

ARTICLE

JOURNALISM AS A FORM OF KNOWLEDGE

A qualitative approach

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ABSTRACT This article discusses journalism from an epistemological perspective. It reviews some of the main approaches to the subject and verifies that those studies classify journalism as a form of knowledge either in a negative way, or in quantitative terms. This study presents theoretical assumptions that support a qualitative approach. It evaluates the characteristics, problems and effects of journalism as knowledge. It concludes that it is highly pertinent that journalism be viewed as a social form of knowledge production.

KEY-WORDS Journalism; epistemology; sociology of knowledge; cognition; types of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Brazilian Educator Paulo Freire used to say that every piece of authentic knowledge is born out of a question (FREIRE & FAUNDEZ, 1985). He also used to say that "without questions, there is no knowledge". The act of knowing would necessarily be the act of asking a question and looking for its answer. It is from this perspective that I present this article as an investigation which aims at providing an answer to the question that should have crossed the mind of those who read its title: is journalism indeed a form of knowledge?

I will not promise that, once you have read this article, you will find yourself sufficiently enlightened to answer this initial question. This is a question far too complex, which allows several interpretations. I suggest that the question itself, written in its affirmative form, "Journalism is indeed a form of knowledge," may be presented as its own answer, although it comes with some restrictions.

However, there is an underlying second question to this debate, one that is traditionally put forward in the academic and intellectual milieu. It refers to journalism as a means of communication rather than seeing it as a means of creation of knowledge. According to this point of view, the question commonly asked is whether journalism conveys knowledge or degrades what is already known. Apparently, once the answer to the first question is given in a certain way - for instance, turning the question into an assertion, - we will have automatically answered the second question, and our standpoint falls in between the two alternatives already given to us in this second question's formulation.

Journalists enjoy setting up this kind of tricky questions, and the incautious will often be easily ensnared in them. Thus, one cannot be too careful in order to avoid stumbling over them. Therefore, I call your attention to the fact that, throughout this article, I shall try to answer the first question by suppressing its question mark - and yet this answer does not necessarily involve taking a position regarding the terms that apparently exclude each other in the second question. The hypothesis I put forward here is that Journalism is a form of knowledge production. However, in our everyday practice, one verifies that this form of knowledge, while it can be used to reproduce other items of knowledge, can also be used to degrade it, and it is probable that in many instances it manages to accomplish both, simultaneously.

Approaches to Journalism as Knowledge

Given its complexity, this topic of Journalism as knowledge makes possible a number of interpretations, as has already been pointed out. In order to simplify this exposition, those interpretations, which comprehend different nuances, are classified into three main approaches, as follows.

The first approach stems from a definition that views knowledge not as concrete data, but as an abstract ideal to be attained. Once this ideal is established, it becomes the parameter from which one can judge all kinds of knowledge produced in the human world. The modern era, with its fantastic technical accomplishments in transforming human life and assuming control over Nature, has made the dream of positivist philosophers come true, enthroning "Science" as the only source of knowledge deemed worthy of being trusted. The "scientific method" was chosen as the appropriate parameter according to which one may know and master the world; and every other attempt at gaining knowledge that

was marginal to this pattern would be demoralized, branded imperfect and disputed as to its legitimacy.

This viewpoint, that glorifies "Science" as "the method of knowing," establishes the first of the approaches to the problem of Journalism in relation to knowledge, that is: according to this viewpoint, Journalism does not produce valid knowledge, and only contributes to the degradation of knowledge. The observations of Austrian intellectual Karl Kraus in this respect are noteworthy, written as they were in the beginning of the 20th century:

"What little was spared by syphilis will be devastated by the press. With the cerebral softening of the future, causation will no longer be determined within a safe range. ... To imagine that a journalist can write about a new opera as well as he writes about a new regulation of Parliament is something of an embarrassing thought. Undoubtedly, he might as well teach a bacteriologist, an astronomer, and even a priest. Were he to come across a specialist in the higher studies of mathematics, he would prove to this specialist that he feels right at home discussing an even higher level of mathematics" (KRAUS, 1918).

