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**MÍDIA**  
**E CONSUMO**

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## **Foreword**

In this edition of the journal CMC, the first of 2017, we bring you some valuable and interesting insights reflecting about politics in the field of communication. In the first article, the issue is dealt within the field of biopolitics and a reading of the tensive semiotics, signaling the possibilities of emancipation in the contemporary life. In the second article, the alternative life and work styles, against the “massified ways of living”, are pointed as expressions of politicalization viewed from the sphere of consumption facing the environmental crisis, in the work layers and economic crisis.

Then we have two articles that establish an interesting dialogue, bringing up questions related to organizational communication. The first one talks about the relations and points of contact between brands and consumers in the digital world. The following article brings a study applied to the same area which analyzes the construction of trust and hospitality in the platforms Airbnb and Couchsurfing.

The articles “Forms of female representation in teen chick lits” and “I always dreamed of being mother” reflect about the role of women in very distinct perspectives: the so-called “empowerment” as speech directed towards teenagers and the issue of motherhood throughout the reality show format. The latter holds relation with the following study, which analyzes the television programs MasterChef Brazil and MasterChef Colombia comparatively, reflecting about the relation between

local context and globalizing aspects that are linked to the reality show format.

Finally, we have a historical approach of communication regarding the “practices of reading and writing of the Brazilian slaves”. Through this study, we have access to the “world of communication and oral practices” in the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We wish you all an excellent reading.

*Denise Cogo e Vander Casaqui*  
*CMC Journal's Editors*

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## From anti-politics to the event: the anarchism of the evental bodies

### Da antipolítica ao acontecimento: o anarquismo dos corpos acontecimentais

José Luiz Aida Prado<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The event, that breaks with the established order, within the states of things with stable representations, can only arise from a post-foundational view of politics, which is not a condominium management of beings from the perspective of mediatized biopowers, but the emergence of a voice for the voiceless, of the people from the differential demands that at first did not dialogue. The materialist theory of communication presented here emerges from a basic antagonism, a negativity of the instinctual order that circulates in a tensive field from which the parts search in a performative way, while struggling for recognition (Honneth) and visibility, the emergence of disruptive events (Badiou). How can discourses on radical democracy be constituted in this perspective outside the corrupt heralds of the traditional system? How at the moment of the event do anarchist bodies emerge, ready to dive into the process of truth that begins there? In terms of a logic of affections or passions, the path of politics is made from fear to joy, from retention to liberation/emancipation. It is in this direction that we will think of communication as the tensive field of emergency for evental performative policy.*

**Keywords:** *tensivity; event; policy; affections.*

**Resumo:** *O acontecimento que rompe com a ordem estabelecida, com os estados de coisas com representações estáveis, só pode surgir a partir de uma visão pós-fundacional de política em que esta não é gestão condominial dos seres a partir dos biopoderes mediatizados, mas surgimento da voz dos que não têm voz, do povo, a partir das demandas diferenciais que, de início, não dialogavam. A*

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*teoria materialista da comunicação é aqui pensada a partir de um antagonismo de base, de uma negatividade da ordem pulsional que circula em um campo tensivo a partir do qual as partes buscam performativamente, na luta pelo reconhecimento (Honneth) e pela visibilidade, a emergência de acontecimentos disruptivos (Badiou). Como os discursos pela democracia radical podem, nessa perspectiva, ser constituídos fora dos arautos corrompidos do sistema tradicional? Como, no momento do acontecimento, emergem corpos anarquistas dispostos a mergulhar no processo de verdade que aí se inicia? Em termos de uma lógica dos afetos ou das paixões, o caminho da política se faz do medo para a alegria, da retenção para a libertação/emancipação. Nesta direção é que pensaremos a comunicação entendida como campo tensivo de emergência da política performativa acontecimental.*

**Palavras-chave:** *tensividade; acontecimento; política; afetos.*

We had, in the last texts (PRADO, 2013, 2015, 2016b, 2016c; PRADO e PRATES, 2017), deepened a communicational and semiotic theoretical perspective for the study of political movements that crosses the discursive theory, the event theory and the tensive semiotics. In this text, we will approach the communicational theoretical theory to later examine concrete practices.

When tracing the genealogy of neoliberalism, as Foucault did (2008) and as Dardot and Laval (2016) do, it is necessary to analyze discursively the enunciation that gave power to the image of the entrepreneur, progressively emptying the image of the citizen "invested in a collective responsibility" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 381). Thus, in the neoliberal discourse,

The reference of the public action is not the subject of rights anymore, but a self-entrepreneur actor that makes the most diverse private contracts with other self-entrepreneur actors. This way, the modes of transaction negotiated individually to "solve problems" tend to replace the rules of a public law and the processes of political decision legitimated by the universal suffrage. Far from being "neutral", the managerial reform of public action focus directly against the democratic logic of social citizenship; reinforcing social inequalities in the distribution of aid and in the access of resources regarding employment, health and education, it reinforces the social logics of exclusion that make a rising number of "sub-citizens" and "non-citizens" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 381).

In this neoliberal context, the positive psychology exalts, on one side, the alpha individual, built as a subject with superpowers from the "human dynamos operating for their own well-being and the socioeconomical order", in the expression of Freire Filho (2010, p. 77), and, on the other side, neglects the weak individual, who blame others for their mistakes and frustration, the ones who feel as victims and do not adapt to the world. It adapts well to the neoliberal mode of functioning, that shapes public action "to the criteria of rentability and productivity" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 379), besides promoting the

[...] symbolic depreciation of the law as an act from the legislative power, strengthening the Executive, [...] Tendency of powers of police to exempt themselves from all the judicial control, promotion of citizen-consumer in charge of controlling between concurrent political offers [...] (DAR-DOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 379-380).

In place of the symbolic principles that anchored citizenship, there is instituted a condominium management of society nowadays.

The confrontation of neoliberalism, however, cannot be done how it used to be, from a critic of ideology. If ideology was then understood as a false conscience, today, in times of cynicism (according to SAFATLE, 2008), it is not possible anymore to think about scraping off a layer of meaning of discourses to point them as fake or improbable. To the question “what means to offer critic”, Butler goes to Foucault to build her answer: The critic cannot be directed in blocks to the world, but to practices, discourses, epistemes and institutions, and “it loses its characters in the moment it is abstracted from its operation and made to support itself on its own as a purely generalizable practice (BUTLER, 2004, p. 304). Critic is as a compass with a LED light on the tip, glued in concrete practices, in disputes and conflicts around the world; It aims at allowing that we walk among antagonisms, in the shadow of the forest, illuminating at each step the contexts of interaction and conflict. It does not illuminate the fighting arena from above, but rather it walks with us. It only maps some centimeters ahead and goes practically materializing the route, announcing when the body loses balance how to give the next step. The critic is situated from the body, although it builds from processes of eventual truths.

However, the metaphor of the language flashlight does not precisely comprise the critic, because there is a game between determination and indetermination in this antagonist walk that demands that we walk many times in the dark and we orient ourselves in and from situations of indetermination; the actor is in the middle of this game, but there is not a mark of eternal truths to distinguish real shadows from fake ones. Communication is not a parliamentary activity of consensus. The argument

given at every step and the truth anchored on the events and the subjects affiliated to them. Against these truths subjects are placed in discourses linked to hegemonic devices.

If the neoliberal world locates the source of suffering in the lack of productive experiences of determination (the citizen as self-entrepreneur of himself), we will bet in the non-identity experiences. A theory of recognition in this route should try to incorporate experiences of indetermination, or, as Viveiros de Castro (2002) would say, a Amerindian encounter in the forest. The keyword here is, according to Dunker (2015, p. 299), expansion of indetermination.

This way, as Foucault (in BUTLER, 2004) said, critic must not be built as a general judgement. To make criticism as a form of praxis, Butler says, it is necessary to apprehend “the ways which the own categories are instituted”, i. e., how the field of knowledge is built and how “something he suppresses comes back as his own constitutive occlusion” (BUTLER, 2004, p. 304) How the field of knowledge in which we are operating, fighting, combating other discourses is constructed? How our active insertion works amidst the discourses “regarding its abilities of reaching goals” (BUTLER; SALIH, 2004, p. 304)?

Language in Butler is thought in a performative mode, in which saying, thinking and inscribing means to change rules, convince, change epistemic fields, forms of management and biopowers. We live a time where the powers are oriented to manage and control life, populations. It is not about building normative ethics, but supporting criticism towards the decrease of subjugation, subordination, of acting when the concrete modes of existence are seen in danger. This performance is political and not condominium management, that Rancière (1996) calls police. In this perspective, the main task is not to evaluate if their objects are good or bad, valued or not, but “to highlight the own structure of evaluation” (BUTLER, 2004). Butler asks: “what is the relation of our knowledge to power, in a way that our epistemologic certainties support a way of structuring the world that suppresses alternative possibilities of ordination”? (BUTLER, 2004, . 307).

I would like to link this idea of criticism and de-subjugation with Badiou's perspective. Badiou starts his book *Logics of the worlds* differentiating democratic materialism from materialistic dialectic. Our most spontaneous current belief is the following: "there is nothing more than bodies and languages". It is the spontaneous belief of democratic or post-modern materialism. In it, "the body is the only concrete instance of the productive individuals that aspire joy. The man, in the regimen of "life potency" is a converted animal that the law of body take over the secret of his hope" (BADIOU, 2008, p. 18). This materialism is a "biomaterialism" that expands animality, because the rights of man are the rights of the living; it is a democratic materialism, because the contemporary consensus, when recognizing the plurality of languages, supposes its juridic equality" (BADIOU, 2008, p. 18). This is the multicultural logic of the globalized capitalism, heiress of the post-modernism. Against this position, Badiou proposes a "materialistic dialectic" in which a third term arises to complement the reality of bodies and languages. This would be the statement of materialistic dialectic: "there is nothing more than bodies and languages, except truths". Having truths makes an objection to the statement of the democratic materialism: Truths are not bodies or languages, but "incorporeal bodies, languages without meaning, generic infinites, unconditional supplements" (BADIOU, 2008, p. 20). This "but" indicates that it is not about adding truths to bodies and languages or dialectic synthesis. "The truths exist as an exception of what it is" (BADIOU, 2008, p. 21). Truths are not only adequate correspondences between object/state of things and statements. They appear as processes that modify the states of things from events.

How does this process actually start? It starts with the emergency of an act (so-called event) that break the state of things, re-shuffles the way which the set of elements that characterize a state of representation is organized, that is, the frames of order and separation. The liberal state places law and order to protect power and wealth. From the subjects of the neoliberal system the self-entrepreneur growth is expected, in which every one prepares to raise their "me" capital, adding characteristics and

attributes. In this perspective, Badiou says, the law is the prescription of a reasonable order for this situation, for this type of conjunction, of setting of elements into sets. Some sets are considered existent, visible, others are not. To these last ones, the system sends tear gas, anti-depressants, prison or the mist of invisibility. For the people that are not from the “elite”, the world is not liquid, but it is rather solid. The accepted and appropriate parts of condominiums get a title of self-entrepreneurs and the others remain without name and without place. The law is, therefore, a decision about the existence, which gives an ontological character to the law of order in this state of things (BADIOU, 2012, p. 67).

### **In search of the recognition**

The main fights against capitalism had been of economic redistribution until the 70's, when the opposition faced was of economic status: On one side, the work force, on the other, the capital. But, since then, the proletariat stopped being one only universal subject that once unified the “multiplicity of social manifestations aiming political emancipation” (SAFATLE, 2015, p. 325). Starting in the 60's and 70's, the “new social movements” had emerged, with the feminist, gay, ethnic, post-national fights, etc. With this, the confrontations had dislocated from a politics of classes to a politics of identities.

In the 90's, social theory, in the trend of these so-called “new” movements, started reinventing the theory of multiplicities following new bases. This did not occur only due to the nature of demands, but from, as Safatle says (2015), reader of Boltanski and Chiapelo (2009), of changes in ethos of capitalism after 1968. With that, the centrality of the concept of fight of classes falls and rises the shout for recognition “as a central political device” (SAFATLE, 2015, p. 326).

Some authors, as Axel Honneth (2003), affirm that all fight must be thought as recognition fight. Nancy Fraser does not agree with this and invite us to think of the injustices as economic redistribution and cultural recognition (FRASER; HONNETH, 2006).



My general thesis is that, nowadays, justice demands both redistribution and recognition. Separately none of the two is enough. However, when we embrace this thesis, the question of how they match both aspects asks maximum importance. I maintain that they have to integrate in one only global mark the aspects that emancipate both issues. From a theoretical point of view, the task consists in ideate a bidimensional conception of justice that can integrate both defensible vindications of social equality and recognition of difference. In fact, the task consists in ideate a programmatic political orientation that can integrate the best of the redistribution politics with the best of the recognition politics (FRASER; HONNETH, 2006, p. 19).

According to Honneth, even the redistribution injustices, from the field of economy, should be understood as unattended demands of recognition, as social demonstrations of disrespect.

The motivation of social protest for the poor layers of society is not based on the orientation of moral principles positively formulated, but rather on the experience of violation of ideas of justice given intuitively; the normative nucleus of these ideas of justice consists one and other time in expectations related with respect or even dignity, honor and integrity. Well, if they generalize these results beyond their respective contexts of investigation, the conclusion is to see in the acquisition of social recognition the normative condition of all communicative action (HONNETH, 2011, p. 136).

There is, in the multiculturalism linked to the global capitalism, the illusion of a pluralism without antagonism:

[...] illusion based on the forgetfulness that identities, albeit psychological or political, are always constructed in the interior of symmetrical relations of power, being therefore expressions of strategies of defense or domination (SAFATLE, 2015, p. 349).

Multiculturalism tries to solve this matter through a “politicalization of the cultural differences”, building a politics of tolerance. As Safatle says, this equation of differences comes from the question “How far can we stand the differences?” (SAFATLE, 2015). With that, however, we

remain in the circle of isolated differences, without building extended logics that do not stop at the differences or hold politics merely compensatory to reach a policy that integrates recognition and redistribution, that is, cultural and economic demands, the way Fraser proposed in his polemic with Honneth (FRASER considered; HONNETH, 2006).

In this sense, multiculturalism is a complement of neoliberalism, to which there is only an individual competing against the others. Safatle invite us to think about politics outside this conjunction between economy and culture:

[...]politics is, above all, a force of de-differentiation capable of opening a productive field of indetermination to the subjects. Political subjects are not holders of individual demands that represent particular groups, statements and classes (SAFATLE, 2015, p. 354).

Therefore, the combat against biopowers must invest in the direction of the indetermination and a change of the circuit of the affection in order to create movements/events that are not anchored in the individual conquests. In this direction, we must think of communication from the scenes of honnethian conflict, not on a parliament that seek habermasian consensus.

In Laclau, the movement for the construction of people can only exist from a lack, a breach that emerges in the apparent continuity of social issues. There is projected an absent plenitude. "The construction of people would be the attempt of giving a name to this absent fullness" (LACLAU, 2013, p. 140). The lack would linked to a demand that was not answered by the powers in effect. There is placed a fracture between the unanswered demands and the powers that did not answer them. The demand does not need to be something as the price it wheat, it can be more abstract, as the attendance to the rights of the citizen, of the woman, homosexual, of trans people. That is, in Laclau, the movement cannot be purely anarchic, having to sew the differences through a equivalencial logic that is opposed to the hegemonic discourses.

Politics has to, therefore, be evental in the sense it has to undo the modes of order of visible, legible and representable, and this is not of

the order of the strictly individual development. As we said with Badiou, it is necessary to undo the law in these ways of order, of naming things, of elements that belong to representable, visible, correspondent sets to descriptions known as clear and distinct, recognizable. The event modifies the states of things of the worlds, introducing the possibility of new processes of truths since that it has citizens faithful to the event. Badiou defines desire as the search of something beyond the normality of the law, desire as “singularity”. It is in this sense that we talk about eventual politics, that can initiate a new communicational process.

### **Occupying the square, inventing the public**

Let us consider the example of the Occupy movements, as in Wall Street (OWS), that took over north American cities in 2011 and 2012. They started with meetings with few dozens of activists and expanded until gathered thousands of participants. The idea was to promote a horizontal activism that would not be subordinate to old strategies of traditional movements linked to labor unions and parties; the movement intended to occupy a square nearby the stock exchange and call horizontal activists to the place. It was necessary to have initial proposals to contaminate other people and to extend the movement. The initial idea for the convocation came from David Graeber: The wealthiest 1% of the population not only concentrated the country's wealth, but they transformed this wealth into political power (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 57). As Joseph Stiglitz said,

[...] practically all the American senators and most members of the house of representatives, when they arrive at the Chamber, belong to the wealthiest one percent, are kept in the power by the money of the richer one percent and know that, if they serve well to this one percent, they will be rewarded when they leave the position (STIGLITZ in GRAEBER, 2015, p. 57).

There came the idea of calling the Occupy Wall Street action of "movement of the 99%". The activists wanted to leave from what was

already been done in the squares of Cairo, Athens, Barcelona and Madrid, "where thousands of common citizens, most of them with no preparation in terms of political mobilization, were willing to occupy public squares in protest against all the political class of their country (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 58). The Occupy decided to adopt the non-violent practice of Gandhi, even though it failed in previous movements - as it was the case of forest defenders in the 90's, that were tortured by the police without the attention of the media; moreover, "the local tribunals deemed acceptable the tactic of applying pepper spray on protester's eyes. Without any media coverage or legal appeal, the contradictions that Gandhi's tactics should unveil were simply lost" (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 76). In the case of Occupy, such tactics worked, because media gave attention to the movement following the trend of international repercussion. Beyond this change of focus from the media, Graeber attributes the spread of news and videos to the social media activity, although, he says, it does not explain why the movement spread so quickly throughout the country (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 80). Here the feeling of "shame, dishonor and strong indignation for hearing one's a loser in a game that no one made him play" (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 81) counts. Graeber tells the story of a lady who:

Even though she came from a modest household, she got to go to a PhD in Renaissance Literature in an Ivy League institution. The result? She had an 80-thousand dollar debt and no immediate perspective except working as an assistant, which would not even cover the rent, much less her college tuition (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 82).

Would Occupy have been an event when bringing to the square a set of people and groups very different from each other who gathered their fight against neoliberalism through an equivalency logic (LACLAU, 2015)? This is a hard discussion to establish, but we can consider that this anarchist movement puts in question something very important in these neoliberal times: democracy is not something defined by the vote of the majority, but rather "the process of collective deliberation under the principle of full and equal participation" (GRAEBER, 2015, p. 187).

In this sense, people gathered in the square to deliberate constitute an event for democracy, because they make this experience a common one. Facing this event, the constituted powers strongly react. The experience of democracy does not appear, therefore, from within a politically instituted system, but it comes of the world of life, of these experiences that suspend the hegemonic discourse (the neoliberal speech, the speech that says there is no other way of living except under the capitalist regime, etc.). We are not talking about ideals. The question is: How can radical democracy speeches be built outside the corrupted circuits of the traditional system? To build equivalential coalitions that gather differences to create a counter-hegemonic movement is not enough, because in order to govern it would be necessary to get into a machine of governability that is already corrupted. Thus, the most basic sense of anarchism – a government “without rulers” – is what really matters here, and not the romantic ideal of a communitarianism without leaders. This “non government evokes a certain political sensibility that proposes a set of relations that do not appeal to force and violence to be imposed. As Graeber says, “the ends will never be reached unless the means are, themselves, a model of the world one wants to create” (GRAEBER, 2015). We cannot negotiate with outlaws if we want to change the ways of governability and sociability.

### **Bodies in alliance and the politics of the streets**

Butler, in an article during the protests post-2010, as for example in the Tahir square, talks about all these experiences of being together:

[...] those in the winter of 2011 against tyrannical regimes in northern Africa and in the Middle East, but also against the increasing deficit of the workers in Europe and in the southern hemisphere, the fights for public education throughout U.S.A. and Europe, and those fights to create a more safe street for women, sexual and gender minorities and, including trans people, whose public visibility is frequently punished with legal and illegal violence (BUTLER, 2011).

According to the authors, the bodies congregated in movement, in talk, claiming a public space. The bodies did not enter a public space that was already given beforehand, already institutionalized, because the public character of the space is already a part of the dispute. This public which is built by the movement in the square is performative in so far as where he constitutes it when we name it an act. The police, when it assaults the protesters, is refusing this perspective of the movement. It supports a neoliberal public who, in fact, is not public, but an individualistic space. The police cannot be thought of as an activity exclusive from a public sphere, says Butler, because “it always crosses this line and again, bringing attention to the way which this politics is already in the house, on the street or in the neighbourhood, or even in these virtual spaces that are not linked to the architecture of the public square” (BUTLER, 2011).

What it means, then, to gather in a multitude, contesting the distinction between public and private? This meeting, this gathering of people, of singularities that cannot respond to the univocal sovereignty, is the public demand, in a way it produces, by their own doing, the public of this gathering, refusing the regimes of instauration of a fixed visibility, an interaction and a governability previously supported by the power of the police. Evental communication is precisely the process of this gathering demanding performatively the public. The gathering is the own evental reconfiguration (intensivity) of the environment, of the material which constitutes the surroundings and the basis of this meeting (the street, the square). There is no collective action without these materials. When trucks become platforms for speech of participants of the multitude or when the human microphones repeat the speeches so that it can be heard by everyone, this is the materialization of this gathering, the effect of the bodies in junction. The action depends not only on the multitude, but on the material supports and the interventions performed at any moment. When we make effective the actions from the multitude, there is a fight in act over what really constitutes and about what will be the public space (while it is made while being), but also about

“the basic modes in which we are, as bodies, supported in the world – a fight against the deprivation of rights and abandonment”, against the deficit of life (BUTLER, 2011).

The public space is not only the material support given by the streets and squares, but it appears, in the meeting of the bodies, as a space for visibility and interaction. Butler speaks of a “space to appear” that appears among the participants - in presence, as the semiotic scholars would say - when the alliance is made, in the measure where the alliance is being made, in the gerund of the action - communication in presence. When appearing for the other, in this gerund of finding in the bodies of the square, the bodies are not there as naked lives, but as political bodies in a space of plural action. The action creates the location, because it does not come from a place that previously support the action: this place created in act is part of the dispute. In this sense, the in public is performative. In the act of enunciate it, materialize it, in the interaction itself, the bodies create it. The discourse arises in so far as the bodies gather and act.

To rethink the space of appearance (or visibility) in order to understand the power and the effect of public demonstration of our time, we need to understand the body dimensions of actions, in which the body requires and what the body could do, specially when we should think about the bodies together, what makes them be together, their conditions of persistence and power (BUTLER, 2011).

These alliances can, as Butler said, acquire performative power, in an anarchist moment, against tyrannical regimes (the case of Egypt, for example, in 2011), against the debt of students and workers from the United States, against the deficit of life, in the search of a better place to live, free pass for national transportations, security for women on the streets or respect regarding sexual orientation of minorities (BUTLER, 2011). It is a recess where you question power, government, make demands that are still not codified under the law. What interest us here is this eventual dimension of acting together, gathered, that “open time

and space and outside the temporality and the established architecture of the regime” and which can reset what is public.

*For the politics to have a place, the body should appear.* A body appears for the others, having a space between bodies that allow these appearances. That does not only create a visibility, but an audience, because voices circulate.

What we are, corporally, is already a way of being “for” the other, appearing in a way we cannot see, being a body for the other in a way that I cannot be for myself, and thus, dispossessed, in perspective, by our own sociability (BUTLER, 2011).

I must appear for others in ways “for which I cannot give an account and in this way my body establishes a perspective that I cannot inhabit”. The body establishes not only my own perspective, Butler says, but it dislocates this perspective and turns this displacement into a necessity.

This happens more clearly when we think about bodies that act together. No body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise only occurs “between” two bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my body and of the other. That way, my body, when it acts politically, does not act alone. In fact, the action emerged from the “in between” (BUTLER, 2011).

## Speech and uprising

With the event, the differences can emerge in a meeting at a square and make the creation of an equivalential logic (term by LACLAU, 1996). After the event, however, a new antagonist field is created, in which there are many types of subjects regarding the event: Those loyal to the event, those who go, from it, build a world in politics, in arts, in science or in love, but there are also reactive subjects, the ones who refuse the event. These reactive subjects in general are linked to the power of the police. In this new field, many speeches challenge the senses of the event, making a decrease in the maximum intensity of evental eruption,



in a way that the first moment of maximum affection make way to the legibility of the event, that gradually arise, in so far as the senses are being built by the speeches in challenge. In order for that disputes develop towards radical democracy, it is necessary that the left expand "the chains of equivalence between the different fights against oppression" (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 2015, p. 264).

In order for it to develop, it is necessary to understand the discourse theory not as an instrument only for reading texts, but as a criticism in the sense that Butler and Foucault say, i. e., as an utility belt for reading practices and devices, including networks that constitute these devices: legislations, decrees, laws, institutions, practices, regulations, etc. The discourse theory should act in the gathering of differences that put us to think, together, new worlds. In this sense, it is not a theory, it is a praxis.

We come, therefore, to some conclusions that are necessary for the understanding of a communication theory and a discourse theory that are not only exam for verbal, visual or verbivisual texts, but also practices linked to the ways of functioning biopotences in their fight against biopowers. This theory is anchored in a Foucault who read Butler and Laclau. Let's see: In Foucault, it was about, for example, in the history of sexuality, of understanding how the experience of sexuality is developed in the individuals, which takes them to "recognize themselves as subjects of a sexuality" (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 10). Experience, for him, means "the correlation, in a culture, between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity". Thus, to make a history of sexuality is not to understand its successive forms in the time as effects of forms of repression, because this would put "desire and the subject of desire outside of the historical field" (FOUCAULT, 2009).

In summary, the general form of inderditiion cannot comprise what is historical in sexuality, the same way as, in Butler, the subject cannot be understood only if we consider its subordination to the norms, but it is always important to think about the space of agency, of creativity that allows him to de-subordinate and open field for events. To give account of this history, it is necessary to face three axes, as Foucault says:

- A. the formation of knowledge linked to the sexuality;
- B. the systems of power that regulate its practice;
- C. the forms for which the individuals are recognized as subjects of this sexuality (FOUCAULT, 2009).

Here comes the theory of discourse as an analysis of practices linked to the device of sexuality, i. e., a network constituted by regulations, laws, norms, decrees, documents, institutions, professional formation linked to this field, etc. With that it is possible, in particular, to examine how the formation of knowledge come to be, “escaping the dilemma between science and ideology” (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 11), but, at the same time, it is necessary to undertake the analysis of power relations and its technologies “escaping the alternative between a power conceived as domination or denounced as a simulation” (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 11). Regarding the last item, the recognition of the individual as a subject of desire, Foucault invite us to undertake a genealogy; it is about

[...] analyzing practices through those the individuals were led to pay attention to themselves, to decipher themselves, to recognize and confess themselves as subjects of desire, establishing by yourself a certain relationship that allows to discover, in the desire, the truth of your being, either natural or decayed. [...] In summary, to understand how the modern individual could make the experience of himself as a subject of a “sexuality”, it would be indispensable to previously distinguish the way for which, during centuries, the western man is led if to recognize as subject of desire (FOUCAULT, 2009, p. 12).

