

# The legacy of Stuart Hall for reception studies in Brazil

## *O legado de Stuart Hall para os estudos de recepção no Brasil*

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### ABSTRACT

The text evokes the itinerary of Hall's contributions to the field of communication in the country, in particular to reception studies. It discusses how his reflections were used by theses and dissertations in the field, defended in the Brazilian graduate programs between 2000 and 2009. The analysis reveals Hall's importance for consolidating them in Brazil for offering theoretical and methodological inputs within a context of expansion of research centers and of problematics addressed. His ideas are adopted according to the demands of the objects of research, which have a multiplicity that denotes the amplitude of the the author's contribution to Brazilian reception studies.

**Keywords:** Stuart Hall, reception studies, Brazilian research

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### RESUMO

O texto resgata o itinerário das contribuições de Hall ao campo da comunicação no país, em especial aos estudos de recepção. Discute como suas reflexões foram apropriadas pelas teses e dissertações da área defendidas nos programas de pós-graduação brasileiros entre 2000 e 2009. A análise revela a importância de Hall para consolidá-los no Brasil ao oferecer o insumo teórico e também metodológico em um contexto de expansão dos centros de pesquisa e de problemáticas abordadas. Suas ideias são adotadas de acordo com as demandas dos objetos de pesquisa, cuja multiplicidade denota a amplitude da contribuição do autor aos estudos de recepção brasileiros.

**Palavras-chave:** Stuart Hall, estudos de recepção, pesquisa brasileira

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1. We thank Ana Carolina Escosteguy, specialist in Hall, for the exchange of ideas and suggestions of references about the author.

2. Two institutions have been at the epicenter of this debate and its dissemination in Latin America: Alaic, created in 1978 and Felafacs in 1981. Intercom also had an important role both in the Brazilian scene as in the one of the continent.

3. The Center was created in 1964 and Stuart Hall took over the direction of the CCCS in 1968. In 1979 it was integrated with the Open University (Mattelart; Neveu, 2004).

4. Especially at ECA/USP and its process of formation of master's degree and doctoral candidates of certain lines of research.

The first course that discussed the then recent texts by Martín-Barbero, mimeographed, was taught by Anamaria Fadul in 1985.

5. Roberto Follari (2003) argues that Martín-Barbero, García Canclini and Renato Ortiz, among others, are associated with cultural studies, when they themselves took their times accepting this insertion, if they ever have fully done so. Ortiz, for example, says: "the first time I became aware that I was a practitioner of Cultural Studies was in Berlin at a conference organized by Herlinghaus in 1995. The following year, in a seminar held in Stirling (Scotland), of which Stuart Hall was one of the participants, that feeling was reinforced because, next to my friends Néstor García Canclini and Jesús Martín-Barbero, I was there representing something that had never occurred to me" (Ortiz, 2006: 173).

### INTRODUCTION

SEARCHING FOR the itinerary of Stuart Hall's contributions to the field of reception in Brazil is a task that demands the recollection of the way his ideas gained space in Brazilian territory, specifically in Communication studies. Anticipatory appropriations apart, like the inclusion of Stuart Hall<sup>1</sup> in the conclusions of the pioneering work of Lins da Silva ([1984] 1985), the author entered the Brazilian field of communication (being important also in the fields of education and literature) as a consequence of the Latin American debate around the communication processes in the cultural scene, especially in the recording of popular cultures, initiated by Jesús Martín-Barbero<sup>2</sup>, without disregard to the important contribution of Néstor García Canclini.

The former consolidated the discussion produced for nearly a decade in the book *De los medios a las mediaciones* (Martín-Barbero, 1987), in which British cultural studies appear through the ideas of its founders: Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Edward P. Thompson. The latter did so in the book *Hybrid cultures* (Canclini, 1989), however, in any of the two books Stuart Hall was quoted, although he was already working at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) since the late 1960s<sup>3</sup>. Mattelart and Neveu (2004: 48) consider him the fourth man who joined the founding fathers, although he belongs to another generation, whose "scientific production only reaches maturity at the threshold of the 1970s". The proposals of Martín-Barbero and García Canclini took shape only between the mid and late 1990s; before that they were restricted to a few areas<sup>4</sup> and among some researchers only. Either way, this discussion, according to Escosteguy (2001), was not immediately associated with cultural studies, not even by the authors themselves<sup>5</sup>, and there was also no sufficient diffusion, in Latin America, of the British bibliography<sup>6</sup> concerning this perspective. She also points out the scarcity of texts that deal with the emergence of cultural studies, in which the arrival of Hall's work could be identified, which can also be applied to Brazil, thus the possibility here is to come across very few evidences only.

