

**BOOK  
REVIEW**

***Taking Journalism  
Seriously:***

*News and the Academy*

B. ZELIZER

Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004.

REVIEWED BY **Cristina Ponte**

In this book, Zelizer runs through the history of Journalism and tells how it has come to expand its agenda and methodologies. For a long time, the study of journalism was centered on the so-called hard news. For a broader research agenda, more views are necessary than those of sociological investigation, which is now more present.

In the first chapter, Zelizer confronts the journalists' "interpretative community" and the "interpretative community" of the academicians that study journalism, noting the clash between the two. Academic research has been molded by social sciences and this gives rise to reservations on the part of journalists and professors of journalism, who consider the social sciences' theoretical contributions as problematic for the training of professional journalists. Journalists and academicians speak of journalism based on different attributes: to the *sixth sense* and professional work that *mirrors* and *serves* society, as journalists tend to express it, the academicians oppose attention to the *profession*, to the *institution*, to the *text*, to the *practices*.

The following chapters present contributions of Sociology, History, Literary Studies, Political Science and Cultural Studies. The genealogy of each one of these lenses, their unavoidable concepts and authors, their potential, their transformations and their limits are traced.

In the United States, the first sociological investigations, starting from the 1940s, involved processes of information control, in the occupational component, in the normative perspectives and in the research of effects. Starting with the end of the 1960s, the study began to focus on organizational constraints. Ethnographic works by Tuchman, Gans and Fishman, among others, became subjects of unavoidable reference. These editorial studies are not indifferent, however, neither to the passage of time nor in their common structure, the attention paid

to the large editorial rooms of newspapers and television of the 60s and 70s, mostly white and masculine. Today, the sociological perspective, not only in American research but also in other parts of the world, is more macro, regarding the institutions and the ideologies of journalism. Sociology thus crosses with attributes of political science, of philosophy, of cultural studies. As the author writes: “Sociological investigation reduced journalists to a given type of actor in a given context. Other disciplinary classifications are necessary to make this image more complex” (p. 80).

The chapter on Journalism and History makes much recourse to the works of Schudson on American journalism, and of Curran and Seaton, on the British media. There is tension regarding what constitutes “historical investigation” in the way that it is considered by historians and journalists. The position of historical investigation in the study of journalism is still marked by contradictory perspectives regarding what is the work of history, due to the lack of clarity concerning the relation between historical investigation and the study of journalism, of communication and of the history of the media. Zelizer identifies three organizing moments in this research: a starting point, marked by the attention to memoirs, biographies and history of organizations; an intermediate point, focused on the identification of periods, topics and events; a moment of expansion of the history of journalism, on considering it inseparable from the development of the Nation-State, articulating History and Political Science.

In the chapter on the Studies of Language, Zelizer emphasizes its importance to journalism research and distinguishes between informal studies, formal studies and pragmatic studies of journalistic language. Content analysis and semantics marked the informal studies, while the formal studies were based on socio-linguistics, on critical linguistics, on discourse analysis, and pay attention to the visual attributes of the news. The pragmatic studies underline the conditions for carrying out the discourses: how the journalistic narrative is *recounted* and *fitted in*, for example, in large newspapers, in television, on the Internet or in alternative journalistic formats. The attention to journalistic narratives, to rhetoric and to the classifications has contributed to a research that goes beyond the episodes and the singular events that constitute the news, and has helped to recognize the systematically constructed nature of journalistic work.

In Political Science, Zelizer highlights the essentially normative characteristics of research, in three directions, equally concerned with

*what is journalism* and how it *should be*, with variations in the scale of the analytical view. The attention to journalistic practices on a small scale marked the studies of journalists' relations with sources of information. An intermediate scale focused on the intersection of journalism with politics, integrating the journalists' link with political actors and with the audiences, in the study of election campaigns and of civic journalism. The largest scale of analysis involves the interactions between journalism and different political systems. This lens also crosses other fields of journalism research, such as political language and its impact.

The chapter on Cultural Analysis shows how this lens is interdisciplinary and self-reflexive. It considers "the meanings, symbols and symbolic systems, rituals and conventions that permit journalists to maintain their cultural authority presenting themselves as those who can deal with events in the public domain" (p. 170). It attains facets and dimensions customarily ignored by previous fields: views of the world of journalism, its practices, genders and formats, its representations and audiences. However, it tends to provide local results, difficult to generalize.

None of the lenses permit the covering, by itself, of the great issues of the research (*Who* is the target of the study, and *what* is studied, *where* and *when* is it located) but each one covers partially all of these issues.

The bibliography (53 pages) is divided into General Sources and Sources on Journalism, based on authors' works or publications in international magazines, in English. The majority of them come from Anglo-American authors, but the contributions of Mattelart, Neveu and Wolton (France); Dines, Marques de Melo, Kucinski and Ruótulo (Brazil); Benavides (Mexico); Brosius and Keplinger (Germany), or of the classics, such as Tarde, Weber or Tonnies, are not ignored. The challenge here is for Latin research to become more visible in these international arenas.

As a whole, this stimulating "revision of literature" challenges the study of Journalism to widen its conceptual horizons. A book to be returned to frequently, it is indispensable to journalism research and its immersion in contemporary societies.

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