With this, we see that politics is this intervention of the bodies battling in this performative perspective in search of lines of escape of the hegemonic speeches. To have politics it is necessary to have event and, for this, anarchic bodies, even if it only happens in the moment of maximum intensity of events. We can think that the speaker/agent, when entering the culture, is being affectionally marked in his body, making his choices and, in the same way, being chosen by the discourses and the affectional constellations invested in him. There is, therefore, a tendency of cristalizing affection and discourses in bodies through discipline,

control and pedagogy linked to systemic devices. The body is, in this manner, marked by words, by speeches. Many speeches try to comprise what occurs in a field from diverse positions of subjects, with their desires, interests and demands. This fight of position does not involve only arguments, but practices rooted in values incarnated in affected bodies, that is, the dominant values also incarnate in bodies that do not only act cognitively, but affectively. That works for discursive disputes in the most different themes, such as sustainability, entrepreneurship and populism. These affections are rooted, incorporated, incarnated ever since that the baby sucked in his mother's chest or since he was in her belly, listening and feeling the world around. The learning of the language is corporal and there is no pre-discursive subject. The body supports many subjects and they respond to speeches and practices. The subject is effect of a speech: On one side, as in Foucault, the subject is subjugated to the speeches in which he is constituted; on another, he is capable of agency, as in Butler, being able to carry through subversion. This subjection was marked in the body by a negativist language, from whose negativation had emerged pulsions.

The semiotics of passion speaks in a protensive subject, which implies to imagine a subject pre-conscience, dived into the magma of the *Lebenswelt*, of the world of life with its atemactical forms, semantic and pragmatic, species of phenomenological unconscious where *dasein* drinks to produce his speeches, that, by the way, as Greimas would say, has his perfumes. The protensive subject is not only dived into these eventual perfumes of the world of life, because there are shades in this world. It is a world filled with affection, because the forms of wording and feeling the states of things, the subjective and social states are not unaffected. The world of life (*Lebenswelt*) is a filling of languages loaded with affection. This experience that is born through the tree of the world of the life is not monologically generated by the individual conscience, but rather it is a communicative corporeal living in so far as *dasein* gets into the language, the collective, being family the first of them. It is in the relation with the other, since early times, since the mother gives the

baby her chest, that the baby-dasein is sucked within the language, in the same way that he sucks the chest when he feeds, learning that food is mother and it is affection. To feed oneself is, since the beginning, to affect by and from the other; or, as Lacan says, it involves the pleasure of the mouth, which takes us from the hierarchy of necessities of Maslow.

There are two levels of these discursive readings:

1. Foucaultian-butlerian, that is in localizing the historical series of statements that constitute the force of the device to be studied (for example, the psychiatric device, neoliberalism, etc.);
2. analysis of texts (including practices) involved in the functioning of the device in question in each case.

It is necessary to remember that the affectivity does not operate only through speeches, but also through the events. Moreover, the circuit of affection is closely related to the disputes of senses of events, when the speeches and the devices come into dispute in order to illuminate the first. The speeches are affected by the affection and reach the bodies - that is, they are become incorporated, they get incarnated.

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## Reflections on living and the politicization of consumption practices.

## Reflexões sobre o viver e a politização das práticas de consumo.

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**Abstract:** *In the last decades, an increase in globally consumption patterns took place, followed by increased pollution, exploitation of natural resources and a constitution of a lifestyle dominated by an excess of labor work and economic debt. This article presents partial results of a research and had as objective to make visible how groups with alternative lifestyles and labor practices related to consumption practices. Aspects related to individualization of responsibility related to environmental problems, as criticized by some respondents of the research, will be problematized. Even though the reflection and modification of consumption practices are not a complete solution to environmental problems, the fact of being concerned with our planet make possible the emergence of less massified relations in our lives.*

**Keywords:** *consumption practices; politicization; lifestyle.*

**Resumo:** *Nas últimas décadas, tem acontecido um aumento nos padrões de consumo de forma global, acompanhado do aumento da poluição, da exploração dos bens naturais e a constituição de um modo de vida tomado pelo excesso de*

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*trabalho e pelo endividamento econômico. Esse artigo é resultado parcial de uma pesquisa de doutorado e teve como objetivo visibilizar como grupos com estilos de vida e de trabalho alternativos a modos massificados de viver relacionavam-se com o consumo. Problematicaremos o aspecto da individualização das responsabilidades sobre os problemas ambientais, crítica apontada por um dos grupos participantes. Ainda que refletir e modificar as práticas de consumo não acabe com os problemas ambientais, o fato de tomar para si as preocupações em relação ao planeta que habitamos pode viabilizar relações menos massificadas com a própria vida.*

**Palavras-chave:** *práticas de consumo; politização; modos de vida.*

## Introduction

Consumption is a human activity that is modified throughout history (BAUMAN, 2008; BARBOSA, 2010). This way, we cannot understand consumption as something homogeneous or that works only to supply our needs. According to Castro (2014, p. 60), “consumption must be understood as the result of a set of social and cultural practices strongly related to the subjectivity of its actors and to the social group they belong to”. When we are referring to the term “consumption”, we are including different actions in the same sphere, because, when we consume something, we are communicating, expressing a “lifestyle, a way of being and acting” (CASTRO, 2014, p. 61). To better express these differences, we choose to use the term/concept “consumption practices” and we use the term “consumption” when we refer to the generalization of these social and cultural practices.

In the last decades, there has been an increase in the consumption patterns globally, followed by some effects, as the increase of pollution, the advance of exploration of natural goods and the constitution of a way of life filled with excessive labor and economic debt, among many others. At the same time, the concerns related to the “limits of the model of capitalist expansion” and their effects are also increasing, bringing to the table “the ethical and political dimensions of consumption practices [...]” (CASTRO, 2014, p. 68).

This relation between consumption and environmental problems have been leading some people to become responsible for their consumption practices and changing them. Some militants of social movements, activist groups and also people that are not organized politically in groups have been stopping the consumption of products and/or services, boycotting brands and/or companies or simply not consuming something they consider superfluous. To stop consuming certain products or to start consuming something become a more conscious action, because it begins to consider: The origin of its production, the type of “labor relation” there is in its making, the fact it was transported through great distances, the political position of the company who makes it



(involvement in war, corruption, environmental crimes, the use of pesticides in the cultivation of foods, etc.)

It would not be possible to say that every person who practices these actions of refusal of the consumption of certain products do it as a strategy of fight against “the Capital”. We can think that these are ways of manifesting indignation in relation to the effects of a certain production and consumption style on the planet and in people’s lives, either because of the critics about the invasion of private spaces (modifying habits of consumption) and/or the appropriation of public spaces by big corporations. Such actions are ways to fight for their own life, because, when they are opposed to certain consumption practices, these subjects come up with new paths for their way of life. When we evidence these practices, we can hear other voices, making visible other ways to inhabit the planet Earth.

The theme of consumption has been related to environmental problems for some decades. Television news talk about global warming, a subject that is still controversial, because there are people who think global warming would be a natural event. According to the report of Intergovernmental Panel about Climate Change (IPCC) in 2013, global warming is an event created by human beings, due to the industrial activity (NASSIF, 2014). IPCC is an institution created by the United Nations Program for the Environment and by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and gathers scientists and specialists from all over the world, that create their reports based on research analyses (WOLFFENBUTTEL, 2007).

The issue of the environmental crises, until the 70’s, was related to developing countries due to the fact that they have major unorganized population growth, producing impact on the environment (PORTILHO, 2005). From that decade on, another speech gained relevance, relating the issue of environmental problems to the way of production used by developed countries, because they consumed more natural resources

and energy, and, consequently, produced more pollution (PORTILHO, 2005). The argument that these environmental problems were due to the way of production used was being incorporated and impacted the production sector through pressure made by the government, for the “establishment of new norms and environmental demands, pressured by environmental movements - through complaints, manifestations and boycotts - and also by the own businessmen that appropriated the environmental speech” (PORTILHO, 2005, p. 2).

It was by the 90's that the discussion about conscious consumption and the relation between consumption and environment started to gain some expression, yet indirectly, coinciding with complaints about the climate crisis (FONTENELLE, 2010). According to Portilho (2005) the Conference Rio 92 and the documents produced at that time, as the Declaration of Rio, the Agenda 21, the NGO Treaty, influenced this change of debate, changing the culpability from the modes of production to the consumption practices. This twist in the discussion about social problems “coincides with – and can be explained by - a tendency of a paradigmatic change of principle that structures and organizes society, which also goes from production to consumption (PORTILHO, 2005). Thus, we see, next, that the report of IPCC on 2007 and the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), directed by Al Gore, former vice-president of the United States, hold people accountable for their choices when relating global warming with human activities (FONTENELLE, 2010).

This article is the partial result of a PhD research entitled *Consumptions and ways of life: Problematizations about the stylistics of existence and ways of consuming*<sup>4</sup>, by the first author. The research had as objective to make visible the relationship that groups with lifestyles and labor relations alternative to massified ways of living had with consumption; to do so, we used the cartography as methodologic orientation and we followed four groups in the city of Porto Alegre and one group from

4 Thesis presented to the Post-Graduate Program of Social and Institutional Psychology for the attainment of the title of PhD in Social and Institutional Psychology at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Nova Santa Rita, metropolitan region of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. When referring to massified ways of living, we are not talking about a fordist/taylorist process of production and the consequent massification of certain consumption habits, but we are talking about a life with less reflection, of a mindset that makes few remarks about the relationship with the world that we live in.

Consumption practices communicate, evidence brands that express something about the relationship of the subjects with the world. For Douglas and Isherwood (1990, p. 88), consumption has the capacity to give the world a meaning, which “supposes interpreting the sensibility of this world”. On their understanding, goods are ritualistic accessories, given that their consumption is a ritual, “goods perish or are consumed, however this is only a small part of the whole process of consumption” (DOUGLAS; ISHERWOOD, 1990, p. 91). That way, thinking about how we relate with consumption is also reflecting about how we communicate with the world we live in.

To study consumption practices, for Castro (2014, p. 62-63), means to analyze “in what way goods work as language, communicating signs of distinction and classification in a social environment highly mediated by signs of consumption”. It also means to reflect on the singularities “of the ways of appropriation of each social group which works according to their own rules for giving meaning to products, services, brands and others” (CASTRO, 2014, p. 63), in addition to give subsidy for analysis about the customer from a market point of view.

When we study the singularities in the relationship with consumption of different groups during the PhD research, it was possible to observe that the consumption practices of each group expressed certain lifestyles. The first group followed was the Cambada de Teatro em Ação Direta Levanta Favela, who performs theater on the street. The second group was Pedal Express, a cooperative of cyclists that do delivery for other companies. The third group was the Cooperativa de Consumo,

a partnership between a group of MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra – Movement of workers without land) members that plant organic products and the Ateneu Libertário A Batalha da Várzea, a libertarian group that sells the products and delivers them throughout the city. The fourth group was the Coletivo Até o Talo, group that cooks vegan<sup>5</sup> and vegetarian food, selling it on public events and in their own house.

Each group was followed during one month on their daily activities (with one or two meetings per week), followed by two more meetings (one per week) specifically to discuss the question of the research: “How do you relate with consumption?”. Notes were made in field diaries, with a total of 100 pages. As a way of restituting and closing the process, we made a meeting with all the groups to socialize what has been already systematized with the research material. On this day, we used a recorder and we had the participation of a colleague from the research group helping with the notes. The meetings with the groups happened between May 2013 and May 2014, having the total of 12 meetings with the theater group, eight with the cooperative of cyclists, eight with the cooperative of consumption and eight with the group of vegan and vegetarian food. The names of the groups were not altered in order to maintain the relation of co-authorship with the participants. The groups agreed and encouraged the use of their names; however, the names of the individual subjects are fictional.

From the meetings, we perceived some characteristics each group had in their consumption practices. For the analysis of this research, we highlighted only one characteristic on their relation with consumption. Thus, for example, with the Cambada de Teatro em Ação Direta Levanta Favela, we highlighted the fact they do not accept sponsorship from brands, so they do not become a sellable product. With Pedal Express, we highlighted the problematization about the ways of resistance regarding consumption, more specifically regarding the use of the

5 The expression “vegan” refers to food or people that do not eat meat and do not use any product with animal origin or even tested in animals.

bicycle (what would mean to resist in this field?). With the Cooperativa de Consumo, we highlighted the solidarity in their relationships (with the community they live in, with the groups with whom they interact and with the buyers of their products), seeking a less impersonal interaction, but rather a more friendly interaction.

## **Individualization or politization?**

In this article, we will reveal the analysis regarding the Coletivo Até o Talo, and the characteristic we will highlight was the criticism towards the individualization of responsibilities about environmental problems. The Coletivo Até o Talo has more reflective consumption practices, seeking to consume in a way of minimizing the effects of this activity on the environment and in a way of not living a life geared towards work and the consumption of goods and objects. However, they believe that the ones responsible for the degradation of the environment and the consumption of natural goods would be the big corporations, the agribusiness and the relation that these sectors have with the government.

The Coletivo is organized in a selfgoverned way; in the moment of research, four people were participating more actively, everyone had other paid activities (none was formal), only one person lived exclusively from the work in the Coletivo. Among the activities developed there were: Production of snacks for events (parties, farmers markets, concerts, etc.) and for delivery; production of frozen dishes for delivery; dinners at their house and the creation of cooking workshops. The Coletivo produces vegan and vegetarian food with a low cost and in a healthy way, in addition to sharing information about this kind of food. Among the forms found to produce food at a low cost are: The use of unconventional food plants (UFPs) found on abandoned places around the city and/or planted by them in their house; using all parts of the food, such as fruit and vegetable peel; using foods in an unconventional way, such as the

“cheese” made out of potato and the “meat ball” made out of beans; recycling, which is the activity of going in the end of farmers markets and picking up food that would be thrown out to use in their preparations.

This lifestyle is not something exactly new; there is a movement called freegans<sup>6</sup>, that began in the United States in the 90's and spread to other countries, including Brazil. This movement is composed by people who adopt a lifestyle based on minimal consumption, who refuse waste and “support the community, the generosity, social interest, freedom, mutual help, contrary to the current society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformism and greed” (O QUE É, 2016). Inspired in their anti-globalization fights and in groups such as Food Not Bombs<sup>7</sup>, they use as strategy the boycott to consumption because they believe purchasing any product from corporations will harm the environment and/or the animals and/or the human rights. For freegans, in an economy based on the large-scale production, “geared towards profit, animal, human and land exploitation, this exploitation happens in every level of production (since the acquisition of the raw material, to the production and transportation) and in practically every product that we buy” (O QUE É, 2016). Thus, the alternative they have is to reuse products used by other people, that is, they collect from the trash: furniture, home appliances, books, CDs, food, clothing, among others. Among the principles of the freegans is: “waste reduction”; “work less”; “renovating what is wasted”; “return to the natural”, through the construction of community gardens, gardening and wild harvesting; “living free from rent” through squat; “ecologic transportation”, as far as possible (O QUE É, 2016).

The Coletivo Até o Talo is not inserted into the freegan movement, but it shares some of their characteristics, revealing there are different types of people that seek to consume less and work less. However, Coletivo has its own singularity, and their members reveal not to believe that their consumption practices will minimize environmental problems.

6 They are participants of freeganism, the word freegan is the fusion of the word free with the word vegan.

7 Independent collectives that distribute vegan food for free in protest against war.

They relate climate problems, air pollution, water contamination, the depletion/devastation of natural resources, deforestation, etc. to the way our society has been dealing with consumption. When they talk about environmental problems, they differentiate from polluting agents, because they believe the big responsible for the environmental pollution are not the subjects individually, but the companies and agribusiness – for using more energetic resources and polluting the environment, producing bigger impacts – and also the government, for participating and enabling this damaging relationship.

For the group, there is a certain culpability of individuals and their lifestyle that is present mainly in the media, such as television, radio and newspapers, when they talk about environmental issues. The culpability of individuals is pointed out by Fontenelle (2010) as one of the crossings of the speech of responsible consumption, since it is offered to the consumers the option of buying products from companies that have more care regarding the environment. Thus, every individual can choose whether to buy or not from companies that pollute the environment, expressing the idea of a subject that is self-governed. According to Fontenelle (2010), this speech, that gained popularity in the 90's, although it marks differences, demands discussions because it makes people responsible for their practices.

This accountability of subjects is shared by the media, according to Fontenelle (2010, p.216): “it is possible to visualize such speech on media in general, on business media, on specific magazines about sustainability and the environment, on the actions of NGOs and company foundations and in the marketing of big brands”. For the author, a feeling of anguish is created on the subjects by having to respond to something that surpasses their understanding about the subject. This feeling will be the “match for a new big product of the contemporary capitalism – security – which, in a new template, sells redemption as a commodity” (FONTENELLE, 2010, p. 218), i. e., responsible consumption. The consumer is responsible for their “self-government” in the responsible consumption speech:

[...] assuming or requiring a subject who is rational, reflective, aware of their own actions and responsible for them. Thus, such speeches might be added to the category “self-management”, in which it is explicit a proposal of “freedom of choice”, and, consequently, a personal responsibility for their actions (FONTENELLE, 2010, p. 220).

The self-management speech blames the individual for actions that are not only individual. That way, the subject is captured by this accountability and can engage in a healthier lifestyle, that is also sold by the media as being a more adequate way of living, from a so-called healthier consumption. Fontenelle (2012), on its research about business-oriented media, in which she analyzed the Brazilian magazine *Exame* and the British magazine *The Economist* from 1996 to 2007, defined healthy consumption as one of the categories of analysis. In this study, she perceived that the concerns about the theme were not related to the environment, but to a more “balanced lifestyle aiming physical and mental well-being for the performance of men at work” (FONTENELLE, 2012, p. 146). When she tried to understand how the speech of healthy consumption was dealt on *Exame* magazine, specifically, the author observed that it was seen as a business opportunity; for example, the idea of making a business “is exalted through the narration of success stories of shake inventors and diet soft drinks, sandwiches, among others” (FONTENELLE, 2012, p. 147). In the analyses of some of the magazine articles, healthy consumption was considered as a way of investment and the body, as a way of making a business (FONTENELLE, 2012). The debate on healthy consumption was, thus, summed up as a business opportunity.

We cannot disregard the contribution the debate about responsible consumption for the environment allows to focus on other aspects for the analysis of the issue. Portilho (2005) makes a distinction between what would be an accountability of the subject’s actions regarding the environment - through green consumption - and the politization of the ways of consumption - from the idea of sustainable consumption. The green consumer is the person that, with their “power of choice”,



chooses to purchase products that do not harm the environment, focusing on individual actions. However, the idea of green consumption would have limitations, individualizing the responsibility, leaving aside the comprehension about consumer culture, giving less focus on the process of distribution and production and provoking a transference of regulation, “from the government to the market, through mechanisms of self-regulation; and from the government and the market to the individual, through their choices of consumption” (PORTILHO, 2005). In addition to that, the author points out the untruth of, from the information about environmental problems, the consumers would choose to purchase products that do not harm the environment - indeed, green consumption ended up increasing a green market for people who could afford such products (PORTILHO, 2005).

Still, sustainable consumption appears as a proposal of collective overcoming of these limitations through creating policies that regulate the production and consumption, stopping to focus only on solutions in the field of technology, behavior or economy (PORTILHO, 2005). One example of that would be investing on actions that improve public transportation, which would depend on public policies and an understanding that a better city is not built by widening roads.

These more politicized consumption practices, more responsible, need to be studied more thoroughly. Studies that can make visible the many forms of resistance, of refusal and/or opposition to certain modes of consumption. Beyond the aspiration or struggle of building a more sustainable lifestyle, there is also the issue of fighting for solidary and ethical values for other human beings and for the planet Earth.

If, on one hand, subjects have been held accountable for their modes of consumption and led to rethink their lifestyle, on the other hand, we can think that there are subjects, individual or collective, that, by rebelling against the more massified way of living, take responsibilities for themselves regarding the world, politicizing a space that was previously seen as private. We do not believe the consumer is the subject that will change the entire society, however, it is possible:

[...] to consider the possibility of politization and environmentalization of the private sphere, considering it a necessary extension of new political practices. If the proposals of change on consumption patterns belong to the project and the utopia of a “sustainable society”, consumers – individual or organized – can be perceived as one of the holders of this project, building new ways of political action and strengthening citizenship and the interest for the public space (PORTILHO, 2005, p. 10).

It is towards this perspective that Coletivo Até o Talo brings to themselves the task of deconstructing the relationship they learn to have with consumption and making a work on themselves to create another relationship, inventing new consumption practices, escaping the logic in which the critics to the effects of modes of consumption are transformed into a business opportunity. At the same time, they say not to have the illusion of living “outside the system”, they just seek to live in a way they experience the type of society they want to, that is, a more fair society, worried about the planet, the animals and other human beings. The dialog below expresses this idea:

Letícia: Capitalism throws the blame onto the individual, but companies consume more than any person. There isn't any change in this, if everyone stopped using natural resources, it wouldn't change a thing about the society. But in an individual level, we are satisfied by living that way.  
 Camila: We are satisfied reproducing something we believe in.  
 Letícia: We are an experience of the society we project (Field Diary, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Participants express that the problems regarding the environment would be related with the logic of life geared towards consumption. When she said she is satisfied doing what she believes in, Camila expresses making her life an experience of the world she would like to live in, being satisfied putting into practice the choices she believes are best for herself and the world. She understands that her practices regarding consumption will not solve environmental problems, even if they can soften one situation or another. When they save water, reuse food, ride a bike, customize their clothes, reuse objects, Camila and her group

members are constituted as subjects and their practices support their principles. Thus, they communicate their lifestyle through their consumption practices. When they express what they think through the way they dress, how they eat, how they move, how they inhabit the city, how they interact with other people, etc. they communicate their choices about how to live, which makes and brings sense to their existence.

However, to seek to put their own principles into practice and politicizing a space previously seen as private (PORTILHO, 2005) demands a great effort. In order to build this politization of a private environment, participants of Coletivo Até o Talo say that is necessary to constantly work on themselves in order to deconstruct what they learned regarding consumption practices. For Camila, “to deconstruct is not to deny consumption, because we live in this system, there’s no way out. To deconstruct is a process of looking for more autonomy in this system” (FIELD DIARY, May 20th, 2014). For Coletivo Até o Talo, the deconstruction of consumption practices goes through looking for a relation with a greater autonomy regarding objects of consumption on capitalism. To do so, they seek to learn activities of building, sewing, cooking, planting, etc. in a more autonomous way and criticize the way of life in capitalism – that produces a distance between who produces something to who is consuming and creates a lifestyle marked by a cyclical movement between work, purchasing objects, debt, and discard objects.

For Rodrigo, this way of life imprisons people, they “get a credit card from the bank and end up in debt, getting bills of financing that will paid in a long-term commitment, that way the person cannot leave their job because of the debt” (FIELD DIARY, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014). For Hennigen (2010), there is a relation of reciprocity, of common production between credit and consumption, or consumption society, because a person can purchase goods and services even if they cannot pay. We can think that credit can either democratize access to consumption or it can produce big problems to the subject when using without planning, “purchasing excessively and without thinking, or if some ‘life accident’ occurs to the person in debt, among other factors” (HENNIGEN, 2010, p. 1.191).

The indebtedness, for Hennigen (2010, p. 1.189), “gets managed. Or not. When the debts exceeds the possibilities of budget of the consumer, what happens is called a over-indebtedness. In order to pay this economic debt, subjects cannot stop working, having intensive dedication to work is one of the characteristics expected of a participant of the consumers society (BAUMAN, 2008). According to Bauman (2008, p. 17), “the ideal employee would be a person without previous bonds, commitments or emotional bonds, and who avoids having them now; a person who is ready to take on any task that comes their way [...]” In this logic, Leticia explains that consumption, in capitalism, generates economic indebtedness, people “get into debt for buying things that are not going to last” (FIELD DIARY, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Coletivo’s critics, along with Bauman’s (2008), are regarding the excessive work, that leaves little room for leisure, reflection, interaction with people and that serve for purchasing objects that will have a short lifespan and soon will be discarded. For Leticia, it is necessary to rescue the “position of not only being a consumer, everyone is educated only to consume. That is what we want to rescue – autonomy - escaping from this idea that every person is only a potential buyer (FIELD DIARY, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014). Hence the importance of thinking that politicizing consumption practices can also take us to reflect about what we do, not necessarily to change the world, but to say that we are part of this world.

For Rodrigo, “nowadays people are only producing symbolic things, because no one knows how to make things with their own hands anymore” (FIELD DIARY, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014). The importance of making “things with their own hands” would be in having more autonomy on their own lives and knowing what they are consuming, of leaving the position of being only a consumer. Participants say that, in this search for autonomy, it is necessary to deal with their own needs and is evident there is no way “out of the capitalist system” because everyone has “bills to pay” and the denial of this way of life in capitalism can bring many constraints, making impossible the reflection about what was lived. When someone denies they live in a capitalist world, thinking there

would be a “way out”, the subject would be creating life and resistance strategies in disagreement with their reality, creating illusions about their own doing. They express that is necessary to reflect about this reality so people can produce consumption practices with more autonomy, taking their needs into consideration. For Camila and Letícia:

[...] it is not possible to escape capitalism, to say that we are doing that would be a hypocritical attitude, since we need to pay rent, for example. [...] Until you create another way, you're in. Even if you occupy a land, you need capital to start producing in it, in order to escape capitalism you need capital (FIELD DIARY, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

However, in their practices, they evidence the possibility of living in another way, even if it is inside the capitalist system. Their ways of life express precisely that we do not live in a society where everyone has a life geared towards consumption, because there are people who try to put their ethical values on their practices, in this case, consumption practices. And in this search for experiencing this world they desire, they constitute for themselves and evidence other ways of living that can inspire other people.

## Final considerations

To understand consumption practices as communication, signals that express something about the culture, choices or impossibility of choices helps us expand our view about our own relationship with the world. When perceiving that consumption practices express lifestyles, it is possible to give a more thorough look on social groups, giving less totalizing analysis about consumption, making visible the existing singularities.

These reflections about the relationship of the subject with himself and the world they live in express the constitution of more reflective subject on a personal level. But they also point out that the incorporation of new practices in the field of consumption can manifest other forms of participation in the public sphere. It is necessary to understand that consumption practices are not individual practices, even if they also express

something about an individual subject. Consumption practices, when they play their role in communication, make cultural habits visible, express lifestyles, reveal political revindications of the subjects about the world. That way, the inclusion of “values such as solidarity, ethic and responsibility in discourse, choices and consumption practices, according to the proposition of certain social movements, demands sociologists and anthropologists to revise the concept of society and consumption culture [...]” (PORTILHO, 2009, p. 203).

The Coletivo Até o Talo showed that politicizing consumption practices is not the same as accepting individual’s culpabilities about environmental problems. Even if reflecting and modifying our consumption practices do not end up with environmental problems, owning preoccupations regarding the planet we live in can enable less massified relationships with our own life. Knowing where our food came from, how they were made, who produced them, expresses the desire of building a less impersonal and a more welcoming lifestyle. At the same time, politicizing consumption practices do not lead to an individualization of responsibility regarding environmental problems, even if culpability does exist and circle around in a somewhat marked manner in different mediatic spaces. This politicalization can lead to the engagement of subjects regarding the world where they live, reflecting about their practices, making visible other possibilities to inhabit the planet.