In the same direction as Escosteguy, the Colombian author Fabio López de la Roche emphasizes that "here we developed cultural studies without awareness that they were actually 'cultural studies'"<sup>7</sup> (Roche, 2005: 314), which put into evidence the tradition of culture studies in the continent<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, it was from the slow, late and disperse introduction of these studies in the country<sup>9</sup> that Hall, the one responsible for their internationalization when he was head of the CCCS (1968 to 1979), gains space in

the Brazilian scene, especially associated with reception studies, under the influx of the text *Encoding, decoding in television* discourse originally published in 1973 and, later, the issue of cultural identity when it is constituted from reception or treated as mediation; in this case, almost always associated with the Latin American authors. This only happens, however, starting from the 2000s (Jacks et al., 2014), as in the 1990s (Jacks et al., 2008) he is virtually absent from Brazilian reception research, characterized by the appropriation of the Latin American theorists. It is necessary to emphasize that, first, the author is presented through bibliographic references, occasional quotes, as in the case of Silva (1985), and theoretical reviews with an emphasis on the key assumptions of his model, in particular textual polysemy, and only later starts being incorporated into empirical works based on the analysis model of reception.

Hall's text<sup>10</sup> was published in 1973 in the so-called working papers and only in 1980 through a publisher in the market (Hall, 1980), circulating as a model, despite its author not recognizing it as such<sup>11</sup>. David Morley, when adopting it in an empirical research, certainly contributed to providing greater visibility to the model, which then circulated internationally, coming to Brazil in the process of the updating of the debate held in the CCCS. It is necessary to highlight the Brazilian context, with the growth of the graduate programs in Communication, in the presence of professors and students in international conferences, in addition to the translation of the article *Encoding, decoding*, published in 2003 (Hall, 2003b).

In terms of the more organic and systematic appropriation by the field, the hypothesis by Repoll (2010) is used, who states that it was achieved through the bridge built by the Danish author Thomas Tufte when he promoted a concrete dialogue between British and Latin American cultural studies in his PhD thesis, *Living with the Rubbish Queen* (Tufte, 2000), in which the methodological-theoretical appropriation proposed by this perspective is made effective. One of the authors present in his articulation was precisely Stuart Hall, though without assuming the model, which had already suffered criticism in the European scene. Tufte also brought this author up for other research in the Brazilian scene (Jacks; Capparelli et al., 2006) developed with local researchers. It is important to emphasize the effort of Capparelli (1997), member of the team, to incorporate the discussion that was being had at the time for bringing political economy closer to cultural studies, influx of the encounter with Tufte. Although with a broader focus, it was within the context of a reception study, developed between March 1996 and September 1998 (Jacks; Capparelli et al.,

6. Escosteguy (2010) comments that in the last decade expressive works began to circulate on the national scene, such as *Da diáspora – identidades e mediações culturais* (Hall; Sovik, 2003).

7. Original: "aquí se venían realizando estudios culturales sin saberlo, sin tener conciencia de que estábamos haciendo 'estudios culturales'". (Our translation)

8. See, for example, the articles by Canclini (1991, 1993).

9. Cevalco (2003: 173) ignoring the presence of cultural studies in the field of communication, declares that "the official date of his institutional recognition in the country may be 1998, year in which the Brazilian Association of Comparative Literature, Abralic, [...] chose as theme for its biannual congress 'Comparative Literature=Cultural Studies?'. Prysthon (2002) writes about "Brazilian contemporary Cultural Studies", but does not address the scope of communication, although he mentions the research of Renato Ortiz when addressing mass culture.

10. The author states that the text does not have the theoretical rigor and internal consistency to be considered a model (Escosteguy, 2001: 70).

