

# THE JOURNALISM STUDIES NETWORK (REJ) EXPERIENCE:

a French-language experiment in collaborative research

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**ABSTRACT** This article discusses the limitations and potentialities of journalism research utilizing the international networking model. It presents the experience of the Journalism Studies Network (REJ in the French/Portuguese acronym), a French-language research experiment, founded in 1999 and made up of 33 researchers linked to universities in Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Mexico and on Reunion Island. The report shows that despite the existing difficulties, the REJ takes the form of a place with relative autonomy in proposing objectives and methodologies for the study of journalism, which is reflected in the diversity of approaches and research interests developed within the Network. It also permits a more frank and level debate between researchers who occupy different positions in their careers. Coherence is also observed in the approaches adopted inside the REJ, which assures the continuity of the research programs developed.

**Keywords:** Research network. Journalism. International cooperation.

## INTRODUCTION

In this article, we discuss the limitations and potentialities of journalism research based on the adoption of the international collaboration network model. We analyze the experience of the Journalism Studies Network (*Rede de Estudos sobre o Jornalismo – Réseau d'Études sur le Journalisme – REJ*), an international interdisciplinary research group founded in 1999 for the purpose of studying the production and mediation of journalistic information. The REJ currently includes 33 researchers linked to universities in Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Mexico and on Reunion Island.

The issues covered by this paper include the organization of the Network as a place for interaction between researchers and social actors linked to a cooperative place. It also moves forward in the discussion regarding the viability of adopting the research network model in journalism studies.

To the extent that historical (CHARRON & BONVILLE, 2004) and geographical (DEUZE, 2005) variations are observed in the construction of journalistic practices and discourses, the discussion of the study – comparative or not – of journalism in different national contexts becomes important in the structuring of a collective research proposal which would make it possible to move ahead in the overall comprehension of this subject. Similarly, there is discussion of the way in which a “looser”, interdisciplinary model that characterized networks such as the REJ (in comparison, for example, with the traditional format of a research group) would permit the establishment of a collective, original research project.

The purpose of this article will be achieved in practice above all by the report produced by Adghirni and Ruellan (2009) on the REJ experience and also by the analysis of documents produced concerning the Network, published on the site [www.surlejournalisme.com](http://www.surlejournalisme.com) or distributed by e-mail on the researchers’ discussion list. We will also have recourse to the observation of some debates held in work sessions and meetings of the Journalism Studies Network.

This article is divided into three parts. In the first part, the research network concept and its place in the context of international collaborative research will be discussed. Following this, we will make a description of the REJ, including its functioning and objectives, the members’ profile and the academic production prepared within the Network. In the third part, we will review some presuppositions regarding the comprehension of journalistic practice which we share with other REJ researchers. Finally, our conclusions will discuss the limits and possibilities of the utilization of this model in journalism studies.

## **1 Research networks and the production of scientific knowledge**

The structuring of scientific knowledge by means of international networks is not new. Back in the XVI century, scientists and intellectuals were establishing collaborative relations by exchanging letters. The systematic study of networks in the context of Science appeared in the decade of the 1960s, in a classic study by Price (1963 apud BALANCIERI *et al.*, 2005) in which the idea of “invisible colleges” was introduced. From then on, one notes a growing literature on the impacts of scientific cooperation in research. In general, there is a consensus among researchers regarding the advantages of coordinating collaborative research, sharing responsibilities and merits, so as to amplify the repertory of approaches and tools and stimulate the interchange of information. This implies, according to Rossoni *et al.* (2008), a positive

correlation between collaboration and scientific production.

The incorporation of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into research had a strong impact on this context. They permitted the consolidation of networks of collaboration, which increased the interchange of knowledge and the availability of information shared by the researchers (BALANCIERI *et al.*, 2005). At the same time, several governments began to adopt public policies encouraging inter-organizational and international collaboration in the field of science, stimulating processes of exchange and innovations between countries (BOONEKAMP *et al.*, 2000).