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## **Organizational Communication and Mobile Media: possibilities and challenges**

## **Comunicação organizacional e mídias móveis: possibilidades e desafios**

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Maria Aparecida Moura<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The article seeks to reflect on how the variety of media and media-tions (especially mobile media) brought new possibilities of interaction between organizations and their stakeholders, in particular the end customers. By extending the points of contact between subjects and brands, the presence and the almost constant use of digital media end up demanding that organizational communication starts thinking and proposing new strategies to approach and relate with stakeholders. Some initiatives will be presented and discussed here based on the reflections brought by mediatization e mobility theories.*

**Keywords:** *Organizational communication, mediatization, mobility, consumption.*

**Resumo:** *O artigo busca refletir sobre as possibilidades e os desafios das interações entre as organizações e seus públicos de interesse, em especial os clientes finais, diante da diversidade de mídias e mediações (com destaque para as mídias móveis). Ao ampliar os pontos de contato entre os sujeitos e as marcas, a presença e o uso quase constante das mídias digitais acabam por demandar da comunicação organizacional a proposição de novas estratégias de abordagem e relacionamento com os públicos de interesse. Aqui serão apresentadas e discutidas algumas iniciativas à luz das reflexões em torno da midiatização e das teorias da mobilidade no âmbito da comunicação.*

**Palavras-chave:** *comunicação organizacional; midiatização; mobilidade; consumo.*

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## Introduction

In last twenty years, electronic and digital technologies had modified the way we communicate. The discussion around the centrality of the mediatic sphere in the daily life and in social relations have been developed through the analysis of its economic, political and cultural implications. The studies on globalization, world-ification of culture and dynamization of informational flows have focused on the perception of the increasing penetration of media in the most diverse layers of the social life, playing an important role regarding the changes in the forms of social interaction.

The mediatic communication, since the development of technologies and the alterations in its uses, has been modified. Some authors even define this process as the mediatization of societies (FAUSTO GRANDSON, 2006, 2008, 2010; SODRÉ, 2002). However, beyond the technological determinism present in the critics regarding mediatization studies, it is necessary to understand the mediatic logics inserted in social practices and in the contemporary sociability processes.

Silverstone, when asking the question “why study the media”, offer us the following answer

[...] acknowledgement that our media is omnipresent, daily, as an essential dimension of our contemporary experience. It is impossible to escape the presence and the representation of media. We begin to depend on the media, both printed and electronic, as a means of entertainment and information, comfort and security, to see some sense in the continuities of experience and, also, sometimes, for the intensities of experience (SILVERSTONE, 2002, p. 12).

Facing this scenario, we highlight, in our discussion, another important element to compose the contemporary communicational landscape: mobility. In this sense, if before there was a time and a place for activities such as watching TV, playing games, sending an email, paying the bills or accessing a website, today, with mobile media, people can choose and

access different contents without many contextual restrictions for their interactions.<sup>3</sup>

Amongst the devices that help spreading info-communicational mobility, we highlight the use cell phones and smartphones. These equipments, that, beyond having voice services, add information in multiformats and have connection with the Internet, are increasingly present in the urban landscape.

Portable computers, tablets, wi-fi connections, bluetooth systems, amongst others, had also become more popular, being incorporated to the daily routine of many people that, in an almost compulsory way, need to keep their workforce available and connected while they are on the move and, also, to establish interactions related to their private life.

The communicational exchanges on the go had significantly modified the way people get informed, have fun, work, study, consume and express feelings. When contributing for the dissemination of new possibilities of interaction, either between people or between them and the content, such medias end up producing a society that is always online and available to enter interactive processes, acting as prosthetics of interaction, extensions of the human body.

Cell phones are considered resources of permanent connection. The individual becomes available all the time. The brand of mobile communication is the constant availability. Either in the middle of Budapest or in Manhattan, in a farm in the countryside of Minas Gerais or a in hotel in Manaus, the person is always reachable, therefore, as a material object, the cell phone work as an icon of dialogue, of a tecno-umbilical connection (Gergen, 2003, p. 111). It is clear that to be always reachable means to be always detectable, which makes the individual more visible to the business corporation that seek information about people, obligating individuals to develop strategies of protection (SANTAELLA, 2007, p. 238).

3 with reservations with issues linked to the infrastructure of the companies of telecommunication – coverage area, quality of service – to the own equipment – battery, memory, product specifications – and, mainly, financial issues: Brazil has one of the most expensive mobile services in the world (DANTAS, 2002), adding to the high cost of the devices, especially smartphones.

As the technologies have been motivating new practices in many social fields, in the field of the organizational communication would not be different. The variety of medias and mediations (especially the mobile medias) presents new possibilities of interaction between the organizations and their stakeholders, in particular the end customers.

With the possibilities of production and circulation of content through the web, new settings of interaction emerge and organizations come across, as said previously, other speech conformations that will modify the strategic dimension of communicative processes. New characteristics of interlocution appear, marked by the dispersion and fluidity (OLIVEIRA et al., 2012, p. 10).

With regards to the dimension of consumption, the possibilities arising from the use of mobile media, smartphones in particular, seem to extend the points of contact between subjects and organizations/brands. Such fact has challenged the organizational communication to think and create new strategies to relate with the customer.

In this context, we highlight the term mobile marketing, that has been used to characterize promotional actions through a cell phone and/or smartphones.

From SMS messages to QR Codes and games that explore the attribute of geomapping in mobile devices, the strategies to approach the consumer through mobile media have been multiplying, demanding a reflection on the interactions generated by the contemporary practices of consumption.

Regarding actions specifically of mobile marketing, we see that, in the Brazilian context, they have been happening in a very diverse manner. Some actions are timid; others, at times, are very incisive, provoking even a certain “irritation” in the costumer. Suddenly, the phone rings and there it is, a message with an offer not to be missed. In some cases, the user himself authorized the reception of the offer. However, it is not rare that many of these messages arrive in an unwanted manner to the cell phone.

The mobile medias - especially smartphones - present a set of intrinsic characteristics that become interesting for the marketing actions: portability, multifunctionality, connectivity and the individualized use. Such elements, in a combined way, generate opportunities for buying and selling, as well as for the creation of a channel of interaction between customers and brands.

According to a research published by Pew Internet<sup>4</sup> (September 2013) in the USA, 63% of adults that own a cell phone use their device to access the internet. Inside this percentage, 34% say they would rather access the web on their cell phone/smartphone. Therefore, 21% of the American adult that own a mobile phone browse the internet, preferably, through this device.

In Brazil, according to the research carried through by Google in partnership with Ipsos Media CT among users<sup>5</sup> that own smartphones and access the internet through their device, 82% of the people interviewed looked for a product and/or service through their cell phone and 30% already bought a product and/or service with their devices.

The potential of mobile media, when put in numbers, are very expressive; however, this is only one of the components of analysis around the subject. These medias are inserted in a complex universe of discussions and reflections around mobility. Therefore, it is necessary to be restricted to concepts related to the theme so we can, then, seek to understand its implications in the field of consumption and organizational communication.

4 Available on: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Cell-Internet/Summary-of-Findings.aspx>.

5 The sample was composed by a thousand adult brazilians (between 18 and 64 years-old) and internet users that declared using smartphones to access the web. According to the report, the distribution is in compliance with the study with national representativity and the data according to the age, gender, region, smartphone brand, frequency of internet use on the cell phone and tablet use. Available on: <http://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/omp-2013-br-local.pdf>. Accessed in: dec. 2013.

## Mobility

When covering the historic path of the means of communication, we perceive a dynamic movement: from orality to writing, from writing to the press, from press to electronic medias (radio and television), until arriving at the digital technologies, that had created the dematerialization and hybridization of the devices.

From personal computers to “collective computers” - connected through cyberspace (LEMOS, 2005) - in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there comes the time to mobile technologies exemplified in the wi-fi connection by smartphones, tablets and notebooks. The information, that already transited the net, covering places until arriving to the subject located in specific points, now starts to move along with these subjects.

This situation of generalized mobility, where bodies, information, products and capital are set in circulation, is inserted contemporarily in the context that some theoreticians of the field of social sciences defined as the paradigm of mobility<sup>6</sup> (URRY, 2007). Such paradigm surpasses the communicational and informational issue and points out the idea of the movement as a key for better understanding the contemporary social phenomena. Amongst the diverse meanings of this paradigm, we are interested in focusing, in this context of reflection, the aspect referring to mobility by informational flows.

According to Urry (2007), the development of information technologies and communication provided what was called productive mobility. In this landscape, beyond typical activities of being in movement, the author highlights the fact of that mobile technologies had allowed the accomplishment of several other activities, mainly those related to work and personal interactions.

The potential supplied by the mobile technologies to perform the micro-coordination of the daily life has also been discussed by researchers as Ling (2004) and Katz and Aakhus (2002) and are frequently used

6 From the theoretical development and the increasing empirical analysis regard the phenomenon of mobility in the most diverse aspects of life, there is, according to the author, a diverse way of thinking the characteristics of economic, social and political relations that would point towards a mobility turn in the social sciences (URRY, 2007).

in the advertising campaigns around mobile devices. Since the pace of modern life imposes a speedy routine on people, for a part of the adult population that is urban and economically active, mobile devices had extended the possibility to co-ordinate routine activities at a distance.

In this sense, the use of mobile media corresponds to a lifestyle. To Elliott and Urry,

Life ‘on the move’ is the kind of life in which the capacity to be ‘elsewhere’ at a different time from others is central. Email, SMS texting, MP3 audio, personal DVD recorders, internet telephonic services and so on enable people to seek escape from the constraints of pre-existing traditions or traditional forms of cultural life, under more fluid patterns and practices. Such mobile lives demand flexibility, adaptability, reflexivity – to be ready for the unexpected, to embrace novelty, as even one’s significant others are doing different things and at different times. People’s experiences are de-synchronized from each other, so that systems and people have to be available ‘just in time’. (ELLIOTT; URRY, 2010, p. 4).

This movement narrated by the authors and attributed to one determined global elite was characterized by Bauman (1999) in the paradigm of the tourist, having as counterpoint of the vagabond. The tourist is the one that moves by choice, which can be an effect of the “seduction operated by the magic of the movement” or to be established in a strategical rationality, in view of the presented “circumstances”.

Although mobile technologies bring a “innovative” character to mobility, the human relation with movement is historic – so much so that the concept of nomadism, adopted contemporarily to cover the processes that are set in this context, has its origin in the practices of the nomadic peoples. In this process of locomotion through space, these peoples used resources offered by the environment until they were depleted, initiating, thus, a new journey, seeking another region that allowed survival conditions.

Maffesoli (2001), in the text *About nomadism*, calls attention to the fact that this ancestral desire of movement has been manifesting itself, in different ways, throughout human evolution. According to the

author, the term “wander” was domesticated under the term “mobility”, referring itself, therefore, to the constant movements of contemporary subjects, which would be: daily migrations (work, consumption), seasonal migrations (tourism, trips) and, finally, the social mobility, provoked by economic disparities.

According to Maffesoli (2001), these trips are the way the modern man has to relive the “adventure” of nomadic times. This desire, that underlies to the desire for wander, can, according to the author’s perspective, be satisfied by experiences created by mobile technologies, including not only communication and information technologies, but also transportation.

The Minitel, the airplane, the “Internet” and the variety of electronic nets, the television and the information roads, every one of these elements allows the subject to live cultural, scientific, sexual and religious experiences that are natural to the existential adventure, in real time and over all collectively. The potentialities of cyberspace are far from depleting, but they already testify the cultural enrichment that is always connected to mobility, the circulation, whether it is from the spirit, from a daydream and even from fantasies, that everything does not let to induce (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 30).

In the previous passage, Maffesoli (2001) was still mentioning the cyberspace to talk about mobility through informational flows. Nowadays, mobile technologies enhanced this type of movement, in so far as it expanded the points of connection on the web. However, contemporary mobility creates a contradiction, because at the same time that the technologies allow the movement, they perform the function of regulation and control. We are free to move, however, our movement through technologies is registered, mapped, monitored.

To Manovich (2006), this would be one of the main points of the notion of augmented space: the fine line between surveillance/control and assistance/addition of information. In the perspective of the author, when the physical space becomes an informational space, the subjects start to live a double situation: there’s the possibility of use of devices



(mobile or not), that extract information from the space - contributing for action of monitoring, tracking and surveillance -, as well as extending the perception of space from the insertion of layers of information, that can be set in motion through many devices.

Bruno (2013) reinforces the idea when he affirms that the constant presence of the subject on the web, beyond notably allowing to articulate action of diverse nature – from the exposure of self to collective actions of a politic nature -, also makes it more vulnerable to the surveillance.

[...] at the same time that the possibilities of expression and individual and collective action are enhanced, devices of surveillance and capture of data of the users become increasingly present in these same platforms and nets, tending to integrate their own parameters of functioning and efficiency. Under the visible flow of the exchanges and social conversations, it is constituted a huge, distributed and manifold system of tracking and categorization of personal data that, in turn, feed strategies of advertising, security, development of services and apps, inside and outside of these platforms (BRUNO, 2013, p. 9).

It is valid to remember, at this point, what Bauman said (2001) when he calls attention to the fact that, in the “solid stage of the modern age”, the nomadic habits were badly seen, in this context, being a citizen meant to make use of a fixed place, to be based in the space (work, family, social status). Nowadays, however, despite the wanderers and homeless continue to be badly seen, there is the return of the nomadism in the format of the extraterritorial global elites. “The contemporary global elite is formed by absent gentlemen”, he says.

To be modern started to mean, as it means nowadays, to be incapable to stop and to be even more unable to stand still. We move and we will continue to move, not as much for the “postponement of satisfaction” as Max Weber suggested, but because of the impossibility of attaining satisfaction: The horizon of satisfaction, the finish line of effort and the moment of calm self-congratulation move way too fast (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 37).

Thus, in the vision of Bauman (2008), the mobility of contemporary subjects resembles less to the travelers or migrants - that had as objective

to arrive somewhere - and more to the wanderers, that have as their main objective to be "on the move".

To the movement, it is added the issue of consumption, that, in the perspective of the author, becomes the main contemporary requirement. "The way as the society nowadays molds its members is dictated first and foremost by the duty to play the role of the consumer" (BAUMAN, 1999, p. 88).

With this affirmation, Bauman (1999) wants to highlight the current emphasis in the consumption and, in that sense, the idea of movement is extremely pertinent, therefore it always puts the subject looking for something. Moreover, this incessant search, even though it provokes a certain discomfort, talks about a new form of being in this world, of participating and integrating socially. To have new desires to be satisfied and to always be looking for something are representative actions of the idea of being alive. In the words of the author: "immobility, in the end, means death".

Facing this reality, it is necessary to begin a reflection around how the day-to-day appropriation of technology, especially the mobile media, are reflecting not only in the interaction between subjects and society, but also detaining us in specific contexts, such as those that bring us to organizations and their stakeholders.

### **Mediatization and organizational communication**

In a world full of stimuli and needs to be created and fulfilled continually by the market, the organizational communication, focused on the dialogue between clients and companies, play an important role acting in the symbolic dimensions of consumption. As for the interaction between customers and brands, mobile media has become, time and time again, an important mediator.

In this sense, such technologies start to be a part of the lifestyle of the subjects, that, in turn, begin to guide the development of equipment not only in terms of design, but mainly in relation to functionality. All

the infrastructure that are mobilized to deliver content/service turn their attention to the subject.

Therefore, the strategic communication in the field of mobile media goes beyond the development of advertisement, but also refers to the consolidation of the presence of organizations in a mobile environment. Numerous actions, from the creation of an app or a responsive website to the adoption of a new (dialogic) posture in relation to the customer/client, represent important steps.

An initial reflection around the potential and challenges of communication – through mobile technologies – between an organization and its target audience can be developed through the analysis of strategies of approaching the customer, such as a promotional email or SMS. Usually, in the content of such messages, there is always a link to the brand's website or even the telephone of the company. That way, if that offer calls the customer's attention, he/she will look for ways to get in touch with the company, either by clicking on a link (to get more information or starting the process of purchase) or through a phone number.

However, in the first case, a lot of times the customer gets frustrated because the website was not developed for the mobile environment, making it hard or even impossible to browse remotely. Something even more common usually happens: the contact information is in an image format and it does not allow the user to click and start a call/interaction. Therefore, in this context, it is necessary to have in mind that, the same way it happens on the web, in the mobile media, the mean where companies advertise is the same place where the customer can initiate (and even conclude) the process of acquisition of a certain service or product.

It is important to highlight that, in the case of cell phones, the presence or acceptance of the strategic communication did not happen (and still doesn't happen) in an easy way. Many people do not feel comfortable to receive messages with advertisement on their devices, for example. Research shows that the "indiscriminate" use of SMS as tool to propagate sales and offers cause a certain discomfort and even rejection to this form of communication (KATZ; AAKHUS, 2002; LING, 2008).

This perception can be explained by the fact of that the interactions through SMS (as well as calls) are part of a universe of connections that are established, most of the time, between people with strong connections in the network of the subjects. It is a territory of personal interactions. Thus, when someone receives a message, there is a big expectation around the importance of that message by the subject who is receiving it. Therefore, there is some frustration when the content is a 'once-in-a-lifetime sale' or a reminder of a bill.

So, before the consolidation of the Internet in cell phones and, therefore, the presence of different informational and communicational flows in these devices, the communication between organizations and end customers happened from the logic of the "marketing of permission". It was necessary an authorization of the user to send offers through SMS or MMS. However, to minimize the negative effect of the rejection, it was also necessary (and still it is) to be attentive for the individualization of offers. The more personalized, the bigger the possibility of these messages to be perceived as services of valuable information, as opposed to be considered annoying and disturbing messages with no relation to the customer (BARNES; SCORNAVACCA, 2004).

In face of the potential of this media in establishing a bidirectional flow of communication, many brands adopt, as a strategy of individualization of offers, a speech that simulates an "one on one" dialogue between the organization and consumer. However, such interaction can reveal itself as being very fragile and innocuous, since many times, even though it may seem individualized, the message is set to be a communication one for all.

Another characteristic element of the mobile media and that is presented as an important factor for the communication between organizations and customers is the relation of these technologies with the place. In this case, services of geomapping allow the creation of messages/interactions specific to the environment where the subject is located.

Many times, due to technical restrictions and others linked to the preservation of privacy, it is necessary for the user to insert certain coordinates (through a number – large account – sent via SMS, QR code or bluetooth activation) in the system, so that he/she can finally access offers or services thought for that specific context.

About this last aspect, it is important to remember that not only the brands can use this type of function, but also the customer can benefit from it. To be able to access information on products and services within the point of sale, for example, is something that allows the customer to perform a more conscious purchase. Mobile technologies, in these contexts, are used to consult detailed information on products, prices and offers, interfering on the negotiation process.

Another important aspect to be highlighted regarding strategical communication in mobile media refers to the capacity of a certain advertisement or campaign to be retransmitted by the consumer to its network of contacts. Called viral marketing or buzz marketing, the “word of mouth” through information and communication technologies gains a new dimension.

To a large extent of the informational flows that transit and are accessed by the Internet - either by computer, smartphones and/or tablets -, the logic of intervention and manipulation of the message is perceived. The subjects are stimulated to give their contribution to the communicational process through production and/or recycling contents of a diverse nature, promoting their dissemination. Such behavior, in the field of marketing, for example, creates a special interest for the fact that a message sent by someone who keeps a close relation to the customer has more possibilities of being well received than a message sent by third parties - in this in case advertiser/companies (BAUER et al., 2005).

From the point of view of the customer, with regards to the use of mobile media to establish communicational exchange towards the acquisition of services and products and/or interaction with the organizations, it is important to highlight the expansion of the capacity of action.

The presence of brands/organizations in social media, in which a great part of the contemporary informational flow circulates, although invasive, operates inside a logic of the two-way street, talked about by Bruno (2013): to see and be seen.

So, at the same time the presence of these organizations in these circles allows the brand to obtain precious information related to customer's behavior, habits and preferences, they also are exposed and target of criticism from the customers when those are not satisfied with the services/products offered/acquired.

In the society of mediatized ambience, the proposition of the institution can be modified by the subjects. The emergency of new spaces of interaction, especially in the Internet, extends the possibilities of reply and the interpretation of these subjects that have the condition to build their own spaces of performance and, that way, to put in question issues of their interest (BARICHELLO, 2008, p. 244).

In this sense, we can affirm that such actions are inserted in a wide context of management of relationships of the organization with social actors. It is not only about the promotion of an offer/service, but also about the complex production of senses due to the relationship between organization and society.

## **Final considerations**

To approach and reflect on the relation between the audience and organizations imply to think about the perspective of the mediatization along with the studies of organizational communication. Organizations are increasingly more "sensitive" to the end customer's behavior - and go to him through numerous techniques. Many researches are made with the intention of empowering industries and markets. So, their reflexive potential is decreased by the guidelines of development of products/services and by the logic of market/capital. That is, a critical outlook to this uses and consumptions is not developed.

In this sense, it is necessary to ask something about the relations under the cultural, economic, politic and social point of view. What is the path that has been taken by the organizational communication processes?

What clues do they bring us about emerging ways of interaction and relation between audiences and organizations?

There are still important issues about surveillance and control, that are presented, sometimes, in well intentioned ways – to know more about the customer, to present the best offer, to narrow the communication between organizations and target audiences - but also talked about strategic interests linked to big corporations or even to the government.

The analysis of phenomena based on the interaction between subjects and organizations, in view of mobile communication on the web - and the possibilities that it offers for the exchange of information, the publication of opinions and the creation of new channels of interaction -, is essential to the understanding of organizations and their communicational processes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## **The construction of trust in hospitality experiences mediated by the Internet: the cases of Couchsurfing and Airbnb**

### **A construção da confiança em experiências de hospitalidade mediadas pela internet: os casos do Airbnb e do Couchsurfing**

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**Abstract:** *Starting from the premise of the importance of trust in economic and consumer relations, this study reflects about the process of building trust in relations of consumption that are developed in the field of hospitality. Such reflection is based on the web platforms Airbnb and Couchsurfing that allow any person to host strangers or to be hosted by strangers in their own houses (with or without payment). This kind of practice interest us by indicating consumer relations which seem to overstep ordinary buy-and-sell experiences and show the formation of other social bonds whose constructions this paper intends to analyze.*

**Keywords:** consumer; trust; Airbnb; Couchsurfing.

**Resumo:** *A partir da premissa da importância da confiança nas relações econômicas e de consumo, este artigo se dedica a refletir sobre os processos de construção da confiança em relações de consumo que se dão no campo da hospitalidade. Tal reflexão é feita a partir das experiências do Airbnb e do Couchsurfing, plataformas que permitem receber estranhos em casa ou se hospedar na casa de desconhecidos pagando ou não por isso. Essas práticas vão nos interessar por*

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*indicarem relações de consumo que parecem extrapolar as experiências ordinárias de compra e venda e evidenciar a formação de outros tipos de laços sociais, cuja construção o texto pretende analisar.*

**Palavras-chave:** consumo; confiança; Airbnb; Couchsurfing.

## About the issue of trust

Trust seems to be a fundamental issue on economic and consumption relations. Its importance can be evidenced by different studies (FUKUYAMA, 1996; FINURAS, 2013; GIDDENS, 1991; SIMMEL, 2004; ZAK, 2012, among others) and by the increasing interest for indexes that measure it statistically.<sup>4</sup> These statistical constructions become important signals to evaluate the context, to search for trends and to try to foresee future events in the economy. As Porter said (1995), the statistics are linked to the constitution of public knowledge, producing a close relation between social numbers and public action, a relation that leads to the creation and disclosure of standardized measurements and indexes.

The indexes of trust are built by different institutions and are related to different applications and are distinguished according to the methodology developed and the statistic calculus that were made. Usually, it measures the consumer's and businessmen's trust regarding the future of economic activities, but also measures people's trust in institutions, brands, the citizen's trust regarding the government and political parties or even the degree of people's trust regarding social groups (such as friends, family and neighbors).<sup>5</sup>

The interesting fact in the construction of these indexes, that we seek to highlight in this paper, is the understanding of trust as a measurable variable. It is not rare that indicators that measure the degree of people's trust in certain situations (such as the job maintenance or payment of debts) and in certain institutions (such as companies, financial institutions or even the government) are presented in the media followed by analyses and predictions developed by "economy specialists"<sup>6</sup> (NEI-

4 Restricted to the Brazilian landscape, some trust indicators: the Índice de Confiança da Indústria e o Índice de Confiança de Serviços (Index of trust for the Industry and Index of Trust for Services, measured by FGV); the Índice de Confiança do Empresário do Comércio, (Index of Trust of the Business Owner, measured by the National Institution of Commerce); and the Índice de Confiança do Consumidor (Index of Trust of the Consumer, measured by Exame magazine).

5 The Index of Social Trust, created by Ibope, measures trust in different layers of Society, quantifying trust in institutions of the public and private sphere, as well as the civil Society.

6 This expression refers to professionals specialized in economy and/or in charge of diagnosing and operating the economic and financial system: PhDs, journalists, investors, government officials.

BURG, 2010, p. 3). However, if we distance ourselves from the naturality in which we can perceive these numbers, it seemed appropriate to ask about how the construction of these measurements is developed, how they are monitored, as well as their effects. We notice that, from the indexes, trust gains visibility and that, when it is conceived through a methodologic approach, it gets adjusted to the mode privileged by our societies to conceive reality (CROSBY, 1999). Trust, when associated to a scale or transformed into number, gains uniformity and apparently distance itself from its personal and intimate aspect. From the number, trust seems to gain precision and, when measured, it gets standardized and manifested through an unit that dimensions it and allows comparisons.

When we ask ourselves about these trust indexes, the idea is not to confront the legitimacy of these indicators and the efficacy of their measurements, but to emphasize the importance of trust as a technical and social element capable of influencing actions. Produced and studied by specialists from different areas, what these indexes tend to reveal is that certain behaviors vary according to the degree (high or low) of trust. Thus, when monitoring these measurements, we seek to identify types of behavior, to foresee actions from different agents, correlating trust and future decisions. To call attention to this fact is to put into evidence trust as a significant element in social relations.

Trust between people is a primordial element for the integration of society (SIMMEL, 2004, p. 191). Anthony Giddens (1992) invites us to look at trust in relation to risk. For example, when we enter a plane or deposit cash on a bank, we trust dynamics that organize these actions and minimize the risks; even if these risks do not cease to exist and the knowledge about the functioning of these systems are in power of “experts”. Faced with this, trust, according to Giddens (1991), works as a conscious act of believing in something knowing about the situations of risks and also about some guaranties.

Trust is, thus, present in daily activities, whether it is the purchase of milk of a certain brand, believing in the quality of that product, or when we drive our car and believe that other people will not drive their automobile towards us on purpose. We always establish social relationships that demand trust and we forge a conviction on the other person. Usually, we suspend our skepticism and convince ourselves that is safe to establish a relationship. This conviction, often times, is supported by personal reasons, but those reasons do not fully explain this feeling.

However, beyond the brands we usually purchase and the services we usually use, it is curious to notice the emergency of consumption experiences that seem to demand more trust than we are used to giving. We talk about it thinking of a market formed by internet platforms that allow travelers to find hosts able to receive them, paying or not for that activity, and offering the whole house or just one room –activities happening between total strangers.

