

***The information is not necessary anymore –
the codes of mass media systems in Brazil***

Ana Thereza Nogueira Soares
Catholic University of Minas Gerais/Brazil
anatsoares@gmail.com

Introduction

This paper's aim is to discuss the role of the mass media system (as seen by Luhmann's perspective) on the construction of social reality. Although it is known that the information selection by mass media systems does not guarantee by itself the existence of a communication process, it is necessary to clarify some points related to the specific relationship dynamics between those systems and their environment. Above all, it is important to consider the production of information by other systems – mainly political and economic systems – and how they promote structural couplings with mass media organizations, i.e., it is depending on development of an analysis above about the use of *media* like power and money/property by a system that, at least originally, should operate with the *medium* information. It seems that the operations of the mass media system do not use the information/non-information code, but the legitimacy of other systems and their social functions, which is expressed in other codes. For example, if we consider that the political system has the legitimate function of upholding the order and suppressing criminality, it must then deal with several other systems involved in the issue (like police organizations) to accomplish that goal. Another way to constitute its own legitimacy, instead, is to irritate the mass media system and to promote couplings with it, since it can easily communicate with the social system communications about anything, including its achievements. It is important to emphasize, however, that these achievements can be fabricated for the media, in other words, may be false. Thus, the hypothesis is posed: because of its social reach and credibility, the mass media system is considered as a path, by organizations and other systems, for gaining visibility and legitimacy. Therefore, could the relations between the mass media system and the political system, or between the mass media system and the economic system, be transformed in deviance of coupling? An

analysis of the Brazilian mass media system's coverage of the referendum on the lawful commerce of firearms and ammunitions, which took place in Brazil in October 2005, can help us to answer that question. A study of the three biggest Brazilian magazines' news reports, on the communication process concerning the referendum seems to show that the power and the money of some political parties and organizations were the major codes for mass media organizations, and not the information.

To attain the comprehension of the media's function in this particular context, it is therefore necessary to observe the observation they make, understanding this operation within the context of intersystem communication. After all, "the reality of mass media is the reality of second-order observation". (Luhmann, 2000, 123).

Possible Intersystem Relations

According to Luhmann, social life is only possible because of communication. And the communication processes are that which makes possible the articulations and "conversations" among many different systems, whether psychic or social. We are interested here in the analysis of specific kinds of inter-system relations, those between the mass media system and political and economic systems. This study intends specifically to analyze the mass media system regarding one of its specific three program contents, namely, the one concerning news reports as instances of information processing and reprocessing (Luhmann, 2000)¹. First, thought must be given to the relation between the news and reports program and the advertising program. As information selectors, couldn't they, sometimes, get confused by their purposes or by the quality of the information they select? What makes good news seems to be, many times, also good advertising. In other words, the mass media system is constantly surveilling the autopoietic processes of the economic system, which is, at first, a characteristic of the advertising program field.

So it seems that the difference between the selective action of the advertising program and the action of the news/reporting program is not very clear. The latter can also select, in its environment, information that, once published and understood, contribute to the perpetuation of market organizations or other political forces. The structural couplings

¹ Even though we must consider the interconnection between this program and the advertising program, as will be discussed.

concerning the news reporting program field do not occur, as Luhmann states, only with politics (2000, 99), though it must be acknowledged that there is an important link between the operations of both systems. Specially in the Brazilian case, this connection is very strong, given the frequent coincidence of political power and the ownership of media organizations². Anyway, a question that should be highlighted, regarding the constitution of the Brazilian social system (obviously this is not an exclusive characteristic of Brazil, but is particularly important for the present argumentation), is that the organizations inserted in the mass media system are also inserted in the economic system, for they depend on capital movement to survive as businesses. What is publishable as news, in that sense, inevitably articulates with what is advertisable.

Thus, in several cases, even though the high-complexity systems are free to manage their meaning reproductions, they need “external” help from other systems to function properly, noting that this help can be ephemeral or lasting, depending on the situation. We must consider also that some organizations may report to two or more complex systems, communicating in their codes, simultaneously, as it appears to be the case with mass media.

