

PROGRESS IN JOURNALISM'S TEMPORALITIES:

A history of Brazilian centenarian newspapers

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ABSTRACT This paper presents a research on commemorative issues published by three centenarian newspapers of Rio de Janeiro on special dates of their existence. These special editions reveal how the longest lasting newspapers in the former federal capital inserted themselves in the temporal frameworks of different eras as vectors of progress. Despite the fact that progress can be understood as an idea which gave rise to a series of doctrines in previous centuries, especially in the mentality of the local elite, it is considered in this paper to be a certain perception of rupture with the past and giving direction for the future. This research attempts to analyze these commemorative narratives, showing how they articulate multiple temporalities, that is, socially shared notions of time. However, in a hegemonic way, the narratives of these centenarian newspapers lead to the future, configuring a demand for a radical rupture between past and future.

Key-Words: Journalism; History; Narrative; Time; Phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

This article is the result of an effort to look for interdisciplinary issues between History and Communication. It stems from a research, in the initial stage, which has as its aim to contribute to the history of journalism by going beyond an inventory of newspapers, their founders and dates of bankruptcy. The research has as an overall aim to comprehend the role of representation in the historical process, taking into consideration the different modes of symbolization in permanent dispute.

It seeks to investigate stories of journalism as told by three centenarian newspapers of the State of Rio de Janeiro, their meaning and, above all, to understand the symbolic basis on which this society developed its journalistic status. To which needs corresponded or corresponds this group of communicational practices? Due to which expectations did journalism assume the form it did in the last centuries in Rio de Janeiro?

In this research, *metanarratives* published in anniversary editions

are analyzed. In them, journalistic companies bring together in narrative form one or multiple trajectories seeking to explain them and publicly present arguments concerning their relevance.

On unraveling the narrative themes developed by journalists in different eras, it is possible to perceive the relationship between this group of communicational practices and the shared notions of time. It is not a question, therefore, of studying the journalistic representations of the time, but of investigating the temporal power of journalism as well as the inclusion of the newspapers in the temporal framework of a given society.

Centenary Journals of Rio de Janeiro

Searching for the commemorative anniversary editions of the main newspapers of Rio de Janeiro, regardless of the era in which they were in circulation, the research limited itself to the most long-lasting: *Jornal do Brasil* (116 years), *O Fluminense* (129 years) and *Jornal do Commercio* (180 years), the three still being in circulation.

The commemorative editions exhibit some special characteristics in relation to the items published daily. They are at the frontier between two discursive fronts. At the same time that they are for the general public, they are above all celebrations of the communication and newspaper companies as institutions, and therefore they also speak to the professionals who work in them. They tell stories which remake the history of newspapers and journalists. They elaborate on the past of journalistic activity, their multiple memories in dispute and their meaning at the time of their publishing.

The exceptional discourse of these editions, however, goes beyond the issue of the projected reader. The combined referential about which the newspapers deal, from the news angle, is usually based on recent happenings. Journalistic narratives are normally marked by the urgency of the present, even when dealing with a recent past – the day before. However, the commemorative editions present stories based on more remote periods in the past than those to which daily newspapers generally refer.

Apart from this, they represent an exception with respect to the theme of the flow of news, especially due to the fact of making the newspaper itself the news. They are, after all, celebrations, moments suspended in news time so that the newspapers refer explicitly to themselves. Instead of talking about others, as is usually the case, they refer to themselves. These articles provide a visualization of the understanding that the

journalists had of their place in historical time. How did they reveal themselves? And what was the need for this exhibition?

Ribeiro (1995: 12) affirms that in these spaces, which she calls places of self-reference, journalism “attempts to build an image of itself and through it to legitimate itself”. These places of self-reference were, in some cases, used in conventional editions, as did the *Jornal do Commercio* (100 years), from October 1-14, 1927, although it did not fail to publish a centenary edition on October 1. On other occasions, self-referential places meant the entire publication (*Jornal do Brasil*, 100 years, April 1, 1991, and *O Fluminense*, 100 years, May 7, 1978), produced in such a way as to provide a kind of historical retrospective, capable of being used in any period as a document:

With the special supplement of the “Fluminense Product”, included in eight editions and also the tabloid in full color with the history of the “100 years of *O Fluminense*” we are giving the readers today a view of the development of the State of Rio de Janeiro and recounting our epic of 36,000 editions.