Kraus does not represent an isolated criticism. His thoughts deeply influenced many other respected intellectuals, such as Walter Benjamin and the founding fathers of the School of Frankfurt. In spite of the criticism directed toward this point of view in the last few years, its influence can still be verified in a large part of the contemporary academic production on Journalism. These studies somehow picture Journalism in the field of knowledge as a deformed kind of science, not to mention a perverse and degrading activity.

A second form of approaching Journalism as knowledge places it still as a smaller science, but on the other hand admits Journalism is not all useless. Former journalist and sociologist of knowledge Robert Park was an advocate of this approach, having published an article on the theme in 1940. Park takes as a starting point the philosophical perspective of William James's pragmatism, that abandons the notion of knowledge as an ideal in order to observe it as a fact of human life, coming to the conclusion that people and collectivities deal simultaneously in their lives with several types of knowledge. Park then proceeds to define Journalism from the perspective of what it has to offer that is different, what makes it specific as a form of attaining knowledge of the real world.

Although he admits distinctions between different types of knowledge, the American sociologist does not advance this aspect much

in addition to what James had already done when the latter distinguished between a “knowledge of,” as used in daily life, and a “knowledge about,” systematic and analytical, as that which is produced by the sciences. Trying to determine the niche of Journalism, Park suggests the existence of a gradation between the two types of knowledge and places the news on an intermediate level between them (PARK, 1940).

Journalists themselves admit this kind of differentiation of Journalism that rises from the degree of depth that it reaches in comparison to Science or History. When they compare their work with the work of scientists, journalists usually refer to this form of gradation. When it does not relate to the depth of analysis, this gradation may be mentioned in relation to speed of production, and then Journalism has been defined as History written “at close range.”

The quantitative comparison of the attributes of Journalism in relation to either Science or History can be useful in order to elucidate some of the differences between one and the other, but it seems to be insufficient to define the specificities of Journalism. Therefore, a third approach has emerged, putting more emphasis exactly on what it is that makes Journalism unique and original, rather than on what makes it similar to Science and History. According to this third approach, Journalism does not expose reality in a mediocre way, nor does it expose reality lesser than Science: it just exposes reality in a different way. By doing so, it may be exposing certain aspects of reality that the other modes of knowledge are not capable of exposing.

Besides this distinct manner of producing knowledge, Journalism also has a differentiated way of reproducing knowledge, linked as it is to its inherent communicative function. Journalism does not just reproduce the knowledge it produces, but it also reproduces the knowledge produced by other social institutions. The hypothesis that reproduction of knowledge actually takes place, i.e., something more complex than the simple conveyance of knowledge, is helpful to our better understanding of the role of Journalism in the process of social cognition. However, for this third approach to be acceptable, it is *sine qua non* that some of its presuppositions be discussed.

Presuppositions of Journalism as Knowledge

Besides the pragmatism that guided Robert Park, several other theoretical lines of study provide grounds not only for the acceptance of the specificities of Journalism as knowledge, but also for its definition.

The critical epistemologies that in these last decades have demystified the positivist precept of the infallibility of Science, and besides demonstrating the cultural and historical character of all forms of knowledge, have contributed both to destroying the ideal of one-and-only-one mandatory truth and, above all, to establishing the logical limits of claims to objectivity. By pointing out the relativity of scientific truths, these critical currents have also accepted other truths as potentially valid and relative, in agreement with their presuppositions and objectives.

Contributing to this new vision, we find the extraordinary development of our understanding of languages, also studied as historical and cultural products. Discourse studies, taking an interest in the actual usage of languages, have demonstrated that every utterance that refers to reality, while it reflects reality to a certain extent, necessarily refracts it to a certain extent as well (BAKHTIN, 1979).

It is with this reasoning that one must distinguish the truth an utterance may convey from reality itself, the reality to which the utterance refers, and that is to be found outside that utterance. To speak of the "truth," common noun, an attribute made into a thing, could be something that slowly becomes meaningless. It seems it would be more appropriate to talk of the adjective, to talk of "true" utterances. And many true utterances can prevail, sometimes even mutually contradictory, although each one of them is coherent with its presuppositions, for no utterance has the power to capture reality as a whole.