The creation of research networks, “alliances among research institutions involving collaborative research and exchange of information and resources”<sup>1</sup> (BOONEKAMP *et al.*, 2000, 143) is presented as a viable model for scientific development on account of the synergies created in carrying out transnational and interdisciplinary research projects.

Nevertheless, the structuring of this type of model depends on the effort of the different actors involved. In a study of institutional networks in the Communication and Technology area in Brazil, Rossoni *et al.* (2008, p. 43) call attention to the difficulties in creating durable research networks in Brazil. The authors note the emphasis on isolated research works which impede the production of knowledge in the area in a cumulative way. “In networks for scientific collaboration”, they explain, “the accumulation of knowledge and the sense of identity depend on the robust nature of the collaboration”. The death or retirement of researchers involved in the networks often signifies the end of inter-institutional collaboration experiments.

## 2 The Journalism Studies Network

A description of the functioning of the REJ follows. The objective is to fill the gap in empirical studies of cases of scientific collaboration in general (ROSSONI *et al.*, 2008). In addition, an effort is made to present a case of the relative success of this model in the journalism area - after all, the Network’s history goes back more than ten years. For this purpose, the main characteristics of the Journalism Studies Network will be discussed.

### 2.1 Functioning of the Network

On the site [www.surlejournale.com](http://www.surlejournale.com), the REJ is defined as a “cooperative, interdisciplinary and institutional space for researchers of journalism and other means of communication”<sup>2</sup>. Its functioning is based on the performance of research programs, on the organization of seminars

and on the collaborative production of scientific communications and publications by the members.

The network's unity lies in the research program developed. The projects are collectively prepared with the objective of constructing hypotheses and defining a theoretical framework which would permit bringing together various disciplinary approaches (Economics, Sociology of Organizations, Management, Sociology of Uses, Sociology of Professions, Language Sciences, etc.) and the utilization of multiple methodologies (quantitative and qualitative). After defining a collective project, the researchers maintain their autonomy of resources and functioning, but share bibliographic sources, hold working meetings, draft articles and communications in co-authorship, create a collective identity.

The researchers belong to different laboratories and receive financing from various development agencies, including the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS – France), the European Union and the British Government. In Brazil, they have already received support from Capes (Coordination for the Perfecting of University-level Personnel), CNPq (National Research Council), University of Brasília and Finatec (Foundation for Scientific and Technological Endeavors).

The results of the work have already been presented in various international colloquies and published in specialized magazines. Periodically, when the group considers a research stage to be terminated (generally every two or three years), a collective publication is edited (see section 2.4).

## 2.2 Subjects and strategies

The REJ project has its roots in different individual and collective research areas, which move and reorganize in a cumulative and integrating perspective. Its ambition is to contribute to giving visibility to the phenomena observed in the field of the transformations and practices of journalistic production. In order to comprehend the meaning of this research, it is important to stress the diversity of the subjects and of the approaches as well as the convergence of the issues in the apprehension of journalism.

The Network's scientific identity cannot be defined simply as the study of journalism or of media information. It is also not based on a doxology, a unity of thought, an *a priori*. Scientific debate was always at the base of the construction of interdisciplinary research projects with theoretical openings and diverse methodologies. The comparative dimension of the works has forced the researchers linked to the Network to take into account the different scientific cultures in the preparation of their research projects.

It should not be restricted to the illusory unity of a discipline or of a research model; what permitted the birth of the REJ and justifies its perpetuation is the willingness to collectively produce the articulation of diverse logics which guide the production and circulation of media information.

Therefore the Network is not a mere thematic regrouping of research works, or a mere place for exchanges between researchers regarding a single field. It is also not an association of researchers of international dimension that would seek to construct an academic legitimacy. That is to say, it is not a virtual place for occasional encounters.

The REJ intends to reunite researchers from diverse horizons in order to produce knowledge of a field circumscribed by social reality: journalism in the public area. The Network's unity lies, in this case, on the scientific programs on which it is based. These are produced collectively with the intention of developing hypotheses and defining a theoretical picture which would permit the collaboration of diverse disciplinary approaches, made operational by multiple methodologies (field and *corpus*, ethnographies and statistics, etc.).

