

# THE POLITICAL AND JOURNALISTIC FIELDS IN BRAZIL: AUTONOMY AND HABITUS

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**ABSTRACT** Drawing on the complementary Bourdieusian concepts of 'field' and 'habitus' – a field is socially structured as such only if its members follow a particular habitus, and the existence of a *habitus* in a particular field depends on informal rules being observed by its members – this article analyzes the relationship between the journalistic and political fields in Brazil. The main question shaping our course is: how autonomous is the journalistic field? We have analyzed media-owning politicians in Brazil. This affiliation to discrete fields is the subject of the first section. Any measurement of the autonomy of a given field must consider whether the *habitus* of the field is sufficiently clear to its members. The journalistic *habitus* is the subject of the second section.

**KEY-WORDS** Field, habitus, journalism, politics.

The journalistic field is a social space, a space of relationships defining social positions and endowed with some specificity, which structures and is structured by a symbolic border that establishes and objectifies an inner and an outer position, defines what is specifically journalistic, and differentiates what is and what is not journalistic. Like all fields, the journalistic field is a *structured* space of positions, defined and redefined by its agents. Acceptance of these positions is a condition for playing the game of relationships which are specific to this space. As in any game, its rules must be previously known and accepted. Unlike most games, these rules are not imposed – on a permanent basis – by some contriver of the pastime, but rather are the object of constant struggle and redefinition.

In the journalistic field, the positions occupied by its agents are defined according to criteria, veritable axes structuring space and allowing an insider to exist in relation to something. Thus, *sensational journalism* or

*serious journalism* are epithets that betray the existence of social categories whose meanings are shared by the agents in the field and structure their connection with it. These categories only find their structuring role when they are reflectively understood, that is, in their mutual relationship, like “north”, which makes sense only in relation to “south”. Thus, the investigation of the relationships constituting a field, such as the journalistic field, calls for more than a mere description of positions occupied and struggles/strategies for the maintenance or subversion of the current power relationship. It requires assessing to what degree these structuring axes have been defined and redefined over the particular history of the field.

For this reason, not all reasonably stable groups of agents purporting to produce news constitute a journalistic field. In the first place, if this social space is to be considered a field, its journalistic agents must acknowledge one or more objectives as the objectives of a shared struggle. In the journalistic field, one of the main objectives of struggle is the very definition of genuine journalism, that is, what is a good journalistic account, a good report, a good schedule, etc.

In the second place, there must be people willing to play the game, the journalistic game which almost invariably hides its adversarial nature under the guise of an information apostolate or mission. It is a game in which the interest in the prizes is disguised as a disinterested representation of public interest. A journalistic field exists only when the rules of the game – although they are always at stake – are known and acknowledged by its agents. In this disposition lie the strategies of subversion available to dominated subjects wishing to leave their positions and the strategies of conservation for dominant subjects.

Thus, in each field there is a set of people who, in accepting to play, implicitly accept the rules and the value of specific prizes. Maybe this can account for the relative conformity with which students of journalism accept the demeaning (and not always legal) conditions proposed by employers as “the only way” of entering the field.

The third law of fields is the organic tendency to preclude or hinder the action of any outside agents that are intent on subverting the rules for entrance, value definition, and access to prizes. This makes the field not only a space of conflict and social struggle – using the jargon favored by Bourdieu – but possibly a space for complicity, where the *esprit de corps* would prevent any revolution that might jeopardize its survival.

The institution of journalistic space entails the imposition of a border separating those who are prepared to enter the game of adversarial production of news and those who, while taking part in certain stages of its production,

are excluded from it. This exclusion stems, apart from the official barriers imposed by the requirement for possession of a diploma, from the inability to convert a set of referentials, both conceptual and practical, such as linguistic stance, which are requisite for entrance in the field.

The constitution of a strictly journalistic competence - the technical mastery of knowledge that is removed from the sheer recommendations of common sense - disqualifies other criteria for assessing reality which are peculiar to other social universes. Therefore, the schedule as the imparting of a certain value, of a strictly journalistic nature, to a fact, objectifies a unique practical knowledge, constituted over a long scholastic and professional trajectory that is not to be mistaken for other social representations. Thus, a lecture on journalistic ethics, whether good or bad, does not usually justify its being accorded news status. Even though its worth may be indisputable according to scholarly standards, the lecture is irrelevant according to the criteria for news production in the journalistic field. It would be relevant if something unusual had taken place during its course, such as a disagreement between students followed by violent confrontation and death.

The distance between the view of a lay source and that of a professional journalist is not at all accidental. It institutes a power relationship combining two different sets of assumptions, two world views. This distance is apparent, for instance, in the familiarity with television technology displayed by a mediator in a political debate, an information professional, as compared to that of the participants.

As opposed to law, economics, and other social activities, journalism does not require a particular usage of ordinary language. Since, in principle, it is designed for larger numbers of people, news does not demand specific knowledge to be understood. Therefore, the relative autonomization of the journalistic space does not rely on a symbolic disruption representing this or that jargonizing of professional activity. Whereas in law, economics, and medicine, linguistic codes have a part in defining the limits of the social universe in which they are produced, journalism employs a device which is less conspicuous, more subtle, and, accordingly, more efficient: method.