It’s suggested, then, that the New Theory of Systems provides an essential basis to analyze the way in which news are made and disseminated in contemporary society, as it helps to clarify how the communication between political and economic organizations and the mass media system actually happen. The hypothesis is that the information/non-information binary code cannot always answer the demands of the mass media system, who then needs to call forth for help, via structural coupling, from the economic system code, or from the political system code. If there is some kind of deviance of coupling this does not, however, impair the existence of the mass media as a component of a system legitimated before society. Its autonomous evolution keeps going, then, within the heart of a global social system that absorbs more and more information.

As Luhmann himself states about this phenomenon, mass media have a fundamental role in the formation of truth, what we do or do not know about society and the world. Even though we know that we cannot fully trust this source of information, as it is subject to

² For more details concerning the distribution of communication media in Brazil, see Cabral (2006).

many kinds of interference, we defend this view of reality, acquired through such a filter. All of this happens while we oppose the suspicion that manipulation and falsehood are too part of the communication process performed by the journalistic media. Nevertheless, according to Luhmann, “this apprehension does not cause remarkable consequences, due to the fact that the knowledge coming from the mass media seems to be created from a self-reinforced fabric that weaves itself”. (2000, 1).

Another element that completes the understanding of how the mass media system presents and strengthens itself within the global social system is trust. As society went through transformation during the last centuries, the familiarity derived from face-to-face interaction processes, which supported trust among people, was gradually replaced by the systems, today considered “specialized authorities”, able to address some subjects and to manage certain sections of social life. People are conscious of the social uncertainty of the world, knowing thus that they cannot trust only their own means of comprehending reality in order to live, and must entrust the institutions, for the sake of their evolution. So arises something that can be called compulsory systemic trust, which does not remove the confidence in that which is familiar, but provides individuals with the trust necessary for them to, inclusively, communicate coherently with the many systems communications in their environments. Regarding this, Luhmann states that:

Trusting the big reduction mechanisms [the systems] is so unavoidable that it doesn't need to be perceived consciously as a subjective activity, that a person can continue or abandon, as is the case with personal trust. As such, systemic trust hardly is subjected to public discussion and the very fact that it is concealed helps to maintain its integrity. (1996,99).

Trust ends up, then, associated to truth, i.e., to what is real. (Notwithstanding the fact that, from the theoretical point of view, the mass media code is not tied to the truth). Psychic and social systems begin to decide about their operations from the moment that they trust that what is being expressed by the other systems somehow ensures the development of future events (although deep inside these are known to be unpredictable).

But what can be inferred from this theoretical reflections to the empirical reality of the communicational relations between profit-based organizations, political organizations and media organizations? We are referring to business, politic or non-governmental

organizations (organizational systems), or even individuals (psychic systems) that due to their historical course, communicate authoritatively in behalf of such organizations or in behalf of even more complex systems, such as political, scientific or religious systems. On the other hand, when we speak about the press, we are referring to the complex system of mass media, considering the above remark on its interconnection with other systems. So, one must think about all potential communicative processes within and among all these systems, considering an infinite potential for articulations. Many levels of interrelation can be presumed, which are described next.

The first level is that of the interaction among psychic systems, based on interpersonal trust and employment relations, concerning what makes sense in the world and what is valuable news. This kind of interaction can happen in the organizational systems, stimulated by press assistants in contact with internal information sources, as well as within media organizations, insofar as they select from their symbolically generalized media (information/non-information) what will be disseminated to the other social systems, through news. This interaction can also be highlighted in the relations that arise among press assistants and journalists and editors, when the former try to irritate the others with supposedly publishable contents. And, likewise, even though based on familiarity, when journalists and editors seek help from the assistants in which they trust, to obtain the information necessary to the support of the routine operations of the organization in which they work.