The different genres of discourse approach reality in different ways, thus defining diverse truths, each one of them concerning a given objective or situation. Arguments validated in one field of knowledge may be considered absurdities in another field. At the same time, a big chunk of what our Western civilization takes for granted -- items that have been discovered and are known today -- is most probably ignored by nine out of ten civilized human beings.

The fact that different discourses address different audiences makes even more complex this issue of knowledge in our society. Both sociology and anthropology of knowledge, on approaching the daily life of common citizens, rather than the reports of the intelligentsia, reinforce the idea that scientific methodology is not the only path towards knowledge, and possibly not even the most important one where our individual survival and our gregarious existence are concerned. Several types of knowledge pervade several social networks (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1966). This discovery does not mean the victory of irrationalism, something that could mean a return to a world haunted by demons, as in the Middle

Ages described by Carl Sagan. On the contrary, it means we could use a more refined type of Reasoning, one that would comprise the extreme complexity of this world we live in, increasingly revealed to us as it is, and therefore challenging all of our parameters.

Among the most complex phenomena we face today is the functioning of the human brain. Knowledge about the human brain has developed in geometric progression in these last decades, and our notion of its complexity has been increasing in the same proportion. It has been some years now that intellectuals such as educator Paulo Freire have been telling us about the evidence that a permanently open mind is what distinguishes the human brain from the brains of other animals. It is this openness to novelty that determines our infinite capacity for learning, prompting us to continually overcome any obstacles to this learning, including here those obstacles we set for ourselves, both individually and collectively -- fixed conceptions and stagnant paradigms are some of these obstacles, and we have managed to overcome them.

Paulo Freire also called our attention to the fact that knowledge cannot be conveyed. He used to say that when some information of any sort is successfully communicated from one person to another, this means the information was not merely transferred, as it would from a diskette to another in a computer, but rather that it was *re-cognized* by the receiver. The human brain is not a container where knowledge is deposited; learning implies a cognitive operation, and the one who learns is as active as the one who teaches. Therefore, both the one who teaches and the one who learns are not confined to reproducing an item of knowledge that existed previous to their actions; instead, they *re-create* this knowledge in the very act of learning and teaching. Thus, it can be said that knowledge is not conveyed, for it is in fact *re-produced*.

Modern cognitive science, now with a more refined knowledge of the functioning of the brain, attests to this intuition of educators: communication is inextricably linked to cognition (SPERBER & WILSON, 1986). Our cognitive equipment neither records nor files information exactly as it is received, but rather processes it, classifies it and contextualizes it, reconstructing the received information by using interpretation schemata and previous information on the topic, the sender, and the communicative situation. The classic model of communication as the mechanical transfer of a message from sender to receiver, through a simple process of coding and decoding, is now dated, given our current knowledge about the human brain. It suffices to give one example of this: emotions, previously despised by the ideal conception of scientific

objectivity, and classified as “noise” in the theoretical mechanics of the communication of messages, is considered today to be an indispensable fuel for the machinery of human reason (DAMÁSIO, 1994).

Intense research work has been carried out in the field of artificial intelligence -- which aims to create machines that think, -- and it has contributed to elucidating to a certain extent the way we think, thus changing our value judgments of what could be the most correct way of thinking. Each obstacle the computer encounters in order to do what we do calls the attention of the scientists to yet another resource of our own minds, and contributes to an increasingly sophisticated elucidation of its functioning. The MIT technicians who develop intelligent machines amaze the world when they reveal that, although they can find substitutes for human specialists in state-of-the-art technological areas in several procedures, they are helpless when it comes to creating something resembling the common sense of a five year-old.