The journalistic space serves as a neutral location producing at first a veritable neutralization of the axiological (worth-imparting) content of common sense with which events are suffused. While they are supposedly indifferent to (although not uninterested in) fact and prepared to grasp present time, these specialized agents, unintentionally and unwittingly, effect a neutralizing distance which is inscribed in the innermost depths of professional *habitus*: the dispositions to distancing, taking shape in a corporate, journalistic "duty"

to preserve “exclusive possession” are brought to mind in all the stages of the professional education and training of neophytes.

The transformation of a phenomenal reality, with its ceaseless flux of causes and effects, into a printed or electronic flash of present time, a hierarchical and dramatized piece of reality, is inscribed in the very existence of a specialized professional body, which is relatively autonomous in the face of social interests involving any reconstruction of reality. This body is charged with defining and presenting reality, with organizing, according to codified forms, the public manifestation of social conflicts, and giving them solutions socially recognized as impartial in their having been defined on the basis of previously established rules of journalistic deontology.

It is this relatively autonomous body of professionals that we call “the journalistic field”. When analyzing its historical formation, Bourdieu (1994: 4) points out that “the journalistic field as such was formed in the 19th century, around the opposition between the newspapers that offered ‘nouvelles’ (novelties), preferably sensational, or, rather, ‘à sensation’ (for sensation), and newspapers that offered analyses and ‘commentaries’, and strove to stand apart from the former by vigorously affirming their claim to the values of objectivity”.

The definition of field proposed by Bourdieu, namely, a structured space of positions, where agents compete for specific prizes and observe specific rules, calls for some preliminary observations. First, the theory of social fields does not account for the whole of social life, that is, not all social activities take place within fields. Thus, we point out that the theory of fields devotes a lot of effort to explaining the great scenes where power struggles unfold, but not much effort to understanding those who prepare the scenes, build the stages, manufacture their props, sweep the corridors, copy documents, type letters, etc.

According to Bourdieu, every social field causes a sort of delusion in its members, a delusion that all struggles, the rules regulating their moves, the prizes pertaining to each field, are the outcomes of the subject’s deliberation, not defined by the inter-subjectivity of social relations or learned through socialization. It must be recognized, however, that other social worlds that do not fit the definition of field also rely on unacknowledged conventions for their existence. A good number of individuals in our societies (the lower classes, necessarily excluded from power fields) are situated “hors-champ” (outside the field), immersed in a great “social space” having as its structuring axes only the amount and structure of (cultural and economic) capital possessed. This is recognized by Pierre Bourdieu when he explains that understanding a famous author’s work poses discrete problems as compared to understanding

a “layman’s” discourse, and this is due “above all, to the author’s belonging to a field” (BOURDIEU, 1992: 418).

Given these exclusions, of “time outside the field” and “actors outside the field”, it is revealing that this sociology not only is concerned with those who were practically “born in the field” or “in the game” (the son of an actor who also becomes an actor, for instance), but also generalizes, sometimes abusively, this sort of situation: “*Illusio* is a kind of knowledge that is founded on the fact of one having been born in the game, of belonging to the game by right of birth: if I say I know the game in this way it means that it is under my skin, that it plays within me, without me” (BOURDIEU, 1993: 44). And also: “Why is it important to think of the game as the place where we are born rather than as an arbitrarily instituted game?” (BOURDIEU, 1993: 49).

Thus, we may be under this *illusio*, characteristic of a social world, without this world possessing the set of properties that would allow it to be defined as a field. The family, for instance, although it never is a social field, is structured around a series of implied norms and values ensuring its reproduction and precluding questioning as to individual losses entailed by family life.

This relativization of field theory is important for the analysis of the journalistic field. A simple examination of the structure of a great newspaper in relation to the space of the editorial room where it is produced – and which objectifies what Bourdieu calls the journalistic field – reveals how many people take part in producing and marketing the newspaper without being concerned with the field, and stand outside the theory.

Another important warning against field theory and therefore against journalistic field theory is that affiliation does not ensure homogeneous engagement. One can live within a universe without being totally possessed by it, by its specific *illusio*. This means that belonging to a world does not ensure equal levels of engagement in the competition for its prizes or the adoption of strategies for attaining its specific capital. For instance, one may play tennis in a club once a week, just to relax, and not be ranked, like a professional player, nor be concerned with the objectives professional players struggle to achieve.

Thus, a social agent can also be a “consumer” of tennis matches and not practice the sport. Finally, he can also be materially inserted in the heart of the game and be free from the pressures that are inherent in the struggle and competition of the game, because he is responsible for looking after the grass at Wimbledon or is a member of the team that cleans the locker rooms at Roland Garros. In these three cases, the forces that act so powerfully on

the tennis player - the professional, the actor enacting performances we can watch - do not apply.

The same thing happens in the journalistic field. The existence of a space of struggle which is relatively autonomous and possesses its own rules, specific prizes and unique strategies is beyond dispute. The fact, however, is that the many kinds of agents within this universe do not belong to it with equal levels of engagement. Given the specificity stemming from an increasing segmentation of journalistic activity, the level and intensity of engagement may vary significantly. Therefore, from publishers and editors involved in the production of press and television news, through columnists who may be committed to daily writing without compulsory daily attendance at the premises, weekly columnists, regular and sporadic feature writers, free-lancers, consultants, to privileged sources, etc., there is a tendency to decreasing engagement. This decrease is almost always directly connected with other forms of earning a living, that is, with affiliation to other social worlds.