In the second level, the highlighted system interrelation is when news accredited by the authority of the mass media system help to mold the social reality, irritating and transforming the psychic systems; when they provide answers to the gaps left by other systems or to the unbalances in such systems. A crisis affecting one political party, for instance, can be due to an internal unbalance, external irritations, or even a communion of both, but the media usually provides a version of the fact, the one selected from the sources (systems) that were better observed and were easier to deal with. In spite of that, to the greater social system that version frequently becomes the right version, for the journalistic media end up helping to build a skewed perception of reality. And an interesting aspect of these results, though subject to little study, is that the organization itself goes back to

receiving irritations from its environment, due to the repercussion caused by the mass media upon other systems and their own patterns of balance maintenance. These irritations, however, can be positive or negative, depending on how the communication processes are completed.

There is yet a third level, maybe more hazardous to the legitimacy of the press as a “guardian of truth” and more advantageous to the political and economic organizations. That would be the structural coupling, understood as the result of an operation by means of which “a system utilizes another’s operational structures. Through this mechanism, a system uses elements from another to further its own communication processes”. (Neves, 2005, 53). The coupling, regarding the systems here analyzed, would take place when business and political organizations, instead of offering information in their relationship with the press, offer another type of code, as for example money or influence, wrapped in information. In these cases, it is as if the mass media system had been violated, in its essence. Yet, incredibly, this violation does not threaten neither system balance, as the coupling becomes essential to its maintenance, nor the resultant information, geared towards the environment. It’s certain that the communications cannot be guaranteed to be understood as developed from the political and economic organizational instances (sources of information eventually understood and used by the media system), but if the discourses of such organizations gain potency through the media, they tend to become thus official versions of the history. After all, the mass media system is experiencing, in the contemporary era, a considerable status in the promotion of trust and therefore becomes the foundation of communication reproductions in the greater social system.

It is important to recall that, according to Luhmann (2000), the social function of mass media is achieved through the social memory it creates and renews by means of the information it decides to observe and display, as dictated by the boundaries upon which the communications are based.

For the social system, memory consists in the fact that every communication is taken for granted, as a presumed reality, without having to be expressly introduced and established. This memory affects all operations of the system called society, and therefore all communication, and is employed by the consistency controls of communication to

asseverate the known world and to separate all the information that seems unlikely. (Luhmann, 2000, 96).

It happens, then, that the known world is a result of one observation, among several possible ones. That is, the blind spot of the media system leaves outside the established reality other realities built by many different social systems, whose communications do not, however, produce continuity. Thus, if the opinion of an institutionalized information source is taken by the media as the expression of truth regarding a certain subject, this opinion becomes reality. “Opinions about facts are treated as facts” (Luhmann, 2000, 129). In this case, even if there is another possible view on this particular subject, and if this view does not receive media attention, it is nullified, since the greatest difference between mass media and other systems is its ability to amplify some information to the detriment of others.

An example: a cellulose company pollutes a river that supplies water to rural communities in Brazil. A group of affected people denounces it, but the uttered information is ignored by the observation mechanisms of mass media. The company, every time it makes public statements, displays in its discourse an extreme concern with the environment. These statements are always observed by the main journalistic media of the country, and re-stated as news. Therefore, the pollution does not exist. Therefore there are no communities negatively affected by the organizational system of the cellulose company.

The big problem with mediated communication becomes then the kind of empirical data they present to the other social systems, since most of them, specially the economic and political systems, rely on those data to decide on their operations. Organizations create, so, mechanisms for constant surveillance of the mass media communication. This surveillance of the mentioned systems is essential for them to guide their decisions, regulate their internal operations, and to direct to the environment favorable irritations, noting that many of these irritations are assimilated by the mass media, which restarts the cycle of intersystem communications.

It is from these repeated cycles of intersystem communication that arises a observation history that becomes frequent and is automatized by the systems, as common and satisfactory to the preservation of their social functions. “In the long term, this is explained by the development of structures that respond to the irritations from certain

sources and are indifferent to the irritations from environment segments” (Luhmann, 2000, 154).