The incessant process of production and *re-production* of knowledge depends not only on the individuals' cognitive equipment, but also on the possibilities of socialization of their experiences. Therefore, more and more attention is paid to the role played by institutions and by intellectual technologies available in each society and in each culture. Several authors have demonstrated the changes brought about in the ways of thinking and of knowing as a consequence of the invention of writing, and of its reproducibility through the press, and, most recently, with the inception of a process that we are still experiencing, that of the electronic revolution (GOODY, 1977; ONG, 1982; LÉVY, 1990).

With so many surprises, with the discovery of so many limitations and at the same time of so many new possibilities related to what we already know, it is not advisable to dismiss *a priori* any of the available ways of knowing and of *re-cognizing* the world, however limited and simple they may seem to be. Thus, we should have a better understanding of how Journalism as a mode of knowledge operates, and we should investigate to what extent it could disclose aspects of reality, which are not approached by other modes of knowledge, deemed more prestigious in our culture.

The Characteristics of Journalism as Knowledge

When using the distinction between “knowledge of” and “knowledge about,” the former being synthetic and intuitive, the latter being systematic and analytical within the tradition of pragmatism, Robert Park

observes that Journalism carries out, for the public, the same functions that perception carries out for the individual. According to Nilson Lage (1992:14-5), "Journalism descends from the oldest and simplest form of knowledge - however, it is now designed on an industrial scale, it is organized in a system, and it makes use of a fantastic technological apparatus."

Adelmo Genro Filho (1987:58), another Brazilian researcher who devoted his attention to this topic, emphasizes that Journalism as a genus of knowledge differs from individual perception due to its form of production: in Journalism, immediateness with reality is a goal to be attained, and not a point of departure. This warning is important if we are to discuss the problems of Journalism as a form of knowledge and its effects. However, when it focuses on immediateness with reality, Journalism operates in the logical field of common sense, and this characteristic is fundamental to the very definition of Journalism.

It is because of this characteristic that we can question to what extent Journalism, as a mode of knowledge, could be rigorous. Until very recently, philosophers despised common-sense knowledge, since all modern science was founded on its denial. However, as the humanities started to value the observation of daily life in order to unveil social relationships, what had been seen as "irrelevant, illusory and false" began to appear not only as a subject worthy of consideration by the theory of knowledge but it ultimately stood out as its main subject for study (SANTOS, 1988:8).

According to Berger & Luckmann (1966:40), common sense corresponds to a cognitive attitude perceived to be natural. "The natural attitude is the attitude of a common-sense awareness precisely because it refers to a world that is common to many men. The knowledge of common sense is the knowledge I share with others in the normal, evident routines of daily life." Moreover, the natural cognitive attitude establishes a certain perception of reality as dominant:

"Compared to the reality of daily life, the other realities emerge as finite fields of significance, enclaves within the dominant reality, marked as it is by limited meanings and modes of experience. The dominant reality surrounds them, (...) and the conscience always returns to the dominant reality as if it were coming back from an excursion."
... "All of the finite fields of significance are characterized by taking our attention away from the reality of daily life. ... It is important, however, to accentuate that the reality of daily life preserves its dominant position even when these 'trances' take place. If nothing

else existed, language alone would be enough to ensure this. The common language I can count on to make objective my experiences is founded in daily life and it keeps on emphasizing itself when I use it to interpret experiences in limited fields of significance" (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1966:43-4).

It is the very fact that it operates in the logical field of the dominant reality is what gives the journalistic mode of knowledge both its weakness and its strength in terms of argumentation. As an analytical and demonstrative method, it is frail, since it cannot be detached from pre-theoretical notions in order to represent reality. And it is strong, as those same pre-theoretical notions guide the principle of reality of its public, and this public includes scientists and philosophers once they return to their daily lives, emerging from their finite fields of significance. As a consequence, the knowledge of Journalism will be unavoidably less rigorous than the knowledge of any formal science, but, to compensate, it will also be less artificial and esoteric.

