

EPISTEMOLOGY, DISCOURSE AND NEWS

possible approaches between discourse analysis and journalism research

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ABSTRACT

Modern times require a methodological effort to build theoretical mechanisms that may allow us to understand the complexity of the role played by contemporary journalism. In this connection, this manuscript proceeds with an analysis of the relationship between journalism and strategies for public visibility of social actors, and then sustains the inversion of the analytical perspective, which is traditionally verified by discourse analysis focused on the reflection on the production of news. By proposing the concept of discursive ruin, the work ascertains that the media visibility strategies of protest movements are also likely to give rise to informative texts, enabling the researcher to explicit *discursive ruin* gestures in view of the protest behavior, that reflect the ruin of transparency (and objectivity) of the journalistic language as well. Therefore, if the analyzer is able to overcome the mere accusations of directing meanings, he will be effectively capable of contributing to the construction of a more complex way of thinking about journalism and its discursive effects of truth.

Key-words: Studies of Journalism. Discourse analysis. MST. Discursive Ruin.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the need for building paradigms for a more accurate analysis of contemporary journalism appears to be a controversial issue. The polemic is still more accentuated in periods characterized by economic, professional and material transformations, which are mainly triggered by new possibilities of exchange, interaction and sharing of informative contents. In fact, new technologies, new products resulting from their use, as well as new professional arrangements really influence the practice of journalism and the research and teaching of the profession, mixing up aspects that were previously well-defined in these areas.

As a result of such changes, some categories that a short time ago were able to define the communication phenomenon – grounded on clear antonyms such as, for instance, emission/reception or enunciator/

enunciated – appear to be gradually less explanatory. In view of this, we face the need for creating new perspectives for the understanding of journalism, in order to avoid, on one hand, the risk of not being able to define the specificity of our theoretical and professional activities and on the other, the trap of conceiving communicational new tools as a complete “emancipation” of the social actors, converted into “producers” of contents, whose quality, independence and impact on the audiences would correspond to those produced by the “traditional vehicles”.

Therefore, this manuscript proposes a cross section that, while being specific, provides dialog elements for this discussion. It suggests the use of analogy in an attempt to think about a deployment of the current phenomenon of mixed-up positions, although on a lesser scale: the inversion of the “critical look” of discourse analysis in the studies of journalism. Our work sustains that the proposed reflection, grounded on the specific case of discourse analysis, may play a generic contributive role for journalism research as a whole.

The same phenomenon of boundary mix-up also impacts discourse analysis¹, here defined as a kind of loss of critical potency. Considering that the contents transmitted by the traditional communication mediums spill over to other spaces, which are also communicational ones (thus being informative, as well), the traditional accusations of effects of meaning produced by the “senders” lose part of their justification, as we verify that in fact the contents will be explicitly negotiated in other vehicles by other actors, no longer mere “receivers”.

As it occurs in journalism – as a science and professional occupation –, the matter does not involve the “surpassing” of discourse analysis as a way of thinking about the communicational phenomenon. On the contrary, we must face theoretical-methodological reconfigurations that may contribute to the understanding of the new arrangements of power relationships within their multiple disputes to designate events as truths. Briefly, discourse analysis may take into account the invariable interactional nature of the process called “effect of meanings between interlocutors” (PÊCHEUX, 1997a), since the subjects to be analyzed are not restricted to the transmitted contents, but also encompass the contexts of discussion (not only those of reception), where mediations (as defined by MARTIN-BARBERO, 1997) can be explicit.

Therefore, this reflection is orientated by a suggested use of analogy between a *macro* epistemological crisis (the limits and boundaries of Communication and Journalism as fields of knowledge) and a *micro* analytic dilemma: the impairment of critical potency in the analysis of

effects of meaning resulting from the traditional media products. Since the *macro* and the *micro* crises share the same cause, some specific suggestions provided in this work may be likely to further contribute to the improvement of broader strategies for progress.