The Network's coherence, which assures its scientific identity in contrast to other initiatives (which can be undertaken in other contexts by the same researchers from the REJ) is what we call – in the absence of a more specific name – a socio-discursive approach (RINGOOT, UTARD, 2005; AUGÉY, DEMERS, TÉTU, 2008). More than an epistemological position, in this case the term designates a pragmatic research posture, based on a shared conviction: the social and discursive dimensions of journalistic practice should be approached jointly in order to take into account the social logics of production and circulation of information. This implies a dual concern with the definition and the performance of the research programs. From the theoretical viewpoint, the perspective utilized should seek to propose an articulation of sociological and linguistic approaches. In practice, the researchers, grouped in multidisciplinary teams around a field or a *corpus*, seek to construct a synthetic viewpoint of the subject, sharing their methods and their languages (see also section 3.1).

The concrete carrying out of each research program presumes the definition of contents and of specific modalities. But as a collective entity, the Network proposes to address the task of working on the socio-discursive logics of journalistic practice. In the long run, it can even aim at creating a language or concepts common to the different approaches utilized.

In this context, the REJ offers its members the possibility of bringing together their competencies and interests in order to:

- mobilize means of research and circulation of people and of works;

- carry out research programs whose size could not be handled only by one university laboratory or by individual researchers;
- promote the comparative dimension of the research works, particularly on the international level;
- share the data and information obtained;
- meet regularly and periodically for discussion with the members of the group;
- encourage publication; and
- establish a collective identity within a collective entity.

The attainment of the Network's objectives depends, in this case, on the mobilization of resources by the members in the development of research programs in their local contexts, and also on the organization of activities which provide for assuring the group's cohesion and which offer continuity for the Network's projects.

### **2.3 Members of the REJ**

According to information on the site [www.surlejornalismo.com](http://www.surlejornalismo.com), the REJ currently has 33 members from six different countries: Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Mexico plus Reunion Island, a subdivision of France located in the Indian Ocean. The members' profiles are diverse and include professors in different stages of the career, researchers and doctorate students (see Table 01). The idea is to encourage dialogue between beginning and senior researchers, as well as providing a democratic place for exchanges between the participants.

A clear predominance of French and French-speaking researchers is noted. On one hand, this results from the very process of establishment of the Network. It was born stemming from the initiative of researchers based in France and within a specific context – the lack of environments for debating journalism in that country. As it developed, through addition of new members and institutions, the REJ ended up being established around a universe of French-speaking researchers and institutions, so that mastery of the language became a requirement for the exchanges between participants.

The admission of new members depends on the existence of common research interests and also on professional affinities or even relations involving group spirit. The candidates are nominated by one or more members of the Network and their names are debated internally before their approval.

Table 1. Members of the Journalism Studies Network

Member	Position	Institution	Country
Aurélié Aubert	Maître de conférences	Université Paris 8	França
Dominique Augey	Professeur	Université Paul Cézanne	França
Marc-François Bernier	Professeur agrégé	Université d'Ottawa	Canadá
Valérie Croissant	Maître de conférence	Université Lumière Lyon 2	França
Béatrice Damian-Gaillard	Maître de conférences	Université de Rennes 1	França
François Demers	Professeur titulaire	Université Laval	Canadá
Benjamin Ferron	Doctorant	Crape	França
Nathalie Fillion	Chargée d'enseignement	Université Laval	Canada
Christophe Gimbert	Maître de conférence	Université de Rennes 1	France
Bernard Idelson	Maître de conférences	Université de La Réunion	Reunion Island
Valérie Jeanne-Perrier	Maître de conférences	Université de Paris IV- Sorbonne	France
Zélia Leal Adghirni	Associate Professor	University of Brasília	Brazil
Florence Le Cam	Maître de conférences	Université Libre de Bruxelles	Belgium
Marie-Christine Lipani Vaissade	Maître de conférences	Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3	France
Nicolas Pélissier	Maître de conférences	Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis	France
Fábio Henrique Pereira	Assistant Professor	University of Brasília	Brazil
Franck Rebillard	Professeur	Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3	France
Roselyne Ringoot	Maître de conférences	Université de Rennes 1	France
Denis Ruellan	Professeur	Université de Rennes 1	France
Francisco Sant'Anna	Doctor, journalist and documentary producer	Federal Senate	Brazil
Nikos Smyrniaos	Maître de conférences	Université Paul Sabatier Toulouse 3	France
William Spano	Maître de conférences	Université Lumière de Lyon 2	France
Jean François Tétu	Professeur émérite	Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Lyon	France
Daniel Thierry	Maître de conférences	Université de Rennes 1	France
Annelise Touboul	Maître de conférences	Université Lyon 2	France
Olivier Trédan	Doctorant	Université de Rennes 1	France
Bénédicte Toullec	Maître de conférences	IUT Nancy Charlemagne	France
Jean-Michel Utard	Maître de conférences	Université Strasbourg 3	France
Barbara Witte	Professeure	Hochschule Bremen	Germany
Eliane Wolff	Maître de conférences	Université de la Réunion	Reunion Island
Adeline Wrona	Maître de conférences	Université Paris-Sorbonne	France
Armando Zacarias Castillo	Professor	University of Guadalajara	Mexico