Evidently, just like every other type of knowledge, common sense is not as democratic as the term seems to suggest. Knowledge is socially distributed, due to the simple fact that individuals do not know every single thing known to their fellow creatures, and vice-versa, a process that culminates in extraordinarily complex systems of expertise. The social distribution of knowledge, therefore, takes place not only in quantitative terms (some people know more than others), but also in qualitative terms (different people know different things). A specific audience shares each field of knowledge (PERELMAN, 1977). The question of audiences, just as the question of logical fields, establishes differences between the modes of knowledge of Science and Journalism.

Scientists' formal language is justified by its universality, the ideal universality of their audience. However, this universality will be equally formal, a universality *de jure* but not *de facto*, given that this language circulates only in certain networks, creating an increasing isolation between the dialects of the several specialties. In this sense, the more the sciences produce knowledge, the more opaque this knowledge becomes (VIEIRA PINTO, 1969:165-6). To break through this opacity, it becomes necessary to penetrate the institutional network -- that generates the opaque knowledge -- through specific pedagogic processes.

However, the ideal of universality in Journalism leads in another direction. The universal audience that it ideally seeks refers to another network of knowledge circulation, constituted by communication in order

to hand back to reality its collective transparency. It is universality *de facto*, albeit precarious, since it is institutionally established in an indirect and imperfect way, just as indirect and imperfect as the public space presupposed by the democratic ideal that both precedes it and requires it. Its amplitude is also limited in another direction, that of the intention of the sender of the message in relation to determining the domain of the target public. But it is in the preservation of this ideal audience that Journalism finds one of its main social justifications: maintaining communication with the physicist, the lawyer, the factory worker and the philosopher. While Science develops by rewriting common-sense knowledge in formal and esoteric languages, Journalism toils in the opposite direction.

Besides being criticized for its rigor, Journalism is also usually criticized for not being capable of revealing to the world what is new -- something Science could do. Starting from premises necessarily taken from common sense, the argumentation in the news builds on what the audience already knew, or rather on what the audience was supposed to have knowledge of. "If the airplane fell, of course there was an airplane, and airplanes belong to the category of things that can fall" (LAGE, 1979:41). That is why the novelty contained in a news item is limited. As suggested by VAN DIJK (1980:176), this novelty is "the tip of an iceberg of presuppositions and consequently of information previously acquired."

This statement suggests that the type of knowledge that is provided by Journalism plays a double role in the construction of common sense, in which revealing the novelty refers to only one aspect of the whole information. Understanding the news involves the processing "of large quantities of coherent, repeated, and structured information on which minimal expansions of and other changes in our models of the world may be based" (VAN DIJK, 1980:248). Journalism provides its public with both cognition and recognition, simultaneously.

On the other hand, revealing new information is a structural datum of journalistic rhetoric; it is actually the conclusion of the argumentation. Again, how Journalism arrives at disclosing what is novel information differs from how Science accomplishes it. While Science, abstracting one aspect from different facts, tries to establish the laws that govern the relationships among them, Journalism, as a mode of knowledge, finds its strength in the disclosure of the fact itself, in all of its singularity, including those aspects that are inevitably looked down upon by the mode of knowledge of several sciences.

As I have suggested in a previous work, in the scientific method the hypothesis presupposes controlled experimentation, that is, an abstract

slice of reality fabricated through the isolation of variables that will allow for the collecting of responses to some question, when the questioning has been based on a previously established theoretical system. Journalism, on the contrary, does not start from a hypothesis or from a chosen theoretical system -- it starts from an uncontrolled observation (from the viewpoint of scientific methodology) of reality on the part of those who produce journalistic material. It also differs from the sciences due to the type of abstract slice of reality it proposes. The isolation of variables is replaced by the ideal of apprehending the fact from all relevant points of view -- in other words, in its specificity (MEDITSCH, 1992).

Genro Filho (1987:163) bases his study on the Hegelian categories of what could be deemed *universal*, *particular*, or *singular* in order to define the mode of knowledge socially produced by Journalism:

“... the journalistic criterion of a piece of information is inextricably linked to the reproduction of an event through the angle of its singularity. However, the content of the information will be associated (though this may seem contradictory) with the particularity and universality that are proposed by this very content, or, to put it in other words, that are delineated or insinuated by the journalist's subjectivity. What is singular, then, is the journalistic form, the internal structure through which signification is crystallized after its particular and universal aspects have been dealt with. The particular and universal aspects are *denied* in their preponderance and autonomy but are kept as the background for the content”.