11. "I didn't think the article would create a model that would last for the next 25 years. I don't think it has the theoretical rigor, the internal logic and conceptual consistency for such. If it is of any use today or in the future, it's because of what it suggests. It suggests a new approach,



new issues, it maps the terrain. But it's a model that has to be worked on, developed and changed" (Hall, 2003a: 326).

2006), that Capparelli's reflection gained shape to anchor the research that empirically articulated the two theoretical traditions.

In the same period, the thesis by Ana Carolina Escosteguy was being created, which was published in 2001, and that addressed Latin American cultural studies having as analytical strategy exploring the trajectories of Martín-Barbero and García Canclini using as counterpoint Stuart Hall's "as greater source of this exploration to the extent that he is, undoubtedly, a central figure in the development of their dominant version" (Escosteguy, 2001: 15). Another factor that can be associated with these is the 1st Brazil-Denmark Colloquium of Communication Sciences (1996), promoted by Intercom, when two Danish researchers associated with reception studies – the aforementioned Tufte and Klaus Jensen – bring to the discussion the contribution of Hall to analyze the polysemy of media texts. Maria Immacolata Lopes, Brazil's representative, does not mention Hall, but he appears in the bibliographic references of her text (Lopes, 1997).

If until this moment the model by Stuart Hall was quoted, analyzed, criticized, Veneza Ronsini (2012: 18-19) brings it to an empirical study recognizing it as an "unpublished work in Brazil and that is inspired by the recent evaluation of Sujeong Kim and David Morley about the vitality of the model for the comparative examination of the interpretations of the audience". The author adapts it and says that "the reformulation of the model follows the suggestion of Hall himself in overcoming his mistake in believing that the text has a uniquely dominant character" (Ibid.: 101), starting from the differentiation between dominant and hegemonic. It, according to the author, based on Gramsci, "also encompasses the negotiated encodings that contribute to consensus and not dominant encodings only" (Ibid.: 103). To analyze media text, Ronsini believes that the "reformulation of the model is in line with the understanding that media is not just an ideological apparatus of the State and enterprises, but needs to meet the demands of the audience" (Ibid.: 21). From her experience with the use of the model, the author was advisor for several researches which used Hall according to their adaptation or reinterpretation of it.<sup>12</sup>

### HALL IN THE RECEPTION RESEARCH SCENE

Within the wider scenario of the Brazilian graduate programs in communication, among the theses and dissertations produced in the early 2000s, it is possible to obtain clues of how Hall's contributions resounded in the field of reception. A recent study (Jacks et al., 2014) has already indica-

12. *Telenovela e identidade feminina de jovens de classe popular* (Sifuentes, 2009), *Envelhecer com Passione: a telenovela na vida de idosas das classes populares* (Wottrich, 2011), *Feminino velado: a recepção de telenovela por mães e filhas das classes populares* (Silva, 2011) e *Jovens rurais, corações urbanos: Jornal nacional e as desigualdades sociais no campo* (Schnorr, 2013).

ted that, in this decade, Hall's discussion has been incorporated into works, with a variety of appropriations. In a complementary movement, this text identifies to what concepts and theses the dissertations charter, how they incorporate Hall's contributions in the theoretical and empirical plan and which objects of study are privileged for a dialogue with the author.

At first, it is evidenced that Hall gains space in the Brazilian field mostly due to the repercussion of the text *Encoding, decoding* and also to the discussion on cultural identities, associated with the debate on social representations. Furthermore, discussions on popular culture, television production, hybridization processes, global culture, location and configuration of communities emerge in the production of students during the decade.

Studies which appoint Stuart Hall as main author have diverse thematic interests: cultural identities (Barbosa 2002; Scoss, 2003; Maia, 2009; Gutbier, 2003; Simões, 2004; Brignol, 2004; Rodrigues, 2006; Tonon, 2005; Sifuentes, 2009; Messa, 2006; Schmitz, 2007; Silva, 2007; Carvalho, 2008), production of meaning (Schramm, 2003; Natansohn, 2003; Silva, 2008; Azevedo, 2001, Guimarães, 2006), popular culture (Cunha, 2005), production of subjectivities (Cardoso, 2005), representations (Cruz, 2006; Gomide, 2006), imaginary (Lazarini, 2005), consumption (Campos, 2008), cultural consumption (Brandalise, 2006), juvenile consumption (Siqueira, 2008), digital inclusion (Bredarioli, 2008), effects of advertising (Carvalho, 2009), consumer behavior (Bragaglia, 2004) and audience study (Jordão, 2008; Rett, 2009).