Source: prepared by the authors based on information available at [www.surlejournisme.com](http://www.surlejournisme.com). For the French-speaking members, we have maintained the names of the positions and institutions in the original language

In the case of the Brazilian group, besides the names mentioned in the table, Professors Luiz Martins da Silva and Dione Oliveira Moura, in addition to postgraduate students who possess projects linked to the REJ research program, are also members of the REJ. These researchers are connected to the Journalism and Society line of the Postgraduate Program in Communication at the University of Brasília.

## 2.4 Research programs

The Journalism Studies Network is articulated around research programs, from which the individual and institutional projects stem. The programs are defined by the members based on questions which arise in the research works conducted in the ambit of the Network (see section 3). In twelve years of operations, the following research topics were worked on:

- local information (1999-2001) regarding the development of local information on the Internet;
- permanent invention (2002-2006) regarding the new practices and new actors of journalism;
- ordinary (2007-2011) regarding the non-professional uses of information and of journalism.

On conclusion of a research stage, the Network publishes a collective work bringing together the works of authors or groups engaged in the collective research programs.

## 2.5 Academic production

As the years passed, the Network's members acquired experience in the collective valorization of their works, by means of the publication of articles, the editing of books and the organization of scientific events. We present below the main results of the REJ academic production.

### 2.5.1 Books

The Network's first work, *Inform@tion.local. Le paysage médiatique régional à l'ère électronique*, was published in 2002 in France by Editoria L`Harmattan. Organized by Béatrice Damian, Roselyne Ringoot, Denis Ruellan and Daniel Thierry, the work brought together research on the impact of the Internet on the production of local information. Having as its starting point a set of empirical research works on different vehicles, the book's conclusions refer to the effort by the managers of local information to protect their territory from the entrance of new actors.

Based on the "permanent invention" research project, two books were published: *Le journalisme em invention-nouvelles pratiques*,



*nouveaux acteurs* (RINGOOT, UTARD, 2005), which brings together five texts by 13 French authors, and *Figures du Journalisme* (AUGEY, DEMERS, TÉTU, 2008), published in Canada and which brings together six other articles by 18 researchers. The second work shows the phenomena of transformation in journalism observed in other national contexts, including Brazil, Quebec, Mexico and the Indian Ocean islands.

There is currently a work in the process of publication on the theme "Structural Changes in Journalism", resulting from an international colloquy held in the University of Brasília in April 2011 ([www.mejor.com.br](http://www.mejor.com.br)) which brought together dozens of researchers of the group. The book includes articles by Belgian, Brazilian, Canadian, French and Mexican authors. The idea is that the book is to be published simultaneously in Brazil, France and Mexico, in three languages, in accordance with the place of publication.

### **2.5.2 Dossiers of magazines, seminars, colloquies and working days**

The modalities for valorization of the REJ's production also include the publication of thematic dossiers in periodicals and the organization of scientific events. In the first case, we highlight the publication of a special edition about the online press in the magazine *Médiamorphoses* (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, n° 4, mars 2002) and another on the theme "journalists and citizens" in the magazine *Communication et Langages* (n° 165, 2010).