This crystallization in the singular aspect helps in explaining why Journalism is able to produce new information with a major economy of means when compared to the other modes of knowledge: “Since what is new always appears as a singularity, and singularity always appears as the new aspect of the phenomenon, the pressure to capture that singular aspect always gives way to a *critical* perspective in relation to the process. Singularity tends to be critical because it is a concept overflowing with reality, it is reality re-creating itself and becoming different from itself” (GENRO FILHO, 1987:212).

Therefore, one can come somewhat closer to the definition of a *normal physiology* of Journalism as a form of both production and reproduction of knowledge. It is possible, as suggested by Lage (1979:37), to theoretically isolate “a relatively stable organization” when we dissociate that “logical component” from the ideologies that inevitably contaminate Journalism in our factual reality - the “ideological component” which characterizes

the pathology diagnosed by the critics - in order to find its specificity, since an ideology is a much more general social phenomenon.

At the same time, this outline of the physiology of Journalism allows us to verify that Journalism is not a “badly finished science,” simply because it is not a science and can never aspire to be one. On the one hand, Journalism as a form of knowledge can reveal aspects of reality that elude scientific methodology (science excludes singularities, cf. PESSIS-PASTERNAK, 1991:72); on the other hand, it is unable to explain by itself the very reality that it intends to reveal. “The universe of the news is the universe of appearances within the world; the news section does not allow for a knowledge of the essence of things, which is the object of scientific study, and of theoretical practice, unless it applies, as it does now and then, to concrete facts. Behind the news there is an infinite weaving of dialectic relations and subjective courses that the news, by definition, do not embrace” (LAGE, 1985: 23).

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize that the content of Journalism, because it is entangled with common sense, is necessarily linked to a context as well. A text acquires meaning only within a context. This hinders both systemization and accumulation of these contents, contrary to what happens in the scientific domain, that isolates the text from its context. Nonetheless, in this sense, knowledge as produced by Journalism is more synthetic and more holistic than that produced by Science.

The Problems of Journalism as Knowledge

Although from this perspective Journalism is believed to produce and reproduce knowledge, and not only in a way that is valid, but also in a way that is useful to societies and their individuals, one cannot fail to take into account that the type of knowledge Journalism produces has its own logical limitations; furthermore, when observed in practical terms, it also presents a series of structural problems. As with any other form of knowledge, knowledge produced by Journalism will always be historically and culturally conditioned by its context, as well as subjectively conditioned by those who participate in its production. And it will be conditioned also by the particular manner in which it is produced.

In the last decades we have witnessed the proliferation of scientific works that throw light on the fact that Journalism is not an image of reality extracted from reality alone, but rather a construction where projects and techniques -- as well as their management, -- and tools and raw materials interfere with the final product (TRAQUINA, 1993). Countless mediations

condition the way Journalism creates and processes information about reality, starting with the professional schemata (MÉRÓ, 1990) - the particular angle from which journalists see the world, - then taking into consideration the objectives, the structure and the routine of the organizations where journalists work, plus the technical and economic conditions they can count on to accomplish their tasks, and finally coming to the struggles for power and the conflicts of interests that are inevitably involved in the social circulation of journalistic information.

One of the main problems in the conception of Journalism as a mode of knowledge is the lack of transparency of these conditioning factors. The news is presented to the public as if it were reality itself, and, even though the public can perceive it as only one version of reality, it will not have access to the decision-making criteria that guided the journalists' team in constructing that story, nor access to material that was neglected or omitted according to those same criteria, whether they are professional or not. Here, the recent establishment - and proliferation - of the institution of a readers' representative, the ombudsman, is undoubtedly progress, not just because it can discuss directly the production in the media, but also because it contributes to unveiling those usual procedures employed in the construction of journalistic information.