One example of that is HomeExchange, a service of house exchange. When launched, in 1992, it allowed, through letters, that the travelers swapped lodgings. Thought as an alternative to booking rooms in hotels, it proposed to reduce costs of accommodation (mainly for family trips) and to enable the discovery of places from a local perspective. With the creation of the Internet, the service migrated to a model closer to the social networks. From an online platform, members would disclose their houses and become, at the same time, hosts and guests. It works like this: A person is hosted at someone's house while their host stays at their house. This idea, however, is not so unique: Other platforms offer similar services, such as GuestToGuest.com, Roomorama.com, Love-HomeSwap.co and Knok.com.<sup>7</sup>

This type of company and business model, although it is recent, have been growing and shows significant numbers. Perhaps the most expressive one is Airbnb.com, created in 2008 and allows you to rent, per season, apartments and houses (or just rooms), besides having more

7 The website HomeExchange.com started to work on several countries, counting with a global team of approximately 50 people. They launched their portuguese version, TrocaCasa.com, in 2006. Available at: <https://www.trocacasa.com/pt/>. Accessed in: April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

singular options, such as castles, caves, igloos, treehouses and boats. Everything with prices as diverse as the possibilities of accommodation, ranging from costing less than a hostel to more than a luxury hotel.

Airbnb has offices in many cities in the world to manage millions of accommodations in more than 34 thousand cities used by more than 60 million people (ABOUT US, 2016). Only in Brazil, there are over 70 thousand accommodations registered in the platform – a growth of 67% in relation to 2015 (INFOMONEY, 2016). The company revenue comes from the taxes over each transaction. A percentage of the payment received by the host is deducted and it is added another percentage to the guests' payments. Currently, the company has market value of approximately US\$ 25 billion (BORNELI, 2015).

Couchsurfing.com, on the other hand, created in 2004, four years before Airbnb.com, is one of the firsts and most expressive hosting platforms, whose peculiarity lies in not performing any type of monetary charge from its users and, mainly, being focused on cultural exchange that can exist from an interaction among strangers. Currently, according to information disclosed by the company, their website gathers approximately 12 million people in over 200 thousand cities (ABOUT US, 2016).

It is interesting the fact that so many people are trusting strangers to the point they host them in their house, being present or not. Regardless of the reasons presented by these people to act that way - the desire to make new friends, cultural exchange or the extra money coming from the rental -, trust appears as a fundamental element in these experiences.

Trust, in these cases, is not only an index adopted by the market to measure the relation between people, but the condition of possibility of these business models. Trust, in platforms as Airbnb and Couchsurfing, seem to suggest the existence of more than a simple disposition for investing or consuming, but also a predisposition of interacting and trusting one another to the point of letting them stay at your house, use your personal objects, live with you and your family and sleep in the

next room as if they were acquainted to you. What is this relationship and how it is developed?

In this context, we go back to the initial question about the construction of trust that needs to be delimited. Thus, the issue which we are going to deal here is about the trust constructed or demanded in consumption experiences that are made in the field of hospitality through the cited platforms. That way, the proposal of this article is to analyze the way trust is built on Airbnb and on Couchsurfing. As it will be presented, these platforms are supported in different processes and mechanisms of construction of trust to create other relationships between consumers. Such initiatives had been chosen by being the most expressive of this business model.

### **Consumption, hospitality and privacy**

Simmel (2005), when analyzing the metropolis at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, talked about the difficulty of individuals to adapt the intensification of nerve stimuli and interactions which they are exposed to. For the author, life in a small city would be marked by more habitual interactions, in which people could establish deeper bonds and construct relationships based on the feeling. In opposition to this model, life in a big city would be marked by the gathering of people with different interests, by a nervous agitation, an ambience of contrasting stimuli and by frequent changes, demanding, that way, that the individual change their lifestyle: instead of keeping solid relationships, it would be necessary to forge more superficial relationships. After all, as Simmel (2005, p. 582) clarifies, in an amplified circle, it would not be possible to establish deeper relationships with all the individuals; it would not be possible to respond to the massive number of stimuli from the big city with the same behavior that leads the small city life. The subject living in the metropolis would interact in a more impersonal way, he would not react with the soul anymore, but with the mind. The subject would have a posture of reservation to achieve a distance from things and people.



Paying attention to the phenomenon of adaptation of subjects to life at the metropolis, economic relations that were developed were the focus of Simmel's attention. The author argues that the monetary economy facilitated the most superficial relationships among people. The producer-consumer relationship would be an example in which would evidence the distance between people - these agents would no longer recognize one another.

The big city lived and described by Simmel presents people establishing relationships that are no longer restricted geographically or limited to family groups or circle of acquaintances. However, if relations, at that moment, became wider, the contact with the other, on the other hand, was marked by indifference and strangeness. In order to face the conditions imposed by the big city, it was necessary to find ways of transforming these relations into more precise, safer relationships, and to search an "objectivity in the treatment of people and things" (SIMMEL, 2005, p. 579). This analysis from Simmel was reinforced by Anthony Giddens (1991), that, following the path of the German philosopher, said that trust is fundamentally involved with the institutions of modernity. In the midst of the great diversity of the big city emerged the need for contracts and institutions that can produce guarantees, i. e., constructing trust between strangers.

Francis Fukuyama (1996), North-American political economist, reinforces this idea when he said that "[...] People who do not trust one another will end up cooperating only in a system of rules and regulations, that have to be negotiated, agreed, organized and put into practice many times by coercive means" (FUKUYAMA, 1996, p. 43). We know and are used to contractual mechanisms that regulate trust among strangers in our society. Institutions such as notary's offices and objects such as stamps create sense on papers and allow us to have guarantee in the transactions we perform. However, what imply to trust in the context of experiences of companies such as Airbnb and Couchsurfing, in which the relations of consumption that involve trust and intimacy seem to build and measure trust in other ways?

For many people, to rent a house per season or to receive a distant relative or a friend of a friend to spend a few days at their house is not something new. However, what Airbnb and Couchsurfing do, as well as other similar initiatives, is to systematize and widen these customs, enabling that more people connect through hosting practices, to the point of transforming certain experiences in profitable business models. Through the mechanisms created by Airbnb and Couchsurfing, it is possible to rent (or to offer for free) a property, contemplating the entire house, but also one room or only a mattress in the living room, remaining, in these cases, in the residence along with the guest/customer, sharing spaces and even the routine of the house. In these initiatives, the transactions (paid or not) are organized by a platform that also functions as a “showcase” of the available spaces, responsible also for creating strategies aiming at constructing and measuring trust so that complete strangers feel safe enough to receive or be a guest with the other. This last dimension is our focus in this paper: to understand how trust is produced in the person who hosts or the one who asks for accommodation.

Let's start by Couchsurfing (CS), that presents as a global community of travelers willing to "share their lives in a profound and meaningful way" and who say to have as a mission "to make the world a better place from trips that enrich human connections" (ABOUT US, 2016). On their website, CS presents five values (OUR VALUES, 2016) that guide the experiences developed through this platform: "Share your life", that is, share your time, your house, your objects; "create connections", because they understand that accepting the good from strangers strengthen the faith on the other and helps creating better people; "Offer kindness", which include respect, tolerance and appreciation for the different; "stay curious", that is, keep the desire of learning from the other person and their world; "leave it better than you found it", a posture that people must have with the world, with relationships and with your host's house.

Airbnb defines itself as a "trustworthy community market for people to post, find and book accommodations" (ABOUT US, 2016), works

with the slogan “make yourself at home”, which categorizes the mission which it presents: to build a “feeling of belonging” and to make the members feel “welcome” and “safe” in any place of the world since they are using the service (THE WORLD IS YOUR HOUSE, 2016).

On both platforms, in order to be a guest or a host, it is necessary to register and create a profile with general information, such as: name, email, photo, city, languages they speak, where they studied and/or worked and a personal presentation; but each one of the platforms have their specifics according to their focus. On Airbnb, for those who want to be hosts<sup>8</sup>, it is necessary to describe in detail the place offered: how many people can stay there, if there is a garage, how is the neighborhood and the public transportation in the region, among other information of this sort; in addition to posting pictures of the rooms. It is also necessary to describe extra services that can be offered to the guests, such as Internet, breakfast, TV, kitchen etc.

Whoever look for a place to stay at Airbnb must write down the destination, the dates of arrival and departure and the number of guests to find the available options. It is interesting to notice that, on Airbnb, when you look for a place to stay, the result of the search highlights the property, not the host. There is a big picture of a room of the residence and in the bottom right corner, a small picture of the host, along with the price of rate of that place. In contrast, on CS, the result of the search for city brings the hosts of that locality and there are no pictures of the property, only pictures of the person. The focus is not in the space evaluation or the comfort of the place, but in the experience of cultural exchange with the other, so much so that the idea of the website is to offer a “couch”, even if most hosts offer a bed or something more comfortable.

Beyond the information previously quoted, on the CS profile there must be if “the couch is available to receive people” (it is possible to say “yes”, “no” and “maybe”) and if the host “accept children or pets”. The profile also shows how the room in which the guest is going to sleep is

8 It is possible to register to be only a host, a guest or both.

(mattress, bed, couch, individual or shared room, living room) and if there is a preference for hosting women or men, among other information of this sort. CS's profile also require answers for questions that try to show the person's lifestyle so that the guest, when looking for a place to stay, can choose somebody they can connect to and feel comfortable meeting, as well as the host, who must read the traveler's profile and choose whether they want to host this person or not. The questions are: "mission in life", "how do you participate on CS", "experiences on CS", "interests", "philosophy", "music, movies, books", "types of people I like", "teach learn, share", "an incredible thing I've seen or done", "opinion about CS".

From what was exposed above and from interviews with Airbnb and Couchsurfing users and the participant observation made by one of the authors, it seems possible to suggest that trust in the relationship between host and guest can be understood from one of their synonyms: the credit. One believes in the other's reputation, suspending, at least partially, the uncertainties and believing in the success of the relationship. One trusts the other with the expectation that the experience is successful. The descriptions made by the hosts and guests, generate profiles disclosed by the websites, enable choosing who to interact with, provoke feelings such as recognition, sympathy, or even curiosity between the users and, in that sense, produce connection and help in the process of constructing trust.

### **Construction of trust on Airbnb and on Couchsurfing**

With the popularity of the internet in the 90's, we were gradually learning about this environment and creating new ways of trusting strangers from the connections offered by the digital network. We believed that the people whom we interact were real; we shopped in online stores and gave our credit card information trusting it would not be disclosed; we bought not only on stores we know, but also from strangers at Mercado Livre or eBay; today, the forms of connection between strangers

increased: We are hitchhiking<sup>9</sup>, sharing meals<sup>10</sup> and sending mail<sup>11</sup>, besides, of course, staying at their house. As we previously indicated, both on Airbnb and on Couchsurfing, the strategies used to build trust, guaranteeing, thus, their business model, are many: profile with personal information (both); message exchange between host and guest (both); references (both); verification of the identity (both); vouchers (CS); hosts protected by insurance (Airbnb) and 24 hours service (Airbnb). Let's see each one of them.

It is not necessary to fill in all the asked information in none of the platforms, but a bigger amount of data can mean greater trustworthiness. CS is not responsible for any situation that occur between host and guest, but it offers many tips that try to contribute with the safety of couchsurfers. For example: It is advised to interact, preferably, with people who have a complete profile, with their real name, clear pictures and detailed descriptions of themselves. Obviously, such information can be invented, however, yet, they seem to have an important role in the construction of the trust. Another element that also seems to be important in this process is empathy, psychological capacity to feel what the other would feel and place oneself in the place of the other. There are people who defend that empathy would be capable of producing, even physically, a predisposition of trust. According to the research by Paul J. Zak (2012), developed in the field of neurobiology in its interface with economy, empathy would produce the hormone oxytocin, which has the function of promoting trust amongst individuals.

Far from thinking of Zak's studies and the forms of constitution of trust on Airbnb and on CS in a biologic determinism point of view, we can assume, for example, that would be possible for somebody to "see themselves in the other person", to feel empathy and trust someone by reading their profile on CS or Airbnb and perceiving that the person

9 Platforms such as blablacar.com and caronetas.com.br allows you to offer and get rides, sharing costs or not, after previous registration.

10 Websites such as eatwith.com and mealsharing.com allows you to receive strangers for a meal or exchange a restaurant for someone's house.

11 Platforms such as nimer.com and meemeep.com connect people that need to send something from one place to another with somebody that will travel to that place anyway.

likes the same movies, read similar books and described themselves using arguments and elements similar to your own. In general, the Couch Surfing profile gathers more personal information than Airbnb's, however, it is common that in the message exchange between hosts and guests they exchange links from their social media profiles, which allows them to know more about each other, trusting more or less according to the empathy built.

As previously mentioned, before being a guest or a host, in both platforms, it is possible to exchange messages to, for example, request more information, solve doubts, organize details and know more about the other person. This exchange of information is usually pointed out by companies as another strategy of building trust, that also seem to work from the construction of empathy through information capable of showing some characteristic of the host or guest in which the other would recognize themselves in.

After each stay, both the host and the guest must write a reference note about the other, that is, to evaluate the experience through a small text that will be exposed on the profile of the evaluated and cannot be altered or erased. People usually talk about either the physical space (in case of Airbnb) or about how the experience was with the other person (on both platforms). It is interesting to notice the friendly tone of references, even with people that only met to exchange keys, as it can happen on Airbnb. More references mean that more people had stayed in that place or that that person were already received in many places. The more positive references, the better constructed reputation and, therefore, the greater the trustworthiness. That is, with each indication with positive mentions, it is easier to get a couch on Couchsurfing or to rent a place on Airbnb.

It is important to notice that the exchanged references are visible to all the users of these platforms. This ample visibility of the references allows that the evaluation process do not get restricted to the guests and hosts, but is available to all, open to different interpretations. Once the references cannot be anonymous, we can notice that not only the

received evaluations but also the given ones have a role on building trust. For example, if you are a guest in a house of a person that has already 30 positive references and, after the experience, describe your evaluation in a negative way, criticizing something that everyone else seemed to like, that might suggest that the problem is you and not the other person, showing that perhaps you are not a good guest. The set of available information in the profile of these platforms allow the users to find different ways of interpreting them, putting them in relation and confronting them. In the case of CS, both the references you gave and the references you receive remain visible on your profile; within this logic, we understand that the way you speak about the other also expresses a little bit about yourself.

It is interesting to notice that, in these experiences, people trust not only the guest or the host, but they also believe in what people equally strange had to say about them. It is as if when you buy a product on an online store and you read the comments of people who already got the product, but you are not sure if, in fact, they are telling the truth.

When we reflect about the importance of these comments or testimonies, we verify the role which reciprocity has within these platforms. The principle of reciprocity, written in great detail by Polanyi (2000), has a fundamental importance for the organization and maintenance of the functioning of platforms we study. In the case we are analyzing, we verify that it is necessary to be recognized as a good guest or host to keep sharing freely the services. The importance of playing your role well not only guarantees a good experience with the other person, but also, most of the time, generates a good evaluation. Such evaluation is like a “credit” received due to a good behavior, that will be used in future interactions. The user reputation inside the platform is totally connected to the fulfillment of expectations and related to the condition of the host or guest. The social relation established will be fundamental for the attainment of a good evaluation and, consequently, the widening of trust (or credit) for new uses.

One of the factors that favor the reciprocity on Airbnb and on CS is the symmetry of the relationships. As Polanyi (2000, p. 68) already had pointed out when he described some socioeconomic principles, "reciprocity is greatly facilitated by the institutional pattern of symmetry". Both on CS and on Airbnb, there is a symmetry in the relationship between guest and host that makes them depend on each other for a good review and, consequently, to keep being successful in sharing the services offered by the platforms. Regardless of the reasons that lead people to use Airbnb and CS, to choose this type of experience, they are subject to the principle of reciprocity – and such mode of functioning of the platform makes the participants actions not be isolated. Giving and receiving are behaviors that acquire the same importance. Knowing how to give and receive – and doing it well – are virtues, are highly valued behaviors on the dynamics we observed. To be a good host or a good guest requires that both share the established rules of good living – whether they are implicit or explicit -, beyond demanding the effort of both parts to fulfill what is expected of them. In the case of the guests, we can, for example, think about the care with the house, the respect for the neighbors, kindness. In the case of the host, the reception, the safety and the observance of dates and hours scheduled.

When we run over the description of the mechanisms of construction of trust, it is important to emphasize that, in both platforms, it is possible to verify the identity of the user. On CS, for that verification, it is charged an optional tax: Through payment, the company is reassured that the name and house address are real. Indeed, this strategy can contribute in the construction of trust, but it does not appear to be one of the most important strategies, since, from the millions of users that are registered, less than one million has a verified account - there are very active users, with over 100 references, that do not have a verified account.

On Airbnb, the account verification is different: guests and hosts connect their accounts in platforms such as Facebook or Gmail and digitalize some identification document, such as the driver's license or passport, and they are not charged because of it. All the information are



kept in secrecy. In this platform, it is possible to speak in verification levels, once that what is mandatory to open an account is to register an email (that would be the first level); in so far as the user offers their profile in a social network or documents for verification, he gradually upgrades his levels and increase his trustworthiness.

Couchsurfing has yet another strategy of construction of trust that reminds the verification, but it is the user's total responsibility: vouchers, a species of symbol of trustworthiness added to the profile that means "it is safe to surf in this couch". But only the user who received three vouchers can contemplate other users. Perhaps due to its scarcity, this symbol of trustworthiness seem to be the most desired of the platform. However, even without having this "stamp", it is possible to travel and get "couches".

When accepting a stranger in house, one of the concerns is about the damages that can be caused by him/her, especially when the host is absent. Thinking about this, Airbnb offers a "host warranty", that promises the reimbursement of up to R\$ 3 million in case of property damage. Any reservation made by the website has this guarantee. However, Airbnb points out that it is only valid in cases where the guests cause damages that are not solved directly by themselves. In general, a broken glass is immediately replaced by the guest. Thus, Airbnb's idea is that the host first contacts the guest to solve the problem; in case that does not happen, they can use the warranty.

However, this warranty does not cover losses of money, pets, civil responsibility and common or shared areas. The company suggests that objects such as jewelry and works of art are kept in safes; regarding simple losses or damages (as a broken window), hosts can create a safety deposit to each reservation. That way, this "host warranty" only covers serious situations, such as possible fire.

Still in the attempt of offering a safe environment for transactions, Airbnb has other strategies to follow and guide their users, such as orientation meetings with new hosts and 24-hour services to the users.

In both the experiences, we can see that trust is developed through a collective, mutual construction. The companies, in their websites, offer mechanisms that allow to know the other: a detailed profile, pictures, the possibility of message exchange, system of references or even the service of verification of identity. However, it is essential that guests and hosts participate.

### **Final considerations**

Unlike evaluations of trust that we saw in the beginning of the study, Airbnb and Couchsurfing do not have quantitative evaluation systems. Unlike trust indexes calculated and measured objectively that want to classify levels of trust and translate personal experiences in numeric and alphanumeric forms, both initiatives privilege description and qualification of experiences. When people describe, recommend and witness things, they create communicative dynamics and constitute bonds that do not go through a fixed classification or a standardized measurement, but through the constitution and permanent management of trust. Every person can define their criteria and parameters, being possible to not worry with any of the elements offered by the website or try to create other elements, such as the indication of closest friends and the elaboration of other questions that are not foreseen by the platforms.

Beyond the previously quoted strategies of construction of trust, it is important to remember that these companies also invest in the use of social networks in order to become known and to have their brands considered trustworthy. Moreover, they make frequent advertisement through personal e-mails for the people registered in the platforms. From the point of view of consumption relationships, it is important to observe that the communicational campaigns of companies usually focus on the construction of a “feeling of belonging” amongst users, using a personal tone, marked by the idea that these platforms are communities that allow unique experiences.

It is interesting to reflect about the use, both on Airbnb and on CS, of the term “community” in their promotional strategies, that seem to

work as an element of attraction and trust for new users. Many authors had already reflected about the communitarian characteristics allowed by tools or platforms on the internet (SMITH, 1999; CASTELLS, 2003; RECUERO, 2009). The semantic field suggested by the word community involves, in different levels, belonging, proximity, knowledge, affinity – qualities that directly contribute for the construction of trust. In the case of the Airbnb and the CS, we observe that such concept reinforces two qualities of these platforms. In one sense, the investment on the idea of community reinforces the idea of integration through common interests. Through the social network developed, platforms offer the possibility to be established as a relation with the other who shares similar interests; following this logic, the proposal of accommodation can be understood as a proposal of connection among people that seek different experiences from those offered by the hotels. Community, on the other hand, also refers to the integration of space, in the sense that it deals with an invitation to the house, to the space of the other - an invitation to a common experience. Through the sharing of spaces, this connection with the other can be experienced in different intensities.

The use of social networks for sharing positive among users is also a strategy of recurrent promotion of the platforms. In the case of Airbnb, it is not rare to see short videos that, in a short and fun way, emphasize data as the number of users registered or the cities where the services are available. Sharing information such as these contribute to put in evidence the size and magnitude of the service. The many numbers used express not only the dimension reached by the initiative: they also endorse the solidity of the business model, that, although recent, has an expressive amount of users and a relevant market value, as was cited. The safety of the platform is emphasized by the transparency of the exchange of information, by the service of financial guarantee and the 24-hour availability of the attendance team - these elements gathered bring legitimacy and authority for the rendering of services.

As discussed previously based on Simmel (2004), trust between people is a primordial dimension for society's integration. In an extended

circle of interactions, the relations had requested greater precision. For the author, the accountable preciseness brought by the monetary economy predominated in the spirit of the modern individual (SIMMEL, 2005, p. 580). To a great extent, the trust in the other, an environment of loss of the personal bonds, was reestablished through more precise and contractual relations, from the creation of institutions and functions to play roles that before were performed by individual subjects, without formalizations. This landscape that Simmel describes when observing the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to remain until today. What we observe with Couchsurfing and the Airbnb reveal, however, a type of “opening” in this objective mode of functioning. Somehow, These initiatives seem to put the emphasis back in the personal relations in a way to take trust between people as the base of its functioning, though the interactions happen mediated by companies and its guarantees. The platforms mediate the contact between users and lead strategies that reinforce the construction of trust, but the business model that they construct demand other bonds, different from those of the basically commercial interactions.

Moreover, both the platforms seek to build an integration privileging the “principle of the reciprocity” (POLANYI, 2000). When providing greater proximity in the relation between guest and host, they value for the construction of consumption relations that are not forged, solely, from the formalities customer-company, consumer-supplier. It is not the currency that intermediates the consumption relation and what it is in question in this relation is not simply the consumption of a service. The established logic is based, mainly, in a relation of reciprocity between the one who gives and/or receives, in a dynamic of mutual obligations in which both need to fulfill their role - that is, what is expected from them. The production of the trust passes precisely by the observance of other people's expectations and by the construction of a reputation.

Following different initiatives of consumption characterized by practices of sharing, we observe that they spread for the most diverse areas: from transportation to food, from tourism to education. In common,

such experiences bring trust as a condition of fundamental possibility. They are located, in this manner, in some place between personal relationship - characterized by their imprecisions - and the market economy - that privileges the objectivity -, but, without a doubt, they reorganize the role of trust in the consumption relations.

The practices of consumptions which we reflected about in this paper apparently belong to recent business models in expansion, as the companies' data the researches previously showed (COLLABORATIVE LAB, 2014). However, in the same way that we were accustomed to buy clothes and objects in departments stores instead of going to a tailor or craftsman, or we consider normal to do a hand gesture in the middle of the street to call a cab without knowing who that person is and where they are going to take us, it seems that such consumption practices can also become habitual or common. Occurring this or not, we should observe and investigate such ways of doing that are also ways of being, because they seem to let visible the connection between market and personal life, evidencing, once again, that, in consumption relations, economic and personal practices are not separate.

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## **Female ways of representation in the teen chick lits: a study around *The Princess Diaries*.**

## **Formas de representação feminina nos teen chick lits: um estudo em torno d'O diário da princesa.**

*Alleid Ribeiro Machado<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract:** *This paper deals with female ways of representation, which appear in the contemporaneity, in books aiming towards the teenage audience, as it is going to occur in *The Princess Diaries* (2000), by Meg Cabot, for example. In this novel, we can observe the construction and the intensification around the ideal standard of beauty and behavior, which can generate issues around gender, body, and sexuality when they try to establish stigmatized standards, especially for girls under development. The idea is to ultimately bring to light the discussion around a kind of literature labeled as teen chick lit (mass literature aimed at teen female audience). Supposedly, this literature is linked to some assumptions related to the third-wave feminism and to the cultural industry which, insidiously, have conducted to the female empowerment.*

**Keywords:** *teen chick lit; gender; third-wave feminism; female empowerment.*

**Resumo:** *Este artigo trata das formas de representação do feminino que aparecem na contemporaneidade em livros voltados para o público adolescente, como ocorre, por exemplo, em *O diário da princesa* (2000), de Meg Cabot. Nesse romance, pode-se observar a construção e o reforço de ideais de beleza e de comportamento que se abrem para questões de gênero, corpo e sexualidade ao estabelecer padrões estigmatizados, sobretudo para as meninas em crescimento. A ideia é, em última instância, trazer a lume uma discussão em torno de um tipo de literatura denominada teen chick lit (do inglês, literatura de massa voltada para o público adolescente feminino) que, supostamente atrelada a alguns*

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*pressupostos da terceira onda feminista e à indústria cultural, tem veiculado a premissa insidiosa de empoderamento feminino.*

**Palavras-chave:** *teen chick lit; gênero; terceira onda feminista; empoderamento feminino.*

## Introduction

To empower a woman means to build her up, give her power, raise awareness about her abilities and competences, to empower two or more women means to develop gender equality in all environment where they may be a minority. The concept of female empowerment is multiplying nowadays through social media, and it is not rare to come across with campaigns followed by the keywords (hashtags) #empowerawoman, #empowerwomen #heforshe #shecan #femaleempowerment, encouraging women to raise awareness of their rights and abilities and, that way, empowering their partners, mothers, friends, sisters.

The question is that the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked by a reality without borders, of unlimited capitalism ruled and orchestrated by the cultural industry. Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) analyze this reality in association with the arts. According to the authors, it would act towards neutralizing critical aspects of an artistic work, transforming it in a commercial object. Therefore, establishing a correlation between campaigns about gender equality, female empowerment and other feminist campaigns in social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, and the mass literature industry, we could argue that these fights are assimilated into the editorial market by the capital in an intense and direct way, when putting into play, themes of feminism and empowerment. However, at the same time, perpetuating stigmas on gender, body and sexuality.

From the understanding of these phenomena, this study seeks to reflect about a type of mass literature that came to be called chick lit and its subgenre, teen chick lit, expression referring to the commercial literature created for the female audience. Particularly, the term teen identifies the female teenage audience - observing that such productions have been related to feminism, according to authors such as Angela McRobbie (2004), Suzanne Ferriss and Young Mallory (2006), not only because it was written by women, but mainly because it highlights protagonists who are supposedly freed from male domination.

In a more direct form, the analysis is based on the novel *The Princess Diaries*, by Meg Cabot. In this book of confidentialities, we can observe the construction and the reinforcement of ideals of beauty and behavior, which generated issues around gender when they establish stigmatized patterns, especially for girls under development. The idea is to ultimately bring to light a discussion raised by a mass literature that, linked to some assumptions of the third-wave feminism and the cultural industry, which, insidiously, have conducted female empowerment.

### **From the girlie movement to teen chick lit: media and consumption**

In generic terms, society in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century excessively changed 66 years after Simone de Beauvoir (1949) said her most famous sentence: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”, that came to be the guiding light to feminism and to gender studies. Nowadays, it is admitted the existence of a third-wave, also known as post-feminism “that would identify more with a liberal and individualistic agenda than with more collective and political objectives, considering the main claims of equality between sexes were already met” (AMARAL; MACEDO, 2005, p. 153).

