AFTER TELEVISION IN THE AZORES

Broadcasting an Archipelago

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ABSTRACT: This article draws on a situated perspective to address the creation of the television broadcast service in the Azores (through the RTP- Açores channel) and its role in constructing a political narrative grounded in territory, society and culture. Through discussion of the insularity of the Azores, media architectural apparatus and the concrete effect of mediated interventions, the proposal is that the Azores exist socially and politically through audiovisual mediation. With the arrival of television, the nine islands began 'to turn towards each other,' constituting a mediated space – a new public arena – which gave rise to a new, modern, archipelagic interiority. Simply put, it can be contended that the Azorean archipelago is only possible through media agency, and it consists of a territory that was formed through its representation. As media and territory are contingent, I contend that it is less interesting to think about the relationship between the Azorean territory *and* the media as it is to think about the Azorean territory *as* media.

KEYWORDS: Television; archipelagic interiority; territory; the Azores; architectural apparatus.

[Note: all translations from Portuguese language texts referred to in the article have been made by the author.]

Introduction

This article draws on both situated experience and data. For the former, I draw on Frie (2011), who also employs the term "agency" to express entanglement in biological, social, cultural (and, I would add, territorial) frameworks. As a result, subsequent discussions draw on my experience of living in the Azores, in particular its intersection with the regional television broadcasting that started thirty years prior to my arrival. The article is also anchored on the data I have collected when I have visited family and friends in the archipelago. While not characterising my approach as autoethnographic, I concur with Uotinen (2014) in asserting that it is useful to draw on a particular perspective when interpreting a somewhat indiscernible agency.

According to Luvaas (2021, p. 63), autoethnography is "ethnography that explicitly focuses on the self as its object of study" and since "the self is an unstable, continually becoming thing, so must autoethnography be the study of personal becoming" (Luvaas, 2021, p. 63). While the first phrase seems explicit, the latter presupposes that the "study of personal becoming" can be seized and written down – in short, it implies a metalanguage.

Nonetheless, in the words of Morton (2013, p. 2), one needs "to abolish the idea of the possibility of a metalanguage that could account for things while remaining uncontaminated by them." Following the same reasoning, Weizman (2022, p. 212) contends that: "[nothing] speaks for itself... every act of speech is a translation, a mediation, and a construction... [i]magination and truth should not be thought of as opposites to each other but as constitutive parts." Essentially, there is no outside in analytic terms. From my perspective, autoethnography presupposes a detachment from *ourselves* that simply does not exist. If "autoethnography blurs the difference between experience and data" (Luvaas, 2021, p. 64), the concept appears in contradiction with its etymological root – derived from the Greek, which alludes to writing, to describing, and interpreting the culture and the experiences of the *self*. I would rather favour the expression "embodied knowledge" (Luvaas, 2021, p. 66), in which the Latin root in "embody" refers to *incorporare*, that is, to incorporate, to merge, which perhaps most accurately translates the notion of blurriness between experience and facts. As Jain (2022, p. 99) put it, "depending on where you are located, the world you live in and the conditions you find yourself in, it will be very different."

In this light, it seems inconceivable to try to explain territories without a commitment, since the possibility of such an explanation being impartial can be discarded. The need to emphasise "the insurmountable partiality of anthropological theory" (Sloterdijk, [2009] 2018, p. 26) gives rise to the reinforcement of the notion that the theory that intercepts society and the dynamics of spatial forms is necessarily situated, and admittedly biased. "Embodied knowledge" (Luvaas, 2021, p. 66) or, rather, "situated experience" (Frie, 2011), resembles what Campagna (2022. p.4) calls "reality-settings" and defines as "the historically specific decision (witting or unwitting) over what criteria we use to understand the baffling experience of existing somewhere, somewhen." Thus, it is significant to establish a basis on which the production of the world rests, in other words, to point out the ontology necessary for this very understanding. If experience is always situated, this article will explore a type of ordering of (my) world and (my) knowledge within it. It is, admittedly, a necessarily partial "reality-setting" (Campagna, 2022). This situated experience methodology is profoundly entangled with Haraway's theory:

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories (Haraway, 2016, p. 12).

In line with Hayward's approach to analysing the contemporary situation on Christmas Island (2021), I present this essay in a reflective mode, assisted by some images, aligning with Haraway's approach to storytelling.