This point of the theory seems to need a better elaboration. When, after all, such intimate relationship ceases to be a structural coupling to become a deviance of coupling? Isn't the media system adopting the code of another system? Yet if we analyze the tenuous border between the commercial subsystem and the editorial subsystem of a media organization, couldn't this organization easily incorporate into its operations a code other than informative news? The informative media, in this sense, seem to fail in their differentiation process, since their function is converted into a form of extension of political and economic systems. The function of the mass media would be, then, to help legitimate the functions of other systems, to strengthen them or to expose the feebleness of other systems. Seen this way, the reality of mass media becomes the reality of politics, religion, economics and so on. These systems use the mass media system to better express their communications, trying to reduce the communication uncertainties of the contemporary social system. The journalistic and advertising discourses promote, after all, self-descriptions of society and its systems that look more reliable and are more persuasive than those made directly by the other systems. At this point, would the remark made by Narrafante, who translated Luhmann into Spanish, be mistaken? He states that “neither the information nor the portrayal made by mass media of art is art, neither the information nor the portrayal of science is science, neither the information nor the portrayal of politics is politics...” (2000, XX). Maybe this point of theory deserves a deeper observation. Couldn't the mass media code become a code parallel to the binary codes of other systems, a code to which these systems resort, for their own benefit (or to depreciate opposing information) before the public opinion? Anyhow, as previously stated, even though this is a possibility, it does not jeopardize the credibility of mass media.

A Brazilian case

One event that took place in Brazil may be observed through the theoretical viewpoint above discussed: the referendum about the lawful commerce of weapons and ammunitions. For many civil society organizations and some political parties, that

commerce had to stop, since it would cooperate with the inaccessibility of a product that is dysfunctional *per se*. Weapons, after all, exist to kill and to oppress, so they do not fit in the contemporary social system's expectation of humanity, tolerance and peace. On the other side, were the firearms owners, the weapons and ammunitions industry and interested political parties, which defended the citizens' right of self-defense, since the political system is considered incapable of promoting order and security for the people. Both discourses were largely presented by the Brazilian mass media system, in the form of news and advertising, and approximately 60% of the voters decided "to keep the right of self-defense", alleging, among other things, that the crime organizations or criminals would keep buying their weapons from international and national traffic. (Most of them, it is important to note, do not have a gun and do not want to buy one). But that was one of the main messages sent by mass media, one which was successful, apparently. The result of the referendum seems to show us a case of "appropriation" of the mass media system's communication skills by political and economic systems. Another remark about the consequences of this case is noticed, empirically, from the following paradox: the information selected by mass media, that helped to create the communication that maintains the right of buying weapons and ammunition is that information which helps to create a dysfunction. The political system is no longer able to control criminal practices and to ensure public safety, and this seems to convey that function, at least due to the communications performed, to the population itself. However, some economic organizations gain power as they secure the permission to keep operating, offering to society firearms and ammunition.

The referendum under consideration was one of the tangible results of the work of congressmen and sections of the Brazilian civil society in the direction of controlling, minimally, the circulation and the use of firearms within the Brazilian territory. Querying the population was part of a group of initiatives stated on the "Statute of Disarmament", approved by the legislators in 2003, which already had set into motion a successful campaign, brought by the federal government, to disarm the population. The voters answered in the poll, with "yes" or "no", to the following question: "Should the trade of firearms and ammunition be prohibited in Brazil?".

Among the goals of the Statute, based on alarming data on deaths caused by firearms in Brazil, are the following:

1. Reducing the demand or the search for firearms (activities directed to make the population aware of the dangers of weaponry and to reply to the arguments of the firearms industry lobby);
2. Reducing the supply (smuggling control and surveillance over the production, sale, exportation and importation of firearms and ammunitions);
3. Stock control (destruction of firearm surpluses and programs of voluntary forgoing). (Viva Rio, 2006).

So we can deduce that among the greater purposes of this new history of communications carried out in the Brazilian sociopolitical system is that which points to the need of disarming the population and to the promotion of a culture of peace. The successful diffusion of this ideal, however, goes through the adoption of this repertoire by mass media. Not always, though, nonprofit organizations or congressmen who oppose economic interests manage to make their communications reach the means of massive diffusion of information. Still it must be noted that even if such messages reach mass reproduction, they may not become effective communications in the scope of public opinion. Specially in the case of the communications concerning the referendum, as will be shown, when a polarization of communicational positions conveys to society the responsibility for a conflicting solution, a paradox is created.