Moreover, these 90 extra pull-outs complement each other in an analytic, and at times critical, documentation of a land linked to its newspaper. There are news articles, interviews and questionnaires to be kept and consulted in almost encyclopedic terms. A century of a newspaper faithful to its mission and to the history of the State of Rio de Janeiro. (*O Fluminense*, 5/7/1978: first page)

Using a variety of editorial strategies of self-reference, the newspapers entwined narratively their trajectories with the life of the country and even of the world. They transmitted in this way the idea that all the relevant events in Brazil and in the world were contained in the newspaper's pages and, consequently, in its own history, as if they were one and the same.

For example, in the 100 year edition (April 1, 1991), the *Jornal do Brasil* points out that it was born on the same day as Cole Porter. Also in its centenary edition (October 1, 1927) the *Jornal do Commercio* states that “it has been evolving with the nation's own evolution” (first page). According to Ribeiro (1995), journalism justifies its social relevance through history:

The media are elevated, therefore, to the position of official spokesmen for events and social transformations which confers upon them, as a record of reality, a certain “aura”. Journalism does not only portray reality and its transformations, but also records it, bequeathing to future societies an unrivaled testimony. Media are

history's eyewitness. (Idem, 27)

The testimony of history can also be understood by the fact that the articulation of the narratives occurs in such a way that they provide an effect of concurrence between the histories of the newspaper and of Brazil. Certainly, as concludes Ribeiro (op. cit.), the interpretation of the historical sense is disputed by two fields (BOURDIEU, 2004a): historical narrative and journalism.

The notion which we have of history, in a society highly exposed to media, is the result of a permanent dispute. According to Zelizer (1992), history (the discipline), journalism, art, etc, all want to tell it their own way: the historians as a science, the artists as interpretations and the journalists as facts. Due to this, journalism would have to struggle to invest itself with the authority to announce the truth. Does this struggle go through the sphere of time, with the journalist being a historian of the immediate?

Nora (1976) believes that since the XIX century journalism and history have become mixed and that it has been increasingly up to the means of communication to determine the historical happening, in other words, that which emerges from the daily tangle.

The author notes an anxiety, characteristic of our time, in providing a historical sense to daily facts, in a permanent effort to interpret the immediate. This interpretation would increasingly be up to the journalist, and not the historian, obliged to provide a secondary analysis about events and meanings already dictated by the means of communication. The condition necessary for the existence of a historical event would be its emergence in the media. Confronted with the anxiety of interpreting the present, the mass means of communication would reaffirm their importance in society.

However, to do this, of which kind of temporality do they avail themselves? Would they be contradictory to those of historical narrative? Is it, after all, in time where the dispute between these fields takes place? Or is the dispute itself the result of a given historical conscience (HELLER, 1993), anchored in a given temporality? In the last instance, it is necessary to question what the connection is between the role played by journalistic media nowadays and the temporalities with which they operate and by which they are operated.

For Barbosa (1999), the media transform the past into the present. Under the imperative of novelty, they extend the present to a maximum, breaking the underlying ties between past, present and future. And these

ties are the inexorable condition for historical awareness. Is this large extended present also verified in the commemorative narratives? Or are these narratives an exception because they refer to the past?

The aim here is to try to understand the role that journalistic media confer on themselves as a result of their temporal insertion, because this articulation can have important implications for the mode of organization and duplication of journalism as a profession and cultural phenomenon.

Between time and narrative

The commemorative editions can provide a different way of telling a story about journalism instead of just listing who founded which newspaper and in which year it went bankrupt. The published narratives can indicate the ways in which the *Fluminenses* (people from the State of Rio de Janeiro) articulate their journalistic activities and their relation to time. The challenge is to perceive this historical meaning in the temporal work carried out by the newspapers researched.

There is only a small amount of bibliography that links temporality and journalism directly. Barbosa (1999:52) affirms that temporality is “the manner of recording human activity in its duration”:

[...] A certain belonging to a concept of time existing in societies, the way how this is lived, the philosophical conception regarding this belonging and, above all, the relation that the social world undertakes with the temporal duration and flow.

And this is essentially a political action:

[...] Synchronizing behavior, substituting the reversible for the irreversible, eliminating or creating the past and reconfiguring a cycle are actions of a political nature. The act of naming the past and reconnecting dates of a given memory, giving meaning to societies, is to establish subjectively duration inserted in its own temporality. (Barbosa, op.cit.: 52)

According to Chesneaux (1986), time is not a natural basis. We daily experience time in multiple ways arising from complex arrangements, and what we measure are the intervals we establish for it, not time itself which is a much more complex experience. We can say that the media with their time-worldliness participate in these arrangements which, however, did not begin with them. The media would be part of a time set up by capitalism through a long process of standardization of the measurement of time, with clocks, time differences, among other

instruments which provided and provide a unique temporal reference for the productive system, for transportation, etc.