The events are classified by the site [www.surlejournalisme.com](http://www.surlejournalisme.com) in two categories: "crossed glances" and "encounters" study days (see Table 02). The objective of the study days is to propose epistemological discussions between researchers from different disciplines that in some way do research work on journalism. They also aim at encouraging encounters between researchers and professionals regarding specific matters. The Network's encounters follow the format of small- and medium-sized colloquies on restricted topics, mostly having some opening for international participation.

These groups, however, do not cover all the activities carried out by the Network. Some of the events, organized before the creation of the site, do not appear listed on the group's page. In addition, there is a series of special encounters, organized through the initiative of REJ members but which do not acquire the character of official events, whether due to the lack of communication between the members or due to the Network's low degree of institutionalization, when compared, for example, with a research group or scientific society.

Table 2. Events promoted or supported by the REJ

Year	Name/subject	Place	Type
2007	Journalisme en 'mutation'? Vies, morts et résurgences du journalisme.	Paris (France)	"Crossed glances" study day
2008	International seminar for Analysis of Academic Production in Journalism Studies	Guadalajara (Mexico)	International Colloquy and "Crossed glances" study day
2008	Economie du journalisme	Paris (France)	"Crossed glances" study day
2009	L'ordinaire du journalisme	Paris (France)	"Crossed glances" study day
2009	Assises du journalisme. Le journalisme se transforme-t-il vraiment	Strasbourg (France)	International Colloquy
2010	Matière et esprit du journal. Le discours de la forme dans la presse, de la Gazette à Internet	Troyes (France)	Colloquy
2010	Journalismes et éthique. Téalités plurielles, éthique commune ?	Ottawa (Canada)	International colloquy
2011	I International Colloquy Structural Changes in Journalism and Study Day : L'entretien de recherche avec des journalistes: Miroir, fiction et transferts ?	Brasília (Brazil)	International colloquy and "Crossed glances" study day
2011	Les mutations de l'information et des médias locaux et régionaux: économie, contenus, usages et pratiques professionnelles	Toulouse (France)	International colloquy
2011	Les mutations de l'information et des médias locaux et régionaux: économie, contenus, usages et pratiques professionnelles	Toulouse (France)	International colloquy

Source: prepared by the authors based on information available at [www.surlejournalisme.com](http://www.surlejournalisme.com)

As we have stated, the events presented in the table reflect only part of the encounters promoted by the REJ. Nevertheless, this scenario leads to two issues which have been discussed currently concerning the Network's organization: the need to decentralize the activities (very much concentrated in France) and the creation of other mechanisms for valorization of the works produced in the ambit of the REJ. We will discuss below two initiatives which reinforce this last aspect.

### 2.5.3 The site [www.surlejournalisme.com](http://www.surlejournalisme.com)

Based on the verification, on the part of the Network members, of a relative waste of their efforts in the context of the diffusion of journalism research works, there began, through the initiative of Florence le Cam, at the time professor of journalism at the University of Rennes I, the edition of a site devoted to the dissemination of international news of journalism research: [www.surlejournalisme.com](http://www.surlejournalisme.com).

The screenshot shows the homepage of the website 'SUR LE JOURNALISME...'. The main title is 'SUR LE JOURNALISME...' with the subtitle 'Site de veille sur la recherche en journalisme'. There is a search bar at the top right with the text 'Rechercher dans le site...' and a 'GO' button. Below the search bar are flags for French, Portuguese, Spanish, and English. The navigation menu includes 'LECTURES - ARTICLES UNIVERSITAIRES', 'RENCOTRES', 'BIBLIO SUR LE JOURNALISME', 'ARCHIVES', and 'REJ-INTRA'. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column has a section 'ACTUALITE DE LA RECHERCHE' with three articles: 'Colloque: Journalisme et culture' (dated 28 septembre 2011), 'Lancement du site Médias 19' (dated 6 septembre 2011), and 'Full-time teaching in Journalism' (dated 19 septembre 2011). The right column has a section 'RESSOURCES EN LIGNE' with a list of resources: 'Ressources universitaires', 'Revue scientifique en ligne', 'Blogs universitaires', 'Outils biblio', and 'Revue scientifique papier'. Below this is a section 'Toutes les ressources en ligne sur le journalisme' and 'A VEIR' with two featured articles: 'Le colloque I Congreso internacional sobre periodismo...' and 'Le colloque Mejor. I Coloquio Internacional Mudanças Estruturais no Jornalismo...'. At the bottom right, there is a section 'RESEAU D'ETUDES SUR LE JOURNALISME' with the text 'Le Réseau d'études sur le'.