To start from the fact that bifacial forms fascinate and bind the environment of public opinion will have long-reaching consequences. The pressing question is, then: how is the unity of society observed and described, if it must appear permanent in spite of the change, (...) as a solidarity that relativizes every conflict? (Luhmann, 1992, 82-83).

Analyzing the referendum case on the prohibition of firearms and ammunitions trade in Brazil leads to what Luhmann classifies as the endless search for meaning in which society is situated. Nevertheless, in theoretical terms, a clear contradiction arises, for in this case prevailed the belief and the justification that the permanent forms of the constitution of

society are better than that which is new and can make a difference. Maybe this can be explained by a more careful observation of the relations that pervade the Brazilian social system, relative to the three possible system references: “its relation to the surrounding global system, its relation to the other subsystems and its relation to itself”. (Luhmann, 1992, 112). It is a complex maze of possible communications and meanings, hard to observe. Here we will examine closely a portion of these subsystems involved, the mass media systems. Towards this end, let us take a closer look to the communication content of weekly journalistic magazines regarding the referendum, before it took place.

The first magazine to be analyzed, “Revista Época”, though being the newest of the three (having been created in 1998), is the second most distributed, having a circulation of 600 thousand copies. “Época” is a publication of the “Organizações Globo” (one of the biggest communication conglomerates in the world) with a design inspired by the German magazine “Focus”, with which it maintains a copyright agreement. It was the only one, of the magazines observed, that dedicated two cover articles to the *referendum* issue. The first was called “Firearms – Understand Before You Vote” and the second, which circulated in the following week, was called “10 Myths About Firearms – For Or Against, The False Ideas That Contaminate The Debate On The Referendum”.

Even though being favorable to the prohibition of the arms and ammunitions trade in the country, the magazine tried, in the first article, to give equal coverage to both discourses, namely, the one in favor of the prohibition and the one against it. Notwithstanding, in the editor’s letter on the second issue dedicated to the subject, we can see the need to reemphasize the impartiality of journalistic coverage, fitting the socially accepted expectations of the unbiased role that a journalistic medium must perform. The magazine’s editorial director, to justify his impartial position, states that when a journalist shows only one side of an argument, he is manipulating information in favor of a cause – and inducing his public. In spite of this discourse, one of the readers’ letters reveals that the magazine, on the first article, induced the readers’ reasoning in favor of “Yes”, the prohibition of the arms and ammunition commerce.

The magazine’s second issue dedicated to the subject seeks to demystify some common sense ideas that permeated the polarization on the debate. One of these big issues,

as previously stated, was the citizens' right to self defense. The article demonstrates, through statistical data, that when threatened by criminals, only a small minority is actually able to defend itself, because of factors such as inability to handle a firearm or the victims' psychological state, which renders them unable to react.

Other themes discussed concern the correlation between the prohibition of the firearms commerce and the reduction of crime rates and the comparison of public safety diagnostics from other countries that have already prohibited the firearms trade, showing that some of them have not experienced any significant drop in police reports involving firearms. These messages, while they define what is important to remember to make the choice between "Yes" and "No", they neglect important data, like the one that demonstrates that since the beginning of the disarmament campaign performed by the Brazilian government the rate of firearm-related incidents dropped. This shows, then, to what extent an observation made by mass media can divert the reader's attention from other informations, relevant to his decision as well.

The magazine "Veja" is the most established of the three publications analyzed. It was founded in 1968 and has a circulation of more than a million copies, which classifies it as the biggest information magazine in the world, outside the USA. In the scope of the *referendum* discussion, *Veja* has positioned itself explicitly against the prohibition of the firearms and ammunitions trade, not only in the space allocated to editorials (as done by *Época*), but within the informative content itself. The magazine causes a lot of controversy when, on the October 5th, 2005 issue, expresses upon its cover the title "Firearms Referendum – 7 Reasons To Vote No – The Prohibition Will Disarm The Population And Strengthen The Bandits' Arsenal". Escaping from the standards of good journalism, which presume impartiality, *Veja* sides with the pro-firearms political groups and organizations, presenting questionable – validity-wise – arguments, and spurious correlations. In the introduction, this is demonstrated by the phrase "Veja believes that the attitude that best serves the interests of its readers and of the country is to encourage the rejection of the prohibition bill".

