

Attractions in an intellectual path: The strength of the female masters

As atrações em uma trajetória intelectual: A força das mestras

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ABSTRACT

This is an account of part of the author's intellectual path, especially as linked to the period of her studies at the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo. To do so, it highlights the attraction awakened by three masters: Maria Immacolata Vassalo de Lopes, Dulcília Buitoni and Cremilda Medina. The self-reflective exercise has the present as its starting point, based on the recollection of experiences. Hence, it recovers focuses of interest that are expressed in her program of studies, as well as principles that guide her practice in cultural studies. By unfolding these attractions, one can see the strength of these threads in her current intellectual production.

Keywords: Intellectual path, experience, cultural studies, methodology, research

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RESUMO

Trata-se de um relato sobre parte da trajetória intelectual da autora, sobretudo daquela vinculada ao período de sua formação na Escola de Comunicações e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo. Para tal, destaca a atração despertada por três mestras: Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, Dulcília Buitoni e Cremilda Medina. O exercício autorreflexivo tem como ponto de partida o presente, amparando-se na rememoração de experiências. Sendo assim, recupera focos de interesse que se expressam no seu programa de estudos, bem como princípios que norteiam sua prática em estudos culturais. No desenovelar das atrações, percebe-se a fortaleza desses fios no seu fazer intelectual.

Palavras-chave: Trajetória intelectual, experiência, estudos culturais, metodologia, pesquisa

Contar es un gesto político encarnado en experiencias situadas que producen saberes toda vez que se deja interpelar, cuestionar y responder a lo inesperado.

Mariana Alvarado

FACED WITH THE challenge of producing a narrative about my own intellectual path and to meet the proposed theme of identifying in what moments the connection with the Postgraduate Program in Communication (PPGCOM) of the School of Communications and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA-USP) was relevant in this itinerary, I chose to highlight the attraction that different focuses of interest exercised in me, motivated by female masters, linked to this postgraduate program, in my intellectual formation. I thereby intend to look in retrospect at such intersections with their trajectories in the light of my current concerns. Therefore, I recall the particular connections I established, especially with Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, but also with Dulcília Schroeder Buitoni and Cremilda Medina, retracing part of my intellectual path in which the present is the starting point and organizer of this self-reflective account.

However, before going any further, as this is an autobiographical text, I note that it was built from a place of social and cultural privilege. The landscape that marked my childhood was the countryside, where I lived until I was six. Taught to read and write in the domestic and rural space, my entry into second grade, at a public school, took place when I went to live in the border town of Santana do Livramento (RS), at the same age. That was the first of the big changes in my formation. At the age of 16, it was college in Communication, attended at a private university in Pelotas (RS). Then came the arrival in the state capital, in 1984, already graduated, when I enrolled in a specialization course at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUC-RS). Shortly thereafter, in 1986, at the age of 23, I began my teaching career at the same university, where I remained until 2017. In that position, I completed my master's and doctorate degree at ECA-USP, as well as forming and strengthening my affinity with cultural studies. Last but not least, I carry out this writing as a white woman, understanding that both in my private life and in my public work, as a professor and researcher, I exercise my engagement from a feminist practice.

Next, through the work of remembering, following the lead of Martín-Barbero (2010, p. 133)¹ that "making memory... here means *remembering* intersubjectively, that is, assuming the part of the testimony of the one who remembers ...", I bring to light some experiences woven into this ball of yarn

¹ In the original: Hacer memoria... significa aquí *recordar* intersubjetivamente, esto es asumiendo la parte del testimonio de quien recuerda...

that make up part of my intellectual path. Thus, this telling is associated with a notion of experience that refers to the legacy of Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, linking it to passions, feelings and perceptions, that is, “to a wide range of registers of the world anchored to a subjectivity crossed by through the relationship between past and present within the framework of an unchosen terrain, marked by historical circumstances”² (Valeria Fernández Hasan, 2017, p. 105). Therefore, I deliberately highlight experiences that, in turn, intertwine with the female masters already mentioned and with the period of postgraduate studies in São Paulo. A training project cherished since my time as an undergraduate student, in the early 1980s.

² In the original: una gama amplia de registros del mundo anclados a una subjetividad atravesada por la relación entre pasado y presente en el marco de un terreno no elegido, marcado por las circunstancias históricas.