Isolated collectives

In 2000, when I was 11 years old, my family moved to São Miguel Island, the biggest and the most populated among the nine that constitute the Azores. The archipelago is in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean (Figures 1 & 2), and it was back then that I felt the biggest geographical and corporeal change in my life. I remember when I got out of the plane and breathed the heavy air, deeply moist and saturated. Indeed, this wet sensation accompanied me through several years: the sea was everywhere. The vastness of the water, the endless liquid medium, made me conscious of the finitude of land limits. Having lived on the Portuguese mainland

until then, in a city where the river represented my daily contact with water, the grandiosity of the sea overwhelmed me. For several months, I felt trapped by a feeling of confinement, intensified by the constant mugginess; the remoteness was for me also a synonym of steamy air and deep breathing. However, this notion of isolation changed profoundly during my adolescence: the portion of land where I lived was part of a broader territory, the Azorean archipelago. I was obviously aware of that fact before moving there but the sense of belonging to something bigger than the island was somewhat difficult to apprehend. In fact, the notion of the Azores as a global territory was present in political speeches and in advertising campaigns, particularly on television, on Rádio e Televisão de Portugal-Açores (RTP-Açores). That regional channel was an absolute novelty for me at that time and I noticed that it was the most watched among my friends at school. Some of my parents' friends also had RTP-Açores on when we visited them during the weekends; in fact, it was aired in almost every home and cafe.
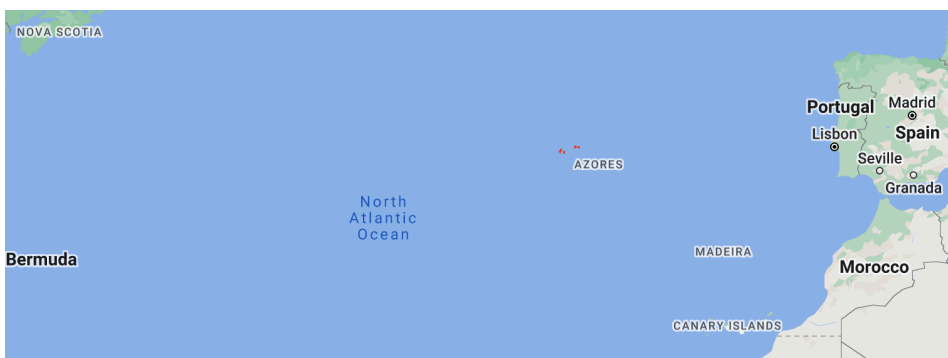

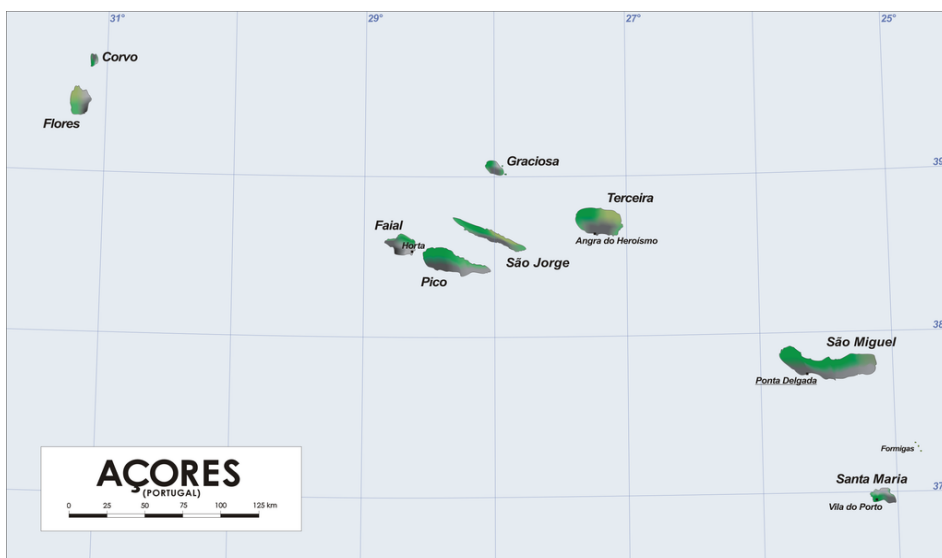Figure 1 – Map of the Azores' position within the North Atlantic (Google Maps. 2014).

Figure 2 – Map of the Azores (Wikimedia Commons).