A borderline is established between journalists, professionals making their living from and living for journalism, and participants in the journalistic field who, while taking advantage of the visibility that only the media can provide in the contemporary public space, “play another game”, obey other rules, and are interested in other prizes. Thus, scholars, artists, physicians, and psychiatrists do not hesitate to use their circumstantial affiliation to the journalistic field as a strategy for acquiring social distinction and legitimacy in their fields of origin.

Field theory is, accordingly, a way of responding to a series of scientific problems, but it may also, in turn, become a stumbling block to knowledge of the social world in that it makes one overlook the constant traffic of agents between the fields where they are producers and those where they are simply spectators/consumers, or even the number of social positions that elude the logic of any given field.

A field will be more autonomous the more its participants are exclusively engaged in it, the more exclusively they struggle for its specific prizes and the more they embody its specific *illusio*. Therefore, we can measure the autonomy of the Brazilian journalistic field by measuring to what extent there are actors who circulate in both the journalistic and political fields, using the former as an instrument for securing (or keeping) positions in the latter.

Belonging simultaneously to the journalistic and political fields in Brazil would be totally explicit if actors from a field were competing for prizes pertaining to the other field, exhibiting behaviors peculiar to the other field, etc. Ultra-leftist critics, who seek to denounce “press manipulation” and the

“lack of ethics among the powerful in the media”, put forth quixotic arguments to this effect. The journalist Perseu Abramo (2003: 44), for instance, says that the Brazilian media “have become new power organisms, political party organs. The great modern media in Brazil look like political parties”. The same author (2003: 46) adds, “If these bodies are not political parties in a strict sense, they are at least party agents, unique, *sui generis* subsidiary party organs. They behave and act like political parties. They cease to be institutions of civil society to become institutions of political society. They seek to *represent* – even without an actual commission or outright conscious delegation – values and interests from discrete segments of society. And they try to *mediate* between civil society and the state”<sup>1</sup>. Brazilian political parties have a monopoly of political representation since 1945, and are the only entities entitled to present candidates in elections. Even if *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, TV Globo, etc. wanted to launch their own candidates, they would be prevented from doing so by this legal impediment.

However, this simultaneous affiliation to the political and journalistic fields in Brazil is clearly evinced in the control of new business by a few entrepreneurs, a fact termed ‘electronic coronelismo’ [from “*coronel*” (colonel) which has also the secondary meaning of “regional oligarch”] by investigators. This happens, for instance, when a state- or municipal-level political boss has the right to retransmit the programs produced by TV Globo in his area. In a ranking of audience ratings, the ten most viewed TV programs in 2000 were all broadcast by Globo. Four of them were information programs, three were fictional productions, and three were variety shows. The first most viewed program was a soap opera, with an average of 67% of the viewers during its broadcast time – 35 million people –, and the tenth most viewed was a news program, with an average of 51% of the viewers – 21 million people (SANTOS & CAPPARELLI, 2005: 85). The power resulting from the right to retransmit these programs is not to be overlooked.

Up to the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, the federal Executive Branch held, through the Communication Ministry, the exclusive right to decide who would be granted radio and television concessions in the country. Renewal of concessions was also its prerogative. Between 1987 and 1988, the Communication Ministry, headed by Antônio Carlos Magalhães (PFL Party), a politician from the State of Bahia, handed out 168 concessions for radio and television stations to companies connected to 91 congressmen. Of these, 88 voted for the amendment that extended for one year the term of office of José Sarney, then president of Brazil.

The 1988 Constitution, however, transferred the prerogative of granting and renewing radio and television concessions from the Executive Branch to

the National Congress. Lima (2005: 1) notes that “the Constitution also forbid federal deputies and senators from signing contracts with or occupying positions, holding offices, performing functions at or receiving salaries from concessionaires of public services”. In other words, belonging to these two fields is unconstitutional. See tables 1 and 2 for the dimension of the problem in Brazil:

**Table 1: Concessions granted to TV retransmitters controlled by politicians\***

| <b>States</b> | <b>Number of Retransmitters</b> | <b>% of Total Retransmitters</b> |
|---------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Maranhão      | 178                             | 58.74                            |
| Piauí         | 53                              | 56.38                            |
| Bahia         | 392                             | 55.44                            |
| Tocantins     | 81                              | 52.25                            |
| Goiás         | 213                             | 42.68                            |
| Sergipe       | 21                              | 35.00                            |
| Ceará         | 103                             | 30.11                            |
| Amazonas      | 72                              | 29.75                            |
| Paraná        | 131                             | 27.75                            |
| Roraima       | 37                              | 24.02                            |
| São Paulo     | 56                              | 3.22                             |
| Other         | 428                             | -                                |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>1765</b>                     | <b>18.03</b>                     |

\* Individuals currently holding office or having held office during the previous 15 years. Source: Santos and Capparelli, 2005.