Inverting the analytical look

In my doctorate thesis, and while analyzing the relationship between the strategies of media visibility used by the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) and the journalistic treatment it received from the press (MENDONÇA, 2007), I faced a methodological trap: to proceed with a "critical" analysis of the news reporting, pointing out the discursive elements that "criminalized" MST. This kind of perspective, often verified in the traditional analysis of the movement, gave rise to a structural problem: considering the communication media as the villains and transforming MST into a passive victim of the journalistic reports.

Nevertheless, the movement's political methods did not allow such a conclusion. As a matter of fact, MST is an organization whose actions of visibility, broadly discussed by its members as a voluntary strategy for taking a position, illustrate MST's degree of consciousness of how the contemporary political dispute is undergoing a kind of discursive existence, obtained from the occupation of the informative space produced by communication media. Consequently, victimizing MST would mean undermining its active political capacity.

Berger (1998) refers to the relationship between journalists and MST as being simultaneously conflicting, ambiguous and symbiotic. The author notes how the measures taken by the movement seeking viability meet a journalistic need, which is characterized by a sequence of productive routines and by criteria of judgment, enabling the journalist to select the factors that would make an event worthy of being reported.

In the search for an analytical treatment that could conceive MST as an active subject – both in the political field and in the discourse –, it was necessary to invert the critical look on this conflicting ambiguous relationship between a social movement and the press. Therefore, instead of pointing out directions of meanings that were hidden at first sight, we realized the need for verifying in what way meaning directions would be provoked by the political action of the MST's "source" in the very body of the text.

In view of this methodological option – that we hereby repute as an instrument for discourse analysis to attain the increasing complexity of the contemporary processes of producing meanings – the texts, layouts,

photos, production conditions and other elements that integrate a certain communication vehicle's discourse may be perceived as a (eternal) product of the confrontation between the journalistic structure and the characters portrayed by the news reports.

Therefore, the analyzer is expected not only to show the discursive standards of coverage developed by the vehicles, but also to proceed with an evaluation as to whether it would be possible for a social movement to become an active initiator of its political actions and of the journalistic report. For this purpose, it may be noted that the political initiative of seeking media visibility (such as land occupations) influences the materiality of journalistic texts by enabling discursive marks that allow the press to explicitly take positions (interpretative ones) in relation to the events.

Such articulation may lead to a visible effect, namely the production of vestiges, of fragments of work to direct the meanings. Then the discursive analysis sustained in this work would be likely to make evident the political strategies undertaken by social actors, that could force journalists to materialize the production gestures of the "effects of truth" arising from the news. Therefore, it may be emphasized how such a taking of position results from the journalistic response to an active behavior, either conscious or not, of specific social actors, with defined goals.

Consequently, instead of merely considering the press as villains and denouncing "unfair" reports, we can make such a discursive confrontation more complex. MST shows a double political capacity: apart from producing events that will be converted into journalistic reports, the movement is also able to produce processes of rupture of meanings, which will pressure the communication vehicles (and some other sectors of society) for a mobilization to reinstate these meanings that were until then considered as natural.

The landless workers' movement is able to cause a rupture of values and meanings that are hegemonically naturalized by the press, by allowing their transformation into others which are no longer "evident", since they are violently confronted. What will be very well-characterized is the gesture of "naturalizing" the enouncements. By highlighting this process, we shall be able to note the historicity of such statements, as being discursive products.

In order to understand the complexity involved both in the landless workers' action and in the response from the journalistic field, the above-mentioned work (MENDONÇA, 2007) had to count on a broad

theoretical-methodological contribution that could likely connect many aspects from several disciplines, such as Geography, Anthropology, History, Political Sciences, Philosophy and Linguistics, thus allowing a dialog between them and Journalism studies.

This interdisciplinary approach provided an understanding of how MST, by using the method of land occupation, was able to occupy a place in the media under multiple aspects. In short, the work referred to above sustained that said occupation gave rise to a connection between geographical and informative spaces, able to transform the occupation into a place in the clandestine memory (NORA, 1993; POLLAK, 1989), where there would occur a discursive re-configuration of the meanings of capitalist property, of history (the discussion concerning the Land Reform Law) and of journalistic truth. Within this space of pedagogy and discursive confrontation as well, new identities were in the process of being built (CALDART, 2004), while the landless workers appeared to understand the strategies of journalistic judgment, allowing the movement's visibility to reach the newspaper pages (BERGER, 1998).