To organize this report, first, I recapitulate points of interest that are expressed in my study program as themes and objects of study, framed by theoretical and methodological appropriations, guided by my training at ECA. In a second moment, I explain the principles that guide my practice in cultural studies, trying to relate them to the different remembered attractions. I recognize, however, that “the search for authentic reminiscence, apart from temporal corrosion, is a chimera, every memory contains relative arbitrariness in its rearrangement, the present is a dynamic factor, intrinsic to the mnemonic process” (Ortiz, 2010, p. 12). In this unfolding of crossings and attractions, I still perceive the strength of these threads in my current intellectual work.

MAKING MEMORY: THE DISCOVERY OF THE METHODOLOGY AND THE POPULAR

In the period between 1988-1993 and 1995-2000, I lived with Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes, my supervisor at both postgraduate levels, Master's and Doctorate. The first period was decisive in my path. It was throughout her disciplines that I learned and developed a taste for methodology to the point of changing and rebuilding my original study proposal. This attraction and affinity with her research program is explicit in the dissertation, but it also has strong repercussions on my doctorate, reaching the present day.

In the master's degree, a period of discovery of the methodology as a crucial scope of reflection, criticism and training, I chose to use her “methodological model” which “proposes to design the research by meeting the methodological demands expressed in levels and phases that are articulated and form a network model” (Maria Immacolata V. de Lopes, 2016, p. 188), for the deconstruction of a set of studies, that is, as an analytical key for internal examination of completed investigations.

When publishing some of the results of the dissertation, I noted that

[...] the starting point of the methodological model used is the assumption of a research theory based on the principle of relative autonomy of all research. That is, scientific discourse presupposes an *internal legitimacy* [emphasis added] that concerns internal and formal resolutions and operations which validate it as such but, at the same time, must contain an *external legitimacy* [emphasis added] that deals with its historical recognition, suitability and relevance as a socially qualified object. (Escosteguy, 1995, p. 22)

In addition to the usefulness of the *model*, what attracted me was the articulation that was implicit between scientific knowledge and historical circumstances. This idea remains in force in my research practice.

My first contact with the premises of this “model” took place in Maria Immacolata’s classes. Shortly afterwards, the publication *Pesquisa em Comunicação: Formulação de um Modelo Metodológico* (Maria Immacolata V. de Lopes, 1990) became a book that was constantly handled both in that period and later, when I started to teach the discipline of Methodology at the PUC-RS. By using the model as an analytical tool, the theme that assumed centrality in the new direction of the dissertation was, therefore, the investigation itself. And, in this way, it was configured as a research about research, entitled *A Pesquisa do Popular na Comunicação: Uma Análise Metodológica* (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 1993).

It was the late 1980s when I started my master’s degree, a time of an effervescent critical theoretical movement that underpinned the development of Latin American reception studies. These, in turn, were in connection with the reflection on popular cultures, especially leveraged by Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987) and Néstor García Canclini (1989/1997). Although, upon joining ECA, I was already interested in examining popular and alternative communication practices, a theme well received in academic research in the 1980s, I was unaware of the work of these authors. My first contact with it also took place under the command of Maria Immacolata.

I remember my astonishment when reading *As Culturas Populares no Capitalismo*, in which Canclini (1983, p. 11) questioned: “what is popular culture: spontaneous creation of the people, their memory converted into merchandise or the exotic spectacle of a backwardness situation that the industry has been reducing to a tourist curiosity?”

Likewise, the position of Martín-Barbero (1978/1987, p. 221) surprised and impacted:

Mass writing is as much writing as cultured writing, for in the former, language is also made and unmade, history and drive also works therein, in the same way as in cultured writing, whether you like it or not, the system is reproduced and the dirty trade incubates its demand.

Therefore, encouraged by these readings, I intended, in the master's degree, to examine whether there was harmony between this theoretical debate that had been expanding since the late 1970s – which was, in the late 1980s, called the “new Latin American theoretical framework” – and academic research in Communication (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 1993). The study then took on the challenge of presenting a state of the art on the research universe in relation to the popular issue in Communication, analyzing the production of theses and dissertations from the 1970-1990 interval of the five main postgraduate programs in Communication of the country in that period: ECA-USP; Instituto Metodista de São Bernardo; Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo; Universidade de Brasília; and the School of Communication of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

Among the most important results of this study, I identified a gap between the strength of the theoretical debate and the timidity of the practice of empirical research that addressed the problematic of the popular. If the first consisted of a revision movement of dominant theoretical models, carrying out both a critical examination of them and a new formulation, the empirical investigation was shy in incorporating this new non-essentialist look at the popular, which came to be seen as an ambivalent space, crossed by both the mass and the cultured, and composed of both resistance and submission.