Figure 1. Home page of the site "Sur le Journalisme"

The site has three vocations:

- Following the **current situation of journalism research**: calls for paper for congresses, magazines and books, announcements of seminars and colloquies, offers of employment and grants, as well as the latest scientific publications in the area and relevant online references;
- Making available a **list of reference links** (academic blogs, university resources and online scientific magazines) which permit access to knowledge of various actors in the scientific area, and at the same time facilitating bibliographic research (by researchers and students); and
- Offering a **support for the publication of communications** originating from the study days organized by the REJ and from colloquies that had received some support from the REJ.

The site publishes news and research works performed in four languages: French, Portuguese, Spanish and English, and receives around 300 unique visitors per day, which represents 9,000 per month and 100,000 per year.

### 2.5.4 Journal About Journalism

The second initiative for valorization of the discussions held by the Network is the creation of the Journal *Sobre o Jornalismo / Sur*

*le journalism / About Journalism*, anchored in three national locations: Brazil, France and Canada. The periodical, in the process of creation, is edited by Professors François Demers (Laval University, Canada), Florence Le Cam (Free University of Brussels, Belgium), Fábio Pereira (University of Brasília) and Denis Ruellam (University of Rennes I, France). It has a tri-national international scientific committee, responsible for the organization of dossiers and evaluation of the articles submitted.

The journal's objective is to serve as a starting point for the publication of innovating works about journalism, of trans-disciplinary glances and of research works produced by postgraduate students. The journal intends to serve as a place for stimulation of scientific production in the area.

The editors are currently working on the production of the two first issues of the magazine. The first reviews the theme of the study day held in Brasília and deals with the topic "The research interview with journalists". The second issue features media convergence.

The journal will be published in print format and online. For the print version, an annual edition is suggested, in almanac format. For the online version, the idea is being studied of developing a specific place for the magazine, lodged on the site [www.surlejournalisme.com](http://www.surlejournalisme.com).

### **3 Theoretical premises of the Network**

In this section we will deal with some theoretical premises that support the works performed by the Brazilian researchers who participate in the Network. We do not intend to make an exhaustive review of the bibliography distributed by the REJ and much less intend to insinuate the existence of a *doxa* that would structure the discussions held in this context. Our idea is to mention briefly some advances produced in the Network which seem to us to be important for comprehension of the subject of journalism.

#### **3.1 Journalism as a socio-discursive practice**

Journalism is a social practice for discursive production before being a profession. This premise implies the abandoning, on one hand, of a normative conception of this activity – which tends to reinforce typologies and myths – and considering it to be the result of the interactions between actors that participate, in some way, in its construction. This analysis concentrates on the social practices as well as on the journalistic discourses and on the discourses produced regarding journalism.

Thus, instead of a functionalist intention, which separates issuance,

message and reception in the analysis of communication subjects, the Network's research project aims, in a certain way, to associate the production conditions with the discourse produced. This proposal has been put into operation by the establishment of interdisciplinary groups (capable of making transverse readings of the same subject) and also by the possibilities of comparison between different national contexts (in which the analysis of the local idiosyncrasies permits the understanding of the different processes for the establishment of journalism). From this perspective it is possible to deduce a research program which must take into consideration:

a) The **mechanisms for establishment of journalism as "discursive formation"** (RINGOOT, UTARD, 2005), including the actors and discourses that participate in this process. This is based on the premise that the way journalism is structured and the social dynamics involved in this process permit the comprehension of the functioning of this social space, as well as the mechanisms for preservation and change of journalistic practice.