Certainly, it would not be possible to discuss in this study, given my objective, the multiple and diverse nuances of feminism – or feminisms – that are comprised in contemporary times. In fact, it is important to clarify some exponents arising within “post-feminism” in order to understand in what measure chick lits can really be considered an effective expression of a movement that brings libertarian concepts for women.

In this sense, according to Ainhoa Flecha (2010), in an article dedicated to the study of feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, generally, the third-wave feminism can be classified into two ideologies: post-modern and dialogic. Thus,

*Under the post-modern ideologies, we consider those that reflect about the concept of difference and those who question the binary concept (masculine/feminine) and propose the dissolution of gender categories. Both are*

*based on the studies made by authors as Foucault (2000) and Derrida (1998), among others. Under the dialogic ideologies, we include those that defend a feminism based on the equality of differences to be capable of including all voices, especially those traditionally absent in feminist forums (cultural groups of women, housewives, women without instruction, third world women, etc)” (our translation). (FLECHA, 2010, p. 327).<sup>2</sup>*

In the studies of Flecha, we perceive a side of the third-wave feminism that is linked to the dialogic field called *girlie*, which would be a movement led by young women, disconnected from deep concepts and less academic in its origin.

The *girlie* movement started in the United States during the 80's and the 90's. One of their main leaders was Rebecca Walker (1969). According to Flecha (2010) and Karp and Stoller (1999), authors such as Walker and others inside this movement, in its essence, support a “do it yourself” feminism, based on the idea that feminism is what each woman make of it, and, therefore, there are as many feminisms as women in the world. The problem, according to the authors (FLECHA, 2010; KARP; STOLLER, 1999), is that the individualization proposed by the DIY eliminates the ability of fighting for objectives and causes that are common to women, decreasing the power and force of collective fight. Another critical point of this movement would be the exaltation of femininity as opposed to the previous model of a “good feminist”, that rejected every attitude that may refer as the “feminine” type. Thus, they defend the right to use make up, high heels, taking as a symbol of this behavior the color pink (FLECHA, 2010).

In any case, the main criticism to the *girlie* (or DIY) feminism is referred to the fact that it became a movement for consumerist young women “from middle to high class that do not know the problems faced

2 “Bajo corrientes postmodernas tenemos en cuenta aquellas que se centran en el concepto de diferencia así como aquellas que cuestionan el pensamiento binario (hombre / mujer) y proponen la disolución de las categorías de género. Ambas se basan en los desarrollos realizados por autores como Foucault (2000) o Derrida (1998), entre otros. En las corrientes dialógicas incluimos aquellas que defienden un feminismo basado en la igualdad de diferencias que sea capaz de incluir todas las voces, especialmente aquellas tradicionalmente ausentes en los foros feministas (mujeres de grupos culturales, amas de casa, mujeres sin estudios, mujeres del tercer mundo, etc.)”

by most young women, being that they have no interest in combating social exclusion, avoiding any political project" (our translation).<sup>3</sup> (FLECHA, 2010, p. 328).

The question that remains after what was exposed is: Why has post-feminism received such outlines? Due to liberal demands of the contemporary society, it is interesting to consider social movements, as previously said, within a context without borders of a global capitalism, thus, admitting that they are marked by a massive diffusion of information. In this scope, media or the different means of communication may be understood as regulatory centers of power (GOFFMAN, 2009) or as central instruments of its propagation. As for the third-wave feminism, it has been assimilating stereotypes linked to the feminine that are shown by numerous media, not as much to question it, but mainly to reproduce it as something that can be controlled and used in favor of women.

In short, DIY feminism cannot happen without the media, that broadcasts behavior paradigms for girls that wish to have their image associated with to an "independent and successful" woman. In other words, what we can perceive is that historic issues related to the women's fight for equality were gradually being assimilated by different means of communication, emptied in meaning, and transformed into a commercial demand. Feminism became something that can be attained by the own young women as long as she wants it or as long as she takes certain kinds of attitude considered "feminine".

As we can perceive, some concepts become "fashionable" and are incorporated into the feminist lexicon, in a type of agglutination of ideas and concepts that are, in its essence, opposites and unethical. These concepts propagate ways of being that create a sensation of freedom and power to the girls. They spread ideal models of which type of woman they will be, instituting, thus, identities loaded with stereotypes. Then, to assume oneself as feminist became, in simpler words, more accessible than what it was in the past. After all, a girlie is a powerful young woman

3 "Clases medias y altas que no conocen los problemas a los que se enfrentan la mayoría de las mujeres jóvenes y a las que no les interesa combatir la exclusión social, evitando cualquier proyecto político".

that can make her own choices and act following her own principles, something never before so easily dreamed in previous generations.

Since the girlie movement is led without academic restraints, but freely inspired by libertarian ideas from feminist authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (1977), this new ideology is being held not only by philosophers, and by anthropologists, but also by popstars, for example. Recently, the British singer Adele, in an interview with Rolling Stone (August 2015), said she is a feminist and believes that all people should be treated equally. Beyoncé, in the event of the Video Music Awards (VMA) in 2014, promoted by MTV, used the moment to leverage feminism while she presented her song “Flawless”, whose lyrics has quotes of the Nigerian writer Chimamanda. When launching her last album, self-entitled, she brought to light the issue of feminism as a model of behavior for American girls. Many songs in this album have a militant content, encouraging the idea that girls can be strong and independent, turning the idea of “women as an object” on its head. Note, for example, an excerpt of the song “Run the world”, from the discussed album:

1. *Run The World (Girls)*
2. *Girls, we run this mutha! (3x)*
3. *Girls!*
4. *Who run the world?*
5. *Girls! (3x)*
6. *[...]*
7. *Some of them men think they freak this*
8. *Like we do*
9. *But no they don't*
10. *Make your check come at they neck*
11. *Disrespect us?*
12. *No they won't [...]*

Beyoncé's song is propagated in a context where American girls, especially black girls, demand power. The pop star arises in these verses as the spokesperson of feminist ideas. However, beside her, there is a machine that moves the fashion, beauty, and customs industry. Beyoncé

personifies many beauty standards imposed to women, but she deems herself as feminist. This may bother the more academic feminists, but is the superstar position of deeming herself a feminist valid? In any way, the artist integrates and represents the DIY feminism. Through her influence, more and more American girls will want to emulate her, including to reproduce her world view.<sup>4</sup> Chick lit can subliminally deal with many situations that comprise the daily life of women, such as school, academic or professional success, etc.; marriage; divorce. Turbulent family and love relationships come into play; body related issues, such as obesity, worship to fitness or even society's pressure around motherhood. They are books about the intimate life, that have as main content the variety of dilemmas, doubts, insecurities and problems lived by women. According to Leiro (2010):

Novels of this genre highlight that women are more worried to look for a husband that can give her children than their maintenance of their professional careers. After reaching stability, the chick lit novels bring an inverted reading of the contemporary woman and transform the discomfort of those affected by mythical femininity (FRIEDAN) into an inverse relation: if women in the 50's felt "incomplete", unhappy with their limited roles of wife and mother, chick lit protagonists are feeling "unfinished" by not having husband and children. They feel the lack of not being into a legitimate structure – the nuclear/bourgeois family. The logic remains binary and oppositional.

In specific terms of genre, as the author seeks to call attention, chick lit does not act as adjuvant of the women, as far as it reinforces standards that are very common inside a patriarchal social structure, approaching other types of novels, as the ones that commonly were called "harlequin". Then, where lies the difference of this type of literature in relation to that literature made for women? Chick lit ended up calling attention of cultural studies in its post-feminist ramification by

4 "In the wake of the publication and commercial success of Helen Fielding's (1996) novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*, by the end of the 1990s the category and term chick lit had become established to describe novels written by women, (largely) for women, depicting the life, loves, trials and tribulations of their predominantly young, single, urban, female protagonists".

owning characteristics that differentiate it from novels like “Sabrina”. Suzanne Ferriss and Young Mallory, in the introductory chapter of the book *Chick lit: The new woman's fiction* (2006), *deals with chick lit as* “A form of woman’s fiction based on subject, character, audience, and narrative style”. *While the harlequin novel would present dramas related to the feminine universe with all the load of stereotypes that are common to this universe, without necessarily being written and led by women, chick lit goes into a more interesting land in so far as it is produced inside a context of freedom of writing of the women. Nevertheless, putting into play, many times, stories with patriarchal content, and the feminine power of choice facing the most diverse circumstances.*

The crisis that chick lit novels present with an adult, urban, contemporary woman seem to reveal the remnants of a society that thinks in patriarchal terms, but quit the frontal battle with feminists and found a powerful weapon to destroy women's achievements without looking like a villain: language. By using resources such as polysemy, semantic nuances and its multifaceted nature, language becomes a fundamental piece (and this is not new) of a very intricate powerplay, given the technologies, that only through a critical device equally supported by language we may identify the nuances of power relations presented in speech (LEIRO, 2010).

For some of the post-feminism authors, such as Stephanie Harzewski (2011), within the so-called “post-modern” fiction, chick lit would not lose its relevance by supplying a portal of access to contemporary gender politics and questions with cultural value. In her book *Chick Lit and Postfeminism* (2011), the author dedicates supported literary and feminist analysis to its origins, its development and importance, according to Suzanne Ferriss (2011).

According to Sarah Gormley (201-?), even though the popularity and establishment of chick lit as an editorial phenomenon is evident; these novels “have provoked intense and oppositional responses. *For the fans [of the genre], it is claimed that chick lit reflects the experiences of contemporary young women*”. However, still according to Gormley (201-?), for the detractors of the genre, “These novels are formulaic, vapid, and,



moreover, anti-feminist, firmly (re)locating women within the private sphere of hearth and heart”.

Under the studies exposed here, which seek to reflect about chick lit in terms of issues related to female emancipation, we will deal in the following title, more specifically, with teen chick lit, taking as a starting point of reflection the book *The Princess Diaries*, by Meg Cabot.

### ***The Princess Diaries*, by Meg Cabot, and gender stigmas**

Meg Cabot is an American author very known for *The Princess Diaries* (first book of her series, published originally in the 2000's, which is already in its 34<sup>th</sup> edition in Brazil). The author, reference in the chick lit genre, has almost 80 titles published among series for adults, teenagers and pre-teens, with more than 25 million sold copies. In Brazil, her books sold over 1.5 million copies (MEG CABOT..., 2015). In *The Princess Diaries*, we know the story of Mia Thermopolis, a young woman around 14-15 years old living in Manhattan. The protagonist of the novel lives with her mom, an artist to which

he [Mia's father] never married [...]. My mother said that happened because, at that time, he rejected bourgeois habits of a society that didn't even accept women as equal to men and refused to recognize their rights as people (CABOT, 2014, p. 35).

Mia's speech transmits, initially, the idea that her mom is an independent woman both emotionally and financially. However, the teenager herself will, throughout the story, contest her behavior - a reasonably intellectualized woman, a "bohemian artist" (CABOT, 2014, p. 45) for not corresponding effectively to the image of the independent woman that she always tried to show her daughter. Mia does not agree with her mother's somewhat careless behavior, either towards the house chores - such as going to the supermarket - or about the bills to pay - as she says in her diary, for example: "THINGS TO DO: 8. October's rent (confirm if mom deposited dad's check!!!) [...] 2. Make mom deposit dad's check" (CABOT, 2014, p. 14, 27) or

Dad repeated these words to my mom. I heard her mumbling something in return. She always mumbles when I remind her she has to deliver her painting in a certain deadline. Mom likes to work when the muses give a little help. Since dad pays most of the bills, this usually is not a big deal, but it isn't a responsible way for an adult to behave, even as a painter (CABOT, 2014, p. 51).

It is clear, thus, that Mia's father supports both, mother and daughter, even though the mother works in an art studio in order to guarantee her financial independence. What we can perceive is a new setting of patriarchy, that is, as it is important to remember, supported "[...] By the authority, imposed unconstitutionally, of men upon women and children in the family context" (CASTELLS, 2001, p. 169).

Mia's father, thus, is also framed in the paradigm of a socially desirable masculinity. He lives in Genovia, a fictional country situated between France and Italy whose inhabitants do not pay taxes, similar to Monaco, due to it also being a principality. He sees her daughter sporadically, working more as a finance provider to her – in fact, Mia has little intimacy to her dad, who she usually spends the summer vacation with in the French castle of Grandmère, her paternal grandmother, in Miragnac.

Mia's private life, exposed in her diary, reflects what the social and cultural contexts still maintain of patriarchy. Another example of that would be her father's treatment to "summer" girlfriends, that are, to him, like disposable objects:

[...] there's always a new girlfriend [...]. In the summer, when we go to Grandmère's castle in France, he always takes the lady of the hour. They were always drooling over the pools, the waterfalls, the 27 rooms, the ballroom, the wine cellar, the country house and the landing strip. One week later, he sends the woman off. (CABOT, 2014, p. 35).

This new setting of patriarchy seem to foresee exactly some type of freedom of choice and woman empowerment, at least to the point where everything is under control. These women decide where to stay and who they want to be with, they can even be in a castle enjoying

comfort and wealth. They can serve and use sex as pleasure for a season, but the final decision over who stays where and with who is from the male subject, that "a week later, sends the woman off" The power is from the man upon the woman, and

[...] so that this authority can be exerted, it is necessary that the patriarchalism surrounds all the organization of the society, the production and the consumption to the politics, the legislation and the culture. Interpersonal relationships e, consequently, the personality are also marked by the domination and violence that has its origin in the culture and institutions of patriarchalism (CASTELLS, 2001, p. 169).

Still concerning Mia's father, it's valid to point out that he is an aristocrat that rules a little country of Europe by inheritance, a man that is also frustrated, inaccessible, depressed, according to Mia's perspective, due to a testicular cancer that took away his chances of becoming a father again.

As the whole problem revolves around the lack of a male heir, which makes Mia's father obligated to make her the next heiress to the throne, the teenager will have to adapt to a new life and learn how to be a princess. The book works with the imagination of many young women because it is a fairy tale that happened to an "ordinary" girl from New York. Mia, then, will have to transform into a real princess, have etiquette classes with her strict grandmother, with who she does not have many connections with, and even to walk around with a body guard. Everything in the peak of her teenage years.

Lessons on how to be a princess.

I am not joking. I have to go straight from my algebra revision classes to the Plaza, in order to take princess lessons with my grandmother. [...] Daddy says I don't have a choice [...]. He said I have signed a commitment, so I was obliged to take princess classes as part of my duties as heiress (CABOT, 2014, p. 111).

The character did not want to take seriously the issue of becoming a princess, but she is forced to do it because she does not have any

alternative. This way, Mia goes on receiving, day after day, Grandmère's lessons: "Tomorrow, you are going to wear nylon stockings. Not mesh. Not knee-high socks. You are too grown up for mesh and knee-high socks. And you are going to wear shoes to school, not sneakers. You are going to do your hair, wear lipstick and do your nails (CABOT, 2014, p. 117). These lessons are intended to teach proper manner to the girl on how to be and how to behave.

Mia was not a role model of femininity, not on Grandmère standards. She did not use feminine accessories, such as nylon socks, or even make up, she was tall, awkward and bit her nails, her hair was messy; she was not like the other girls regarding consumerist desires, she was a Greenpeace supporter. Being different, in that sense, started to be inadequate and Mia felt obligated to mold herself into the new paradigm of behavior that was being imposed to her.

The great idea of the author resides in building a character that would not fit into the socially ideal gender, body and beauty models, which would be relatable to some readers, to then put her right into a standard and then form an empathy network with the audience.

In Meg Cabot's story, this adaptation to this new identity causes pain on Mia.

[...] It is kind of difficult, when all these beautiful, elegant people, say how we look so well wearing that and how our cheekbones come to life with that, we remember that we are feminist and environmentalist and do not believe in wearing make up or chemical products that are harmful to the planet [...]. But I don't feel happy. Not even a little bit. Grandmère is happy [...] with my appearance. Because I look nothing like Mia Thermopolis. Mia Thermopolis never had nails. Mia Thermopolis never wear make up, Gucci shoes, Chanel skirts or Christian Dior bra [...]. I don't even know who I am anymore. She is making me into somebody else (CABOT, 2014, p. 135-136).

Mia's identity crisis reminds us of the feminist draft. She needs to play a role she does not feel prepared to. The tension of the narrative lies

on her non-acceptance to her new identity, basically, linked to gender, body, behavior and beauty stereotypes.

However, the fact is that Mia will settle and fit into the “princess” standard, accepting to wear the accessories that seem to be more adequate to her new life: “Grandmère said that, when I go to dinner with them on Friday night, I must bring a gift and wear my Gucci loafers.” (CABOT, 2014, p. 183). Therefore, throughout the narrative, she is gradually changing her behavior, going from non-acceptance and resistance to a certain type of conformism. This will happen properly when Mia end up having her image published on the first page of the New York Post with the following headline: “*Princess Amelia and, in smaller print, the authentic New York Royalty*” (CABOT, 2014, p. 187).

From this moment on, Mia, who before felt rejected by the boys in her school for being “tall, a giraffe [...] no beauty” (CABOT, 2014, p. 189), sees that “suddenly, [were] very popular” (CABOT, 2014, p. 194), also starting to be hit on by the most interesting young man of the school, that invites her to go with him to a ball:

Well, here I am, sitting, wearing my new dress, my new shoes, my new nails, my new panty hose, with my legs and my armpits properly shaved, my new hair, my professionally done face, it is seven o'clock and there's no sign of Josh [...]. Thank God the intercom rang at that moment. It's him (CABOT, 2014, p. 253).

Mia, in the end, will not end up with Josh, who only wanted to take advantage of her fame. She turns around and picks another boy. Now, the protagonist can choose whom to be with. Everything starts to be right. The story does not end up in a big palace, but rather on a party where Mia finally dates Michael, her old love, the older brother of her best friend, Lilly. He, a common teenager, less popular, but who she always liked, whose predominantly quality is the intelligence, contrary to the other teenager, who was only “handsome”. The main character is already transformed, she is already a princess: “I thought that I really am a very happy girl. Things seemed so bad for a while, but isn't it funny how it all works out in the end” (CABOT, 2014, p. 281) and

there is the happy conclusion. What prevails in the end of the story is the ideal image of a woman in a girl who knows how to dress and is educated to please, who represents well the aristocratic position and a beauty standard.

For Naomi Woolf (1992), these desired paradigms of body, beauty and behavior for the feminine do not only represent the object, person or event they illustrate, but bring us deeper meanings, not always easily identified. In fact, when these images may represent empowerment and girly attitude, in a counterpart, contribute for the unworthiness of feminism, and consequently, for the reinforcement of the stigma of beauty, constructed, theoretically, social and culturally against women.

### **Final considerations**

Meg Cabot's book is an example of the genre chick lit or teen chick lit, i. e., a type of literature that is produced within female authorship fiction that has as a common agenda issues related to the universe of contemporary young women. The reading of the novel allowed seeing it as a novel with a light plot, located in the mass culture, looking to show an image of well-informed, independent and cultured women.

In this sense, some feminist theoreticians linked to the third-wave feminism seek to consider chick lit as a type of post-feminist literature because it exposes women not as victims of an oppressive society of gender anymore and it is a fiction related to female experience, such as dating, beauty, profession, activism, sex, etc. The same would apply to teen chick lit.

However, this literature would be overlaid with gender oppressive content linked to the industry of consumption. As we can observe, what is interesting to teen chick lit is to present "well dressed and with good appearance" main characters that have, however, critical thinking and are aware of the reality in the cultural context that they are inserted in. The question is that the same young women also represent "a place" in which they use their voice and their actions. Either Mia, main character of *Princess Diaries*, or the other main characters of teen chick lits are, in

general, white, straight, middle to high class, in misogynistic, patriarchal contexts, as Suzanne Ferriss and Young Mallory (2006) attest. It seems that the drama faced by teen chick lit protagonists represent a gender culture that seems to be not ready for female empowerment, in addition to excluding issues of sexuality, social class and race when privileging only normative ideal standards of these categories.

For Stuart Hall (1997, p. 33), all social practices have a cultural dimension and a discursive character: "consequently, culture is one of the constituent conditions of existence in this practice". Regarding adolescence, thinking in terms of cultural identity and constitution of subjects as social constructs (HALL, 2005), we can infer that the construction of identities is articulated to discourses shared and supported by many cultural artifacts built, often times, exactly for this type of audience. As for young women, among such artifacts, the teen chick lit novel, sharing massively an extensive array of information about a variety of subjects, also distributing ways of being and even what they should like and how they should proceed.

Therefore, when taking as an example the analysis of young Mia, we perceive that, if, in the beginning of the novel, she perceived herself as out of standards, for being tall, skinny and with big feet, for biting her nails, having messy hair and most of all, for questioning the consumerism of her school colleagues. In the end, the protagonist ends up fitting into a standard behavior, turning into a socially acceptable image in favor of a new identity: of being a "princess". Along with that, came the success in having the boy of her dreams, the admiration of other schoolmates, the media's approval.

Since, as we know, the reading of a novel does not end on their consumption, but unfolds in practices of a social impact, the question that underlies here is: how many girls cannot feel like Mia? After all, if a common girl can become an "independent" princess in a few months, any girlie can feel this "empowerment", they just need etiquette lessons, adequate make up and branded clothes. It is in this sense that, among the array of possible interpretations and considerations, *Princess Diaries* fits

into as a commercial product which content linked to the field of fights for female emancipation acts in favor of the market of consumption.

In the end of this text, the impression we have is that the engagement proposed by the DIY feminism, in which chick lit (and its subgenres such as teen chick lit, for example) became an expression, presupposes the reinforcement of symbolic norms and moral values that are linked to forms of conduct that academic feminists have been questioning for years. In other words, a more attentive reading of this type of novel reveals a realignment of this “new female autonomy” into a society whose patriarchalism authorizes and regulates human behavior. If, on one hand, it contributes for the dissemination of the idea of female empowerment through independent and active protagonists with critical thinking, on the other hand, it reinforces stigma of behavior and beauty that act completely against the empowerment.

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## Maternity stories lived on TV: the role of testimony in a Brazilian reality show

### Histórias de maternidade vividas na TV: o papel do testemunho num *reality show* brasileiro

Fernanda Silva<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *How to show an experience on television makes the viewer sympathetic with it as a partner and accomplice? It is on this issue that this article is structured, focusing specifically on a Brazilian reality show dedicated to showing the birth of babies: the program Boas Vindas, displayed by the paid channel GNT. The aim is to discuss the role assumed by the testimony on television, not only from the account of the characters in the stories, but the images that anchor the moment of birth and make the viewer a witness of the narrated experience. The analysis seeks to highlight at least two uses of testimony in the show: 1) there is an effort to minimize personal conflicts and value their overcoming; 2) testimony works as a way of constructing the subjects' authenticity and experiences.*

**Keywords:** *testimony; life histories; motherhood; reality show.*

**Resumo:** *De que forma mostrar uma experiência na televisão solidariza o telespectador, posicionando-o como parceiro e cúmplice do que é vivido? É em torno dessa questão que o presente artigo se estrutura, tomando como recorte um reality show brasileiro dedicado a mostrar o nascimento de bebês: o programa Boas Vindas, exibido pelo canal fechado GNT. O objetivo é discutir o papel assumido pelos testemunhos na televisão, não apenas a partir do relato dos personagens, mas das imagens que ancoram o momento do parto e tornam o telespectador testemunha da experiência narrada. A análise busca destacar ao menos dois usos do testemunho no programa: 1) há um esforço em minimizar os conflitos pessoais e*

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*valorizar sua superação; 2) o testemunho funciona como forma de construção de autenticidade dos sujeitos e das experiências.*

**Palavras-chave:** *testemunho; histórias de vida; maternidade; reality show*

## Introduction

In July 1998, *Jornal Nacional* dedicated about 10 minutes of its schedule to talk about the birth of Sasha, daughter of the famous TV presenter Xuxa Meneghel, whose history were consolidated around performances as model and presenter of TV shows for children. Xuxa was not married and made clear her intention of having a child, which was widespread throughout media dedicated to cover celebrities' lives. For many years, TV viewers, fans of Xuxa or not, followed through the press her love relationships and the hope nurtured by the presenter of finally becoming a mother. In 1997, Xuxa began a relationship with the businessman Luciano Szafir, unknown to the audience since then, and then her motherhood story begins. Throughout her nine months of pregnancy, viewers intensely followed Xuxa's expectations, her growing belly, the decoration of Sasha's room and other details around the baby that was about to be born.

Sasha's birth made four different entrances on *Jornal Nacional*: Two news reports about the birth of the heiress of the "queen of the young ones", a live report from the maternity clinic and a homage to Xuxa's daughter in a videoclip. The first TV report (two minutes and 25 seconds) brings back Xuxa's pregnancy announcement in a TV show: "I will always have someone with me, a person that is going to be mine. I am pregnant".<sup>2</sup> In another interview, Xuxa tells: "[rubbing her belly] There is a person that helped me get this dream come true [referring to her partner Luciano Szafir]. [Cut. Xuxa looks at the camera and says:] We are already married". Beyond these excerpts, the report brings the recordings of the last show before the birth, all registered in José Mário's images, director of *Planeta Xuxa* and *Xuxa Parque*. Mixing the text in off of the reporter with testimonies that the presenter gave to the media throughout these nine months, the report had the objective of showing

2 The comments made on this study have as source the News reports posted on YouTube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up0IkRgOjEI> (acesso em: 15 out. 2015). They do not have credits of the soundbites or the reporters, what makes it harder to identify.

the emotion and joy of being a mother and, most of all, the achievement of a dream.

The second news report (three minutes and 48 seconds), made by the reporter Marcelo Canellas, spoke about the actual birth: How the maternity clinic prepared to receive Xuxa, her fans keeping vigil in front of the hospital, the child's birth, the medical staff, etc. In this second moment, the construction of narrative aimed at showing the unpredictability of the event and its overcoming, as it's clear on the reporter's speech: "a last-hour misfortune. The cesarean had to be rescheduled. The umbilical cord got wrapped around Sasha's neck. But everything went well". The news report shows the dad, Luciano Szafir, preparing himself to go in the surgical floor and into the operating room. However, Xuxa, the celebrity that was going to have her dream child, does not appear in the preparation for birth. We do not see her with a hospital gown, we do not have access to her fears before the surgery. We only know, through the reporter's speech and by a soundbite with a member of the medical staff, that "everything went well". In another soundbite, the doctor tells what happened in the operating room: "She [Xuxa] was conscious all the time. And when the pediatrician placed Sasha on her chest, she started crying, crying, crying. She cried more than Sasha did". This was the only testimony we have about the child's birth, that only appear in the arms of a nurse to take her first bath.

The third appearance about Sasha by Jornal Nacional was a live report (one minute and 43 seconds) made by the reporter Roberto Kovalic straight from the maternity clinic. Luciano Szafir talked about his feelings when her daughter was born:

[...] to have her in my arms is, without a doubt, the strongest feeling I have ever had in my life. You know, I got her in my arms, I started singing to her, she... She took one of my fingers in her hand, another one with the other, its... [sigh] it is... I have no words to describe it.<sup>3</sup>

3 Testimony available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Up0IkRgOjEI>. Accessed in: Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

The objective here was to get, in the father's testimony, the feelings around fatherhood. All the testimony and the performance revolved around the emotions that the baby had awakened in their parents. To finish, *Jornal Nacional*, by Xuxa's request, showed a videoclip with a compilation of images of her upcoming show.