It took me some years to realise that the success of this broadcaster had a crucial explanation behind it. Until the mid-1990s, it was the only channel to be transmitted in the Azorean islands (aside the spatially circumscribed event at Lajes Field, which will be mentioned next). In the pivotal year of 1994, Cabo TV Açoreana was created, delivering over two hundred other channels, among them the Brazilian Globo and Record (Anacom, 1994). Cable television distribution throughout the archipelago was completed in 1996, when all the islands got access to this service. For almost two decades, the RTP-Açores was not merely the most viewed channel among Azoreans, it was almost the only thing available. On the other hand, on the Portuguese mainland, there was a choice between at least two channels since 1968, seven years before public television came to the archipelago. In essence, the triumph of RTP-Açores could be partly explained by the fact that there was no competition for an extended duration. Within this context, it seemed to me that it was only the audiovisual apparatus that transmitted the sense of totality embodied in the concept of 'the Azores' as an identifiable territory constituted by nine islands that share the same society and culture. Through images and sound, the archipelago was a concept produced, transmitted, received and subsequently acknowledged by its viewers. An Azorean identity was previously associated with festivities, religious events, fiction and audiovisual narratives (mostly productions adapted from literary works by local authors) and regional news. These collectively composed the unity, the archipelago. After television, I suggest, the nine islands became unified as isolated collectives (Figure 3). The proposal of this article is, therefore, that the Azores exists socially, culturally, politically and territoriality through audio-televisual mediation.
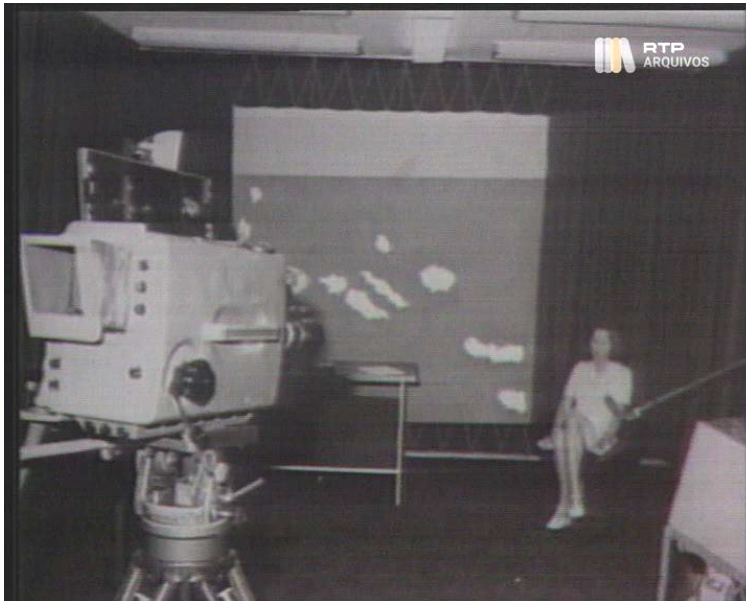

Figure 3 – A frame from the *History of the RTP-Açores* video, broadcast on 8 October 1995, which shows a behind-the-scenes view of a television news broadcast in 1975. (RTP Files).

The 'American Island' as a harbinger of modernity

Raymond Williams began his book *Television: Technology and cultural form* with the sentence "[i]t is often said that television has altered our world" ([1974] 2003, p. 1). At the time he wrote it, public television had not yet arrived in the Azores. However, twenty years earlier, a hermetic form of television broadcasting had occurred in the archipelago, specifically on Terceira Island. The dawn of television in Portugal, even if on an extremely restricted context, was led by the United States military who were on the island at the time. Following the British Royal Air Force, who had previously operated a base there, the North Americans arrived and occupied an insular space, the epicentre of which was Lajes Field (also referred to as BA4), enclosed by fences that separated it from the rest of the territory.

In 1954, the American Forces Network (AFN) TV broadcasted CSB-218 live from Lajes Field (Figure 4), preceding the arrival of television in the rest of Portugal, which would be created a year later and inaugurated in 1957. Along with AFN's own television channel, military radio, hamburgers, Coca-Cola[1], chocolates, music, movies, sports (mostly basketball and golf), English language and foreign money also arrived on Terceira (RTP-Açores, 2023) and the so-called 'American Island,' experienced a regime of exception, a modern microcosm. This is a clear example of what Williams called "the penetration" of the broadcasting systems of other states as a "planned operation" (Williams, [1974] 2003, pp. 35-37). The channel was closed in 2015, when most of the workers left the base.