This finding was exciting and, to a large extent, encouraged my return to ECA for my PhD. I was interested in deepening my study of the theoretical and methodological contributions of those two authors. This type of approach fostered the affinity process with one of the landmark objects of Maria Immacolata's study program (2016, p. 186): methodology. And, of course, the chosen authors also converged with their interests. Therefore, I applied for the doctorate, in 1994, intending to be supervised by this master again, with a proposal entitled *Estudos Culturais na América Latina: A Vertente da Comunicação*.

At the end of the studies, the work was given a new title, *Cartografia dos Estudos Culturais: Uma Versão Latino-Americana*, published in 2001, in a sold-out edition³, outlining the line of research that I would pursue from then on. By understanding cultural studies as a research program, composed of epistemological, theoretical and problematic premises, I believe that my main

³ In 2010, it gained an online version, in open access, although it is currently no longer part of the publisher's catalogue.

interest is in methodology, an attraction already attributed to the vigor of Maria Immacolata's thinking.

In addition, I note that the thesis gave rise to several concerns that will still accompany me for some time. In the future, I would also like to deal with the particular dynamics of academic legitimation of knowledge – cultural studies – in the academic-intellectual territory where I find myself, in Communication. In the national context, cultural studies have not been institutionalized as a field of its own. In combats and disputes with different fields of knowledge, they conquered their place, establishing particular developments in different areas, for example, in Education and Literary Theory, and forged a practice of its own, also, in Communication.

Unraveling the steps taken, I see as unequivocal the teachings of Maria Immacolata (2016, p. 185), now extracted from her self-reflection on the intellectual itinerary covered, that “the choice of research themes is hardly the researcher's exclusive responsibility, rather, it must be credited to subjective and objective factors, both micro and macro social”. Therefore, I glimpse, on the one hand, my enchantment with learning in the classroom, my discovery and attraction to certain themes, through reading and making contact with the Latin American bibliography. On the other hand, I envision the emerging and circulating theoretical discussions in certain territories and periods, as well as the characteristics and conditions of existence of the field of Communication itself, mainly in Brazil, but also in its relations with Latin America.

In the next section I outline some epistemological-political principles that guide my research and teaching practice, tying them to the awakening of other attractions. I turn to memory again, trying to recover traces, erased by time and hidden at first sight, on this trail, left by two other female masters, Dulcília and Cremilda, to whom I owe a lot. This is yet another gesture that aims to retrieve experiences and ways of teaching, accompanying, intervening and building knowledge that occur in the daily work of teaching, but are underestimated in current intellectual histories.

Intellectual practice with a political vocation

Considering my affinity with cultural studies, it is inevitable to start with the power of two premises that structure this research program. The first concerns the commitment to the possibility of social transformation. The other deals with the understanding that intellectual practice takes place in close convergence with concrete political interventions. Nowadays, the latter unfold in my professional activity in three distinct threads, albeit interwoven.

The first concerns my link with an emerging movement of reparation and recognition of women's particular ways of producing knowledge, mainly those who contributed to the legitimization and, in some cases, institutionalization of the academic field of Communication. Only recently did I realize that the genealogies of the area's intellectual history have neglected the role and importance of many female teachers who actively participated – whether in the training of human resources or in the intellectual configuration of the field – and that the modes of discrimination are not always evident, which delays our own perception of the impediments we suffer.

On the one hand, my teaching activities on this path, since the beginning of the 2000s and, in particular, since 2018, have focused precisely on proposing courses and seminars, both at the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM)⁴ and at the Federal University do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), on Feminist Cultural Studies, highlighting foreign authors-researchers⁵ with little or no circulation in the national academic environment, as well as a new generation of Brazilian researchers⁶ who have been related to cultural studies or their cross-cutting themes. I emphasize that these activities take place within the scope of Communication⁷.

On the other hand, research and part of my intellectual production also adhere to this theme. For example, one of the axes of the research *A Prática em Estudos Culturais e Comunicação: Teoria e Pesquisa*, developed in the period 2018-2022 with CNPq funding, outlined a characterization of what I provisionally called *feminist media criticism* and fostered the preparation of a new proposal. Thus, in the project *Comunicação e Estudos Culturais Feministas: Genealogias e Trajetórias* (2022-2025), also funded, the focus was redesigned for specifically examining the role and contributions, mainly, of women researchers to the area. The main motivation is centered on the reconsideration of sources, understood as the intellectual trajectories of researchers who became famous for their respective research work within the mentioned field, aiming to strengthen the name *feminist cultural studies*.