At the time, the visibility that *Jornal Nacional* gave to the girl's birth was strongly criticized, especially by the audience, as we can see in the letters of readers published by the *Jornal do Brasil*:

[...] It is almost a subservient attitude of journalism working to this not at all humble lady, whose belly, extensively showing (sometimes, even in cold weather) was imposed to us as something to be adored, idolized by everyone and even kissed by adulators everywhere. An undisclosed obsession in facing her pregnancy as the event of the century.

I can't bear to hear about Xuxa's child anymore!!! Why does this child have to be treated like a demigod if she was conceived just like everyone else? [...] Why didn't anyone lend Xuxa a VHS tape on the hunger in Sudan? Maybe it would wake her up a little and stop with this nonsense? I can't take it anymore! Heeeeelp... (XUXA & XAXA, July 29<sup>th</sup> 1998).

If on the other hand the event was considered a futility, on the other, more recently, the subject found in its own formats a space for its existence and social legitimacy. If for a part of the audience the way broadcast journalism works with reality does not comprise a theme like this, reality shows, especially those related to lifestyle, base their structure and relation to the audience having as the central objective to show the birth of babies. It is necessary, however, to notice some differences.

Although we have, as TV viewers, followed the path to Sasha's birth narrated by her mother, we were deprived from the moment of birth. We did not hear Sasha crying and Xuxa's emotion, we did not see the baby being born. We only know her in her first bath, filmed by the mother's request with the reporter's narration. Xuxa, the celebrity, didn't reveal her vulnerabilities to the audience, she did not talk about her fears and expectations regarding the birth of her daughter. In that case, there was

a whole mediatic circus around the birth of a celebrity baby, but her arrival to the world was kept private from the viewers.

In reality shows, as it is common on the genre, there are common people that become celebrities when bringing to television the story of their lives. Differently from celebrities, common people do not book the floor of the maternity clinic for their child's birth (as Xuxa did), and they do reveal their vulnerabilities, pain and suffering. And that is the authenticity of these testimonies shared with the audience. These shows are structured around the testimony of two modalities: First, the narrative in a confessional tone of the story of the parents until the baby's arrival and, secondly, the visual narrative of the birth, that rejects any mediation of the event: Images are enough to legitimize the narrative, turning the viewer into an eye witness of their own story and, therefore, an accomplice of their happiness.

The following study has as the objective to reflect upon this form of testimony on TV and their implications on summoning of the viewer. How to show an experience on television makes the viewer sympathetic with it as a partner and accomplice? It is around this question that the present article is structured, focusing on a reality show dedicated on showing baby's births: the TV show *Boas Vindas*, broadcast on GNT, a paid channel which focus on lifestyle with a schedule based on cooking shows, debate programs and interviews, TV series and reality shows, in its majority. The life of common people is present in a majority of the schedule of the channel with the objective of sharing problems and their solutions. That way, common people learn how to cook (*Que Maravilha!*), renovate and organize their homes (*Decora e Santa Ajuda*) learn how to feed their children a balanced, healthy meal (*Socorro! Meu filho Come Mal*), learn how to throw parties (*Fazendo a Festa*), get married (*Chuva de Arroz*). With this schedule, GNT seem to want to assume a posture that makes it capable of minimizing possible conflicts of the viewer's personal life, showing how it is possible to live a happy,



balanced life. A part of the shows are filmed into people's homes or is referred to it, being placed in the most intimate part of people's lives, building healthy relationships. The channel is, thus, a partner of the viewer looking for quality of life and an accomplice of the challenges of the private life.

### **“Emotional, real and honest testimonies”: the testimony as an effect of reality**

The TV show *Boas Vindas* is on their 8<sup>th</sup> season, each one having 13 episodes. It dialogues with a trend of the international schedule whose focus is the birth of babies, as it is the case of shows such as *One Born Per Minute* and *I didn't know I was pregnant*, shown in Brazil by Discovery Home and Health, channel that is also focused on lifestyle, health and quality of life.

*Boas Vindas* show, in its 30 minutes, the story of two families that willingly sign up to participate on the show and tell their life stories.<sup>4</sup> The page of the program on the Internet anticipates a part of this promise to the viewers:

The series follow the most important day of so many people's lives: the birth of a child. *Emocional and real testimonies recorded in maternity clinics before and after birth will bring stories of families with different components, social classes and traditions. You will follow the apprehension, joy and sadness lived in a unique moment.* The arrival at the maternity, the preparation for the labor, the birth are some moments registered by the cameras. The day to day life of a maternity clinic captured in an affectionate way, with honest testimonies of a family that is reborn with the arrival of a child. (our highlights)<sup>5</sup>

In this excerpt, it is possible to perceive the emphasis that the show gives on the two testimony dimensions juxtaposed throughout the broadcast: the one verbally narrated (through the family's interview) and the

4 The analysis of this study is referred to the episodes of the 6th season, broadcast in the year 2014.

5 Available at: <http://gnt.globo.com/programas/boas-vindas/episodios.html#pag=5>. Accessed in: Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

one told visually (what we see, what the camera shows). That way, each family, when they share this experience, constitute their own testimony that is one of a kind. On the other hand, the show, when using the testimony as a communicative strategy, it constitutes the viewer as an “eyewitness” of the narrated experience, dimension that, in the national bibliography, is frequently attributed to broadcast journalism.<sup>6</sup> The relation between testimony and journalism, we believe, is related to the authentication of the narrative to create the effect of reality. The reconstruction of events through a verbal or visual narrative is constituted in an evidence of its veracity, and that is why the testimony has been the object of analysis of many researches in journalism.<sup>7</sup>

Considering that other TV genre are also based on reality, in this study, we seek to expand the discussions on the field of broadcast journalism to think about the reality on television and its relation with testimony. It is the case of reality shows, genre that comprises our object of analysis. According to Freire Filho (2011), even though the label reality show is applied to a very heterogeneous group of programs, they are unified by a common promise:

[...] to supply the visualization (hilarious, touching, inspirational) of “the spontaneous” behavior and “the authentic” emotions of “real” people - that is, of individuals that are not acting professionally as actors, saying lines and taking decisions based on a script created by TV channels (FREIRE FILHO, 2011, p. 115).

In the case of programs focused on lifestyle<sup>8</sup>, the testimony narrated by the subjects creates a dimension on something that is happening in the broadcast. Therefore, the viewer is an accomplice of the process

6 It is interesting to remember the *slogan* of Reporter Esso, a historic TV and radio show from Brazil, was “eye witness for history”.

7 In October, 2015, french and brazilian researchers gathered on the 2nd International Seminary of French-Brazilian Television Studies (UFBA) to discuss the theme “Eyewitness, Media, Identity”. Part of the discussion was about testimonies on journalism, whether they were a problem or a cut-out..

8 Different from reality shows that work as games offering prizes, what is at stake on lifestyle shows is the transformation in one's life (on their body or home) which promotes an individual growth and/or the resolution of a problem.

of transformation – the weight loss, the house renovation, etc – since it is a “construction of the eye witness that founds the images that we see” (JOST, 2003, p. 62). According to François Jost (2003), the testimony can validate the narrative of someone who witnessed the event and, hence, has the authority to tell others, or put the experience into play, the feeling that can be told by someone who lived a situation and, because of that, can be an example of more broad questions and be an example for others. Still according to author, the testimony replaces information supplied by specialists for the authenticity of experiences lived by any person. Authenticity, therefore, is a value that attributes legitimacy to the genre, according to what we are going to discuss.

*Boas Vindas* has the mediation of a narrator that ties the cases together throughout the broadcast. The narrator’s voice rarely appears and is restricted to specific moments: in the opening of the program, with a somewhat standard sentence to introduce the episode characters (“Every year, more than a million babies are born”); before and after the break; and, sometimes, throughout the show to conduct the narrative, leaving queue for possible conflicts (“because she tried for so long, Rosana had many insecurities with her pregnancy”, “Fernanda enjoyed calmly her pregnancy until she had a big scare”). From this, the voices that appear are from the child’s relatives presented to the viewer in its family functions – father, mother, grandmother, uncle, godmother -, which focus on the child that is about to be born. There are rare moments in which the show resort to specialists to deal with the theme, and even so, the specialists appear to comment on the case that is being shown, not to talk about the general scenario.

In the first part of the program, the couple tells the audience how they met, the beginning of their relationship up until their marriage and the pregnancy announcement. Sometimes, the show talks about some difficulty that occurred along the way and the implications of that to the couple. In episode 10, entitled “Not everything is a fairy tale”, Boas Vindas seek to explore the difficulties faced by couples before or during the birth.

Narrator: Carolina have always wanted to be a mother and it seemed that her dream would come true in the first try.

Mother: I've always dreamed of being a mother. We only thought that I would not get pregnant that quickly. I stopped taking my birth control pills and 15 days later I was pregnant. And everyone was very excited, first child, first grandchild of my family, a lot of euphoria. And then, in the first ultrasound, we could hear the little heartbeat. When I went for the second appointment, we saw that his little heart wasn't beating anymore. There was two weeks that I had him dead inside of me. It is very difficult to talk about it because you feel anger and sadness at the same time.

Father: There is no difficulty. An obstacle, to us, is only a different path. (BOAS VINDAS, season 6, episode 10).

The story is followed by scenes of the couple giving their testimony along with images showing their love and affection - kisses, hugs - supposedly captured as spontaneous. It is clear that there is an effort of the show of transforming people's life story to be more acceptable for the viewer, even if, in order to do that, it is necessary to act moments of intimacy of the couple narrating their experience. After showing the steadiness of the relationship, the show goes on talking about the baby's birth, publicizing and intensifying the feelings lived by the couple, becoming the peak of their life story. Therefore, even though there are different models of family in society, the feelings of the show are always positive.

Let's see two cases of Boas Vindas as an example: In the first, the show – entitled “Suddenly, family” – brings the story of two families that did not plan the pregnancy, but, when it happened, were excited about the arrival of a new family member. The young couple Livia and Thiago told that the early pregnancy united them even more.

Mother: It is a complete change, because you are not desiring it... It isn't even planned. Because I also don't think things should be like that: Everything calculated and all.

Father: Yeah, it wasn't like: “are you pregnant? Wow! That's perfect, let's have a family”.

Mother: It wasn't our plan.

Father: Yeah, we already talked about children: "Oh, I don't want to have children".

Mother: I used to have a lot of fear about putting someone in the world, you know? Too much responsibility. But when we heard the baby's heartbeat...

Father: Everything changed. From that day on, we were stoked.

Mother: We wanted to be mom and dad (BOAS VINDAS, season 6, episode 1).

Erica's testimony, in turn, highlights that any difficulties that may arise for being single can be overcome. Érica suffered from depression before getting pregnant and the news made her overcome her emotional struggles and form a family composed by brothers and friends. On the fact of becoming a solo mom, Erica said:

Mother: I cannot be angry [at the children's father] because it is impossible to be angry at a person that gives you a gift, a baby like this, you know? He is aware that it is his loss. There is no such drama: "Oh, I will be a single mother. What now? How is it going to be from now on?". No. There are other ways of having a child without necessarily having someone beside you, mommy, daddy and child (BOAS VINDAS, season 6, episode 01).

Therefore, even though the TV show reveals struggles in the process of birth or even in the background story, the moment of birth is the moment of overcoming all struggle. *Boas Vindas is not a show that reflects about social questions, but it puts different stories as a model for overcoming life's obstacles.* In this sense, the self-narrative must seem spontaneous and authentic. The "real me" that the show intends on showing has conflicts surpassed by love and complicity of people surrounding the child.

The sense of authenticity and spontaneity can be perceived by the participants' performance, along with the images and narrative broadcast.

According to Erving Goffman (2005), meetings between individuals in everyday life are marked by basic operations that denote a specific way of acting in this situation. Because of that, individuals share certain basic information about one another, information that can be supplied before or during the interaction. As consequence, Goffman says that, every time, when they are in contact with each other, individuals are playing a role in front of an audience, and what is different is the belief they have on that role, either the belief of the interlocutor or the belief of the speaker in themselves. When there is a coincidence between personal belief and the belief of other interlocutors on the attitudes and words spoken by an individual, what happens is what the author calls *façade*, that is, a pattern of an individual's behavior in many situations. The *façade* represents the "real me", a set of actions that characterize the individual, and, because of that, allows that the other participants know how to act before him/her. It is that correspondence between the impression you want to create and the belief that the others have about the interlocutor, between the "real me" and the attitudes of the speaker, that gives authenticity to the individual. When these spheres are not corresponding, there is the impression of fakeness, and as consequence, there is a lack of credibility of the individual. Then there is the effort of TV shows in making life stories seem authentic, especially when the shows are anchored on a dimension of reality.

François Jost, when talking about the "real world", says that the "first reflection of the viewer is to determine whether the images speak to our world. Whatever the idea the viewer has of this world" (JOST, 2003, p. 42). Because of that is that the spontaneity emerges as a criterion for validation of authenticity of television testimonies, in an attempt of getting the show closer to the day do day practices.

According to João Freire Filho (2009), the pleasure that the viewers have on reality shows consists on seeking points of honesty and spontaneity in the performance of the individuals in the television scene. Freire Filho talks about the work of Adrejevic, according to whom the measurement of value of these shows are not in the pleasure of peek into

someone else's life (typical conception of authors that say that voyeurism is a pathology of our contemporary society), but seeking for objective glimpses (not scripted or planned) of the subjective" (FREIRE FILHO, 2009, p. 7). It is in moments of emotional frailty that the "real me" is manifested and it is in this attribution of veracity in the role played on screen that builds the pleasure of reception in these shows.

We are sensitized, through narratives and emotionally persuasive explanations, to the importance of elaborating authenticity, of setting an identity and a distinctive image true to our own self (FREIRE FILHO, 2009, p. 11).

On *Boas Vindas*, if, on one hand, the narrative of the background story seeks to be revealed without conflicts to create this favorable mood for the baby's birth, on the other, the images of the birth seek to create the true event. The show elongates the labor pains through the voice of the narrator, the characters do not hide their vulnerability, women do not hide their bodies, as if the show wanted to show reality without embellishment or reducing the "television intervention" about the event – as it was done in case of Xuxa. The authenticity of the stories and experiences is built on the visibility *Boas Vindas* gives to the struggles and their overcoming. A lot of the program is surrounded on a dream: the dream of becoming a father/mother, the dream of having a normal labor, the dream of having a girl/boy, the dream of having a big family. Hence the moment of birth implicates the achievement of this dream, because of that it is necessary to show with details this achievement, which we share as viewers.

When it shows the labor room, the show is also inserting the viewer in this moment as an accomplice. The framings of the camera seek to induce the viewer to look for the expressive aspects the subjects imply when they are living their experience: because of that, these framings preferably vary from the medium to the closed-up shot in order to show the subjects' movements.

Verbal text	Images
[Instrumental music of suspense]	Sign on the hospital saying “Operation Room” Maternal-fetal ITU. Admission nursery Rooms of natural childbirth”.
Narrator [off]: Thaís’ baby was born, but he hasn’t cried yet.	Member of the medical team massaging the newborn baby. Horizontal panoramic until framing the father, who watched the procedure crying. <i>Zoom in on the father.</i>
[Instrumental music of suspense]	The baby, in the foreground, receiving a massage from the member of the medical team. In the background, the mother, lying over a gurney, watches the procedure.
[Baby starts crying]	<i>Close-up on the father crying.</i>
Father [off]: I think it was the only moment I cried, that I said: “Oh wow, I want to see my child ok”. My relief came in the moment my son took his first breath.	<i>Close-up on the father crying.</i>
Father: “My son is ok, man, my son is ok”.	Close-up on the father giving the interview after what happened.
[Baby soundtrack] Father [looking at the child]: “Welcome, my son. You are always going to be my son”.	The nurse gives the crying baby to his father; in the background, the mother, still lying down, watches the moment. [cut] Father turns his back to the camera and walks over to his wife to give her the baby. The camera follows him in a sequence shot.

**Table 1.** Verbal and visual narrative at the moment of labor. Source: My own making

This sequence had 53 seconds of duration and intended to show not only the labor, but the moment of vulnerability that happened, with the low vital signs of the baby. The sequence begun with the narrator’s voice talking about what happened, since it was after the images of another family. After that, only the voice of the father sews together the events in the maternity room. When the labor happens, Boas Vindas usually puts



a soundtrack for when they take the baby for the first time, as if it was the "baby song". The soundtrack is usually a calm song that talks about feelings of love. In this episode, this song just entered when the father took the baby in his arms, after the baby cried.

The relatives build the moment of birth in their personal narratives, directing what we see in the images with the feelings lived in that moment, what suggests that the link between image and verbal text – that here is formulated by the person herself, with their language and the way they speak – seeks to promote a strong identification and intimacy between the characters on screen and their viewers.

### **“Now I am going to read, get informed”: Sharing experiences as a way of information**

By centering the program on sharing personal experiences, Boas Vindas plays a role of helping people living similar situations or even giving information about the process of labor (type of labor, water birth, type of anesthetic, overcoming individual struggle, etc.). However, as typical of the genre, these types of information come by personal testimonies of lived experiences. It is the case of the episode “Sempre cabe mais um”, on the sixth season of Boas Vindas. The character Andréa talks about her wish of having a vaginal birth and the voice of the specialist (the obstetrician) comes only to confirm what is said by her. This is one of the few moments in which members of the medical staff speak as experts:

Mother: I always wanted to have vaginal, natural childbirth. Since my first pregnancy. But in the first one there was a confusion on some procedures and it didn't work out. In the second pregnancy, I said: “Oh, she [the obstetrician] will try, I hope...” I trusted. It didn't work out. And in the third pregnancy, when I found out, I said: “No. “Now I am going to read, get informed”: And then, in 38 weeks, I said: “Baby, let's try another doctor”.

Grandmother: She said she wanted the natural [birth] so badly, but she kept the same obstetrician, and, according to her it would be a cesarean. Two weeks before, she said she would change doctors. Ok. It is her right to

have a normal delivery. Could it have consequences to her? I don't know. I'm not a doctor. So, it is worrying. We feel the impact of their child.

Mother: Until the end I felt worried if it would be dangerous for the baby. Because what people say is exactly that: It is almost impossible having a vaginal delivery after having one or two cesareans, that is too big of a risk, bigger than another cesarian, even.

Dr. Bernadette<sup>9</sup> (obstetrician): The bigger risk is that uterus rupture exactly where there is a scar (or scars) of a previous cesarean. But here we are talking about a spontaneous delivery [...] (BOAS VINDAS, season 6, episode 4).

This case is beneficial given the high percentage of cesareans performed in Brazil, especially in private hospitals. For the women that choose vaginal birth, the show *Boas Vindas* gives voice to their testimony.<sup>10</sup>

As we already discussed previously, the testimony can give private life a dimension that surpasses voyeurism, but allows a reflection on broader social questions through the experiences of these people. To base arguments having as a starting point an everyday situation and to awake common interests between the TV characters – supposedly "people like us" – and the viewers are other attributions of the mediatized testimony on television (SILVA, 2011). Another function is giving meaning to experiences lived through their own narrative. We believe that the reality of TV "works for the reader to interpret their experience as an experience shared by the community to which they belong" (MEAD, 1926, p. 390). George Mead's statement applies to journalism and its social role, that goes beyond information and reaches a dimension of uniting people around the same interests. Despite that, we believe that other ways of dealing with reality in television can also play that role, which is confirmed by the television critic Artur de Távola when he says that the

9 Dra. Bernadette appears as an obstetrician for many character of the show.

10 In Brazil, there's a movement getting stronger that aims at raising awareness on the various forms of obstetric violence, which constitutes as forcing a patient to accept medical intervention when there is no diagnosed risk.

simultaneous character of TV reception, and, especially, the reception of dramatic images build an emotional bond among viewers: “When the drama of reality surpasses fiction and everyone participates, a new form of solidarity and love must be growing (and it is, I know that), otherwise everything would be hopeless” (TÁVOLA, Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1972).

When they narrate themselves, Boas Vindas characters use their experience to strengthen their bonds of intimacy that the show intends to build. At the same time, the viewer is located around the pleasure of listening and watching another person talking about themselves. Such characteristic was highlighted by Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt (1994), which show that talk show viewers – another genre that has its roots linked to the exposure of the private life of common people – can rearrange everyday practices through testimonies; “Some think they can learn something about the social world through these shows” (LIVINGSTONE; LUNT, 1994, p. 83).

To be a witness, therefore, is not only to witness an event, but to live it and share it through the feelings it conveys. Personal testimonies invite the viewer to occupy a place not as much of a person who wants to learn about something new, but of a person that shares the same world. The story of personal experiences capture the viewer by the sensitivity and by the emotion, that is manifested by what is lived by the common person and the way he/she can give meaning to experiences and share it with others. It is these meanings that, according to Mead (1926), allow the perception of a “real” world and the socialization of individuals through the imagery that generates a feeling of appreciation and pleasure by the simple fact of being shared with others (SILVA, 2011, p. 328-329).

## Final considerations

It is possible to notice that there are not much evident differences on the content of the coverage made by Jornal Nacional of the moments before Sasha’s birth and what is done on Boas Vindas: On both cases, the focus lies on the preparation of the family and the emotions lived with the arrival of a baby. The differences are in the format – Jornal Nacional tells

the story with the mediation of renowned reporters, while Boas Vindas delegate the narrative authority to the characters involved – and, especially, on the approach of the delivery itself - on the first case, silencing and absence; on the second case, visibility and detailing. In the birth of Sasha, the conduction of the coverage revolves around the renowned celebrity – Xuxa; in the case of Boas Vindas, the center of the story is common people and their struggles.

TV shows like Boas Vindas suggest the existence of conditions that allow their legitimacy on the television schedule through a dimension of nonexistent sharing of the delivery of Sasha, which demonstrate transformations on the expectations of society about the role of television. The perception, of the audience, of the absence of newsworthiness of Xuxa's pregnancy in the end of the 90's contrasts with the desire of knowing, watching and participating of the story of common people's lives, tendency that is shown outside the environment of television. It is noticeable, nowadays, the variety of channels of information (blogs and websites) about maternity/paternity, child rearing, among other subjects.<sup>11</sup> A part of these spaces is formed by mothers that simply share their everyday experiences with the intention of helping other moms with their dilemmas. Boas Vindas' website has a section called "Pregnancy and Post-Partum Period" with information on types of birth, child development during the pregnancy, recommended diets for pregnant women and when to go back to the routine after the delivery. Even though there are specialists (psychologists, educationalists, doctors) they also identify as mothers or fathers, creating a more humanized layer of the expert knowledge and a proximity with common people that are looking for information. The construction of a sense of authenticity is dislocated from the distanced testimony of reporters for the lived experience.

*Boas Vindas* is structured around the diversity of families – young couples, experienced couples, homosexual couples, single women -, but whose conflicts are lived and overcome in an individual context. It is

11 *Matemar, Dona Mamãe, Mamatraca, A Mãe Coruja*, besides special magazines websites, such as *Crescer e Pais e Filhos*, are some of them.

important to remember what the anthropologist Roberto da Matta says about the street and the home:

Facing some problems and relations [we, Brazilians] prefer to include the street [with our problems] to our home, treating the Brazilian society as if it was a “big family” living under a wide and generous roof (DAMATTA, 1997, p. 9).

Certainly, as it was in Xuxa’s case, the theme that is around *Boas Vindas*, is related to the home, which is strengthen and becomes a privileged place for experiences that will still be built. When it narrates life stories and shows a child’s birth, the show confirms the strength of individual domestic relationships and reduces the ambiguity that may come from an unwanted pregnancy, a miscarriage, a couple’s divorce. Throughout the duration of the program, everything is built in an uplifting mood, implying that this child that had just born may have a brilliant future, because the context that surrounds them are always favorable to their success.

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## **Food as chef of a television format: MasterChef Brazil versus MasterChef Colombia**

### **A comida como *chef* de um formato televisivo: MasterChef Brasil versus MasterChef Colômbia<sup>1</sup>**

Ariane Diniz Holzbach<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The main objective of this paper is to understand how a reality show of cookery deals with local phenomena, despite of being a TV format that emphasizes global elements. To do so, the paper analyses MasterChef Brazil and MasterChef Colombia in order to see how their similarities and differences are able to explain the relation between the global and the local in both contexts. The analysis points out three perspectives: the judges' identities, the contestants' geographic and social origins and how these TV shows deal with food. The work considers that food, when mediatically explored, evokes elements related to global culture and, at the same time, with local identities and local media characteristics.*

**Keywords:** *television format; MasterChef Brazil; MasterChef Colombia; reality TV.*

**Resumo:** *O objetivo do trabalho é entender como um reality show de comida, a despeito de ser um formato televisivo e, portanto, trabalhar elementos globalizados, lida com questões vinculadas ao contexto onde o programa é produzido e exibido. A proposta é comparar o MasterChef Brasil ao MasterChef Colômbia para compreender de que maneira as similaridades e diferenças explicitam relações entre o global e o local. A análise enfatiza a identidade dos jurados, a origem geográfica e social dos competidores e a maneira como lidam com a alimentação. Como premissa, considera-se que a comida, quando explorada midiaticamente,*

1 A version of this paper was presented at the work group Studies of Television at the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of Compós, at UFG, Goiânia, from June 07<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

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*evoca elementos vinculados à cultura globalizada e à identidade do local onde se desenvolve.*

**Palavras-chave:** *formato televisivo; MasterChef Brasil; MasterChef Colômbia; reality show.*



## Introduction

At a first glance, both shows seem to be the same. On one side, the channel Bandeirantes broadcasts *Masterchef Brazil*, a reality show which has the objective to choose, through an intense gastronomic competition, who would be the chef of the hour. On the other side, RCN Televisión broadcasts *Masterchef Colômbia*, TV show that shares the same objective as its brazilian colleague. Each version uses similar strategies and edition rhythm: Three judges specialized in gastronomy taste the dishes prepared by the competitors, one presenter explains the challenges, the challenges have similar objectives, the edition dramatically explores the moments of expectation, such as choosing the one who would be eliminated. The same dynamic is developed wherever *Masterchef* is being produced: Australia, Bulgaria, Chile, Mexico, Ukraine... Originally developed by BBC, the franchise was already produced in over 40 countries, and every time a channel intends to produce the show, this has to be done in regional grounds, as long as it maintains the characteristics that create unity with the *Masterchef* brand. It is, thus, a television format, a type of content which production logic has as an objective the transnationalization of a model that is potentially developed anywhere (CHALABY, 2015).

What happens is, when analyzed closely, *MasterChef Brazil* and *MasterChef Colombia* are very different from each other. Firstly, since they are produced in different contexts, each show evokes elements that are necessarily linked to each country, which work in perspective with global elements that the format demands to be recognized as such. Secondly, it is essential to have in mind that *MasterChef* turns food into the main character. The food, in turn, does not act only as an instrument through which the competitors are hierarchized; the food is the main element that individualize the *MasterChefs*. The type of cuisine valued in the challenges, the gastronomic identity of the judges, the ingredients offered to the competitors and other elements linked to the food may be perceived as fundamental pieces that “speak” and help clarify phenomena related to each context.