**Table 2: Concessions granted to TV broadcasting stations controlled by politicians\***

| States              | Number of Broadcasting Stations | % of Broadcasting Stations |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Roraima             | 2                               | 100                        |
| Rio Grande do Norte | 6                               | 85.71                      |
| Maranhão            | 8                               | 72.7                       |
| Goiás               | 10                              | 62.5                       |
| Alagoas             | 3                               | 60.0                       |
| Bahia               | 8                               | 57.14                      |
| Piauí               | 5                               | 57.14                      |
| Ceará               | 5                               | 55.5                       |
| Paraíba             | 3                               | 50.0                       |
| Amapá               | 2                               | 50.0                       |
| Sergipe             | 2                               | 50.0                       |
| São Paulo           | 13                              | 20.63                      |
| Other               | 62                              | -                          |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>228</b>                      | <b>33.60</b>               |

\* Individuals currently holding office or having held office during the previous 15 years. Source: Santos and Capparelli, 2005.

We note a large regional variation in the occurrence of “electronic coronelismo”, which is more frequent in Northern and Northeastern states. According to Santos and Capparelli (2005), 97 political figures control as many as 128 broadcasting stations. They belong to the following political parties: PMDB (25), PSDB (25), PFL (23), PP (7), PL (3), others (14). Lima (2005: 2) also remarks that “a significant number of federal deputies and senators, in different terms since 1988, are concessionaires and still hold positions and/or functions in their own radio and television businesses”. Among the current 513 congressmen, at least 51 are concessionaires of radio and/or television stations (LIMA, 2005).

Congressmen holding concessions pose an additional problem, since they can occupy positions on the Science, Technology, Communication and Information Technology Committee (CCTCI) of the Chamber of Deputies. This committee votes on the granting and renewal of radio and TV concessions. Now, if concessionaires are members of the CCTCI, they can be expected to use this office for their own benefit. Conditions for this have certainly been made available. According to Lima (2005: 8), the names of 16 federal deputies who are also members of the CCTCI in 2003 appear in the registry of the Communication Ministry as partners and/

or presidents of 37 concessionaires (31 radio and 6 television stations). That year, the committee had 51 full members. The minimum quorum for voting on any matter was 26 deputies. With a minimum quorum, these 16 concessionaires would be the majority on the committee and could pass any measures benefiting themselves.

The same scenario could be found in 2004, since there were 15 full members of the CCTCI registered as concessionaires of 26 radio and 3 television broadcasting stations. That year, the number of CCTCI members was lowered to 33, allowing the federal deputies holding concessions a vast majority for passing or vetoing any proposition related to their concessions in the case of a 17-member quorum. Lima (2005: 12) ascertained that Federal Deputies Waldemar Corauci Sobrinho (PFL Party – State of São Paulo) and Nelson Proença (PPS-Party, State of Rio Grande do Sul) took part in renewing the concessions of companies in which they were partners. Of course they voted for the renewal.

Their having voted goes against paragraph 6, article 180 of the Chamber of Deputies By-Laws, and article 306 of the Senate By-Laws. These state that: “In the case of a matter involving a private or personal interest, the representative must deem himself disqualified and communicate this fact to the Committee, and his vote should be considered not valid for quorum purposes”. The by-laws are sets of rules defined and accepted by the members of the political field in the area of legislation. Besides double affiliation, to both the political and journalistic fields, the above-mentioned congressmen disregard assumptions defining the political field as such, that is, they conflict with what had been tacitly agreed upon by the rest of the members.

In an effort to measure the influence of the political field on the journalistic field, Darras (2005) shows that political debate programs in France and the US function as political institutions in which the selection of guests and subject matters is determined by the logic of the political field rather than by the logic of the journalistic field. In the same way, Cook (1998) claims that the news values connected with the economic pressures employed by journalists have been driving rulers to create and adapt public policies designed to draw the attention of the media<sup>2</sup>.

In this respect, according to Bourdieu (1996: 39), “television is a communication device with very little autonomy, undergoing a series of pressures stemming from social relationships among journalists, relationships of ruthless competition, connivance, objective complicity, based on common interests related to their position in the field of symbolic production and on their shared cognitive structures, categories

of perception connected with their social background and education (or lack thereof)".

Nevertheless, a distinction between factors inside and outside the journalistic field may lead one to overlook the fact that the journalistic field is a social universe just on its way toward autonomy, with often undefined boundaries with other social universes. This is because one cannot discern in the journalistic field strict uniqueness as regards regulations, strategies and prizes. Thus, journalistic decisions seldom obey, as recognized even by Bourdieu<sup>3</sup>, the logic of this social space.

The French sociologist also says that "the journalistic field has very little autonomy, but this relative autonomy, however feeble it may be, means that nobody can understand events in the journalistic field by simply observing the surrounding world. To understand journalism, it is not enough to learn who finances the media, who are the announcers, who provides subsidies, etc. Part of what is produced in the journalistic field can only be understood if the researcher understands the field as a microcosm and seeks to understand the effects people engaged in it produce on each other" (Bourdieu, 2005: 33). This is what we do in the next section on postulating the existence of a specifically journalistic *habitus*.

## (II) Habitus and the journalistic field

Among the internal structures of the journalistic field, there is a self-preservation device objectified in a constant twofold classification of actions undertaken by the press. Journalism is lavish in self-criticism and indication of procedures, in the same measure as it is protective against attacks and criticisms from outside (BOURDIEU, 1996: 109). The practice of self-criticism ensures an impression of autonomy, independence, and freedom on the part of the agents in the field, while leaving outside the debate the structures of the field, which largely condition actual practice.