This program completes a 20-year cycle as a Research Productivity (PQ/CNPq) fellow, which began with the investigation *Os Estudos Culturais e a Problemática da Recepção: A Categoria Gênero em Debate* (2001-2003). This research produced a survey and analysis of Brazilian reception studies from the 1990s and the use given to the concept of gender. The repercussion of the production generated in the context of this investigation did not happen immediately, but lately it has been mentioned, as it demonstrates the weak interest of these studies in the gender issue, which contrasts with the current strength (for example, Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2002, 2004).

⁴Where I worked as a visiting professor, from 2017-2020.

⁵Among them, Charlotte Brunsdon, Janice Winship, Ann Gray, Hazel Carby, Pratibha Parmar, Valerie Amos, Joanne Hollows, Rosalind Gill, Michèle Mattelart, Silvia Elizalde, Silvia Delfino, Marta Rizo, Aimée Vega Montiel and Claudia Laudano.

⁶From the new generation, Tatiane Cruz Leal Costa, Lígia Campos Cerqueira Lana, Milena Freire de Oliveira-Cruz, Lirian Sifuentes, Fernanda Nascimento, Rayza Sarmento, Fernanda Carrera, Laura Guimarães Corrêa, Winnie Bueno, Mariana Selister Gomes, among many others.

⁷Before that, I taught scattered classes on feminist issues and communication, in undergraduate and graduate courses, at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS), and I felt firsthand a certain repudiation, non-identification and distancing of the student body with this theme.

⁸The 1998 milestone was attributed to the impact generated by reading *Learning from Experience: Cultural Studies and Feminism*, by Ann Gray (1997). In this work, the author maintained that feminist contributions to reception studies had been obliterated, due to the patriarchal character of cultural studies, practiced mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, in the English context. See Ana Carolina Escosteguy (2020a)..

⁹On this aspect, there is a connection with French semiology, especially with the notion of myth proposed by Roland Barthes, which connects his research with another pioneer in the intersections between communication studies and gender issues, Michèle Mattelart.

¹⁰As a record of these meetings, I found in my files a very worn photocopy with a marking of Dulcília's discipline. The text is *Talking Pictures: Field Method and Visual Mode* by Ximena Bunster (1977). With regard to my interest in the links between image and methodology, this only gained prominence during research carried out in rural areas, between 2014 and 2017. In a first stage, photography was incorporated as a record, illustration and feedback of the research and, later, as yet another instrument in the methodological strategy with the purpose of developing visual narratives about the rural properties visited and including portraits of the interviewees with their favorite means of communication. This reference was not used in these works. It was in the face of the task of remembering my years at ECA that I came across it. See Ana Carolina Escosteguy, João Vicente Ribas and Aline Bianchini (2019).

In addition, in terms of intellectual production, I have made efforts to reconstitute, in a historical key, traces of theoretical influences associated with feminisms in Brazil, but also in the North, and their impact on the national research agenda in Communication and gender (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2020a). Also, from a historical perspective, I experimented with a methodological path that transits between intellectual biography and the history of Latin American research in Communication, in the analysis of key moments in Michèle Mattelart's itinerary, in the 1960s and 1970s (Ana Carolina Escosteguy, 2020b).

Not long ago, I indicated as a temporal and intellectual mark of my interest in this subject the year 1998, the period of my sandwich doctorate in Birmingham⁸. Today, triggering much older memories, I place this attraction in the master's period, specifically 1988-1989, in the classes of professor Dulcília Schroeder Buitoni, a *uspiana* (USP member), of the graduation in Journalism and Law to the post-graduation in Literary Theory and Comparative Literature. Courageous, in the mid-1970s, while completing her master's degree, she shifted her attention from the Brazilian short story to the *fotonovela*. And, in her doctorate, she carried out her work that had the most repercussion, on the Brazilian women's press. Two of her texts have wide national circulation, *Imprensa Feminina* (1986) and *A Representação da Mulher pela Imprensa Feminina Brasileira* (2009), being a mandatory bibliographic source mainly in research on women's magazines.

I will not, nor would it fit here, discuss the theoretical and methodological options of this master, evidently articulated with the theories in circulation and in predominance in the area in the 1970s and 1980s. This is part of my new project within the scope of a movement to rescue, in a feminist key, the experiences of women in the history of research in communication and, in this case, the possible gender clues opened in her work⁹.