Despite the multiplicity of concepts applied in the works, Hall acquires centrality in the contextualization of cultural studies, almost always associated with Latin American authors. The text *Encoding, decoding* is usually brought up within this context, as a milestone for the development of cultural and reception studies. The discussion that takes on the model is thus not exactly methodological, but theoretical and even historical.

This historical appropriation happens in two senses: the sense of using the accumulation of the author to present cultural studies and of addressing the importance of Stuart Hall for the field, with recurrent references to the text *Encoding, decoding*, which relativizes the power of media and points to the polysemy of the messages. The important systematizer role of the discussions that Hall undertakes to the works may be observed through the redeeming of the theoretical concerns and material motivations that characterized the emergence of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS). At that moment, the work *Da diáspora: identidades e mediações culturais* (Hall; Sovik, 2003), which brings together and introdu-

ces in Brazilian soil some of Hall's central reflections, becomes a central reference. These works consider Hall's legacy as foundation for cultural studies, as well as central for reception studies.

At the center of this general contextualization there are theses and dissertations that mention specifically the article *Encoding, decoding*. In these works, the ideas contained in Hall's article undertake a paradigmatic role, a rupture in the way the reception field begins to build the figure of the receiver. This perception is best understood in the words of one of the authors when he says that

Stuart Hall's effort is one of the most notable in this sense, because he proposed a revision of the taboo of the passivity of the general public towards mass culture with his Encoding/Decoding model, changing the classic transmitter-message-receiver model into the production-circulation-distribution (consumption)-reproduction model. (Siqueira, 2008: 89)

Even if Hall was not the only author to confront the positivist perspective on the communicative process, the rupture represented by his article at the time of his presentation, in 1980, seems to strongly resonate in the academic production of Brazilian students in the 2000s. The reflections on the nonlinearity of the communicative process and on the polysemy of the message, which brings together a multitude of meanings, are brought to surface by the studies, and the hypothetical positions of decoding, which are dominant, negotiated and opposite, in special, are highlighted, but with little depth. Although many works recognize *Encoding, decoding* as a model, there are not many who venture into its theoretical design and empirical experimentation.

The appropriation of Hall's text by the production of Brazilian students focuses on the polysemy of meanings of the media discourse, which allows for a multiplicity of analyses within the context of reception. In large part, the model is discussed briefly. Only the aforementioned works, developed with basis on Ronsin's proposition (2012), follow Hall's indications and develop *Encoding, decoding* in methodological terms, dialoguing with the empirical experience. Sifuentes's work (2009), mentioned earlier, is an example in which Hall's model is articulated to the communicative mediation of culture developed by Martín-Barbero (2003)<sup>13</sup> to investigate the reception of soap opera by women of the popular class. Through them, he positions the speech of the soap opera in terms of dominance, negotiation and opposition from the analysis of the representations conveyed

13. The author developed the perspective of the communicative mediations of culture in the preface to the 5th Spanish edition of *De los medios a las mediaciones*, in 1998, translated and published in the Brazilian edition of 2003.

by the plot. In the reception, he assesses the analyses based on these same categories.

It is possible to say that *Encoding, decoding* was gradually incorporated into Brazilian reception studies much more as a theoretical horizon than as a model for analysis of reception, apart from the exceptions which have been already mentioned. The relative fragility of the theoretical incorporation perceived in these works contrasts with the vigor of the appropriations of the researches focused on identity.

These studies follow two main approaches: the first regards identity as a mediation in the process of reception, and the second sticks to the identities constructed through the reception of media products. It is in this latter approach that Hall's ideas are more present. Among those analyzed, various thematic interests were identified, such as production of sense, representations, imaginary, cultural consumption and the identities themselves in their multiple dimensions: of gender, racial, juvenile, regional, national and professional.