Another problematic aspect of Journalism as knowledge is the speed of its production. However, at the same time that speed represents a limitation, it also represents an advantage in relation to other modes of knowledge. Speed is not an exclusive characteristic of Journalism; it turns out to be a feature of the civilization we live in, which needs information to be produced very quickly.

And, finally, we must mention a problematic aspect of Journalism as knowledge, which is its having been turned into a show. What makes a journalistic story different from, let us say, a scientific report, a textbook chapter, or a police report, is the fact that it addresses individuals who are not asked to read it. As a consequence, it seeks ways of luring people into reading that information, through narrative and dramatic techniques. This is not negative *per se*, and the utilization of these techniques is amply justified by their communicative and cognitive effectiveness. Problems do emerge, however, when these techniques are used in the pursuit of non-cognitive goals, such as the commercial struggle for a bigger audience and the attempts at political propaganda. In the daily routine of Journalism as practiced in our societies, it is now very difficult indeed to distinguish between these three types of goals.

The Effects of Journalism as Knowledge

Very little, in fact, is known about the effects Journalism has on individuals and societies. Although different hypotheses have been presented, it is extremely difficult to isolate the variables involved in order to test them and eventually prove those hypotheses right (SAPERAS, 1987). It is undeniable that the media are powerful in the social milieu, but it is difficult to determine just to what extent this power is exercised in an autonomous way and to what extent it just functions as an instrument for other institutional powers. Many of the grave faults attributed to Journalism, including the theories and hypotheses that try to explain its results, actually have their causes planted in deeper ground. The manipulation of the democratic system, the growing disparity between the top and the base of societies, and the dissemination of the prejudices, stereotypes and ideologies of those in power are not figments of journalistic imagination - although it will sometimes participate in all that. As a social product, Journalism reproduces the society in which it is immersed, with all its inequalities and contradictions; but then no mode of knowledge available to us is totally immune to that.

It is also quite difficult to isolate the effects of Journalism on the cognitive environment of the individuals. When people quit reading newspapers, watching television or listening to the radio, they will find countless other points of contact with reality, and will connect with countless other networks of information that work marginally with respect to the media, and thus will mature their criteria of discernment (SOUZA, 1995). Journalism may sometimes misinform people, but it certainly teaches them a number of useful things. It is known that a person with university education will profit more from reading/watching/listening to the news than a person who has been deprived of primary education. Well, that is plainly not Journalism's fault.

Conclusion: the Pertinence of Journalism as Knowledge

Given the advantages and disadvantages discussed above, one can finally consider whether it is pertinent to view Journalism as a form of knowledge in its own right, instead of viewing it as a mere instrument to convey knowledge produced by others and which will sometimes even degrade that knowledge. With all due respect for divergent opinions, I have tried to answer the question that was presented to me in an assertive way, by suppressing its question mark.

Theoretically, I have tried to demonstrate that what makes this pertinence is not journalists' arguments, but rather the recent developments in the fields of epistemology, discourse analysis, sociology of knowledge and cognitive psychology, disciplines that rest on respectable scientific and philosophical foundations.

I do believe that, in practical terms, other reasons could be added to this discussion, so that our question may be taken even more seriously. When we cease viewing Journalism just as a means of communication and start considering it as a mode of knowledge, then we will have taken a first step towards increasing the demands concerning journalistic contents. Knowledge implies an improvement based on critical criteria, and it requires rigor.

Viewing Journalism as a mode of knowledge also implies increasing demands regarding the professional qualification of journalists, who will no longer be mere communicators, for they are now producing and reproducing knowledge.

Finally, having knowledge of reality is such a vital matter for individuals and societies that, when the journalist is not just the person who communicates this knowledge, but also the person who produces and reproduces it, he/she must be subjected to a closer and more permanent technical evaluation and social control. This issue of a type of knowledge that is produced and reproduced by journalists, and of its effects on individuals and societies, may be far too strategic in people's lives to be under the exclusive control of either journalists as a professional group or the organizations for which they work.

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