This methodological construction led us to conclude that the political gesture by the press of returning the meanings to their prior state (obviously natural) is not invisible: the marks of this "work" (in the Marxist sense) shall remain in the records of the coverage. Therefore, the main focus of analysis of the journalistic discourse sustained here is not grounded on the interpretation of gestures of meanings' displacement, but on the emphasis on the political special feature of actors who are capable of provoking in the press a new set of meanings. This strategy ensures more than visibility: the evidence of the political tactic of looking for inscription by the temporary rupture of the hegemonic meanings, even though such a plan leads to (the lack of) political legitimacy.

This verification gave rise to the formulation of a concept that could embody the discursive talent of actors who are capable of provoking, by the ruin of their own visibility strategy, the ruin of the illusion of transparency in the journalistic discourse. Then, instead of the search for evidence attesting to the rhetoric weakness of the journalistic discourse, we repute as the overriding instance of discourse analysis the use of instruments that are capable of destroying this myth, precisely while the work to dissimulate its process of creation is being carried out. In order to deal with this ambiguous political likelihood of a discursive construction of its own textual destruction, we suggest the concept of *discursive ruin*.

Discursive ruin as a political instrument

In order to avoid any possible interpretation of the above-described political gesture as mere suicide, it will be necessary to outline a summarized genealogy of the uses of ruin as a category of thought. We also intend to illustrate the multiple essence of the methodology adopted for constructing the concept mentioned. Then we will understand those political actions (and the proposed concept) as a potency, whose evident nihilism, far from characterizing a negative and voluntary “surrender” to tragic destiny, appears as a creative response of discursive reinvention of itself.

References to ruin as an esthetic category of artistic works are as ancient as its use as a metaphor by occidental thinkers. Between the Dionysian and the Apollonian of the Greek tragedies and the allegorical ruptures of the baroque drama, from the picturesque rescue of gothic architecture to the impossible love of romanticism, from the “monumental” Wagnerian music – inspired by Schopenhauer’s pessimism – to the dandy decadency of Oscar Wilde, from the neo-gothic, with its nostalgia of castles, to the grotesque popular romance, the figure of ruin played several roles during the history of the arts and of occidental thought. Either by turning into a metaphor the tragic and inevitable fate of all existence, representing nature’s triumphant revenge against the arrogance (and inutility) of human knowledge, or by laying the groundwork for a new and radiant beginning, in view of the concrete verification that what exists is fading out, the image of ruin – this multiple chaotic disorder of meaning fragments – is always seductive.

In spite of the relevance and the recurrent symbolism of ruin in occidental production, the subject was not much explored by the theoretical scientists in their research works. Not by chance, one of the most brilliant exceptions to this rule is the thought of the German Georg Simmel. At the end of the XX Century, when decadent pessimism still prevailed, this sociologist, whose academic relevance was obfuscated by the contributions from Weber and Durkheim, wrote an interesting essay on the possible interpretations of ruin.

In fact, Simmel’s metaphysic purpose was to outline a parallel between ruin and the human condition. Leaving his romantic plea of the fall and his search for the essence of the spirit aside, we suggest making use of some of his insights that may contribute to the understanding of the potencies involved in the *event-ruin*.

The author conceives artistic movements as a constant fight between spirit and nature; between the soul, eager for elevation,

and the gravity that attracts it to the floor. For him, among all kinds of art, this confrontation will only find peace in architecture, because it is architecture that is charged with shaping elements of nature, by preserving something from its “essence” and settling, in the act of building, the dispute between the desire to rise up and the desire to fall.

Nevertheless, this peace between material needs and the freedom of the spirit is temporary. As soon as the building begins to collapse, the forces of nature invert the prevalence of human action. For Simmel (1998:137-8), “this displacement becomes a cosmic tragedy, that (...) leads any ruin to the shadow of melancholy, as the failure now appears as a revenge by nature for the violation imposed by the spirit.”

