

Journalism and the Art of Sensitive Knowing (Being)

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MEDINA, Cremilda (2008).
Ciência e jornalismo: da herança positivista ao diálogo dos afetos.
[Science and Journalism: From the
Positivistic Heritage to the
Dialogue of Affects]. São Paulo:
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Abstract

This review seeks to point out some contributions of Cremilda Medinas's book to the field of journalism. Throughout the text, the relationship between journalism and science given by the author is discussed, drawing, from other references, a map that makes it possible to thinking about her work from a reflexive point of view. Thus, we call attention to the main issues listed in the book, the way they are outlined and the concepts that appear in this route. In our reading, we try to dialogue with some proposals of the book, building, on the basis of what affected ourselves, an understanding of the presence affects in the journalistic narrative about the present.

Keywords: Journalism, Science, Affect.

In his book, *Introdução a uma ciência pós-moderna* [Introduction to a post-modern science] Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1989) says that in postmodernity there is a decline in the great stories of modern science, a reduction of great narratives, of the absolute and unquestionable truth. From this perspective, science, as a legitimated form of knowledge, in an attempt to approach society (both in form and in aims) must cease to be a discourse that rejects other less formal knowledges.

Santos' view (1989), guided by the crisis of paradigms experienced by social sciences in the last decades of the past century, claimed a new paradigmatic dimension of science based on a *double epistemological rupture*. The ultimate goal of the latter, derived from a reflexive movement on modern science, its precepts and its relationship with common sense, was – basically – to institute an informed common sense and a prudent science. Finally, the aim was to obtain a new configuration for science in society: more practical and enlightened, wise and socially distributed. A science that breaks with its prejudices and begins to hear and respect the Other.

This return to Sousa Santos' thinking is interesting here, not only because of the movement performed by the author, but because it opens up spaces in which a few reflections brought by Cremilda Medina in *Ciência e jornalismo: da herança positivista ao diálogo dos afetos* are located. In this book, published in 2008, the author embodies in other ways a few reflections that had already accompanied her in publications that she has written, all of them with references in the text. Particularly, good echoes of A

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arte de tecer o presente – narrativa e cotidiano [The Art of Weaving the Present – Narrative and Daily Life] (2003), *O signo da relação – Comunicação e pedagogia dos afetos* [The Sign of the Relationship – Communication and Pedagogy of Affects] (2006) and *Entrevista – O diálogo possível* [Interview – The Possible Dialogue] (2008) resonate in the proposals presented to the reader.

In *Ciência e jornalismo*, Medina shows in a different way the paradigmatic turn that was proposed by the Portuguese professor, taking journalism and its relationship with science as the material for this route. Although she does not refer to Sousa Santos, in her route from the positivistic heritage to the dialogue of affects the author performs a movement that, also based on a double – in this case journalism and science –, currently points to a third. And the latter, which is the result of the (critical and hermeneutical) tensioning between the former two, points to another journalism, just as Santos (1989) pointed to another science in the tension between science and common sense.

However, this new journalism proposed by the author brings another element besides the two first: affect, sensitivity. Whereas in Santos this factor is, in a way, present in figuring the subject and in the counterpoint the subject offers to the scientific object by returning to common sense and the modification of one by the other, in Medina the subject-object relationship is made present by human sensitivity's "coming onto the stage", by subjectivity, based on what is sensitive and its materializations which are possible in the journalistic processes. The result of this would be the different journalism proposed by the author, where not only the subject and object are placed under tension, but where, more than that, attention is paid to the potentials and needs of the subject-subject relationship in the daily practices that inform about the world, in which journalism is outstanding.

In this sense, there is an issue that becomes important: journalism as a form of knowledge in society, and as a main actor, in the contemporary period, in "the art of weaving the present". This is something which, from the perspective proposed in the book, points to an option for the return of the journalist's authorship, as indicated in the preface of the book by writer Sinval Medina:

Cremilda Medina proposes to bring back authorship as a key element of professional practice. Emotional involvement with the narrative and the subject-subject relationship between the human beings involved in it appear as a new frontier in the representation of the present time, or, with the author's permission, in the art of weaving the present, which is the main role of social communication (p. 12).

This same dynamics follows the narrative of the book itself, beginning before the table of contents with a note that tells about the idea of this work and its temporal and affective materialization. As Medina says, *Ciência e jornalismo*, "written in the autumn of 2008, was born of an inspiration in the late afternoon of December 31, 2007" (p. 7), when, in a São Paulo bookstore, the author found a "precious Spanish edition of Auguste Comte's *Discurso sobre el espíritu positivo*" (p. 7).

Throughout its pages, much of this emotionality is expressed. First of all, with the excellent use of concrete examples of the clash between "hard", positivistic scientific knowledge and other knowledges – which is seen in the fact of taking recourse to the legal debate on the regulation of stem cell research in Brazil, or in the critical reading of the media coverage of what was called the "Isabella Nardoni Case". Secondly, with texts by the author, written in the 1980s, whose search for a more human look drives the reader to a "journalistic explanation" that goes beyond the positivistic perspective consolidated on it, in Brazil, by the United States tradition. Thirdly, with a clarification on the importance of valuing human senses (via "social interaction") in journalism, be it in a simple interview, be it in the coverage of facts and topics. This is something that points to the dialogical condition of journalistic communication, but for

many readers who come from the “communicational bibliography” also leads to memories of the studies of the so-called Chicago School.