When analyzing the dominance discourse and the attitude of students toward what they were told, there appeared a vague hypothesis of a progressive absorption of criticism by the field as a tacit condition for expressing participation in this world. The amazement of students would become a tacit, if not enthusiastic, approval of criticism. Often, admiration for the speech would turn into praise of the speaker. In other words, structures determining practical action included an ontological critical dimension as a premise for the existence of the field.

Examination of the main criticisms directed to journalism exhibit a surprising unity in the choice of arguments and targets, while the differentiation of both expected and condemned procedures evinces a connection of free criticism with discrete conditions for action in the journalistic field. In other words, journalists' criticism of journalism appears as part of the structure of the field – here, a device for legitimizing practical procedures through criticism of these very procedures.

An express condition for action within a field, objectivity of procedure manifests itself in the apparent absence of prior references, concealing structures which are inherent to any codification. Disseminated by the field itself in order to secure its own existence, to win and maintain the trust of its public, criticism of the profession by its main representatives is a guarantee of independence. Practical procedure is presented as an abstract entity connected only with the agent's subjectivity.

Criticism of the profession is a procedure that is acquired as individuals become acquainted with the specific conditions in the production and practice of journalism. First-year students of communication specializing in journalism evince a sort of "fascination" for the profession, due to their connection with social worlds in which the prestige of the "man of letters", founded on a long and complex tradition (COHN, 1973), is still very strong.

As they acquaint themselves with journalistic activities, through reporting, editing, and text production since their first college years, the process is reversed. Learning the practice results in criticism of the practice, with due respect for the canon of what is conventionally considered good journalism. In both cases, the foundation is to be found in the transference of symbolic capital through the imitation of recognized actions in the spheres of practice and criticism.

Presenting the current norm as absolute eliminates the historical, and therefore material, dimension of its production, and fosters an impression of timelessness regarding the regulations of the practice and, therefore, its positioning beyond the reach of criticism. Historical modifications in the correct practice of the profession reveal the arbitrary elements in the successive conceptions of excellence in the profession. Our present rules, therefore, should be situated both historically and socially as constructions which are peculiar to a particular moment. At every moment history turns into rule as new rules are devised in opposition to old ones and are absorbed by the members of the field.

There is a clearly paradoxical relation between independent criticism on the part of the journalist and the concomitant accommodation to the

very mechanisms he is criticizing. This legitimizing effect is always related to the dominance discourse within the journalistic field. Thus, there is far more at stake than the propagation of a model of journalism. Each faction intends to secure domination for its own trend within the field and divest its competitors of their *raison d'être*. That is, they want to represent the latter's professional capital as minor, fallible and therefore useless.

The establishment of everyday practices is a complex phenomenon which is influenced by a diversity of action matrixes, regulated by a set of factors that are not to be accounted for either by the reduction of a behavior to the subject's volition nor by his submission to a specific spatial and temporal context. Practices are not established by objective and measurable criteria, available for articulation by the individual. On the contrary, most actions are presented to the subject as the obvious outcome of a previous action, with disregard for the arbitrariness of choices. This phenomenon is caused by the interplay between the space occupied by the individual within a particular field and the individual's *habitus*.

Pierre Bourdieu starts from the principle that objectives are built rather than given. Nonetheless, the world is not based solely on subjective – or volitional – representation, built on volition principles. Structures for the action of the subject are, first of all, objective, pre-existent, and fundamental for a later understanding of the world by the subject.

The principle for this construction is the system of structured and structuring dispositions, which are constituted in practice and always directed to its practical sense. Such dispositions are absorbed by the agent in his social trajectory, especially from the family and educational institutions. This system of durable dispositions, applicable to any situation, a “structured structure”, predisposed to operate as a “structuring structure”, as a principle for the generation of practices and representations, is the *habitus*. The *habitus*, Bourdieu (1980: 88) explains, may be compared to a maestro, conducting the various parts of a subject's action in the fields in which he is located.

The *habitus* therefore is the “generating and regulating” principle of everyday practices, defined in its joint action with its context, in apparently spontaneous reactions of the subject. A particular social practice is produced by the relationship between an objective structure defining the social conditions for the production of the *habitus* and the conditions in which it may operate, that is the situation in which it is found.

The existence of a particular *habitus* comprises the tacit acceptance of rules for behavior within the field, objectified in the practice of rival and friendly agents. There is, however, a depersonalization of this situation which refers the student of journalism to a presumptive rule which would not be dependent on the subject – a phenomenon of reification, as pointed out by Lukács. “It is journalism that turns the journalist into a master of journalism. The origin of journalism is the journalist. The origin of the journalist is journalism” (COSTA, 1991: 241).

The professional *habitus* is the common matrix of the practices undertaken by all agents who are living or have lived in the same social conditions of professional existence. Thanks to these common dispositions coming from a shared perception of the world, which is socially shaped and interiorized along trajectories within the same universe, each professional, in obeying his “personal taste”, unwittingly agrees with many agents driven to action under similar conditions<sup>4</sup>.

Bourdieu employs the “invisible maestro” metaphor to clarify this agreement. For, when it is realized as such, it becomes obvious, natural. Thus, the causes for the phenomenon are simplified by the economy of the identification of specifically social processes leading to it<sup>5</sup>.