Architecture would be likely to promote a unique balance between spirit and nature, and the destruction of the building would likewise give rise to very distinct types of rubbish: “nevertheless, ruin becomes a phenomenon that is more significant and full of meaning than the fragments of other destroyed pieces of art.” (SIMMEL, 1998:138). While in fragments of other pieces, the only meaning lies in the artistic vestiges, Simmel sees a new integrality erupting from the ruin:

ruin of the architectural piece means that, at those parts of the piece of art that were destroyed or simply disappeared, other forces and forms – those of nature – grew up and built a new integrality, a unit of characteristic, raised from the part of art that still lives inside it and also from the part of nature that already lives inside it (SIMMEL, 1998:138).

The intuition of this new integrality found in ruin may contribute to the understanding of the discursive strategy which began to operate from the contact between MST’s actions and journalistic reports. If we look for an analogy between Simmel’s opposition “human work/effect of nature” and the relationship “MST/journalism”, we shall note that, given the political strategy of the landless workers’ “spirit” of promoting the occupation of land and of newspaper pages, the “nature work” of interpretation to be done by the papers will also form a new integrality, far beyond the peace kept by the consensus of meanings that was previously imposed.

Due to the capability of preserving the potency of both aspects in the conflict, which is materialized in ruin, we can observe the unity of the discursive rubbishes. The protest strategies will be delegitimized by the press, but may remain in the text as rubbishes. Back to Simmel, we are observing the specific seduction of ruin: the likelihood for a human work

to be perceived as a product of nature.

What sets up the building is human will, what provides its current appearance is the power of nature, which is mechanical, likely to undermine, corrosive, devastating. Nevertheless, it does not allow the work to sink into the lack of form of mere matter – provided that it is still a ruin, and not a lot of stones (SIMMEL, 1998:140).

The analogy proposed here is grounded on this amalgam: what seduces Simmel in the ruin is the latent coexistence of opposing forces that form an integral force. As the vestiges of the destroyed building remain intrinsically connected with the destructive effects of nature, in the same way the features of new meanings proposed by the protest action during its *media occupation* mark the gesture promoted by the press to restore and control the prior meanings.

The sociologist sustains that in the ruin nature uses the work of art as a material for its formation, just as art had previously used matter as its substance. As regards *discursive ruin*, the strategy adopted by the movement is the target and fuel for the journalistic interpretation, which unites the meanings that it intends to see shared as hegemonic ones, but without completely erasing other possible interpretations triggered by the protest action.

Therefore, the discourse analysis we propose may consider the new integrality represented by the news reports, which will integrate its *corpus* with a dual evidence of traces: on one hand, the non-authorized point of view sustained by the protest agents and on the other, the directions of meaning promoted by the vehicles that will re-mean that other vision. Bearing Simmel's ruin in mind, the return to the "natural state" of the hegemonic meanings of journalistic reports will not be free from scars: the memorable milestone of ruin (of the protest and also of the press work) may be interpreted as an insight of a line of escape, being thus likely to lead to other forms of fighting in other scenarios.

If we were to extend the conceptual analogy proposed here to another "esthetic use" of ruin, we could migrate from the architectural (and concrete) field into the (symbolic) level of literature by adding to the concept of *discursive ruin* another aspect that encompasses the same migration promoted by the social protest actors with their political actions of visibility: from the social field to the journalistic text.

While during the XVIII. Century, the interest in ruin was due mostly to the illuminist rescue of the monumental vigor of classicism, the reformulation of its symbology throughout the first half of the XIX.

Century was inspired by the romantic deception with modernity and the respective nostalgia for the Middle Ages. In the last quarter of that century, the attachment to past times was progressively replaced by decadent nihilism. In order to suggest the fundamental differentiation between romantic and decadent literature, Mucci alludes to the concept of allegory and to the use of ruin as a category, as proposed by Benjamin:

the romantic mimesis extracts from the symbol an ancient idea that acquired special features in romanticism, while decadence breaks with the symbolic representation, inaugurating the esthetic of allegory: the beautiful in ruin or the ruin of the beautiful, introducing the scenario of ashes that would characterize modernity and post-modernity (MUCCI, 1994:61).