The objective of this paper, however, is to understand in what way a television format linked to food clarify phenomena related to the culture where the show is made and the way it relates with the global phenomena it demands. To do so, the idea is to make an analysis of two of the most popular MasterChefs of Latin America: The Brazilian and the Colombian versions, both broadcasted in 2015. In order to do that, first the paper creates a discussion around food as a tool which translates social phenomena related to the place where it is produced. Later, the role of the contemporary TV formats will be discussed and the relation which mark between local and global. Finally, the idea is to analyze MasterChef Brazil and MasterChef Colombia through three categories: the identity of the judges, the geographic and social origin of the contestants and the value of native food in relation to international cuisine. It is important to emphasize that, instead of performing a mediatic analysis per se, the approach has the intention of analyzing the content of these TV shows and the way their elements relate with wider social aspects, those necessarily linked to the mediatic culture developed in each context and added to different mediatic phenomena perceived in a social perspective.

### **Food that stratifies**

To eat never was a mere physical act. Probably due to the vital function that food carries, it holds an aura that transforms it in important social foundations in different contexts. Lévi-Strauss (2004, p. 1) argues that, behind the way society deals with food, there are “conceptual tools to isolate abstract notions and chain them together in propositions”. The anthropologist emphasizes that: 1) The ways in which food is handled; 2) the expressions used during the manipulation (raw, cooked, rotten, fresh...); and 3) the value of certain foods in relation to others are contextual forms of interpretation of the world that hierarchize specifically social elements. One of the most revealing elements of contemporary societies, in turn, is based on the manners people have on the table, during meals. About this matter, Norbert Elias (2011) reminds us that

natural behavior does not exist, it is rather historically constructed. The author considers that the historical process that settled the behavior based on “good manners” was based on an intense verticalized process that put in prominence the behavior of the Eurocentric elites of the Middle Age and Modernity. These, formed by the aristocracy and later by the bourgeoisie, had in these rituals an important support to differentiate them from the commoners, that did not have access to education or to culinary and table utensils that encouraged specific behaviors related to the act of eating. Good manners, thus, constitute a powerful symbol of social stratification that has the western Europe as an important reference.

The sociology of food has appropriated this observation to explain phenomena related to food in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Goody (1982) reminds us, for example, that many foods are historically linked to the elite, even in different societies and historic periods, and that characteristic was consolidated by the junction of social stratification and the offer or lack of certain foods. Meat, for example, in many cases, receive the adjective “noble”, either by being rare or by being more common between the aristocracy. And in this context, from a logic that has its origins in Bourdieu (1996), it is possible to socially hierarchize the types and cuts of meat, in a way that some are related to the elite (lamb meat, for example), while others were historically linked to the poor (guts). Historical processes such as the Industrial Revolution intensified the relation between capitalism and food, especially because the huge importance that technology got in preparations. Tinned and frozen foods and instantaneous seasonings, for example, caused a profound change in the relation between society and food; even so, there is, currently, a diversity of brands and prices that turn certain foods in popular foods while other types of food are usually consumed only by people who can afford it.

Nowadays, the ingestion of food was transformed into a mediatic phenomenon, which intensifies the relation of food with social stratification. If the existence of culinary books dates back to at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century (BRAGA, 2008), the 20<sup>th</sup> century watched the proliferation

of journalistic and entertainment programs that have food as the main theme. In journalism, the existence of gastronomy columns has been increasingly common in newspapers, magazines and websites that seem to sell the ideal of “eating well” that still owes much to the aristocratic eurocentrism evidenced by Elias. Furthermore, they act in the choice and preparation of food for many people, as Jennifer Cole (2014) points out, which boosts the role of media as an institution that directs the value of certain preparations over others. In entertainment, the TV shows which talk about food transform the act of cooking in one of the most celebrated practices since 1937, when the “TV chef” Xavier Marcel Boulestin appeared on BBC (OREN, 2013). Right after the Second World War, there were at least two cooking shows in the anglo-saxon context: *Cookery* (1946) in the United Kingdom, and *I Love to Eat* (1946-1947), in the United States. In Brazil, Ofélia Ramos Anunciato premiered a cooking show in 1958 on TV Tupi and, later on, hosted for 30 years *A Cozinha Maravilhosa de Ofélia* on Bandeirantes (DEMOZZI, 2012). Initially, these shows had as brand a kind of gastronomic ABC’s for the audience, given that they carried highly didactic content which had as objective to teach especially the female audience on how to cook “well”. Nowadays, most TV shows have a different dynamic, based on competitions that are broadcast on TV’s primetime (WEI; MARTIN, 2015), which is the case in cooking reality shows.

### Television formats between global and local

The television formats exist, at least, since the 50’s, although the idea was already present in radio since the previous decade (CHALABY, 2012). In the last 20 years, however, television formats have grown in number and complexity, which points for two characteristics that the context holds: 1) its great capability of flexibility and adaptation to different social contexts; and 2) being a product that intends to be international (KEANE; MORAN, 2008).

From the media company’s point of view, formats are one of the most strategic television contents, considering they are models that gather

basic rules and that, after they are licensed, can be globally produced. With that, they supply for at least two geographically different markets: Companies specialized in the creation and sale of these formats and those who acquire them and become responsible for their production and/or exhibition. In a first moment, this model developed shows with low cost and easy production, such as game shows, which encouraged its expansion in channels throughout the world (CHALABY, 2012, 2015). Between 1980-1990, formats benefit from a bigger transnationalization of mediatic content and the privatization of a large number of channels, which allowed them not only to have a bigger participation on the television schedule, but, mainly, to begin working with new content, which expanded their schedule and their potentially attainable audience.

At a first glance, the popularization of formats seems to boost the pasteurization of content and the erasure of local television characteristics. What happens is, as Waisbord (2004) points out, formats encourage a bigger economic integration and present in their content many characteristics from the place where they are produced. A format only makes sense if it enables, with a nice dosage of flexibility, that the producers bring some kind of local identity, even to raise audience ratings to the show. From this point of view, formats develop hybrid content that comprise a complex mixture of global and local characteristics. Furthermore, if, on one hand, big format exporters, usually coming from the mainstream media, benefit from a bigger demand for this content, on the other, it is increasingly higher the number of independent producers that have been specializing in creating and selling formats in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Argentina and in the East Europe region.

The relationship between local and global in the context of formats is particularly visible on reality shows, "a global phenomenon that has the capability of overcoming cultural barriers and selling for different markets" (HETSRONI, 2010, p. VII). Reality shows are a television

genre commonly transformed into a format<sup>3</sup> that, in general, work with the premise that the contestants are “real” people; that is, they are the main responsible for regionalizing the format, giving a high dosage of local culture. Some reality shows, such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor* and *The Farm* potentialize the regionalization of the genre because they explore, in many ways, the day-to-day life of these contestants (CANN, 2013; HAYES; DUNBAR, 2010; HUFF, 2006; RAICHEVA-STOVER, 2010). This way, each program develops a daily ritual linked to the local identity, which comprises, for example, how to dress, historically contextualized accents, preference for a certain kind of leisure (pool, sunbath, parties, etc) among other activities. Moreover, the audience has an important role in the regionalization of the formats related to reality shows. After all, they are the ones who help select, in many cases, the winner of the show. In addition to, at times, expand the television experience in virtual communities and other spaces, as Campanella (2012) and Hill (2005) pointed out.

Cooking reality shows, in turn, complexify the relation between local and global, especially due to the way they build the authority of the judges and the relationship they have with food. Instead of highlighting the daily life of the contestants, these shows focus on the food preparation and the choice of the “best” cook. This choice, in turn, is, usually, integrally made by the judges - therefore, without the participation of the audience (who usually cannot taste the dishes) and through highly subjective criteria. The judges usually say that such preparation is not good because they “don't like it” of one of the ingredients or they praise a preparation saying that it is similar to the “original”. The judges' authority is not put to the test, especially because of the place of speech they have - usually, they are renowned chefs in a global and mediatic context, owners of famous restaurants that are filled with gastronomic reviews. As the bigger objective of the contestants is to please the judges, they

3 The idea of gender is associated with the narrative structure developed in reference to more or less socially established conventions. The television format is linked mainly to modes of production, business models, workflows and publicity and marketing strategies (KEANE e MORAN, 2008).

need to create a dialog between their local experiences and knowledge and a more global demand from the judges.

In regards to the relation they have with the food, contestants of cooking reality shows are obligated to use ingredients exclusively chosen by the show, regardless of the type of cuisine that each one is acquainted with. In many cases, the show chooses an international dish and demands that the candidates reproduce the preparation. It is very explicit that who succeeds in these competitions usually is the contestant that can travel through global types of cuisine and have knowledge about the hegemonic references of "good cooking" Each competitor, however, develops strategies to deal with these elements, adding splashes of their regional experiences.

### ***MasterChef Brazil vs MasterChef Colombia: Combining global with local***

Even though they are developed in different ways, television in Brazil and in Colombia show similar characteristics. Both countries have big, consolidated media companies, which act almost as monopolies, especially in open TV. While in Brazil great conglomerates are proprietors of the main open television channels, in Colombia, two big groups, also private, share the main slice of television in the country: the Santo Domingo group, owner of Caracol Televisión, and the Ardila Lulle group, owner of the RCN Televisión.

Until the 90's, Brazilian television had more international projection than Colombian television, especially due to the exportation of Globo's telenovelas. While in Brazil the open television was developed with big participation of private corporations, Colombia developed a television that was more controlled by the government. In 1954, the television in this country was instituted by the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. In 1963, the country created a mixed system, in which the government controlled property, regulation and concession of the commercial television and the private companies explored the production and the

programming of the channels. Because of a big market pressure, César Gaviria's government instituted, in the Constitution of 1991, the privatization of television and telecommunication companies, giving this space of the market to the big economic groups (MONTROYA-LONDOÑO, 2014). Today, Colombia is one of the seven biggest television markets in America Latina (PIÑON, 2014). During the last 10 years, Brazil and Colombia have imported a significant array of television formats, especially reality shows.

In Brazil, *MasterChef* is broadcasted by *Bandeirantes* and they have produced four seasons already (2014-2017), all presented by the journalist Ana Paula Padrão and judged by the chefs Henrique Fogaça, Erick Jacquin and Paola Carosella. In Colombia, the first season was released in 2015, broadcasted by RCN and presented by the model and presenter Claudia Bahamón. The three judges were the chefs Paco Roncero, Jorge Rausch and Nicolás de Zubiría. In both cases, the show is broadcasted during the week, in the evening (Tuesdays, at 10:30 PM, in Brazil; Mondays and Fridays, 8PM, in Colombia) and 18 contestants are selected to compete. They had good audience ratings: In Brazil, the last episode of the season in 2015, for example, leaded the ratings during 19 minutes according to Ibope.<sup>4</sup> *MasterChef* Colombia was the eighth most watched program in 2015 and the fourth most popular program of RCN throughout the year.<sup>5</sup>

*MasterChef* franchise, in turn, is one of the most important shows of Endemol Shine Group, one of the main creators, producers and distributors of content in the United Kingdom. The format was already exported for over 30 countries and broadcasted in at least 200 territories. The idea was created in 1990, when Franc Roddam produced it for BBC. In 2005, the show was modified and transformed into a format, and, since then, reaches high audience ratings in many countries that broadcast the show in prime time. In Australia, for example, it became the third most watched show in history (ETTER, 2010).

4 Information available at: <http://goo.gl/pZx3oF>. Accessed in: jun. 2015.

5 Information available at <http://goo.gl/14IBHe>. Accessed in: jun. 2015.



The objective of MasterChef is to find the best amateur cook through a cooking competition. In each episode, the competitors must prepare dishes that are appraised by three or four renowned chefs through themed challenges, which may comprise a specific ingredient to be worked on (pork, goat cheese, chocolate, etc.), a type of cuisine to be celebrated (French, vegan, Amazonian...) or an event (wedding, children's birthday, happy hour etc.). To create a rhythm of competition to the challenges, all versions use at least three strategies that, combined, generate an environment of tension and expectation: The preparations must be made in a fixed timeframe, the judges appraise the dishes without sparing criticism and the challenges include preparations made individually and in groups. In order to understand how MasterChef works the relation global vs local in Brazil and in Colombia, both versions will be analyzed under three perspectives: the identity of the judges, the geographic and social origin of the contestants and the value of native food in relation to international cuisine.

### Identity of the judges

Considering the subjectivity contained in the evaluation of a dish (for example, how much salt separates a dull plate from a salty one?), it is important to have in mind the history of the judge and their food preferences can influence their selection of a dish as being "tastier" than another. The perception of flavor is historic and contextually constructed, as Lévi-Strauss observed. The Brazilian and Colombian versions of MasterChef adopted a format with a triad of judges to evaluate their preparations. In Brazil, MasterChef chose to have only one Brazilian judge, Henrique Fogaça, in addition to an Argentinian judge, Paola Carosella, and a French judge, Erick Jacquin, which indicates the intention of the program to conceive a cosmopolitan nature to the evaluations. While Paola frequently repeats, during the show, that she grew with Italian grandmothers and that, therefore, she has a great knowledge about this type of cuisine, Jacquin is clearly a connoisseur of French haute cuisine and values complex preparations and artistic presentation

of the plates. Jacquin, in numerous occasions, criticized a preparation saying it was “ugly”, in addition to criticizing dishes that were inspired by French cuisine, but, in his opinion, were badly executed. Paola, in turn, values the professionalization of a preparation. In the second episode, she refused to taste a dish of a contestant because he had used pickled palm hearts, saying that “I don't eat canned things”.

The Brazilian judge Fogaça brings to the show an urban identity and he is known in the gastronomic field as an expert in street food, normally made in an artisanal way. However, his concept of urban is contextualized: He developed his career entirely in the streets of São Paulo. This state, thus, is transformed into a metonymy of what would mean Brazilian food for the show. In addition to that, the three judges run famous restaurants in São Paulo, whose target audience are artists and connoisseurs of the “paulista night”. Finally, it is important to highlight the legitimacy of the three judges happens on the mainstream media, because all of them received prizes from magazines such as *Veja* and *Prazeres da Mesa*.

MasterChef Colombia deals with the identity of the judges in a different way. Firstly, there are two Colombians – Jorge Rausch and Nicolás de Zubiría – and one Spanish judge – Paco Roncero. This characteristic enhances the presence of the nationality and the Hispanic identity through the eyes of the judges. Jorge Rausch, particularly, has restaurants in many parts of Colômbia, such as Bogotá, Medellín and Cartagena, which makes him knowledgeable of many parts of the country. Nicolás, in turn, has restaurants in Bogota, but he is originally from Cartagena, besides being an expert in street food. The cosmopolitan part of the show is shown indirectly, since the three judges studied gastronomy outside of the country, and Jorge was specialized in French cuisine. The image of Paco Roncero is important in this sense, because, besides being a foreigner, he owns many restaurants throughout the world, in Madrid, Ibiza and Shanghai. Just like the Brazilian version, the judges won prizes from important institutions, including the Michelin Guide, renowned French gastronomic guide.

The biggest presence of a Colombian identity among the judges do not mean that the regional cuisine is more valued in relation to the international cuisine; it only means that the way they perceive regional cuisine has a different tone. In the fourth episode of *MasterChef Colômbia*, the participants were still appraised so the show would get to the final 18 contestants. They, then, had had to create a dish whose protagonist would be the egg. The contestant Mayra made a dish inspired on her motherland, the city of Valledupar, but she was eliminated. The only reason for that was given by Paco Roncero: “I believe you have to cook other things that are not always inspired by your land”, which clarified a certain tendency from the judges to value a more globalized cuisine.

### Geographic and social origin of the contestants

In *MasterChef Brazil*, out of 18 competitors, 7 are from the state of São Paulo, which represents approximately 38% of the total, four participants being from the capital and three from the countryside (São Roque, Santos e Parapuã). In second place there is Rio de Janeiro (exclusively the capital), with three participants (16%), followed by Minas Gerais and Bahia, with two participants each (11%), one from the capital (Belo Horizonte and Salvador) and one from the countryside (Araguari and Porto Seguro, respectively). Finally, there is one participant from the state of Paraná (Londrina), one from Mato Grosso (Cuiabá), and one from the federal district. Besides the 17 participants, there is one Chinese participant, representing the “global” contestant. It is very clear that *MasterChef Brazil* prioritizes the representation from the Southeast region of Brazil, especially São Paulo, considering that only six participants - less than the number of paulistas - are from other regions. The six participants, in turn, seem to be selected in a way of composing a heterogeneous landscape that adds people from different parts of Brazil and the world, even though there aren’t any contestants from the North. The heterogeneity, thus, is marked by an assumption that considers other parts of Brazil as secondary.

The 18 competitors from Colombia act towards a slightly more heterogeneous representation. Four competitors are from the capital, Bogotá (22%), four are from Medellín and three are from Barranquilla (16%). In the other cases, there is a competitor from Palmira, Ipiales, Ocaña, Santa Marta, Quibdó, Cúcuta e Bordo de Cauca. Even though these cities belong to only seven of the 33 Colombian states, they geographically comprise regions from the whole country. In only one case there is two cities from a same state: Ocaña and Cúcuta, that integrate the northern state of Santander. The priority for choosing competitors lies on the more politically important cities: Bogotá, Medellín and Barranquilla, but there isn't a region of the country that dominates the identity of the competitors as it happens with São Paulo in the Brazilian version. On the other hand, the fact that they have exactly the same number of competitors from Bogotá and Medellín, two of the most populated cities, besides being strongly present in the recent political history of the country, is symptomatic. There seems to be a selection with a high degree of direction, although there is a bigger representation in relation to the geography of the country.

The social status of the competitors is also different when we compare MasterChef Brazil to MasterChef Colombia. The vast majority is employed, however, in the Brazilian version, a bigger part of the competitors holds positions usually related to the urban middle class: Event producer, advertising person, administrator, lawyer, artist, statician, etc. Only one competitor can be framed professionally into a different social category: Iranete Santana, from Bahia, who is a housekeeper. In the Colombian version, there are many competitors with professions that are similar to the Brazilian contestants: Lawyer, advertising person, architect, etc., but the number of participants whose professions are linked to lower classes is bigger: Painter, housekeeper, telemarketing agent, restaurant clerk and barman. Colombia seems to conciliate better the social complexity of the country by dealing with the social status of the participants in a slightly more heterogeneous way.

This difference in relation to the social representation of the participants causes a major difference in the show's narrative. The Colombian version explores many situations in which many competitors do not know certain preparations considered popular, using this lack of knowledge as a tool to boost the tension. In the 14<sup>th</sup> episode, the competitor Diorlin Andrade says she never had risotto, a dish she would have to make next. At the same time, in various occasions, the edition of the show builds a biography of Diorlin so that they can clarify the financial struggle she had that made her change paths instead of investing on the career of being a chef. The Brazilian version, on the other hand, explore less the personal problems of the participants and focus only on the conflict generated inside the competition.

### **Native elements: Regional food in relation to international cuisine**

Both in the Brazilian and the Colombian versions, there is the tendency of prioritizing the international cuisine considered as "good cooking" according to the common sense, especially regarding Eurocentric references of eating "well". On both versions of MasterChef, the competitors had to make a beef Wellington, typical dish from the United Kingdom. In the sixth episode of MasterChef Brazil, the competitors had to prepare a lasagna, typical Italian dish, and serve it at the house of the general consul of France, Damien Loras. In Masterchef Colômbia, the 14<sup>th</sup> episode divided the participants into three categories that should create three Italian dishes: Risotto, lasagna and gnocchi.

Beyond the strong presence of an Eurocentric cuisine, it is very common for MasterChef to elaborate challenges that include unusual dishes according to the competitors eyes. In the Colombian version, the contestants had to guess the ingredients and reproduce a borsch, a Russian soup that was unknown to the competitors. In the Brazilian version, one of the most difficult challenges was the creation, in the seventh episode, of a crème patissière, one of the bases for French sweet cuisine. To teach the preparation, the show invited the French chef Fabrice Le Nud, giving a highly Eurocentric tone to the demands made for the competitors.

What differentiates MasterChef Brazil from MasterChef Colombia in the way they deal with food is the presence of cuisines related to the regional identity of each country. In the Brazilian version: the regional is normally defined by what does not belong to the Southeast region; and, generally, 2) there is a tendency of distancing the regional food and turning into an exotic dish. When the show decides to deal with the regional, there is an emphasis on the cuisine from the North and Northeast region and the challenges are thought in a way of distancing from the familiarity of the participants. In the 12<sup>th</sup> episode, the competitors flew to Manaus, place filled with “different”, “unusual”, “weird” ingredients, as the competitors said throughout the episode. They strolled around the City Market and the video edition built an environment of surprise, fear and lack of knowledge about the ingredients from the competitors perspective. Some of them looked choked when they saw “for the first time” a pirarucu (typical Amazonian fish) and handled tucupi (yellow sauce extracted from wild manioc root), in addition to looking overwhelmed when they knew they had to cook with some of these delicacies. The show invited Felipe Schaedler, owner of a famous restaurant in Manaus, who worked as a teacher, teaching the use of Amazonian ingredients and helping competitors understand the food of the region. To increase the exotic experience, competitors had to create their dishes on boats crossing the Amazonas river. Fernando Kawasaki, from São Paulo, described what his team prepared and said he felt like “talking like an indian”, in a behavior that distances the competitor from this regional cuisine and stereotypes the place.

In MasterChef Colombia: Regional cuisine is shown in a particular way and defines the identity of the competitors; and 2) the regional aspect is defined not only through Colombian aspects, but it comprises South American elements in a broader sense. Although, as previously analyzed, the judges are accustomed to an international cuisine, competitors, in many cases, use the challenges as a way of reinforcing their local identity. On one side, many challenges are planned to celebrate South American cuisine: In the fifth episode, the competitors had to

work with lamb from Patagonia and with tuna – “typical from the Mediterranean cuisine, but also found here in the Pacific ocean”, said the judge Paco Roncero. On the other side, in many episodes, the competitors created dishes inspired by their regions, in addition to pay an homage to their family, expressing with pride many feelings linked to their roots. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> episode, the judge Jorge Rausch said that the competitors must prepare “a completely South American dish. This dish is prepared in Peru. It is also prepared in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico... In all the countries of the region”. Next, he shows a preparation made inside a cup. Immediately, the participant Wilmar Sánchez sighs smiling and says: “Ah, ceviche!”. The contestant Diorlin, in turn, says she already prepared ceviche before and looks very calm while she cooks. In the end of the preparation, Wilmar says, moved, that he was having the chance to use ingredients “that represent my land, Ocaña. For me it is an honor to make this delicious plate”. He also cites his parents and grandmother and says he is inspired by them. During the episode, the elimination challenge is made thinking about the approximation there is between the food and the cook, which ends up balancing the value on global cuisine that happens in other moments of the show.

## Final considerations

A television format is so much more than a formula of a global television show. It brings together, in a complex way, social elements related to the transnationalization, but also to the regionalization of cultural products. This phenomenon is particularly relevant when we analyze cooking reality shows, given that the food is an omnipresent element which instrumentalizes contextual ways of interpretation of the society where it is developed. When it turns into a protagonist of a mediatic product, food starts revealing characteristics from the media itself.

The analysis of MasterChef Brazil and MasterChef Colombia showed two seemingly opposite sides of the same phenomenon. On one side, it was possible to perceive how a television format has similar elements

even though it is produced in different contexts. In both versions, the program presented a food competition formed by similar challenges, by three highly critical judges, and an edition with intense dramatical load. On the other side, the way how the shows dealt with food turned them into unique experiences, whose characteristics reflected social and mediatic behaviors around the act of cooking.

Both in MasterChef Brazil and in MasterChef Colombia, the effort made by the production was very clear in giving a more cosmopolitan and Eurocentric environment regarding the preparations of the contestants. Remarkable cuisines, such as French and Italian, are recurrently cited and mark the judgement from the judges. However, while in Brazil French cuisine gains special attention, in Colombia this construction is less dependent from legitimate figures, in addition to sharing space with the local and Hispanic identity of the judges. Perhaps this characteristic reveal the judgement created by each country related to what is foreign. In Brazil, for example, the western Europe, and France, in particular, form an important reference of good cuisine.

The origin of the competitors, in turn, reveal many sides in relation to the way mainstream media perceive their audience. While in the MasterChef Brazil São Paulo and the Southeast are highlighted with bigger representation, in MasterChef Colombia the emphasis lies on the three most populated and important cities: Bogota, Medellín and Barranquilla. In a similar way, the almost omnipresence of representation of the urban middle class in the Brazilian version reveals, perhaps, a mediatic desire to build an "ideal" group of characters that relates with the audience. In the case of MasterChef Colombia, there is a slightly bigger balance (although it is far from ideal) in relation to the social differences of the country.

Finally, it is central to perceive how both versions deal with food. If there is a tendency on reinforcing international cuisine, especially European, the presence of regional cuisine is relevant in both versions of MasterChef. In Brazil, the reality show builds the idea of regional as an exotic element, whose elements are defined especially for what it



does not belong to the Southeast region. In the Columbian version, on the other hand, the regional is defined in an expressive way by the competitors, who use elements linked to their roots as a way of legitimizing what they cook.

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## **Modes of communication and reading practices of slaves in the 19th century**

## **Modos de comunicação e práticas de leitura dos escravos do século XIX**

Marialva Carlos Barbosa<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The article shows some modes of communication of Brazilian slaves of the nineteenth century, emphasizing, above all, the reading and writing practices of these fundamental social actors in the history of Brazil. Divided into two parts, it initially seeks to show the oral skills of everyday life, to sequentially, from primary source research, describe their skills around writing and reading. It thus reveals part of the world of communication and oral practices, reading and writing of Brazilian slaves in the nineteenth century.*

**Keywords:** orality; reading; writing; slaves; nineteenth century.

**Resumo:** *O artigo mostra alguns modos de comunicação dos escravos brasileiros do século XIX, dando ênfase, sobretudo, às práticas de leitura e de escrita desses atores sociais fundamentais da história do Brasil. Dividido em duas partes, procura inicialmente mostrar as habilidades orais cotidianas para, na sequência, a partir da pesquisa em fontes primárias, descrever as suas habilidades em torno da escrita e da leitura. Revela, assim, um pouco do mundo da comunicação e das práticas orais, de leitura e de escrita dos escravos brasileiros no século XIX.*

**Palavras-chave:** oralidade; leitura; escrita; escravos; século XIX.

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The silence we produce regarding the acts of men that lived before us and that had in us an image of a possible future comes from many reasons. In this article, whose objective is to show to the modes of communication and reading and writing practices of Brazilian slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the path begins by the noise, deemed as deafening, that these men and women made around public spaces in many Brazilian cities.

Echoes that, from the past, travel until the present show the many modes of communication of those who formed, on the 1800's, the biggest parcel of the Brazilian population, but who had their modes of communication, which included not only the possibility of reading and writing, but the capacity of handling written codes, for so long relegated to a deafening silence, however oxymoronic this expression might seem.

What is the reason for disregarding the modes of communication of the majority of the Brazilian population from the 1800's? We could list numerous reasons, but it is necessary to call attention to issues that are synthesized into three words: remains, testimonies and value.

If the memory is the most important gate to access the past, the testimony is the living proof of the reliability of the past. Yet, we have to consider that not only the processes located in the past can be considered historical: Historical is everything that, from the past, traveled until the present.

The testimonies, which allow the reinterpretation of the past, are from multiple orders: Documentary texts located in archives that keep the memory of a certain place in time; multiple textualities that were produced in a world that now we call past; remainders of a lasting material culture; images that insist on remaining in different supports; live memory of those who were inscribed in the past and that attest their existence by the oral testimony.

