

Herta Herzog y “La experiencia prestada”. La fundación de los estudios de comunicación y audiencias

Leonarda García-Jiménez, Amparo Huertas-Bailén & Teresa Vera-Balanza (Eds.)

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The Memory of communicative research: Herta Herzog and the origins

It is no coincidence that the “Comunicación y género” collection, from Comunicación Social Ediciones y Publicaciones, begins with a volume dedicated to Herta Herzog. The title, *Herta Herzog y «La experiencia prestada». La fundación de los estudios de comunicación y audiencias*, edited by Leonarda García-Jiménez, Amparo Huertas-Bailén and Teresa Vera-Balanza in 2023, reflects the editors’ objective: to incorporate women researchers into the canon from which they have been erased. To fix an injustice that, in the words of Teresa Vera, must be faced up, reinforcing the subject, which, in addition to restoring due recognition, “nourishes the genealogies” (p. 67), “generates models and grants tradition and authority to the entire collective” (p. 67). The success of this volume is, therefore, to bridge a gap, a systematic unstitching that the androcentric publishing industry applies by default, and to recover the trail of a pivotal figure in communication studies.

This is the first translation into Spanish of the article “On Borrowed Experience. An Analysis of Listening to Daytime Sketches” (1941), which establishes the theory of uses and gratifications, one of the most fertile approaches to communication. In addition, this is the first complete work dedicated to the pioneer Herta Herzog in Spanish language. Even though – or precisely because of this – in life, Herzog “crossed all geographical and epistemic borders”, “her figure however does not withstand the passing of the years and ends up disappearing from reference books and manuals, something that is common in the cases of women researchers” (p. 75), as Leonarda García points out. Although in her lifetime, Herta Herzog enjoyed some recognition for her work, seen “as a milestone among members of the Bureau of Applied Social

Research at Columbia University” (p. 95) –formerly the Office of Radio Research (ORR) at Princeton University–, she achieved academic and professional success – “becoming the ‘most powerful woman in American advertising’” (p. 10) – and even won an award – the Market Research Council Hall of Fame –, her ambition in the theoretical approaches and her brilliant observation and listening skills were not enough to give her a place in the history of communication theory. Completing her first doctoral thesis (1933) in a new field, audience analysis, was not enough to keep her in the canon. Neither was it enough that she had published the first formulation of the theory of uses and gratifications, opening the path that would mark “the canon of communication research in the following decades” (p. 60). Or that she led the first mass experiment (2,700 surveys) in Austria. Or that she articulated quantitative research with qualitative research, giving priority to in-depth interviews and focus groups; or that she went into the kitchens of American housewives to place them as research subjects and ask them about their radio preferences. Or that, essentially, she altered the way of approaching research, moving from who to why, at the dawn of a new discipline. The lack of recognition that she already experienced in life, with her colleagues, contributed to this. Hadley Cantril ignored her as the author of the classic *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* (1940), Paul Lazarsfeld accused her of appropriating an idea supposedly from Cantril, Robert Merton was credited with creating the focus group; turning Herta Herzog into a “researcher silenced and subsumed by other –male– leaderships” (p. 58).

Amparo Huertas wonders in the biographical chapter, “what she would have said about what was written” (p. 51). Herzog did not leave autobiographical texts. But an interview, translated in this volume, conducted by the professor of Communication at the University of Delaware, Elizabeth Perse, together with

a biographical note signed by her stepdaughter Lotte Bailyn, also published in this book, provides us with valuable data for a glimpse into Herzog's attitude towards his erasure and that of her female colleagues.

Already in the 1930s, the ORR in Princeton had more than thirty researchers on its team; however, despite their participation in the projects, the articles appeared without their names. We have mentioned the case of Cantril-Herzog, but the case of Cantril-Gaudet, in the same study, was also talked about. Another "competent and trustworthy" woman (p. 45) deleted as the author of a study she had done. Or that of Lazarsfeld-Jahoda. With some ambivalence, Herzog's colleagues recognised her responsibility and creativity. As Huertas recalls, Lazarsfeld himself places her as "a member of the management team [of ORR and Bureau] from the first years (2001: 273)" (p. 45) and they chose her work, *The borrowed experience* translated here, as the insignia of the ORR, being a turning point, and the spearhead of its new methodology.

Herzog's reaction was not to focus on herself, as she said herself to Perse, "I'm not that interested in myself yet" (p. 172). Herzog preferred to focus on her interlocutors, "brilliant people" (p. 52) of the time, but also ordinary people. Perhaps for the same reason that she did not claim to be a feminist, she also did not consider herself "a good team coordinator" (p. 46). Herzog focused on remembering experiences and not positions. This volume takes on the task of restoring her memory, contrasting her memories and legacy with that of her colleagues. The result is a work in which readers will be able to read in Herzog what she herself did not see, paraphrasing Leonarda García, who rightly places emphasis on the invitation made by the self-proclaimed "social psychologist" (p. 188) to the subalterns, in a milestone of cultural studies: "Herzog reads in these women [the American housewives who listen to radio dramas, whom she made subjects of her research] what they themselves do not see" (p. 80).

In short, this collective essay sheds light on the founding moment of communication studies, within the nascent sociology and psychology, to offer a remastered overview of the interdisciplinarity of a group environment, in which women also mattered. With an explicit feminist perspective, writing from a situated position, the authors of this polyphonic volume stitch together the loose, blurred, erased points of a particularly fruitful period. To illuminate the paths and lines of continuity that, only through a relational construction of experience, will allow us to advance as a discipline; far from making a figure exceptional, rather, reinforcing the patriarchal perspective that only allows the chosen ones, rare, tireless and self-sacrificing specimens, to remain.

Like this text, Herzog is not an exception, but rather – as Esperanza Herrero points out – "the result of a continued and persistent research effort" (p. 99). In coherence with this, this book builds a bridge between the author, her work and her receptions, to illustrate the "richness of –her– creative and intellectual process" (p. 99), thus filling the triple void that for

more than half a century made the author, the work and their joint history disappear. Restoring her place in the necessary dialogue of the discipline. With her voice, Herzog bequeaths us the voices of the ordinary women of her generation and helps us understand their motivations in their interaction with the media, notably with the newly established radio. Opening fissures to the correlative assignment of sexes and spaces. The public is introduced into the kitchens of housewives and, based on the three types of gratifications proposed, Herzog predisposes us to listen. With the reparation of the author's exclusion also comes that of the women locked in private spaces. With Herzog, and as she herself did in her retirement, we return to the origin, thus gathering new tools for current challenges.