We note the opposition between the symbol's valorization by romantic literature and the rescue (re-meaning) of the baroque allegory promoted by the decadents. While the symbol could be defined as an "image with meaning", the allegory would be capable of "saying something to mean something else". This esthetic proposed by Benjamin is grounded on the allegory's capability of overcoming the mere technique of illustration by using images, thus becoming an expression, like a written one. It is on the basis of this interpretation that we shall be able to attribute to the work of art the qualification of ruin.

The allegoric physiognomy of a historical nature, put on the stage by the drama, can only be really present as ruin. As such, there is a sensorial mix-up between history and the scenario. In this way, history does not consist of a process of eternal life, but of inevitable decline. Therefore, allegory appears to be far beyond the beautiful. In the realm of thoughts, allegories play the same role as ruins in the realm of things (BENJAMIN, 1984:199-200).

While reputed all that lies in ruins, the significant fragment, the shrapnel, as the most noble subject of baroque creation, Benjamin notes that art encompasses a discontinuous conception of history and of the power of nature itself. If we join this specific contribution to another displacement, which is implicit this time, we shall be able to add another element to the concept of *discursive ruin* outlined here. By summarizing that allegories play, in the realm of thoughts, the same role as ruins in the realm of things, Benjamin transfers the representation of the "ambiguous nature" of the word ruin from architecture to the universe of "ideas".

Benjamin allows us to sustain that *discursive ruin* arises from the normal journalistic "unique thought", showing a destructive force

whose potency would belong to the same order as an “allegory”. Then, *discursive ruin* remains (and resists), keeping the potency of the allegory that it is: it subverts conclusions, bars synthesis, and floats as a scar, with its entangled vestiges and traces, allowing other interpretations that may get around (and refuse) the sentences issued by the press as truths.

Gagnebin refers to the thinking of Assmann to observe how the memorable potency verified in the “scar left by the holocaust” belongs to the order of *trauma*, which would be

the wound opened in the soul, or in the body, by violent events, either repressed or not, but that cannot be symbolically elaborated by the subject, particularly in the form of words. (...) The survivors’ wounds remain opened and can not be healed, neither by enchantments nor by narratives (GAGNEBIN, 2006:110).

As we apply Assmann’s reflection to the effects of discursive ruin, we conclude that the wounds provoked by the protest action in the “meat” of the journalistic text do not only avoid the healing represented by the re-naturalization of meanings, but are also converted into the evident allegory of the hegemonic gestures of this attempt to achieve healing. Pointing out this violent confrontation and making more complex its multiple interpretations is the role of discourse analysis, which is proposed here as a science of vestiges. However, as a preliminary step, it will be necessary to better understand the political mechanisms involved in the public space that will allow and give rise to discursive ruin: the journalistic field.

The journalistic discourse as a public space for ruin

The concept proposed here is well justified when we approach its characteristics from the perspective of the ways in which contemporary journalism works, and particularly its simultaneous roles of public space and political actor. From the point of view of the transformations of representative politics nowadays and of the role played by the press in this process, Manin (1995) sustains the emergence of the model of *democracy of the audience*, where political preferences are dissociated from the social, economic, and cultural characteristics of the voters. Political parties are no longer capable of guiding the discussion, since journalism becomes the communication channel between citizens (converted into the audience) and their representatives.

Therefore, journalism becomes the most important space for political discussions, leading us to conceive the media as a political institution. In

this respect, Martín-Barbero (1999) sustains that apart from representing the social and building the present, journalism would play the role of socializing and forming the political culture, being likely to influence the society in relation to the interventions of the governing class, or becoming a determinant factor of (un)governability.

Assuming that Hannah Arendt's definition of democracy as an union between political rhetoric and communication in a public space is quite correct, and bearing in mind, as ascertains Martin-Barbero, that the public is what can be seen and heard by all, we may conceive the media (and journalism itself) as a contemporary *agora*, that provides existence to the main political aspects of society.

For Thompson (1998), we live a new form of mediation between politicians and voters, resulting from the transformation of the public space nowadays. At the Greek *agora*, as well as in Europe during the ancient regime, co-presence was a fundamental condition for politics. The invention of communication media inaugurated the "mediated publicity", where events are shared by persons who are physically distant from each other.