Figure 4 – "The first overseas military T.V. station, which was also the first T.V. station in Portugal, broadcasted live from Lajes Field, Azores, in 1954." (United States Airforce Website).

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[1] Coca-Cola only officially arrived in Portugal in 1977.

Television or Revolution?

The crucial media event, which I consider revolutionary, was initiated in the Azores Regional Center of Radio and Television of Portugal, in Ponta Delgada, São Miguel Island. The newspaper *Açoriano Oriental* disclosed the introduction of television at an archipelagic scale (Figure 5). The arrival of public television in the Azores occurred a month after this newspaper was published on 10 August 1975, eighteen years after the start of regular broadcasts in the Portuguese mainland and three years after the first regional broadcast in the archipelago of Madeira (RTP Arquivos, 1995a). If the Azores was previously conceived as a unit mostly in the literary form, having Vitorino Nemésio's (1928, 1932) work as an example, I contend that the very same concept was actively built through the audiovisual apparatus after 25 April 1974.[2] This endeavour had the public television channel as one of the central instruments for the purpose of making the islands known to the islanders.

Figure 5 – *Açoriano Oriental* newspaper, 5 July 1975, first page (see central item headlined 'A Televisão'). (BPARPD - Ponta Delgada Public Library and Regional Archive).

From this perspective, this article attempts to account for the creation of television broadcasting in the Azores (through RTP-Açores) and its role in constructing a political narrative grounded in territory, society and culture. More precisely, it is argued that the

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[2] Known as the Carnation Revolution.

perception of the Azores as an archipelago was the product of a modern action brought by democracy and television. The RTP-Açores channel is therefore presented as the result of the fusion of political power and technologies, through a continuous process of territorial mediation. It should be noted that even the RTP-Açores' motto suggests an extended reach of the medium: "We unite the islands."

Even though radio reached the archipelago during World War II, on 28 May 1941, through the installation of the denominated 'Regional Broadcaster of the National Broadcaster' – which continues to function to this day as Antena 1 Azores – in the scope of this text, radio territorial effects are considered as distinctive from television, since the former started essentially with a musical programme (Assembleia Legislativa da Região Autónoma dos Açores, 2016). It was only in 1982 that the Regional Center's structure was legislated as a decentralised representation, enabling its own decision-making arrangements with power to determine information and programming criteria. In other words, public radio 'in' the Azores became the public radio 'of' the Azores (Assembleia Legislativa da Região Autónoma dos Açores, 2016). With respect to public television, its introduction to the archipelago has had a regional reassembling function since the beginning. The first director, a military professional, José Costa Parente, affirmed that they "sent people to all the islands to find out what kind of program the islanders wanted to see" (RTP Play, 2020). This means that the regional viewer was considered or, rather, targeted in conjunction with the creation of the public channel (Lusa, 2014).

In this regard, it is important to highlight the Portuguese context at that time. The RTP-Açores channel appeared after the official end of the Colonial War in 1974, and it preceded the legal constitution of the Autonomous Region of the Azores and its local Government in 1976 (Regional Decree no. 1/76, 1976). The decolonisation process was brutal and exposed multiple fractures within Portuguese society. When referring to the disorder and difficulties involved, the Azorean poet and writer Natália Correia ([1974-1976] 2015, p. 353) stated that "the revolutionary party was the sudden revelation of the tragic." At the same time, amid the so-called 'Carnation Revolution', the poet declared that it "is necessary to believe in the impossible for the present to exist" (2015, p. 48), a hopeful statement alluding to a visionary insurrection. Basically, there were several political and societal dynamics overlapping during the arrival of public television in the Azores: the massive Portuguese emigration during the 1960s, the Carnation Revolution and the country's implementation of democracy, the independence of the Portuguese former colonies in 1975, the process of regional authority endowed to the Azores and the Madeira territories, and several popular demonstrations in São Miguel Island calling for Azorean independence.