This common action, whether originating in pre-reflective actions or not, is the raw material for the professional *eidós*. The homogenizing effects mentioned above cannot conceal the uniqueness of each trajectory in the field. Behavior units, in spite of their singularity in the eyes of each observer, are realized as similar. Therefore, an unperceived factual set, which is the sum of professional behaviors in this or that universe, is superimposed on another sequence, perceived, made up of scenes that are partly imposed – in the eyes of the observer being socialized – by chance and partly sought after and found.

It is this last sequence that exists for the observer, and, therefore, the one that produces socializing effects on him. Accordingly, it is in this unique display that the journalistic *eidós* turns into subjective inclinations to act, that is, a journalistic *habitus*.

As already noted, every *habitus* is a sort of practical knowledge, that is, action- or praxis-oriented knowledge. Thus, given a particular situation, this praxis may be preceded by calculation, by conscious reflection based on presumed effects and goals to be reached. Not always, however, is this calculation necessary. Constant observation of similar situations may elicit spontaneous and unreflected reactions from the social agent.

In short, practical knowledge is not always consciously learned and applied. Therefore, we will (a) first approach the origin of the journalistic

*habitus*, through the socializing observance of a routinized practice, and then (b) we will highlight the synthesis of this practice in dispositions to act or react in familiar situations.

### **(a) The origin of the journalistic habitus: routinized practice**

In news production, a *habitus* mistake is a mismatch, a misadaptation of inner dispositions to objective social conditions. It may be caused by disruption of a factual order – the reality to be reported does not properly match the schemes for imparting interiorized value until then - or, more frequently, by a disruption of a practical nature. This may happen in socialization conflicts. Under which conditions of news production can these conflicts be seen?

The journalistic field is made up of many sub-fields. Although these share aspects justifying the constitution of a general journalistic field – relatively autonomous in relation to other social spaces – they are distinguished by unique features that also make them relatively autonomous social spaces. Thus, the television, radio, and printed media varieties of journalism are very close and, at the same time, singular as social spaces for a specific production and, therefore, the subjectivization which is peculiar to a certain kind of professional.

The same thing occurs with the journalism found in daily newspapers as opposed to weekly magazines. Ultimately, each company as a space comprising social positions is structured in a specific way and produces singular effects of subjectivization. These singularities give rise, in the case of a new position or space being occupied, to those mistakes we mentioned above. A previous social position would allow and demand acting “with one’s eyes closed”, a procedure made unfeasible by the unknown topography of the new space.

One of the difficulties for acting in this new space is the conversion of one’s social capital, accumulated during the trajectory followed in the previous space, into capital having validity in the new one. This conversion will be more onerous the more structured it is, the greater its autonomy in relation to other social spaces – autonomy as regards rules of behavior, prizes, actors, etc.

When analyzing the burdens involved in the occupation of a new space, sports host Milton Neves remarked on his experience at Super Técnico, a program broadcast by Band TV: “Things that I used to do on radio without giving them a thought had to be relearned for television. The first days, alas, were a disaster. In terms of audience, I had to face people with a lot of experience”.

These mistakes, however, are not the rule. The relative coherence of socializing processes allows for reasonably safe predictions, even when separate sequences involve larger units of different natures, such as in the case of interviews. What one usually terms a “great insight”, “a sense of opportunity”, “a brilliant intuition” is really very often the result of a practical knowledge acquired through the sometimes painstaking observation of repetitions on the part of the people interviewed.

In the following text, dealing with preparation for interviews, the answers given by journalists reveal an aspect of the practice that is not always the outcome of calculation. “I was very straightforward in asking reporters whether they prepared themselves for an interview and whether their questions were planned beforehand. Essentially, I found the same answers in four countries: ‘It depends.’ The main difference is to be found in interviews regarding unusual events (‘I have to plan the interview on the way’, says a British reporter) and interviews arranged beforehand (‘If it is an important person, such as a prime minister, I make a careful plan, for there is no one better prepared to detect ignorance on the part of interviewers’, says another British reporter). As to time spent in preparation, an American reporter said: ‘It depends: a few seconds; 30 to 45 minutes; ten years, perhaps!’” (COHEN, 1987: 119).

As pointed out by Jô Soares, “don’t ask me why, but well before the person sits down, I know whether the interview will be successful”<sup>6</sup>. Also pointing to the existence of this embodied practical knowledge, Marília Gabriela was emphatic in a comment published by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*: “After conducting so many interviews, I feel a strong intuition as to what the person is going to say. It is as if there was nothing but repetition of it.” Therefore, in the same way as we expect a second kiss, an interviewer may anticipate reactions and, this being the case, rely on previously prepared rejoinders.

In what way do reality sequences perceived by the observer dispense with calculation, allow for prediction, and generate reactions? Hume says that similar or comparable cases, when verified through observation, coalesce in the imagination. Similar experiences overlap as they are perceived by the senses and lose their uniqueness. They form inductive foundations for categories that once they are defined, dispense with foundations. They give empirical support to generic schemes for classifying the world. When capitalized, sense of opportunity is transformed from a calculable social fact that can be reproduced into an element of individual action dependent only on talent and perception on the part of the journalist. A statement by Mino Carta (interviewed by us on 12/07/01): “I



have always been at the right place, at the right time, ready to do things that had not been done before. But I have always worked with a team, because journalism is teamwork. You also need people that are close to you to exchange knowledge. It is from conviviality that good schedules and interesting ideas are born and your task is carried out.”