As we verify the importance of visibility for the contemporary society, we are reminded of Foucault and his proposal of the panoptic model as a synthesis of the disciplinary society. According to the French philosopher, the subjection to a permanent state of visibility would ensure a structure of power grounded on the possibility of many people being kept under surveillance by a few. However, Thompson sustains that nowadays the political visibility strategies surpass this Orwellian view of power. Therefore, the communication media maintain a relationship where:

many persons can gather information about a few people and, at the same time, a few people can appear to many persons; thanks to media, those who exercise the Power are now those who are subject to a certain kind of visibility, rather than those over whom the power is exercised (THOMPSON, 1998:121).

Returning to the relationship between MST and journalism, we note that the media occupation brings a change of *status*: landless workers no longer circulate on the edge of the spaces controlled by the foremen's "panoptic", but invent their own political visibility, wrested by force in the fields and in the newspaper pages. At this moment, professionals and media come on stage that, in their role of political actors, select, place in a hierarchy and mold events by using professional and ideological criteria and by following the routines for news production.

Cook (1998) reminds us that this role is not necessarily related to the personal political position of the journalist, but to a “professional ideology” based on journalistic objectivity. While sustaining the political role of the press, Bucci believes that this latter:

touches the sphere of power, criticizes and watches over the governing class, being, in this sense, a social activity that is markedly political – but its political nature comes from information, opinion, and not from partisanship. Therefore, the journalist, and particularly the political one, is a politician making politics by other means (...) and the trust agreement that these latter execute with the audience is political (BUCCI, 2000:104)

In other words, we see the concretization of the adage enounced by the *Folha de São Paulo*, according to which “the journalist’s party is the reader’s party”. Press does not become a political party (representing the thought of specific groups), but a kind of universal “power” – a supra-institutional instance, able to identify and ensure the interests of the whole society through a rhetoric that at the maximum ends by proposing the political gesture of the political “dominance” in contemporary society.

In an attempt to point out the social effects of the press, McCombs and Shaw (2000) introduce their agenda-setting theory, as the process whereby the news media would be capable of using the continuous flow of information to exercise a medium- and long-term influence on the receiver by the choice of their day-to-day task of displaying the news and by daily discussions. As a producer of a constant flow of reports, the media would not be capable of imposing an interpretation of the facts, but could determine which ones - to the detriment of other subjects - would be discussed by public opinion.

This is the way in which the media agenda would be converted into a personal and socially-shared one. The research conducted by the above-mentioned authors also shows the likelihood of the inverse gesture: public opinion can also impose some subjects on the media (this gesture will be constantly adopted by MST). In spite of its limitations, this is a contributing theory, as it notes that the interpretation adopted by hegemonic journalism can be refused by the audience.

Nevertheless, more important than assessing the social effects of the agenda-setting of discussions will be the understanding that journalists are tasked by their vehicles’ product itself. If it is difficult to proceed with an empirical verification, the newspapers disclose how similar the features and the relevance attributed to certain events can be.

Schudson considers that the advantageous position of journalism would not arise from its power of declaring things as being true, but from “the power to provide the forms under which statements will appear” (1993:279). The author refers to the journalist’s routines of production, to the choice of sources, to the definition of the relevant questions, briefly: to the journalistic capability of defining which part of the event “deserves” the *status* of news.

Traquina alludes to Goffman to show how this construction involves implicit *framings* for the journalist, while defining his routine, and for the audience, while reading: “when applied to the study of news, *framing* is an interpretative tool that establishes the principles of selection and the codes of emphasis to be used for drafting news, for building stories” (TRAQUINA, 2000:28).

After reviewing their theory twenty-five years later, McCombs and Shaw considered that the selection of gestures and the *framing* of the events to be reported play a fundamental role in the matter:

crucial to the journalistic agenda and to the daily group of subjects – matters, celebrities, events, etc...- are the perspectives that journalists and, consequently, the audience as well, adopt to think about each subject. These perspectives guide the attention to certain attributes, diverting it from other ones. The generic expression of these journalistic perspectives is the news value (MCCOMBS and SHAW, 2000:131).