A pro-independence uprising broke out on 6 June 1975, in São Miguel Island.[3] A few days later, Correia ([1974-1976] 2015, p. 189) wrote, reflecting on her Azorean origins, this "explosion of tensions accumulated for centuries against [Portuguese] continental macrocephaly, which has suffered disproportionate humiliation and burdens, had four levels of indignation as a catapult," among which was "the corrosive trauma that decolonisation inflicts on Azorean Portuguese." She added: "I suffer... [t]he possibility of a choice between Portuguese and Azorean nationality [which] shreds me" (2015, p. 193). Roughly two months after the islanders' unsuccessful insurgency, RTP-Açores began its televisual operation.

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[3] See Gallagher (1979) for further discussion of the uprising and separatism in Portugal's Atlantic territories in the 1970s.

Throughout 1975, the poet Natália Correia continued to formulate her thoughts while living and working in Lisbon, asserting that after 25 April 1974, the Azorean separatist tendency was reignited, given that, among other "factors involved in the current Azorean problem," ([1974-1976] 2015, p. 587), "the policy of decolonisation, which excludes the Azorean archipelago," (pp. 586-587) stood out. She went further, arguing that:

> it has only fuelled an independence inclination incisively inscribed in the Azores. Ignoring the fundamental issue, the [Portuguese] continental focus subjects the separatist tendency to the pressure of US imperialism [despite the fact that it is] undeniable that the separatist enthusiasm of the Azoreans arouses foreign appetites. But its roots are autochthonous" ([1974-1976] 2015, p. 587).

I point to the fact that around the same time (more precisely during 1977 and 1978), the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard worked in the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique, helping to establish the country's first television station.[4] He was stimulated by the prospect of "working with a tabula rasa, in the sense that the vast majority of Mozambique's population had never been exposed to film images before" (Fairfax, 2010, p. 55). Godard perceived it as an opportunity to:

> Study the production of these desires for images and their distribution via the airwaves (oh sirens!) or cables. Study, for once, production, before distribution comes into the mix. Study the programmes before making a grid out of them, behind which the spectators will be plonked, who will no longer know that that [sic] they are behind the television set... and not in front of it as they believe (Godard, 1979, as cited in Fairfax, 2010, p. 60).

Eventually, the video work was never completed, and the project turned out to be unsuccessful (Fairfax, 2010, p. 56). In fact, during the middle of the 1970s, similarly to Mozambique, in the Azores "most of the population had simply never seen a mechanically reproduced image" (Fairfax, 2010, p. 59). A short document produced by Sonimage (Godard's collaborative production company with Anne-Marie Miéville) for the Mozambique government explained:

> In general, a country which goes in for television (after first going in for radio particularly) begins by equipping itself with one or several transmitters (stations) from which it sprays / arroser or it floods / inonder the territory that it declares its own... **"Before sending out an image, perhaps we should ask what image, or an image of what?"**[5] (MacCabe, 1980, p. 138-139)

As an inaugural device aimed at the masses, the depoliticisation of the role played by television might be part of its success as an agency tool. As an example, one ought to highlight that the televised operation was conducted within a context of a high illiteracy rate (in the case of Mozambique), consequently, there was little room to develop a critical understanding of the content being disseminated. In 1978, in the Azores, 21.3% of those over eighteen years old were illiterate (Resolution no. 5/81/A, 1981).

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[4] I owe this information to Joaquim Moreno.

[5] Bold in the original.

Given the circumstances previously outlined, the archipelagic broadcasting operation might be thought in the light of Friedrich Kittler's argument that:

> *After the Second World War brought about a surge of innovations in all fields of telecommunications, particularly in television and radar, it became historically necessary no longer to produce theories about individual media… but rather to pose the simple and common question of what media in general do* ([1999] 2019, p. 43).

This assumption instigates the main purpose of the article: what did the RTP-Açores channel do? Given the panorama provided by Kittler ([1999] 2019), a relationship seems to exist between the apparatus of war and the apparatus of the audiovisual industry in the Autonomous Region. In line with this, I consider that it might be reasonable to argue that the RTP-Açores was conceived as a 'weapon' for the dissemination of the political project that was being designed at the time. In this sense, and following Colomina (1996, p. 210), television advertising campaigns can be understood as military ones. Consequently, the television simulacrum, the message, or the code, in the case of the Azores, might be seen as being of a military order, within the domain of ownership – and I propose that it *is* the archipelago itself, the territory as such.

