (2023) assert that misogyny stands out as the foremost prejudice, allowing us to consider gender as a particularly vulnerable field and one frequently attacked by disinformation.

It is at this point that the thought of Judith Butler (2024), especially in *Who's afraid of gender?*, adds complexity to the analysis. Butler (2024) discusses how anti-gender advocates—those who interpret gender as a mere "ideology"—seek to eliminate the concept and social reality of gender. This stance is often grounded in a refusal to read studies on the subject that challenge their views, rejecting, in principle, any engagement with informed forms of critique. This anti-intellectualism and distrust of academia represent not merely a refusal to participate in public debate; they render informed public deliberation, essential to democracies, unfeasible. The author emphasizes that informed debate becomes impossible when parties refuse to engage with the contested material, stressing that "reading is not merely a pastime or a luxury, but a precondition of democratic life, one of the practices that keep debate and disagreement grounded, focused, and productive" (Butler, 2024, p. 24). This mechanism of rejecting dialogue and evidence echoes the dynamics of polarization and truth-denial that Recuero (2024) attributes to systemic disinformation.

Butler (2024) shares an experience that illustrates the disinformation landscape and the widespread disregard for truth-based discourse. She recounts an encounter in Switzerland, following a lecture, when a woman approached her and said she prayed for her. When asked why, the woman explained that the divine scriptures created man and woman, and that through her books, Butler denied this precept. The woman went on to state that male and female were natural categories and that nature itself was a divine creation. When Butler commented that nature is complex and that the Bible itself allows for multiple interpretations, the woman responded with mockery. Then, when asked whether she had read any of Butler's work, the categorical answer was: "no! I would never read a book like that!" For the American philosopher, this refusal demonstrated that, for that woman, reading a book about gender was tantamount to "dealing with the devil." According to the author, this view echoes the call to remove books on gender from classrooms and the fear that reading them might contaminate or ideologically indoctrinate, even though the proponents of such restrictions have usually never read the works in question.

The aforementioned experience resonates with Recuero's (2024) analysis of the systemic effects of disinformation. The scenario of refusal to engage in informed dialogue and the preference for belief over concrete evidence, as

experienced by the philosopher, is a direct reflection of what Recuero (2024) describes as the devaluation of objective truth. As the author points out, disinformation systems, coupled with platforms and social networks, have created the conditions for objective truth to be devalued and for a debate space to emerge where rationality, science, and evidence are replaced by opinions and emotions. Instead of a debate at least minimally based on facts, there is a debate rooted in emotion and belief, driven by disinformation. This crisis of confidence in "truth," marked by the rise of denialism and the transformation of science itself into a field of narrative dispute, highlights how disinformation undermines the stability of the social system—a central point in Recuero's (2024) work.

In light of this account, and in the process of concluding this review, Recuero (2024), through this book, opens space to conceive of disinformation not merely as an object, but as a system also composed of processes and effects. And in this context, who holds the power to destroy whom? M

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MATRIZes is a journal aimed at publishing studies on communication. It welcomes theoretical and empirical research on communicative processes, media and mediations in social interactions. It is a publication open to reflections on media cultures and languages and their sociopolitical and cognitive implications. MATRIZes preserves the transdisciplinary horizon of communication thinking and hopes to shift knowledge and practices that contribute to defining, mapping and exploring new communication scenarios. The main objective of MATRIZes is to be a space for debate on the different perspectives of the field of Communication.