However, there are different ways to attribute values to the events. Journalism would have the capability of using political perspectives to select interpretative criteria for the drafted report. According to McCombs and Shaw, this would be a way to promote a social consensus, which is less perceived in relation to opinions, and more observed in terms of acceptance of the relevance criteria adopted by journalism. These parameters will allow the classification to remain unperceived as an active political gesture taken by those who produce “effects of truth”.

The predominant role of the media agenda-setting can be the production of social consensus on the definition of the agenda itself, if it will be the traditional agenda of subjects or anything else (...) By supplying an agenda that anyone can share, even partially, the media are giving rise to a communitarian meaning (Idem, 133).

There is a constant production of fancies and interpretations which transform journalism into a field crossed by fights and power

relationships. The conception of power developed by Foucault allows us to understand the authority strategies adopted in journalism making. In fact, the journalistic activity arises from the functioning of groups of knowledge that are born from it, but that condition it as well.

The “politic economy” of the truth has five important characteristics: the “truth” is focused on the form of the scientific discourse and on the institutions that produce it; it is subject to a constant economic and political incitation (...); in several ways, it is immensely diffused and immensely consumed (circulating through educational and informative apparatus) (...); it is produced and transmitted under the control, non-exclusive but prevailing, of some big political or economical apparatus (university, army, writing, communication media); briefly, it is the subject of a political discussion and social confrontation (FOUCAULT, 1998:13).

It is inside this hegemonic place of conflict that journalism appears as a manager of the flow of “truths” (space of knowledge), as well as a “guardian” of the voices, meanings and political memory (space of power). This effect can be legitimated by the acceptance of the enunciation strategies built inside the journalistic discourse, and also by the agenda-setting capability, which is inherent to journalism. But it is also inside this space that counter-discourses may seek their viability and the ruin of these ruses of power. It will be precisely in an attempt to encompass this complexity that the discourse analysis of the news sustained here may be considered a true science of vestiges.

Conclusion: for a science of vestiges

Through the inversion of the analytic look, the concept of *discursive ruin* does not show the primary meaning of the news reporting or of the protest actions, but the preservation of the potency of forces acting for destruction that it represents. And it also represents a change of place for the dispute of meanings.

In this sense, reading Assmann through Gagnebin’s eyes allows us to reach a deeper understanding of the contemporary characteristics of the *vestiges*. There is an intrinsic relationship between writing and the desire for memory. The word materialized by visual signs is a powerful metaphor for remembrance, since among other reasons, it is inscribed in the “narrative flow that composes our stories, our memories, our tradition and our identity” (GAGNEBIN, 2006:111). Therefore, the written language was, throughout Western history, considered as the most important and lasting “*trace*” that man was able to leave.

However, Assmann reminds us that since the XVIII. Century, the certainties as to the truth maintained by this trace were gradually challenged by modern rationalism. The conquest represented by the fall of beliefs led into a re-meaning of the concept of writing: from memorable trace to something random.

A trace results from hazard, from negligence, sometimes from violence; if left by a running animal or by a thief who is in the process of escaping, it denounces an absent presence – but without pre-judging its legibility. Considering that all those who leave traces do not act for the purpose of transmitting a meaning, deciphering traces is also marked by this lack of intentionality. The detective, the archeologist, and the psychoanalyst (...) may decipher not only the trace in its concrete singularity, but must also try to guess the process, that is often violent, of its involuntary production. Strictly speaking, and differently from other cultural and linguistic signs, traces are not created, being left behind or forgotten (GAGNEBIN, 2006:113).

This broad definition of the contemporary potentialities of writing as a memorable trace is perfectly applicable to the concept of discursive ruin. Firstly, its “absence-presence” is similar to the temporal ambiguous essence of ruin, defined by Simmel as the “inter-space” where the “not-yet” and the “no-more” would coexist.

Therefore, it is the same “presence in the absence” mentioned by Huyssen (2006), as he points out the paradox that inside the body itself of the ruin’s “setback utopia”, the past is as present at its residues (traces?), yet is no longer accessible, since it is decadent. This relationship between time and memory is still focused by Simmel (1998:143) from another perspective: the verification that ruin “is the site of life, from which life was detached”. For the sociologist, the fragments entangled in a “new integrality” of ruin preserve, in an immediately visible present, vestiges from the past, not as symbolic representations, but as concrete elements, ensuring that ruins would maintain the same seduction of antiquities, since “ruin creates the present form of a past life that is not in accordance with its contents or vestiges, but with its past as such”. (SIMMEL, 1998:144).