Thus, it can be said that the logic of the “third parties” permeates *Ciência e jornalismo* and is described in a connected sequence. The first “tertiary logic” is in the very motto of the book, resulting from the critical trajectory between the spheres of positivistic science and journalism. These two, tensioned by the dialogue of affects, would lead to a third, another journalism, which we discussed above, and that, deep down, in the crisis of paradigms experienced by the two first, claims a place for journalistic communication in its “relational globality”.

Next, another “logic of the third parties” is in the very structure of the work, comprised of three parts.

In the first of them, “Non-operating Positive, or Auguste Comte Revisited”, Medina reviews Comte’s text that she presented in the opening note of the book, listing the main precepts of his positivistic theory and indicating, at the same time, how journalism, in its eagerness to explain the facts of the world, as it became professional was rendered operational in a “positive” manner. “If we visit the press handbooks, schoolbooks on communicational orthodoxy, there we will find fixed the canons of this philosophy, later reaffirmed by functionalist sociology” (p. 25).

In this salvage, the author takes a path that questions the scientific and journalistic objectivities, reviewing a few authors and thoughts. In the positivistic review, besides Comte, also René Descartes is highlighted.

Based on the reflections of the Portuguese neuroscientist who lives in the USA, Antonio Damásio, Medina highlights a major factor in the break implied in the “journalism of affects”, which is in accordance with a break inside science itself: the break of dualisms. In Damásio’s reading of the Cartesian dogmas, the “abyssal separation between body and mind” is challenged, as well as the way in which the former, influenced by physical and social issues, interferes in the latter. Therefore, it is necessary to think of the whole formed by joining both. This is a dualism – also undergoing transformation – which appears in contrasts which predominated in the past and echo even today: false and true, belief and method, reason and emotion.

In the wake of this thought the author also refers to the Colombian humanist, Luis Carlos Restrepo and his reflections on the human senses as configuring our personal relations, as well as the thinking of Pascal, who, already in the 17th century, pointed to human weaknesses and their complexities, which configure a series of “subtleties” that challenged the infallibility of modern science.

In the journalistic context such subtleties should be reviewed, according to Medina, in acknowledging the inability of the canonical journalistic model to explain all of the complexity of the world: “Understanding the limits of reason, whether it be from the instrumental aspect to achieve technical efficiency, or from the aspect of the ethical virtuality to control unreason, is always made present in the tragic circumstances of the monster that has not been tamed” (p. 59). In the turmoil of the daily world, says the author, each new situation can “go beyond the accepted limits of reason” (p. 61) and the journalists, “no matter how much they listen to those who ask themselves, and not only to those who affirm precisely and clearly [...] lack a complete understanding of the complex web of the present” (p. 61).

This lack and the process of overcoming it are indicated in the second part of the book, “Possible Dialogue: Report on an Experience.” In the attempt to seek a new journalistic rationality, which will know how to mix technical (professional and linguistic) and emotional aspects, Medina reproduces journalistic texts that she wrote, in which a Jewish woman who survived the concentration camps in World War II and has lived in Brazil since the end of the conflict gains a voice. From the reports based on the

interaction between the journalist – Cremilda Medina – and the interviewee – Bela Lukower – the author brings out a number of issues: another use of the journalistic text, which manages to affirm the presence of the subject, even rendering explicit the marks of the relationship established during the act of interviewing; the existence, in any story, of a plot that must not be seen and explained by means of linearity; the role of feelings in the orientation of the journalistic discourse, i.e., in the objective and subjective constitution of the communication constructed there.

Despite mentioning an extreme case, which touches on delicate issues of human ethics, the example explored by Medina shows the course taken by journalism towards affects and highlights for the more perspicacious readers, a set of elements which can (and should, from the author's point of view) compose the ordinary practice of news production.

In the third part of the book, "Reflexes and Reflections: Outside Certainities", these elements are reflected, clearly showing the meanings of an author's attitude in daily journalism which also go beyond the limits of the interview itself. "The art of weaving the present, therefore, points to the multiple capacity for producing meanings: in brief, it brings back protagonism, it expands in the sociocultural contextualization, researches the historical roots and promotes specialists the act of listening to experts on the theme on the agenda" (p. 95). This is a process that concerns the creative and transforming action of social communication, as a result of the apparatus of perception and observation by the person who produces the meanings.

Finally, in our opinion, these aspects guide the last "tertiary logic" of the book, which closes this circuit of "third parties", in which a few major conceptual notions appear. On proposing the substitution of "dissemination by relationship", in this "journalism of affects" Medina values a professional whose academic education, as a social communicator, will be turned to a view of the world that is attentive to discovering and understanding what happens in the contexts that surround him or her and also pays attention to the relationship with the Other. In this sense, three interlinked concepts permeate this proposition and are dispersed in the weave that composes this third logic: relationship, intersubjectivity and dialogic. The first, because of the very "sign" claimed by the author to think about this journalism; the second, because it values the recognition of individual and social sharing in the construction of the sociability to which the journalist turns and of which he or she is part; and the third because it shows the potentials of dialogue in human interaction.

The final merit of the book is to call attention to the need for journalism, as a discourse of contemporary times, to overcome "the administrative function of the senses", raising "human protagonism" beyond the levels of power or technology. In a time of paradigmatic crises, the dialogue of affects points to the presence of a poetry of the senses, claimed today increasingly by different fields of knowledge. In this context, Cremilda Medina chooses to think about the narratives, indicating the vigor of the author's discourse, of witnessing by sensitivity, instead of the absolute discourse of the positivistic narration and of the "well-aimed" journalistic framing. Less than an epistemological work, *Ciência e jornalismo* is a poignant work. Its dimension is not grandiose, like a treatise, but its constitution arouses, based on what we are, what journalism is (and should be).

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