We also have to consider that the past is only accessible through the trails and remainders that, as an action of communication of men located in these past times, traveled until the present. Different trails, but

they need to be indicatively read so that the message they contain, often times sparsely and imprecisely, be interpreted.

Finally, it is important to talk about the issue of the value of knowledge. As Agnes Heller (1993) emphasizes, knowledge has a proper value in each place in time: There always were something that could not be know, knowledge known as unholy, things that no mortal should know. Some of these knowledges only arise when we reach a certain degree of historical conscience. This seems to be the process which neglected, for over a century, the reading and writing cultural practices from slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The fact we emphasize reading and writing practices from slaves does not mean that the so-called "orality competences" are not recognized. Quite to the contrary. For that reason, before going into the territory of reading and writing practices from the slaves, it is interesting to show two sceneries in which the modes of communication are highlighted once again: the first one we call orality competences and the second one we call indications of a literate order.

## **Orality competences**

Among the many orality competences, we highlight communication techniques that made memory be a fundamental place for the repetition of immemorial narratives. Near the fire, after a tiring day of work, men and women could gather to tell stories, and, through them, remember a land that constituted, especially for the elderly, a type of paradise lost. But they could simply talk loud and clear. Storytelling was the first of the competences in the orality world.

Black folks like gathering at nightfall around the fire, smoking, lecturing and gesticulating, in a big fuss. The tarimbas<sup>2</sup>, each one measuring 2.5 to 3 feet of width are separated from one another by a wooden division with 3 feet of height, having a blanket or a mat to cover the entrance to the side of the corridor. The senzalas<sup>3</sup> stay open at 10 PM, having until this time,

2 Tarimba is the place where slaves used to sleep.

3 Senzalas are the slave camps in colonial Brazil.

a mixed conviviality there. With a signal made by a bell, men and women leave, each to their own lodging, and the guard locks them in, opening again the next morning, one hour before the beginning of the daily labor (TSCHUDI, 1980, p. 56, our italic markings).

But the senzala was not the only place where this murmur of voices was present. Many regions were gathering points of slaves that, between one task and another, made echo their presence by oral modes of communication. As, for example, the fountains. The time to look for water was also the moment of updating people's lives, of knowing what was happening in town, when the main theme was the new contingency of new-comers from Africa. In 1828, reverend Robert Walsh described the howl of men and women around the fountain on the street of the Ditch (nowadays called rua Uruguaiana, at Downtown Rio de Janeiro).

Once, I was looking this extraordinary scene through the windows of Saint Anthony's Covent when, suddenly, all the square was a buzz. Men threw their cans, women spilled water everywhere and the police used the whip; everyone fought, screamed and laughed in great confusion. (WALSH, 1985, p. 211, our italic markings).

Around the fountain, used to gather libambos, prisoner slaves condemned to carry water to the public institutions. Chained by the neck during the day, they used to go to these places deemed by the high concentration of people walking. There was the place where the libambos made contact with different people, gathering information and taking it to the prison, becoming 'prison windows'" (ARAÚJO, 2008, p. 93).

The modes of communication between imprisoned slaves point to a pact with information which was absent as possibility for many. For solidarity, they transform in modes of communication for those who could not see the daylight. In this case, their bodies and the technology of the voice were the possibility of others to come in contact with the news of the world. There were men who widened the horizon of vision (by information) to others, being constituted as windows, that, from the prison, would open towards the world that existed outside.

Another orality competence was musical. They improvised sounds and followings, making their hands privileged instruments for percussion, and executed songs to be published, i. e., directed for an audience that could be or not participating directly on the circle of songs and dances.

The communication orally created was always oriented for the other, assuming an audience, an external audience from the one who speaks and they are perceived as somebody that, even if they are outside from the action of execution of sonorous communicational acts, are partners of the dialogic scene that was established. Facing the audience and their reactions, the actors of oral communication could change the intensity of the following, the dance gestures and even the verses of the songs. A shared composition was always created.

One would say that after the labor of the day, the loudest pleasures produce the same effect as rest would give to the slave. At night, it is rare to find slaves gathered that would not be excited by songs and dances; one would hardly believe that they performed, during the day, the harshest labor, and we cannot persuade ourselves in believing that there are slaves in front of our eyes. (RUGENDAS, 1972, p. 147, our italic markings).

In the body movements after the work of the day, it is interesting to notice the way how they executed these dances. Excited, they would establish a dialog capable of inviting others to join the same narrative. The rhythmic clap of hands was the communication that the show of music and body would begin. The percussion was directed by an “extra” that would have the role of master of ceremonies, with the participation of others that would follow the singing with manual and bodily sounds. The repetition of the chorus attests the presence of dialogue in oral communication.

The usual dance of the slave is the batuque. *Only a few black people gather and soon you can hear the rhythmic clapping of hands; it is the sign of the calling and the invitation for the dance.* The batuque is directed by an “extra”; it consists on certain body movements that may look overly expressive; mainly the thighs that shake, while the dancer snaps the tongue

and the fingers, following a monotone singing, the others create a circle around him and repeat the chorus (RUGENDAS, 1972, p. 147, our italic markings).

By the possibilities of the technologic device of speech – the mouth – they would transmit the code of a illiterate culture whose competence would also be brought by the capacity of transmitting senses and communication. The singing was followed by rhythms that came from the body and the mouth and others understood the sounds emitted, repeating the chorus, that was memorized because of the frequency which the musical dialogic act was executed.

In the scene described by Rugendas, the way the body participated in the acts of communication is highlighted. Following the rhythm with the hands or inviting people to dance with the movement of the thighs, the enunciated speech was expanded with body gestures. The body was place of storage of a cultural information that could be reused.

Song was also a part of the labor world. The vissungos, African songs, worked not only to rhythmize activities, but could also become ways of establishing encrypted communication. The repetition of the chorus of certain verses could be used, for example, as a signal to warn others about the slave driver coming. The sound defined, thus, the rhythm of work, communicating something that could not be told directly and turned the spare time into something shared. The enslaved life was organized in a particular way around complex oral practices of a communication that made music as a way of survival.

If, by around 1660, there was a population of approximately 3.850 souls, amongst them 3.000 were indigenous, 750 portuguese and only 100 black people (ABREU, 1987), in 1799, the city already had 43.376 inhabitants, from which, 34.6% were slaves (KARASCH, 2000, p. 109). And this number would not cease to rise on the following decades. In 1849, there were approximately 80 thousand slaves and the city, during the three previous decades, would shelter the biggest slave population of the continent. In the 40-year period between the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family (1808) and the end of slave traffic, in 1850, more



than 1.4 million slaves were introduced in Brazil, i. e. , around 40% of Africans that came in three centuries of history of Brazil (MARCÍLIO, 1999).

We gradually observe, from remainders of the past, a new order of communication arising: The literate order. Despite the lack of substantial modifications in the practices of most of the population that made the cities dive into a deafening noise of the streets, where people used to sell everything and where there are images of the human buzz, we have to consider that the slaves also become characters of this scene of communication practices. As a lasting register of the second decade of the 1800's, we see a gradual construction of the literate and reading sphere that would result in an exponential expansion of magazines throughout almost all the provinces of the country starting in 1821. And, within this reading and writing population, there were also the slaves.

Out of the paintings of Debret and Rugendas, we see arising readings in public spaces, print letters marking different shipments or fixed as signs on doors of bars and barbershops. We also see the movement of students shaking their writings in the party of Santo Aleixo, saint patron of pupils. We also see a white girl going to school with a slave carrying her school supplies. We see the movement inside the residences when, in a painting of a home, slaves are around the floor beside a woman who sews and a child reading the first letters of the ABC. But we see, overall, in the cities and in the fields, newspapers, maps, books, a diversity of printed material taking up the spaces.

In the image of Rugendas *Praia Rodrigues perto do Rio de Janeiro*,<sup>4</sup> two white men, apparently scientists, are followed by two slaves. The first one is standing up in front of the slaves while the second one is ahead, crouching on the floor looking at a book. By the format, we can assume it was a map or a scientific textbook. The most important element is that the print, in that wild and inhospitable environment, was a source of information about the world that would open their eyes.

4 Available at: <https://bdlb.bn.gov.br//acervo/handle/123456789/19898>.

Thinking about the image of the man kneeling on the floor, we can observe that he goes through the pages of a big book looking for something while the other man waits the end of his gesture. Perhaps he was looking for the exact location where he wanted to go or compared species found with the naked eye with those that were registered in the book.

In the second image, also from Rugendas, Matosinhos,<sup>5</sup> a group of travelers pass through a road between the mountains of São João Del Rey. One handles an oxcart while the others follow by horse and one on foot, pulling his donkey full of products. In the opposite direction, when crossing by the latter, a man takes off his hat. By foot, following him, a slave, also full of products, stops so he could turn the pages of a big print that is on the man's hand. Expanding the drawing, we see that the black man is pointing at an image. Perhaps it is a map and he is indicating a location.

It does not matter if Debret and Rugendas really saw these scenes, if the garments were that exact ones, if the gesture that each one of these characters did were accurately fixed by the traveler artists or even if there was a critical sense when they intentionally produced distortions on the drawings. What matters is to perceive that, when they register in different paintings images of notebooks, books, written sheets, novels, maps and scientific textbooks glued to these subjects bodies, they were showing a new communicational order that started to exist. The handwritten printed letters would add to the oral modes of communication, widening the technologic possibilities of the world of communication.

The experience shared even by those who still did not know how to handle the written literate code, as the slaves, when they lived in a world which the letters assumed, yet very partially, the place of speech, implicated a participation of everyone in this world. Even without knowing how to decipher the communicational code, slaves in the scene of Praia do Rodrigues took knowledge of the new artifact and saw in it a

5 Available at: <http://bdlb.bn.br/acervo/handle/123456789/423038>.

possibility of looking for something. The world of senses and expectations in the practices around the print was flowing.

Maybe that is why, in the following painting, in the process of communication, the slave becomes an active character in the composition. He is not waiting for the gesture of reading of the literate character anymore: Now he is the one who, facing the print, points and touches the book, indicating the possibility of being the decipherer of that code.

Thus, the slaves who wait the deciphering of the text in the Praia do Rodrigues to complete their tasks formulate an impression about the gesture that was produced in the relation of the probable scientist with the text materially fixed in the big book. In that print there was something that would allow the following step; in it they looked for something that could be deciphered.

And, finally, it is disclosed. When pointing with the finger the image that is fixed in the print – would it be a map? –, the slave of the following scene not only recognizes the materiality, but he is capable to establish an abstract thought, relating the image to a place, a code, a direction.

We observe that the expansion of the world of print allows that many groups make contact with these materials and in multiple forms, introducing them directly or indirectly to the communicational processes they perform. Despite it was not the dominant way of communication, the written and/or printed letters assume a symbolic place in the cities' streets and the imagination of those who are capable (or not) to decipher those codes.

The world of printed letters and the ways of reading also get spread into the society start, thus, to be a part of the daily life of the slaves, that are now presented as immerse in communication practices that let them see reading and writing ways. The world in which we are going to go over now.

## **Modes of communication and slaves**

Like men of their time, surrounded by an atmosphere in which the printed letters would start to occupy central place, the slaves of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century were also reading in multiple natures: readers by knowing effectively how to read and write, being immersed in codes of writing and reading; readers by listening to the texts, the ones which directly read for them or the ones which were spread through the houses of their owners; readers, at last, by knowing the meaning of the printed letters and by following the images of their faces and bodies displayed frequently in the newspapers that were circulating at the countryside and the cities.

Many, however, even without knowing how to handle the written codes, were literate: They knew how to count; they were capable of doing carpentry and masonry, to which it was indispensable to know numeric codes; they could be salespeople; printers; finally, they did multiple professions in which the lettered codes were fundamental.

But even those who didn't know the printed letters knew its importance. After all, what would conceive their freedom was a paper full of inscriptions: the emancipation letter would grant freedom by writing. Therefore, the maximum aspiration of all was inscribed in a simple piece of paper which was added letters: Literacy would equal freedom.

Through the remainders that the past let inscribed in the present, we can recreate the relationship slaves had with the world of reading (and printing) on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the announcements newspapers published, texts emerged looking for those who would rebel and run away. In these, the marks of their bodies and their many aptitudes were described to facilitate their recognition: among them, it appeared the fact "to know how to read and write".

Ran away on April 1<sup>st</sup>, the below signed, the slave named Pio, with the following signals: mulato, straight black hair, medium height, slightly overweight, thin nose, has a sign of burning on his back and good teeth; knows how to read and write and works a little as a tailor (GAZETA DE CAMPINAS, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1872, p. 4, our italic markings).

In the lost and found ad, we can see that, beside body marks, some due to common punishments of the captive world, Pio knew how to read and write, knowing the profession of tailoring, for which was indispensable to have the ability to handle codes of the world of literacy. Other

ads show, sometimes, the craftiness present on their speeches when they used to say they were free, even though they were not. Some knew how to recite verses and many carried papers next to their body.

To say to belong in a world that is not effectively yours: To consider oneself free, to say they were free, it was not a lie, it as a credible possibility due to their cognitive abilities. How could someone be a slave if they knew how to read and write, spoke well and in an articulate manner, kept many papers on their pockets and liked reciting verses?

Ran out of the city of Itapetininga the slave named Luiz, 22 year-old man, medium height and overweight, big feet, tousled hair, lively and small eyes, has some teeth missing in front of his head, knows how to read and write regularly, is well spoken and articulate, laughs a lot and always has papers on his pockets, likes to recite verses, is a mason and a footman and usually says he is freed, walks barefoot. He is from Macaé, Rio De Janeiro (CORREIO PAULISTANO, August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1877 in SCHWARCZ, 1987, p. 141-142, our italic markings).

Even though Luiz has the most visible code of slavery – walking barefoot, since it was forbidden for slaves to use any kind of shoe - he had many codes from the world of literacy: Besides knowing how to read and write regularly (perhaps he used to read all the time, with regularity, or he read with the aptitude of literate people, that is, with velocity and correction?), he liked to recite verses. Moreover, he was well-spoken and very articulate, which denotes once again the ability he had with words.

If some carried papers next to their bodies, others were able to handle machinery that were fundamental for the technologic world of cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Slave – Ran from Bierrenbach & Brothers, at Campinas, on September 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year, the mulato Rodolpho, 24 years old, medium to short stature, heavy body, speaks well, firm step [...] *He is very active and intelligent, born in Campos (RJ), hatter teacher, but knows how to sew in a sewing machine, had worked in a steam machine in practice. Knows how to read* (CORREIO PAULISTANO, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1877 in SCHWARCZ, 1987, p. 142, our italic markings).

Rodolpho, as young as Luiz, could be identified by his firm step. Beyond that, he was well-spoken, being “very active and intelligent”. Knew how to read and was a “hatter teacher”. What each one of these words indicates about the conceptual world of Rodolpho?

The mulato knew how to handle machinery, technologic novelties from the 19<sup>th</sup> century: The steam machine and the sewing machine, which made him much more than a mere hatter. Making hats is not something simple, but he was more than that: He was the one who taught the craft to others with less conceptual ability. Moreover, the fact that he is “intelligent” is one of the highlighted characteristics to make his identification possible.

The reading and writing capability of slaves, at times, were even more evident. Written testimonies that lasted in time can clearly indicate the mastery of this ability. The case of the mason Claro Antonio dos Santos, described by Maria Cristina Cortez Wissenbach (2002), shows the dimension of involvement of slaves with writing.

The slave Teodora, when passing in front of a house that was being floored by Claro, casually sees that he, in a moment of rest, writes in the back of the residence; then, she asks him, in exchange of six pennies, to write letters to her husband and child. In total, Claro writes seven letters to her.

The first indicates the meaning the slave had in that practice of communication: By writing, perhaps she could discover her husband's location, since she vaguely felt where he could be. Writing, beyond being a dialogue between her and her husband, as if they were creating a conversation, was also the possibility to establish a communicational connection beyond restricted spaces.

But it was more. The letter served to tell histories, to perform memory labor, to emphasize beliefs, to reaffirm promises. Everything in writing that only could be deciphered if it was read, again, out loud. The codes of the orality migrated to the world of writing, creating a communicational universe of mixtures between oral practices and literate universes.

My husband Mr. Luis

I really want you to be healthy and I wish you send someone to tell me where are you living. The man who bought me was a very rich man from Campinas, the man is called Marciano, I made a promise in Congo, you don't remember the promise I made you, you don't remember that your father sold you to remember the promise that you warn me in the night I was sleeping. Queen has a companion of making promises and not keeping it, and now she is lost in evil and because of that she has no saints and because of that you see that the queen is the biggest in the world and she is lost in evil and can't save herself because Saint Benedict has lost her in the sea and can't save her and because of that I am careful with saints, I hope to still accomplish that even if I have grey hair... (AESP, A Justiça versus Claro e Pedro, escravos do cônego Fidélis Alves Sigmaringa de Moraes, 1868-1872 in WISSENBACH, 2002, p. 114-115).<sup>6</sup>

Newspapers, often times, also reproduce scenes of slaves who read. The Revista Ilustrada, for example, in the edition of October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1887, shows an image that reveals the mixture of communicational modes and the reading capability that many of the slaves who lived in cities or in the countryside had. In the drawing, 10 slaves form a circle around one slave who has an edition of the newspaper O Paiz in his hands. In an attitude of reading, standing up, surrounded by others, this slave is reading the first page of the newspaper. In the handwritten description, an explanation: “a farmer also made a discovery that left him surprised! A slave read in the plantation for his partners to hear an abolitionist speech to them from Conselheiro Dantas”. The other slaves who compose the circle, seven men, two women and a child, listen to it stupefied. They lean on their hoes and make (we can presume) the most absolute silence. They

#### 6 “Meu Marido Snr° Luis

Muito heide estimar que esta va achar você esteije com saude que meu desejo você me mande contar para hande você esta morando. Quem me arematou foi um moçó muito rico de campinas o homem chama Marciano quina eu fis uma pomeça em congo você não esta lembrado da pomeça que você que eu fis você não esta lembrado que você pai vendeu você para se lembra da pomeça que me avisou de noite eu estava dormindo. Rainha tem companheiro de fase pomeça e não compir e agora ella esta persa no mal e porço facillital com santos e porço você veja que a rainha e maior do mundo e esta persa no mal e não pode se salvar porque São Bendicto perdeu ella no mar não pode se çalvar e porço eu não facilito com santos eu espero hinda compir ainda que esteja com cabelos bracos... (AESP, A Justiça versus Claro e Pedro, escravos do cônego Fidélis Alves Sigmaringa de Moraes, 1868-1872 in WISSENBACH, 2002, p. 114-115).”

listen carefully to the words that, in a printed world, invade the oral world (BARBOSA, 2010).

The scene shows, once again, the practice of reading of the slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the possibility of them being, in fact, newspaper readers. Readers of first instance as the one who is in the center of the circle, in a reading directed to the ears listening. Readers of second instance as the 10 others that, waiting, listen closely the printed words that echo as voice. And readers of third instance for those who, near or far from there, knew that there was, in the plantation, slaves reading news and the type of information received through these readings.

In this communicational world characterized by mixtures, there is a triple economy of writing. In the text of the letter written by Cosme to the slave Teodora, the oral modes prevail in shapes ably composed as writing. In the text read by the anonymous slave, the printed modes are transmuted into words that, in the shape of sound, invade the oral/literate universe of those who listen to the speech of conselheiro Dantas. And, finally, the description that completes the illustration of *Revista Ilustrada* indicates, through handwriting, the dominant way of writing that, also read, transforms into sounds that spread into the environment.

### **Many others also write**

The indications about the ability to write of the slaves are not summarized to the letters that Claro wrote for Teodora. In the archives, other letters written by slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century remained. This is the case of the letter of the slave Arnaldo Rigão destined to his slaveholder, Antonio Coelho, from April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1862.

My Sir Antonio Coelho

Rio, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1862

Your slave will be satisfied to hear that you found those lines with perfect health. My lord, for the love of your children, I'll ask that you'll be kind and patient with your slave Arnaldo, because my Lord knows well the way I was raised and today I see myself whipped every time not because I am



bad because I walk when asked, I walk, not run and even so I don't satisfy my lords because of that I ask my lord to be patience sending someone to look for my mom to ask her the money she has that I can get the rest, and I hope to God I could come there to thank the good that your lord is doing, and I ask the blessing of your lord's mother, your lord do not forget your slave respect Arnaldo Rigão (LETTER written by slave Arnaldo Rigão in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1862 in OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 212).<sup>7</sup>

The letter, whose main objective was that the slaveholder would look for Arnaldo's mother to ask for money – certainly to buy his emancipation – has all the elements of literacy of the slave. After a beginning in which it reproduces the dominant way of the start of the letters, with a sentence indicating the desire to find the recipient in perfect health and that served to introduce the central subject, Arnaldo does not talk initially about the intention of his letter. He reminds his owner of his obedience, asks him for patience and tries to briefly describe the punishments he was suffering. With the craftiness of a speech filled with written letters, he refers about his owner's mother with respect, making him remember the way how he was raised. All these arguments allow him to ask his owner to look for Arnaldo's mother.

In the expression of his feelings, he wishes that God thank the good that his owner might do and also asks for the blessing his owner's mother. Lastly, he asks that the owner do not forget "his slave" and reminds him of all the respect he has about "his owner", after all he still was "his slave".

7 Mêo Senhor Antônio Coelho

Rio 6 de abril de 1862

Será satisfação para sêo escravo se estas linhas o encontrar com perfeita saúde. Mêo Senhor pelo amor de vossos filhos lhe vou rogar que pela bondade de mêo Senhor tenha paciência com o sêo escravo Arnaldo pois mêo Senhor sabe bem a maneira que fui criado e hoje me vejo chicoteado todos os momentos não por faltas de minha parte pois quando ando em mandado não ando corro e assim mesmo não satisfaço aos mêos senhores' por isso peço a mêo senhor que tenha paciência em mandar procurar minha mai para pedir-lhe o dinheiro que ella tenha que eu cá arranjo o resto, e espero em Dêos ainda hir ali para agradecer o bem que mêo senhor me faça, e peço mais a bencção de Senhora mai de mêo Senhor não s esqueça de Sêo Escravo muito Respeito Arnaldo Rigão (CARTA escrita pelo escravo Arnaldo Rigão na cidade do Rio de Janeiro em 1862 in OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 212).

The letter also indicates certain proximity that Arnaldo deemed to have in relation to his owner, but reveal, over all, the traces of orality present in the written form in which the text was composed. On the other hand, we can also see the codes of epistolary writing both on the opening of the letter and on its closing, when Arnaldo ends the letter talking about the respect he has for his owner.

The act to writing goes way beyond writing a thought under the written form. It also refers to a set of historic phenomena that presupposes three dimensions. The first one is the operation performed by the hand when tracing characters with the help of an instrument (in this case, quill on paper), assuming an interaction of communication that exceeds the gift and is directed towards an assumed future and also is capable of reaching other spaces. The second dimension refers to a set of (biologic, psychologic, sociologic, etc.) conditions and circumstances that are inherent to the own operation of writing. And the third dimension refers to the result of the operation. Each one of these elements is redefined at an always historical moment (ZUMTHOR, 2009, p. 101).

Initially, the words inscribed into a surface are those pronounced out loud, referring to another feasible verbal surface than a written surface. Only gradually the writing is converted into composition, with a type of speech which the feeling of someone effectively speaking out loud is absent (ONG, 1987, p. 34).

In the compositions written by slaves, we can notice, in all the examples, the strong bonds of the written words with the orality, which makes, for example, a single word in the same composition to have different written forms according to the melody of speech in a certain moment. We can also notice that, in writing, the rhythm of reading and repetitions of the spoken text, in which the logic of composition is directly related to a bigger velocity of pauses of thought.

#### Forgiveness

There is a long time I wish not to exist because life had annoyed however not existing not anymore because those who can live without having disgust keep living. Jaia Pombinha and all her family I'm very grateful for

that I ask for the love of god Forgiveness being that the third time I have attacked against my existence however who does not want to live should not take glass or poison because they are slow who has love for life admired me for not being afraid of my genius not making an arrangement for me because I don't think it's crazy this way of proceeding.

There is no time to waste!!!

Because I need to declare that it wasn't me, and I don't know who did that infamous role, and he thought I'm innocent, if I make this declaration is to free those who'll go to hell, these souls that will mislead their conscience!...

They will not be persuaded by what I did said: That I've committed this attack, for fearing what was being done; not for feeling better, there was nothing to fear: The reasons are others because the grave will be wise, not this infamous place and not this land of the alive (TEXT written by slave Timóteo in the city of Salvador in 1861 in OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 212-213).

In the text written by slave Timóteo in 1861, there is no explicit recipient, once the main purpose is to produce an everlasting goodbye. Knowing that the inscription in the shape of handwritten letters were capable of going beyond time, producing the perennial of composition, Timóteo starts his writing with a title that clearly synthesizes the purpose of his act. To ask forgiveness for the action he would do next.

To condense the purpose of the goodbye letter that was produced in a simple word reveal the index of literacy of the slave, who were capable of producing an interpretative synthesis of what would follow. Forgiveness was what he wished, even facing the act that would possibly end his life.

After that, he clearly exposes the reasons of his act: There is a long time he wished not to exist, because life was annoying to him. By not existing, he would not have any more disgust. After that, he expresses all his gratitude to "Jaia Pombinha and all her family". He, then, makes a surprising revelation: That was the third time he would try to commit suicide.

Weaving considerations about the way he could end his life, Timóteo says he does not think it is crazy to act that way and says: "There is no

time to waste!!!". Classifies his act and consider his innocence as an infamous role; to him, the land of the alive was an "infamous place". He feared his soul would burn in the fires of hell and seeks, thus, to justify his act.

The letter of farewell of Timóteo has all the indexes of complex literacy, since the arguments he makes show the mental formulations he was capable of doing. He goes tying the arguments into a textual network, producing a narrative with beginning, middle and ending at the same time he demonstrates to clearly know the senses present in a writing which he recognized the possibility of lasting in time.

Despite that, in his writings, there are orality indexes appearing throughout the text. Only reading one more time out loud, perhaps in the same way the text was produced, we can recover the wishes present in a composition whose last purpose is to last in meaning.

I would like to close this article with the transcription of a little excerpt of the testimony of the traveler Charles Ribeyrolles, that, in 1859, when seeing the senzalas present here, registered his impressions facing the hovels where "no one never speaks about the past - which is painful - nor the future - which is closed", he said. What caused more strangeness was the fact that, in all senzalas, little hovels, without windows and with one only opening (the little entrance), there was a permanent fire lit all the time. The fire, in the foreigner's point of view, would grime the ceiling and the walls, beyond making the unbearable heat even more unbearable. But the fire would never go out (and it could not go out). And he highlighted: "In the black people's cubicles, I have never seen a flower: that is because there isn't any hope or remembrances there".

The fire permanently lit was the way the slaves had to maintain their most complex form of communication. The fire symbolized the continuity of the group and their origins in a "ancestral founder". The fire allowed opening a window so that they would find a way of communication between the world of the dead and the world of the living, *calunga*.<sup>8</sup>

8 About this theme, see "Calunga: a comunicação dos vivos e dos mortos" (BARBOSA, 2016).

The joy that Ribeyrolles did not see - since, according to him, it would be synthesized by the flower - was not in the flower, but in the fire. The fire, as Robert Slenes well said (2011), was the flower. The possibility to establish the biggest communication of all: the communication with all the others that had lived before us and that are the ancestors.

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