Similarly, *discursive ruin* allows the materialization of meanings proposed on the basis of traces of action found in the subtleties of the text. Besides, the second aspect that Assmann’s definition of trace allows us to associate with our concept is that the process of seeking visibility, triggered by any of the protest actors, does not have to explicitly reveal the intention of converting itself into ruin, or of “communicating” the

gesture of silence that is subsequent to their protests. Therefore, the tactic analyzed here reaches its maximum potency not by superimposing on the journalistic discourse its counter-discourse, but for being capable of interrupting the normality of the hegemonic informative flow, whose homogenization of meanings had always been invisibly produced.

In this respect, it is worthwhile to recall the Chinese proverb mentioned by Pêcheux to illustrate one of the crucial proposals for discourse analysis: the suggestion that from a political point of view, every *sign* is always a *trace*.

When we show him the moon, the simple-minded looks at the finger. In fact, why not? Why could discourse analysis not turn its look to the gestures of designation before looking at the designata, to the processes of assembly and the constructions before examining the meanings? (PÊCHEUX, 1997b:54).

This is exactly the fundamental basis for the proposal of focusing the analysis on the discursive moments that disclose the misunderstanding of the stability of meanings: when language fails, the illusion of the transparency of truth that was underlying it becomes still more evident. Therefore, the scar represented by *discursive ruin* adds to the journalistic text one more fragment of meaning: the evidence that its irruption into a discursive event will be always as violent as the act of writing itself. Foucault already warned:

do not transform the discourse into a game of previous meanings; do not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, only waiting to be deciphered; it is not an accomplice of our knowledge; there is no pre-discursive measure that may swing it in our favor. The discourse may be conceived as an act of violence we commit against things, as an attitude that we impose on them in any way (FOUCAULT, 1996:53).

Pêcheux reminds us that all pacified meanings can always undergo new instabilities. The “discursive regularization (...), thus inclined to form the law of series of the legible, is always likely to collapse under the weight of the new discursive event which may arise to disturb the memory.” (PÊCHEUX, 1997b:52). If we can extend this destructive potency to the underlying “pillars” of journalism (the orchestration of voices, meanings, silences, and the power to “legitimate” actions), it will be clear how the phenomenon of *discursive ruin* is capable of transforming itself into a line of escape for protest actors.

The proposed concept tries to bring together in different ways some basic characteristics of the theoretical fundamentals examined here. Firstly, *discursive ruin* crystallizes an unbalanced fight between two forces that even though are not completely eliminated. However, this (public) space of conflict establishes a rupture with the prior existence, thus providing the basis for a new beginning, with no connection with the past, and capable of irrupting into another meaning. Despite this, and in a contradictory way, *discursive ruin* brings in itself the gesture of being converted into a memorable moment, by transforming the past into the present, in those aspects in which it can no longer exist. And it is the combination of these gestures that will allow the “researcher of vestiges” from the discourse analysis proposed here to visualize the traces that were involuntarily left by the fight between protest groups and the discursive uniformization intended by the journalists.

Returning to the initial proposal of reflecting on the *micro* question to reach a broader understanding of the *macro* dilemma, the discourse analysis sustained here tries to go beyond the transmitted contents by associating them with other contemporary communicative possibilities, such as social networks, micro blogs, independent media, either protest or alternative ones, and independent media centers. Considering that *discursive ruin* clearly shows the impossible objectivity of hegemonic journalism, these media considered “engaged” can transform “partial reports” into task assignments for “other news”. This is the new complexity that appears as a challenge (and ruin?) to be surpassed by the journalism researcher and by the discourse analyst.

| NOTES

- 1 By discourse analysis we do not refer to a specific doctrinaire position, but to all methods that focus their critical look on the effects of production of meaning, since the controversy under examination concerns not only discourse analysis (both French and English), but also semiotics and some studies on narrative.

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