The time-world, according to the conception of the author, would be an instrumentation of time by capital. He states, however, that this temporal quality does not annul the other particular times of the diverse societies, which may also enrich themselves mutually, as long as one of these times is not taken as unique and inevitable, which happens, for example, when developing countries disqualify their own rhythms and tend to imitate the path of hegemonic countries (idem,; 204).

The conflict between various times is only possible because the temporalities in which we are placed are multiple. Pomian (1984) explains a series of them. Psychological time, subjective for everyone, varies for example when we remember our childhood, which seems distant or close depending on the situation in which we live, and which may seem long, even though it is a shorter biological period than adulthood, or when we are in a rush and waiting for a bus which takes an eternity to arrive, or when we are on vacation, when the days pass by so quickly.

We also live in times measured quantitatively, such as solar time, with its cosmic measurement, based on the movement of the stars which guide us; liturgical time of the religious calendars; political time of the solemn national holidays; or the time of the clocks which command the industrial rhythms of work and rest, of machines and men.

Historical time, for example, in its common meaning, has a sequential causal character. As for mythological time, it is essentially cyclical because it periodically updates "a happening which occurred in primordial times, the fabled time of the 'beginning'" (ELIADE, 1972:11). Christian time can be linear, when it focuses on death which will lead the person to live eternally beside God, or it can be cyclical when it introduces the possibility of resurrection and the return of the Messiah.

Pomian (1984) also explains that printing technology is at the center of a long process of the recording of time, in other words, of its instrumentation. In this sense, both formal education and daily journalism are closely linked to the bourgeois belief of control over time, of future planning, of scientific knowledge of history. How does this instrumentation appear in journalistic narratives? And is this function only part of the rhetoric of its legitimization and in practical terms does journalism capture its public through a variety of strategies? And how is it possible to study time in the narrative?

It is Paul Ricoeur (1994) who provides the solution, for whom there is reciprocity between narrativity and temporality. This conception

derives from the link between Saint Augustine's thoughts about time and Aristotle's thoughts about the mimetic act.

Saint Augustine noticed that "the lapses of time do not simply fit into each other following numerical quantities, the days into years, the years into centuries. In a general manner, the problems concerning the length of time do not exhaust the question of human time" (idem: 128). Due to this, Ricoeur came to think that time only becomes human to the extent that it is articulated in a narrative manner, or in other words, that it is only carried out narratively.

Interested in the ontology of time, Saint Augustine affirms that if the past no longer exists and the future has not yet arrived, then there is only the present: the present of things present, the present of things past and the present of things future. He envisions the past as a memory, the future as hope and project, the present as action.

But if only the present exists, how can it be perceived if, when we think of it, it has stopped being, has become a non-being? How can one consider the instant if it has no form, if it is immeasurable? Ricoeur concluded from these issues that the only thing which prevents time from not being is the mention of time.

The conflicting condition of time resolves itself, therefore, poetically, as it is in the narrative that we reconfigure our temporal existence. Ricoeur (1994) adopts this understanding and articulates it with the Aristotelian *mimese* to consider that what provides the form of an instant, of the time of action, is the narrative, that is, he affirms that time can only humanize itself through language. *Mimese* is understood here not as an imitation, as it could be interpreted in Latin languages, but as a representation of a unit of action inserted in a limited time span.

"It is through the plot that we reconfigure our confused, shapeless and at the limit, silent existence." (idem, p.12) In other words, thanks to the plots we reconfigure time, that is, our practical existence. On the other hand, narrative intelligibility only occurs through temporal intelligibility. That is, *mimese* provides the mediation between time and memory, between time and memory of journalism, for example.

To develop his theory, Ricoeur makes no distinction between fictional and historic narratives, as for him what is at stake is a question of likelihood, not occurrence. Both kinds of narratives are equally temporal articulations and possess a referential character, although they avail themselves of different strategies of probability. In the former, the reference is given by what could have happened, in the latter, by what happened. In the former, the event will only be a reference in the shaping

of the plot. To become intelligible, both will depend upon a productive imagination necessary for interpretation. Both journalistic reports and historic narrative or fiction literature possess their temporal lapses, their mnemonic bases, all resort to common interpretive repertoires and shared codes which establish their intelligibility. They are, in short, poetic operations which thus respond to the human need for narrativity.