Being at the right place at the right time is ascribing to oneself the credit for occupying a social position which is largely reflective and determined by other positions and the people occupying them. As noted by William Bonner, editor of *Jornal Nacional*, “I think every moment of my life had a part in the almost spontaneous reactions I now have during my work, but I cannot make them out while I am acting”<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, the ability to evaluate and therefore classify a fact of phenomenal reality in relation to what is peculiar to the medium and other facts, to limits of varying natures acting on any editorial production, is the outcome of a certain type of training, a *sui generis* training, it is true. Daily repetition, which is inherent to a certain journalistic production and also, to a lesser degree, weekly repetition, lead to – or perhaps, force – the ingraining of associations between event and news that become natural, solid, and crystallized. It is a *sui generis* learning process because it dispenses with reflection. Following the reporter, it is like smelling out the news..

The routinized dimension of journalistic work is evident, although not clearly stressed, in the account given by Isabel Siqueira Travancas (1992). The use of the present indicative in the account reinforces the daily repetition of procedures. Thus: “she leaves her things on the table, greets me and then goes to talk with the man responsible for the schedule. He is finishing the schedule for the day, and she gives him suggestions. (As usual) there is nothing yet for her. She browses through the newspapers, and comments on yesterday’s subject.

“She looks forward to a schedule, an interesting one, preferably. From that brief talk you can observe how a good subject matter is defined – that piece of news that elicits a wide reaction, that is on the front page, is read by all and is the object of comments, generally good and flattering. An important factor in the routine is the delay in defining the schedule. The longer it takes for a reporter to go out, the longer it will take him to return. The ideal for every reporter is to arrive, take his schedule and go out. Otherwise, when he is about to leave, another subject matter appears, and this spoils the timetable. It is no wonder many of them say, when their time to leave is near, certain reporters hide behind their terminals or go to the toilet.” This account equates journalistic work with professional activities of a bureaucratic nature<sup>8</sup>, recognized as repetitive<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, in the same way, the distance between two people seldom is the subject of outright calculation. This is only necessary when one is faced with a relatively, or more rarely, an absolutely new situation. Thus, almost always, the repetition of similar approximations allows for a topographic adaptation of the distance between bodies to various kinds of theme, location, and social position of the interlocutors.

This adaptation is neither memory nor understanding: a contraction which allows for the translation of continuous learning into instant, behavior-generating practical knowledge is not reflection, but a synthesis of time. At this point, time, trajectory, and habitus converge.

### **(b) Journalistic action as a synthesis**

The various moments when one experiences repeated and mutually independent actions are condensed, compressed into a single moment, a single expectation, a single disposition to act. It is at this moment of updating of powers, reduction of contingencies, of contact between the contraction of what is observed and the social action directed to further observations, that the subjective perception of time, of time itself, becomes possible.

Why an updating of powers and reduction of contingencies? We have seen that the habitus as interiorized practical knowledge results from the various experiences in an individual's trajectory being compacted into equally various action situations. This means that this practical knowledge is the outcome of a strong determination and factual uniqueness or, more precisely, uniqueness in the perception of fact.

Thus, had the individual's trajectory and perception of the world been different, so would be his *habitus*. Thus, an individual's trajectory precludes, in each step of his constitution, an infinite number of "non-courses", infinite displays, unperceived in a process of exposure to an essentially selective world. Hence the updating and reduction of contingencies: the world is potentially infinite, because instances of perception are infinite.

This contraction of experiences is not a synthesis carried out by the subject, but a part of it<sup>10</sup>. Thus, observing the criteria of activeness and passiveness of the subject, made popular by law with the categories of "active subject" and "passive subject", we qualify the synthesis of a social trajectory in a single moment of passive synthesis, because it is not reflective, because it institutes subjectivity and therefore is prior to it. Gerson Moreira Lima<sup>11</sup> usually gives his students the following example:

“Romário and Ronaldinho have their legs broken on the same day. Which one of them will get the headline? They take some time to answer. They do not have a sense of schedule. That is why they have to think of categories for assessing what is and what is not news, such as proximity, universality, etc.”

In other words, passive synthesis is the efficient cause of subjectivity; it is the device or the process of subjectivization, and therefore cannot depend on any decision by the subject nor be under his control. On the contrary, it is imposed on him, not always in the same way and with the same intensity. Instances of the realization of factual sequences perceived by the subject as repetitions in unique trajectories are unequal, as regards both quality and quantity, and thus produce varying effects.

Therefore, not only can we observe the subjective effect produced by the observation of “repeated” social actions, but also assess the strength of this effect, that is, the expectation of a supervening element from the sequence generated by the realization of an effect immediately prior to it. As Deleuze (1968: 96) puts it, “imagination contracts the cases, elements, homogeneous moments, and these coalesce into an internal qualitative impression with a certain weight”. Discussing the degree of determinism in practical knowledge embodied in the form of a *habitus* is to specify the moment in which the calculation of costs and benefits becomes necessary for action.