In light of this comprehensive thematic universe, one may agglutinate Hall's contributions, following the recommendations of Escosteguy (2001) under the auspices of identities as diaspora, synthesized, according to the author, in some central aspects: identity is a space of intersection of theoretical discourse and also a set of cultural practices, as well as a "politically and culturally constructed category in which difference and ethnicity are its constituents". In addition, "the experience of diaspora becomes an emblem of the present; hybridization leaves its mark and the fluidity of identity becomes even more complex due to the intertwining of other socially constructed categories, in addition to the ones of class, race, nation and gender" (Ibid.: 156).

Hall historicizes the concept when situating and keeping up with its theoretical configuration until contemporary times, always considering it as under permanent construction through public speeches and social practices. This dual perspective on the understanding of identities became profitable for reception studies for considering the role of the media in its configurations, without, however, subsuming them to the media apparatus. Their construction through different media genres has been the object of most of these works, which gave space to Hall's reflections on the processes of identification, diaspora, decentering and hybridism. The authors are based mostly on two main works (Scott, 2000; Hall, 2004) to concretize their ideas, which are brought up, usually as theoretical reference, without articulation with the empirical development.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The effort to redeem the introduction of Stuart Hall in Brazilian communication studies, especially in reception studies, brought to light some gaps that had not yet been identified, for example, those who would have introduced him in their studies and how. Facing this challenge to settle the scenario in which his writings were adopted puts another piece in the assembly of this small puzzle that, certainly, is not yet completed. So, if at first Hall appears in Brazilian studies, as in the thesis by Silva (1985), to legitimize their conclusions on the differentiated appropriations of workers in the reception of *Jornal Nacional*, we were able to identify that gradually his reflections gained shape in the premises adopted by the works of the 2000s.

The retrospective analysis of the studies developed in this decade reveals the importance of Hall for the consolidation of reception studies in Brazil when offering his theoretical input to the field, within a context of expansion of research centers and problematics addressed. Considered to some extent the father of British cultural studies, though he refused that label (Sovik, 2003), or the one responsible for grouping together the discussions in the field (Escosteguy, 2001), in Brazilian reception studies, Hall takes on little by little the central role of instigator of theoretical discussions. His ideas are adopted according to the demands of the objects of research, which have a multiplicity that denotes the amplitude of the the author's contribution to Brazilian reception studies.

The works bring Hall up especially through *Encoding, decoding* and the discussion on cultural identities. Regarding the article, the impression of it being presented as theoretical justification for a complex conception of receiver as an active subject that is open to a myriad of interpretations of media discourse is given. These appropriations allow predicting a certain need for studies of reaffirmation of the activity of the receiver in light of the positivist conceptions of audience studies. From another perspective, there is also the idea of a receiver that resists and performs an oppositional analysis of the media discourse. Here the issue of power is highly relevant, being central in *Encoding, decoding*, in which the media has a privileged position to hold control of the apparatus of signification in which the analysis of the receivers are based. This idea, however, is not developed by most works that use Hall's text as a model, which are limited to position the interpretations of the messages by the receivers in terms of dominance, negotiation and opposition.

The appropriations of Hall's reflections on identities, on the other hand, were vigorous for providing the theoretical input that composes a histori-



cal overview of the concept in light of contemporary social dynamics. The didacticism present in the works which were most disseminated in Brazil on the topic facilitated the spreading of his reflections. The proposition on the constitution of identities which are “open, contradictory, incomplete, fragmented of the postmodern subject” (Hall, 2004: 46) was used by studies geared not only towards the traditional identity referents (class, ethnicity, nation), but interested in unveiling the formation of multiple identities in the relationship with the media. In the works juvenile identities of gender, race, nation and profession, among others, are discussed; the issues on race, for example, a relevant concern in Hall’s work, are shily inserted. This reinforces the impressions obtained on the itinerary here traced that, although Hall has expression in reception studies, there is still much to be explored in terms of theoretical perspectives. A potential to be developed *pari passu* to the consolidation of reception studies in the country. ■

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