b) Thus it is possible to perceive journalism's constitutive heterogeneity, **the dispersion in the groups of actors and in the modalities of production and circulation of the informative content**. The apprehension of these objectives is linked to the strain between order and dispersion of journalistic practice and to the interweaving of the practices of the actors (journalists, but also publics and sources) and the discourses which they produce regarding their own practices (RUELLAN, 2006).

c) **The modalities of circulation of information among publics**, which includes reception of the contents, the modalities of the publics' intervention in the means of communication, and the appropriation and circulation of the media production *among* publics in the tools of self-publication, by means of mediation processes previously invisible from the journalists' viewpoint – and in this connection the research of Tredan (2011) on blogs appears as illustrative of these new mediations.

### 3.2 Journalism as a permanent invention

We start from a minimal definition of journalism as a socio-discursive practice, a place for interaction among three elements pointed out by professional sociology: sources, practices and publics. Beyond the stable relation between actors and distinct activities which support the myth of autonomy and of journalistic independence, these elements are considered to be poles or roles, which can be filled by different or identical actors.

This conception makes it possible to take a new look at the

undifferentiated practices of journalism. The collective maturing of these studies led us to refute the recurring temptation to reconstruct safe continuities. In a particular way, this would lead us to think of dispersion as diffusion of a model starting from the center. For this, we adopted at first the idea of a constitutive *flou* of the journalistic profession's frontiers, developed by Denis Ruellan (1993). But it will be based on the adoption of Michel Foucault's conception of dispersion applied to journalism's discursive formation (RINGOOT; UTARD, 2005) that it will be possible to explain the transformations or the mutations observed in the media without bringing back the movements of strain or of submission to the professional model of journalistic practice.

What this idea intends to affirm is that the new practices emerge in a dispersed way, that is, not linked to a sole source. And this idea questions the possibility of identifying them as journalistic, regardless of the historically constructed norms. Not that the latter do not have their social reasons. Nor does this mean to say that journalism, in the way it has been institutionalized, is not a necessary dimension of democratic logic. But it does not intend, alone, to occupy a space which overruns a territory or a function to be extended to other practices for production of information and knowledge of the world.

It is in this way that we comprehend the idea of a journalism being invented. The explicit allusion to the title of the work by Thomas Ferenczi (1993) – *L'invention du journalism en France* – retains the idea that journalistic practice is constructed by the differentiation or by the rupture with other practices and constitutes an identifiable area. But the lasting aspect of the formula which establishes the rupture as a continuous act signifies the impossibility of identifying journalism exclusively as an essence which must have found its incarnation in a profession.

### **3.3 Journalism based on the ordinary**

In 2007 the REJ launched a new program based on the idea of "ordinary" in journalism. The development of the Internet, with its entourage of new forms and modalities (blogs, collective and participative sites, forums, social networks, online newspapers, etc.) appears to have accelerated a movement of singling out media uses in two ways:

a) The singling out of reception, carried out in nomad media, not linked to time, more specialized contents, more fragmented and personalized means of access;

b) The singling out of production, thanks to simplified means, to varied devices, more autonomous, often free and more accessible than

the traditional means of fabrication and diffusion of information.

Nevertheless, this movement cannot remain restricted to recent times nor to the Internet. It coincides with pedagogical practices of printing, of militant political uses of the newspaper, of associative investments in radios, of the use of photography and of video for public purposes.

This trend is amplified by the growing use made by the mass media of the public expression of the audiences, incorporating them at varied levels in the editorial arrangement (e-mail, debates, information, etc.). At the same time, the way in which the media content is in turn appropriated by the users completes this process. By articulating these two levels, it is possible to advance in the comprehension of the processes of the emerging of new social scenarios (within or outside the traditional media) in which these different forms of appropriation participate in the construction of individual and collective identities. In this hypothesis, the “common” which Certeau (1975) talked about is the space which makes it possible for individuals, between reception and production of messages, to forge a singular universe of meanings, of knowledge and of relation that slips away from mass productions.