Due to this, for this research we have sought to “apply” the basis of the narrative theory to the journalistic *muthos*. The Aristotelian *muthos* is fiction in a more ample sense than that in which it is commonly known. It deals with all mimetic operations, every plot composition, disposition of heterogeneous facts in a combination of temporalities; it is the plot’s own contexture. “The word fiction is free to designate the narrative’s configuration in which the contexture of the plot is the paradigm, without paying attention to the differences that only concern the claim of truth by the two kinds of narrative.” (RICOEUR, op.cit.: 102)

It is necessary to take into account the fact that the empirical subject is introduced as much as any other narrative into multiple temporalities, as well as this research. Among these temporalities are the time to count and the times counted. Included in the time to count, for example, there is the time of the journalist’s work, of professionals who take a certain time planning and producing the commemorative editions in order that the readers subsequently take more time reading them; the time which companies take to ensure that their newspapers last for decades, among many others.

These editions, above all, are celebrations, and as such, command the time of the newspaper professionals. Each one of them contributes with his individual memory, together with the company’s archives and readers’ memories, which dialogued in those times, with the remote past becoming the present in those editions; and the memories of all those researchers who brought these memories into the present while researching them, and all those that serve us as a theoretical basis, and all those that are reconfigured here, resulting from the reading of the researcher.

There is also the time of the workers in the National Library Foundation who microfilmed the newspapers in previous eras and the times of the researched microfilms, untouched because they were so recent or microfilmed such a short time ago, for there has been no time for interest in them to arise.

Apart from all these times, the daily newspapers are placed not only in the time-world, which may be only rhetorical, but also in the concrete

time of days and nights, which ties them inexorably to the particular temporality of awaking and sleeping.

There is also the time of the experiences of the readers who read their copies on bus stop benches, who read collectively on the ferry, with the stranger who looked over their shoulder, of those nearly illiterate who leafed through the same copy various times, second-hand or not, and who completed the reading with the help of comments given by their fellow streetcar riders, beachgoers or passers-by.

It is above all on the narrated times that this research focuses: on the narrated time of journalism's history when a newspaper celebrated its 50th year, and then the same newspaper celebrated 100 years; on the times of other newspapers and of the other stories told on these centenary pages. And the un-narrated times of those excluded from time will probably be left out.

Based on the work of Ricoeur (1995), who carried out an analysis of time and the meaning of narrated time in three literary works: *Mrs. Dalloway* (Virginia Woolf), *The Magic Mountain* (Thomas Mann) and *In Search of Lost Time* (Marcel Proust), the intention is to build a diagram of time in the narratives configured in the commemorative editions, in order to thereby perceive their temporal movements and their meanings: the landmarks, the definitions of past, present and future, the duration, the ruptures, the different speeds attributed to the phenomena and occurrences, seeking to interpret the meanings of these temporal relations.

Vectors of progress

It is too early to talk about conclusions, but the preliminary observations lead us to believe that there is a general positioning of these three newspapers as vectors of progress, in other words, vectors of a time projected to the future. This positioning, that is, this temporal inscription, would be aimed at two audiences: the first made up of journalists and the second of readers in general.

To the first audience, the special editions would themselves constitute a memory bank. They would function as a kind of ritual ceremony so that the journalists "get under the skin", to use Bourdieu's expression (2004b), of a self-attributed mission.

On the other hand, by promoting the sharing of the same past by journalists and their audience, the editions would mark the newspapers as mediators of time. Teleologically, they produced a retrospective illusion as a way to explain, a posteriori, past intentions,

establishing futures and rhythms in the present.

In the *Jornal do Commercio*, the origin of the press becomes narratively confused with the origin of the newspaper. Clearly, the *Jornal do Commercio* considers itself to be a factor in the development of the country. In its centenary edition, it associates, for example, the evolution of medicine with the advent of the press in Brazil, and attributes to the latter the entrance of Brazil into the flow of universal history:

While in the old world of Eurasia the waves of people and races simmered, which for centuries had represented the drama of human evolution, tracing Humanity's historical pages, the vastness of America lay far off from all of this, in the torpor of anabiosis, as a fertile element awaiting the founding embryo.