In the article, the magazine displays arguments that demoralize the instrument of popular query, alleging that it diverts the people's attention [from](#) the real problem in Brazil,

which is banditry. Among the reasons to vote “no”, one that stands out is that countries that prohibited the arms trade experienced rises in crime and in the cruelty of criminals. The information there uttered is selected facts (without entering the discussion of their veracity) that revive the memory of other similar, ill-fated experiences, insinuating that one of the possible outcomes of the referendum would not answer the expectations of society.

Other “reason” presented selects, from the historical memory of mankind, negative experiences relating to totalitarianism and dictatorial systems. The text states that “population disarmament is historically one of the pillars of totalitarianism. Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Fidel Castro and Mao Tse-Tung are among those which prohibited the possession of firearms by the people”. Besides, Veja also selects pieces of information which are the motto of the “No” advertising campaign and transforms them into three more reasons to make the citizens manifest themselves against the prohibition of the arms trade in Brazil. The first points to the question that the criminals will still obtain their firearms, regardless of the trade prohibition and that the people, unarmed and defenseless, will be at the mercy of all kinds of crime. This argument leads to the question that the population must think carefully if they want to give up the vested right to purchase and keep a firearm. The second correlated reason emphasizes the defunctionalization of the State as a provider of public safety (“the Brazilian police is unable to ensure public safety”). And the third reason reinforces the need for the State to recover its essential function of ensuring the population’s safety (“the referendum is a distraction from that which should really be done: the cleansing and equipping of the police, the Justice and the penitentiaries).

In a side text, Veja also bring attention to the interests of organizations like MST (“Landless People Movement”) that, supporting the prohibition of the arms and ammunitions trade, would gain the advantage to invade lands without facing armed resistance. Well, isn’t this exactly the fear of being killed by landowners and their guards the reason for the social movements of the landless to place themselves in favor of the disarmament of the people? Even so, the magazine disregards an important fact: in spite of the prohibition of the trade and of the issuance of gun-carrying licenses to common people, the law still makes an exception for country dwellers to keep their firearms. It must, though, be highlighted that this article is part of a historical campaign by Veja against the MST.

The magazine “Istoé”, created in 1976 and also having an expressive circulation in Brazil (which puts it, like the two previous ones, among the ten most read magazines in the world), adopts a selection different from its competitors’, concerning the content expressed about the arms referendum. The issue dealing with this subject, published one week after the Veja article, values the opinions of the people, bringing a list of fourteen reasons (7 for and 7 against the trade of firearms and ammunitions) that are given by common people, representatives of the populace. The Istoé article concentrates on the motives of public opinion itself to help in the vote decision. “Only you can decide” is the subtitle, and the idea of opposing the kind of information provided by Veja is also expressed in an advertisement published in the same issue, which states “We are not the center of the world. You are. Istoé – independent”. Thus, the magazine places itself against the explicit side taking adopted by Veja, focusing on the reader, who is really the one who must be informed and, most importantly, heard, because of his history, situation and future expectations.

Doing that, Istoé displays an informative balance derived from psychic systems. It is interesting to note that people that have undergone alike dramas in their lives (for example, physical sequels, as paraplegia, caused by gunshot) may take stances for or against the prohibition of the arms and ammunitions trade. By giving voice to the “public opinion”, Istoé seems to distinguish itself from the other magazines, although we must note that most of the opinions selected by the magazine already carries implicitly or explicitly selections of the content of the “Yes” and “No” advertising campaigns and of the journalistic coverage of the referendum.