The intention of the research program regarding the ordinary in journalism is precisely that of questioning the role of the amateur in the media configuration. This role is not analyzed based solely on the logics of competition and conflict with the professional dimension of journalistic practice – as suggested by the sociology of Bourdieu which tends to reinforce the public’s non-identity based on their instrumentation by the journalists. On the contrary, the interactions carried out in the ordinary space are apprehended based on their contributions to the construction of social identities and in the (re)establishment of the public space.

Various empirical initiatives were launched simultaneously by the members of the REJ who meet regularly to share ideas regarding this notion and their articulation with the results obtained in the field. A new publication on this matter will soon be launched.

#### **4 Final comments: on the Network’s potentialities and limits**

The tradition of journalism studies is old, but always renewed by the reactivation of the challenges linked to the social, political, ideological, cultural and technological transformations that affect this social practice. Nevertheless, we note that these research works are very dispersed, and marked by strong disciplinary differences.

The establishment of an international and interdisciplinary experiment such as the Journalism Studies Network makes it possible to

fill in the gaps and open up paths with respect to journalism research. The possibility of advancing in the comprehension of this subject based on national research contexts is not always easy, in view of the structures which restrict the production of knowledge. In general, the latter is limited by the restraints imposed by the university career, by the management model of institutions for learning and research and by official policies for promotion and evaluation of research.

In this context, the REJ takes the form of a place of relative **autonomy** in the proposing of subjects and methodologies for the study of journalism, which is reflected in the **diversity of approaches** and of **research interests**, developed in the ambit of the Network. It also permits a more **frank** and **level** debate among researchers who occupy different career positions, insofar as these individuals' status is diluted in collective research proposals.

This loose character of the Network does not imply a dilution of the academic production. In fact, we have noted a reasonable **coherence** in the approaches adopted within the REJ, which assures the **continuity** of the research programs developed. At the same time, the collective effort of the researchers engaged in this project has been reflected in a **dense** academic production, although it may not be significant from the quantitative point of view.

On the other hand, the Journalism Studies Network still appears to be excessively concentrated in France. This has at least three negative consequences: first, the relative ignorance of the works produced by the REJ outside the French-speaking world; second, the absence of a more consistent dialogue with other journalism research traditions (Ibero-American world, Anglo-Saxon countries, etc.). Finally, the REJ's incapability of becoming a really international place for exchanges – it is possible to think of it more as a transnational network, whose focus is still concentrated on the contexts of French/French-speaking scientific production.

In addition, the possibility of intensifying international cooperation through the Network also depends on a greater comprehension among the members of the institutional contexts of journalism research. For example: in France, journalism still appears to be a secondary subject for study, analyzed by disciplines such as Sociology, Linguistics, History, Political Science, Information and Communication Science. In Brazil, a higher degree of emancipation and institutionalization of this discipline is noted, which is reflected in the proliferation of specific periodicals (*Brazilian Journalism Research*, *Estudos em Jornalismo e Mídia*, *PJ: BR*, etc) and in the existence of



consolidated scientific societies such as the *Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo* (Brazilian Association of Journalism Researchers – SBPJor) and the *Forum Nacional de Professores de Jornalismo* (National Forum of Journalism Professors – FNPJ). In this case, some needs for legitimatizing the field of study, present in the French debate, while they have already been surpassed by the Brazilian researchers, end up by directly impacting the organization of the REJ.

These issues have been placed internally in a wider debate on the Network's future, its degree of institutionalization, the definition of a new collective research program, the opening up for new members and institutions, etc. More than a sign of crisis or fragility of the Journalism Studies Network, this discussion refers precisely to the group's capability of reinvention in the establishment of an original, useful model for researching the subject of journalism.

## | NOTES

- 1 In the original: "alliance among research institutions where collaborative research takes place and information and other resources are exchanged". All the translations to Portuguese were made by the authors.
- 2 "*um espace coopératif, interdisciplinaire et international de chercheurs sur le journalisme et les médias*".

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