The opening of the ports having been decreed, the prohibition of factories and manufacturing suspended, and the official press founded [...], commerce, industry, art, literature and science promptly developed, emancipating themselves further and further from the monopolies of the (Portuguese) realm. (*Jornal do Commercio*, 10/1/1927: 55)

As for the *Jornal do Brasil*, it emphasizes the role of guardian of the freedom of the press and personal freedom, especially in its centenary edition (1991), post-military regime. The issue of progress in the *Jornal do Brasil* suggests an association with the idea of the individual's evolution and of the quality of the nation's leaders and recounts decade by decade the happenings it considered relevant, providing a linear effect. Temporality is also a vector of progress, developing causal sequences. The paper emphasizes the simultaneity of times of its history and of national history, claiming authority based on its longevity and, consequently, the power to restore certain connections with past, founding traditions:

In our Brazil where all is new, where institutions acquire some privilege of tradition, where things and men pass so quickly, where the progress of evolution erases all traces of so many things and so many people, the fifty years of journalistic work, celebrated today by the *Jornal do Brasil*, are in themselves a rare reward, precious, in the life of a Rio de Janeiro paper. (*Jornal do Brasil*, 4/9/1941: first page)

On this same page, the paper teaches the "non-initiated" the meaning of the date:

The *Jornal do Brasil* celebrates 50 years of existence today. This fact may not have much relevance to those who do not participate in journalistic struggles and activities. Those who are familiar, however, with the difficulties which day by day hinder the work of a daily

newspaper, know that half a century of life represents certainly a victory, and no small one at that. Consider this fifty-year panorama from the initial period when the *Jornal do Brasil* appeared, guided by an intellectual elite, to participate in the struggles that accompanied the first period of the republican regime. (*Jornal do Brasil*, 4/9/1941: first page, italics in the original)

O Fluminense, although it also privileges the idea of progress, does not speak of the past in the centenary edition, but of the present. Progress appears in perspective, as that which will still come. In the first two newspapers, progress is occurring due to their efforts.

This difference in the relation to time is interesting because it reveals how much the temporal frameworks are part of and vary according to the historical contexts of different social groups. Could it be that they also vary according to the multiple forms of performing journalism?

What is initially recognized in this problem is that, even though there are different editorial styles (*Jornal do Commercio* and *Jornal do Brasil* are very different – one explicitly conservative and boasting about this, the other building a image of fighting for and being the guardian of men's freedom), these narratives seem to be marked by a progressive temporal line, directed to a supposedly predictable future and, due to this, controllable, but which acquires its own configurations in each period according to its historical placement.

Conclusion

Although each one of the newspapers tells a story of journalism with different outlines, the initial analysis leads us to believe that they constitute instruments of temporalization, based upon their power of daily narrativity, on redefining the frontiers of the past, the present and the future, according to the present.

In this sense, the papers inserted themselves in the historical time as mediators of time. They would be capable, on articulating the times, of providing notions of decay or progress, indicating that which declines, that which rises, encouraging hierarchization of the phenomena, expanding or contracting time, speaking of accelerations or shrinkages, providing effects of ruptures with the past or insertions in the future.

The measuring of time by journalism, in its hegemonic mode, would be given in a vectorial manner for the future, forming a type of rationality, which, in turn, would favor certain forms of social organization. On directing ourselves towards the future, and in an ever accelerating manner, we abandon other temporalities and other rhythms, increasing

the cognitive and social abysses also through the temporal distancing that we produce.

Although the idea exists that progress has been the basis of a series of doctrines in the last centuries (NISBET, 1985), it is important to understand progress here as a temporal perception of rupture with the past, of superiority of the present in relation to the past and of looking forward to a “better future” (LE GOFF, 1997: 303). The discourse’s organization projects itself to the future and provides a sense of radical dichotomy between the society in which we live and the society that should, according to some people’s thesis, exist, as if between one and the other there were no practical link with today.

To how many pasts do we stop belonging performatively? In how many futures are we placed every day in the media? As everything passes, history changes, only the newspaper remains. Its metanarratives tell us that it is the newspaper that gives stability to our existence, guardian of the daily conscience.

Newspapers therefore make themselves necessary by establishing themselves as temporal organizers, with rhythms and meanings that favor certain manners of social organization. From this derives, perhaps, the constant preoccupation, mobilization and faith of certain social groups in journalism, as, for example, the intellectuals.

On the other hand, care should be taken not to perform a simplistic reading of the relation between the ideas of an era and that which was put into practice, above all in the different social classes and in the different dimensions of culture. Due to this, even though the notion of progress may have temporarily ruled journalistic performance, it is not possible to put aside the idea that there are stratifications of rhythms, of times which interlink themselves and collide (VOVELLE, 1991). And it is precisely this “fine tuning” (idem: 282) which is the main contribution the field of History can make to research in Communication.

| NOTES

- 1 Version to English by Marcos Hasselmann & Luciana Dumphreys

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