In its article, Istoé also grants the same coverage to representatives of both causes, presenting a small interview with each of them. Renan Calheiros, senator, a representative of the “Brazil Without Firearms”³, states that reducing the number of circulating firearms decreases the number of deaths, although he recognizes that the fight against violence is gradual and depends on socioeconomic policies. Referring to the advertising campaign

³ Within the scope of the political system, the legislators have divided themselves into two “factions”, the “Parliamentary Front for Self-Defense”, pro-firearms, represented in its majority by right-wing politicians and parties, and “Brazil Without Firearms”, anti-firearms represented in its majority by left and center-left wing politicians and parties.

done by his Front, which is supported by many celebrities and artists, he says that everyone participates voluntarily and so the advertising expenses are minimal. But deputy Alberto Fraga, president of the “Parliamentary Front for Self-Defense”, states that the trade prohibition will lead to the creation of a black market identical to the drugs one. Besides, when referring to the “No” advertising campaign, Fraga states that no celebrities and artists were called because the actors of the campaign are the populace, common people, who live daily with violence and because of that they are revealing the truth (from their viewpoint) to the Brazilian citizens. The truth, then, sides with the continuance of the arms and ammunitions trade.

Finally, to conclude this analysis, there is still the informative content of the magazine “Caros Amigos” to be considered⁴. Despite being a magazine with a small distribution compared to the others (it is monthly, with a circulation of 50 thousand copies), it is one of the few in Brazil having a critical editorial line. It is a left-wing magazine that, because of its limited reach, has little public repercussion. While the others discussed possible motivations for “Yes” or “No”, Caros Amigos presents the connections between the economic system and the political system, when demonstrating that the “Bullet Bloc”, composed by deputies from the “Parliamentary Front for Self-Defense”, was elected with the help of expressive donations in cash from the war industry, represented in Brazil by the Companhia Brasileira de Cartuchos – CBC, ammunition manufacturer, and by Taurus, firearms manufacturer. Both organizations were also contributors in the “No” advertising campaign (it is estimated that the incentives were on the order of three million dollars).

These intersystem relations, though, are not transparent in the big media, maybe because it is not interesting for them to reveal the unavoidable influences they suffer from their environment. Except for *Veja*, that was more explicit in its direct connection with the politic system and the economic system, the other two publications tried to balance the discourses for and against firearms. Although, in all the cases, we cannot deny that the communications presented in mass media are always the reflection of codes originated in other systems, from environment communications, as discussed above. Because of that, this

⁴ “Caros Amigos”, albeit not a part of the sample of this study, carries information useful to the analysis and was therefore included as a reference.

communicational reflexivity is questioned. As they are the result of constant couplings with politics and economy (among other systems), aren't they suffering, in reality, a deviance of coupling? Aren't we, in fact, revealing a new system operating mechanism, specific to the intersystem relations that involve the mass media system? As seen above, at last, the communications produced by the mass media are derived from interactions and "conversations" with/from many sources. These include psychic systems with authority to speak, for their importance in a certain section or in a certain organization, as well as discourses already institutionalized by organizations and high complexity systems. Of course we cannot affirm that the media simply reproduce such communications, as they have their own internal dynamics, their autopoietic reproductions that are determined by, among many factors, by positions of power, by adaptation to the specific languages of journalism (or advertising), productive procedures, etc. Although constituting themselves as a field of forces and communications of many levels, the mass media end up granting visibility or weakening other systems, as they mediate a good deal of the communications with society. The systems need, therefore, the mass media, and it is thus that we can affirm that the couplings are deviant, because they are constant. They exchange, at every moment, reportable information for the information produced by systems like the political and the economic ones (even if they coincide in many occasions).

The Brazilian population's answer on the arms referendum may be a demonstration that, instead of enhancing the future possibilities of communication, the mass media in fact promote the closure of such possibilities, since they reproduce their environments' communications, and not internal and original systemic communications. This may, however, be a precipitate conclusion, for so complex a reality has, surely, many blind spots. Other second-order observations, performed from new angles, would be necessary for us to come closer to more definitive answers concerning the function and the autopoietic forms of the mass media system.

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