It should be pointed out that this passive synthesis, a genus of which the Bourdieusian *habitus* is a species, is not exhausted by the unconsciousness of experiences. In other words, there is nothing to prevent synthesized experiences, undifferentiated in a condensed perceptual magma, a sort of one-point trajectory, from being recovered by memory, understanding, and from being assessed and classified in terms of cognitive referentials and of a repertoire.

We do not go back thereby to the original state of observed things, “to that state of matter which does not produce a case before another one has vanished” (DELEUZE, 1968: 98). However, starting from passive synthesis, from a unique imagining process, memory reconstructs discrete points of the trajectory and produces, now actively, a sort of decompression. This, in opposition to the compression of passive synthesis, is developed under the aegis of reflection and understanding. Conscious identification of this or that point of the course does not change dispositions to act determined by passive synthesis.

Thus, the virginity metaphor, which is so dear to many handbooks on journalistic methodology in their effort to indicate eidetic or transcendental

suspension, leads the reporter or researcher to the illusion of a possibly brand-new quality of investigation, of conscious definition of a gap in the trajectory, which, although subject to cogitation in the active stage of decompression, finds its limits in passive synthesis, over which he has no control.

Thus, if every investigation, either journalistic or scientific, exhibits teleological, “final” causes, usually specified in the statement of research goals or in the discussion of journalistic functions, one cannot lose sight of its effective causes, material and social conditions in the production of scholarly journalistic discourse, which are not limited to the most conspicuous hierarchical relationships of an infrastructural nature, but are extended to interiorized manners of acting, peculiar to their respective fields.

While exhibiting discrete features, compression and decompression do not preclude but rather complement each other. Any reflection or calculation is based on a reflective practice, profoundly interiorized during a long course of reflections. In the same way, any memory-based reconstruction of this course resorts to a recalling habitus, a habitus of search, an associationist practice that connects new sensory experiences to prior referentials, organizes discovered information, and, circumstances being favorable, devises an account.

The combination of active and passive syntheses affords us reflections of a deontological nature on investigation and reporting, reflections that try to avoid a more or less socially authorized impressionism, based on the varying degrees of credibility of its spokesman. An instance of this combination is the (fostered and rewarded) journalistic drive, the so-called reporter’s vocation which, in the competition among peers – where the attainment of fresh news is a prize that determines and imparts value – leads the individual to resort to the most efficient means of obtaining it. Thus, deception in the relationship with the source, through the adoption of behavior and investigation strategies criminally tending to arouse mistaken expectations, is increasingly becoming part of journalistic culture.

Thus, even the most critical trends of journalism concentrate their analyses on the conscious and reflected-upon options of news production, as if these could thoroughly account for this particular form of production. By ignoring modes of practical knowledge not based on reflection, apocalyptic and integrated individuals share the same representation of journalistic praxis, centered on reason and calculation and bypassing relevant ethical and moral issues.

## NOTES

- 1 Hallin (2005) details in what aspects the media differ from political parties and organized social groups.
- 2 A Brazilian variation of this are the “*projetos-bandeira*” (flag bills), proposed by congressmen for the sole purpose of appearing before the voters as sponsors of interesting projects, while being aware that they do not stand much chance of being passed. See Ricci (2003) and Diniz (2005).
- 3 “Journalistic decision-making is largely determined by economic pressures that elude the adversarial logic of this body of information professionals” (BOURDIEU, 1994).
- 4 Two complementary statements testify to the validity of the comment on the expected ethical conduct of the journalist: first, the statement by Heródoto Barbeiro (interviewed by us on 05/04/01): “The fundamental issue is the good faith any journalist must have. Technical issues, such as speaking on the microphone or writing for the radio, may be learned. However, the constant and responsible search for factual truth is the key to being a good communication professional.” To the same effect, here is the principle posited by Bernardo Ajzenberg (interviewed by us on 06/08/01): “Either the person is ethical or not. And this applies to any profession or occupation. This is even more so in the case of journalists, because they have ethical responsibilities.”
- 5 Of course, not all the agreements found in discrete professional universes result from the *habitus*. Collective practice is also partly determined by explicit strategies and calculations, consciously defined orientations and projects, slogans, and collectively taken decisions. However, there is a rich literature concerning these actions.
- 6 Interview conducted by Hebe Camargo on 09/08/01.
- 7 Interviewed by us on 07/25/01.
- 8 The following statement inscribes the professional activity of journalists in a set of typically routinized procedures. “The typical reporter is a respectable citizen. Either at home or at work, it seems difficult to set him apart from any other professional. He performs his daily work, generally under supervision, comes back home at night, pays his taxes, signs bills for the laundry and the milkman, and goes out with his kids on Sunday” (WARREN, 1975: 13).

- 9 The editorial room, the journalists' habitat, takes on the air of a government bureau. "Except for the editors' talk and some occasional phone call, every editorial room is a particularly calm place. If someone were to shout 'Stop the machines!' they would either be joking or raving" (WARREN, 1975: 13).
- 10 "Creativity depends on something which is usually 'inside' the journalist: sensibility" (PATERNOSTRO, 1987: 51).
- 11 Journalist, professor of journalism, course coordinator at the Universidade Santa Cecília (Santos) and member of the Ministry for Education and Culture committee responsible for devising the so-called "provaão" (big test) for journalism students, interviewed by us on 01/31/02.

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