When I mention Professor Dulcília here, I think more about how she stimulated my reflections, opened a horizon, awakened an attraction. I admired her classes, the affable atmosphere that was created, her way of walking through a constellation of themes: from narrative to women, from women to popular mass culture, from these to women's magazines and their particular journalistic practice, from the image to its use together with the interview technique. These are memories of a daily activity, the exposition of ideas and teachings in the classroom space and, therefore, are knowledge fundamentally constituted by oral transmission¹⁰.

The second tangled thread in political interventions has a methodological character and expression. In this context, I aim for an active confluence with

premises of a feminist way of thinking, assuming that the knowledge produced contains a subjective and situated dimension. In this direction, the position of Margareth Rago (2019, p. 380) is taken as a guide:

Despite the difficulties, I seek to assume a way of thinking that incorporates this subjective dimension, recognizing that, with this, from a feminist point of view, a new epistemic agent is outlined, not isolated from the world, but inserted in its heart, not exempt and impartial, but subjective and affirming its particularity.

Appropriating this idea implies giving visibility to the particularities of the speaker's voice and experience. Hence the pertinence of revealing a little bit of personal history, decisions and choices, some individual, others not so much, in a process of self-analysis of training paths and professional trajectory, highlighting key moments in the process of my location in the field of Communication.

In some ways, this is combined with a concern with the forms of narrative expression in research reports and articles. Although I do not have any special writing talent, lately I have been experimenting with the use of the first person, summoning my own experience as a way to combat a supposed neutrality of knowledge. And I have insisted, in the field of references and citations in articles, on the use of the first names of a contingent of women that remain hidden by the surname that presents itself as neutral, understanding this practice as yet another political action.

In this exercise of reviewing my itinerary, trying to locate motivations, influences and attractions, I realize that this concern with writing may also have its point of origin in the classroom, this time in the instigating and disturbing classes and interlocutions made possible by another teacher, Cremilda Medina. Graduated in 1964 in the Journalism course at UFRGS, a postgraduate and the first master of the Postgraduate Program in Communication Sciences (PPGCOM) at ECA-USP, in 1975, she taught and received friendly guests¹¹ who instigated us to think about, among others, themes such as interdisciplinarity, complexity, science and art relations. Eloquent, seductive and permanently enthusiastic, her classes were a whirlwind of ideas. In this case, I only found in my archives the final work of the discipline, a typed text composed more freely and in a personalized tone, in which I explored the theme of the search for cultural identity in Mario Benedetti, trying to get closer to my own origins¹².

Finally, in a third thread of understanding intellectual practice with a political vocation, I seek to assume a decolonial attitude that, without despising dialogue and exchange with Eurocentric and Anglo-American thought, is composed of a critical disposition towards the past and to the present of our research practice

¹¹ I vividly remember at least three guests who were with our class: José Paulo Paes, poet and translator; Milton Greco, Cremilda's partner in some works; and Sinval Medina, her life partner.

¹² Some of her books were part of my mother's library, Uruguayan like Benedetti (1920-2009).

which, to a certain extent and in certain conjunctures, was and perhaps still is tributary and dependent on foreign theoretical traditions.

From the master's to the doctorate degree, I understood Latin American cultural research in its particularities and differences, encompassing cultural heterogeneities, ethnic pluralities and political-economic diversities. However, it cannot be isolated from the rest of social thought, isolated from the ideas in circulation. Today, this type of positioning also strengthens the option for retrieving contributions from female masters who, mainly through their teaching activity and interlocution in the classroom space, marked not only my education but that of many others. The specific ways of thinking and doing research, disseminated orally and shared throughout the respective teaching journeys, should also compose a new intellectual history of the field.

The non-existence of the record of these particular modes of knowledge production that are constituted in teaching classes, orally, contributes to the erasure of the particularity of these practices. Hence the importance of recognizing the practices and role of professors Maria Immacolata, Dulcília and Cremilda (and many others), who, despite the masculinist logic of the academy and scientific work, built a remarkable intellectual, political and affective legacy both in the ECA and in the field of Communication itself.

Finally, the unwound threads are joined together in a weft. My intellectual itinerary owes – and a lot – to these intersections, sometimes momentary and creative – from the classroom, sometimes more structured and established – from the guidelines, provided by the PPGCOM at ECA-USP, where I formed my position as a researcher and feminist, engaged in the cultural studies practice. ■

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