The central message seems to be that the Azores has an identity, an example of the dictum that cultural values "are decreed, not discovered" (Strathausen, as cited in Groys, [2000] 2012, p. xviii). Television is the instrument that puts an ideology into practice: the existence of an Azorean distinctiveness or, preferably, *açorianidade*, a Portuguese term. The ideology of an Azorean uniqueness existed in the 1920s in the work of Luís da Silva Ribeiro and Vitorino Nemésio, within a political and literary context that legitimised it (João, 1993). Even if Nemésio had proposed the *açorianidade* as an Azorean attribute (1932, p. 59), he had previously distinguished two dominant psychological types: the *Micaelense* (which includes São Miguel and Santa Maria Island's inhabitants) and the Azorean of what he termed the "lower islands" (Nemésio, 1928, p. 166), where he differentiated the *Terceirense* and the *Picoense* (the inhabitants of Terceira and Pico islands, respectively). As João pointed out, there is, therefore, "no uniformity in the Azorean microcosm in the eyes of this perceptive observer" (1993, p. 21). João went further in criticising this theory, asserting that "Nemésio lets himself be more influenced by the literary beauty of his sentences and feelings than by the rigor of his analysis" (1933, p. 212). João continued to counteract Nemésio's thesis, arguing that:

> *the true "mother" of the Azorean is the island, more than the whole formed by the archipelago. Therefore, building a regional awareness that translates into demonstrations of unity/solidarity among the islands has been a slow and difficult process* (João, 1993, p. 26).

For that matter, the proposition of the sea as something that allegedly "uplifted" the Azoreans (Nemésio, 1928), which was rejected by João (1993), is otherwise commonly referred to as a daunting environment, a 'carrier of misfortunes' as exemplified in fiction, such as De Melo's *Pedras Negras* (1964). Indeed, it has been contended that "the sea is hideous for the Azorean" (Carneiro et al., 2017, p. XI).

The notion of *açorianidade* is, therefore, multiple. *Açorianidade* is much more than the homogeneity it may at first seem, considering that "each island ended up creating its specific niche, separated by the sea, with no possible unification" (Oliveira, in Carneiro et al., 2017,

p. 15). It is a concept that unfolds. In concert with the present article's proposal, Oliveira argued that "the Autonomy implementation revived the *açorianidade* as an identity and a unitary concept" (Carneiro et al., 2017, p. 15). In this line of thought, I would add that television created the audio and visual narrative for the apprehension of a regional and territorial identity. Essentially, media performed the ultimate consolidation gesture of the concept of the *açorianidade*. In brief, although the islands are effectively different in terms of identity, I contend that television homogenised them. Television arrived to 'unite' the islands, socially, culturally. Through the lens of the "submedial spaces" (Groys, [2000] 2012), I suggest that the 'other message' might be the notion of the territory itself. In this light, television also came to 'unite' the islands, territorially. Ultimately, the idealised archipelagic construction was (and still is) produced.

Le Corbusier's ([1923] 2004) proclamation 'Architecture or Revolution' makes it possible and enticing to establish a parallel with the first television broadcast in the Azores, thus framed as 'Television or Revolution.' In other words, if the primordial public broadcast was revolutionary, it might first have been conducted as an escape from the 'Revolution' that was being outlined.

Media architectural apparatus

It seems that no other media achieved the archipelagic dimension that television did in the Azores. I felt it myself in the summer of 2000. There was a significant delay in the distribution of newspapers at that time. I remember my parents telling me that during their stay in Terceira Island in the 1980s my father would ask my grandfather to send him newspapers as soon as they were printed and sold in Lisbon. They also told me that the only newspaper that was distributed practically at the same time as in Portugal's mainland was the sports one, entitled *A Bola*. Another curious fact about that period was that local island newspapers were almost only distributed within each island (RTP-Açores, 2018). There was no press at an archipelagic scale, in other words, the frontiers of the press produced within the archipelago were practically the frontiers of the islands themselves.

Television, by contrast, as the medium of disruption par excellence, was revolutionary in exceeding these island frontiers. In the beginning, the signal transmission only covered 75% of the archipelago, with two transmitters and five re-transmitters which took television to seven of the nine islands – Flores and Corvo, given their distance, were left out (*RTP 50 Years of History*, 2007). The infrastructure came from Germany and was installed by engineers working for the RTP channel. The transmitters, one located in Santa Bárbara (Terceira Island) and the other in Barrosa (São Miguel Island) started the network, which was completed by the re-transmitters: Salto do Cavalo (São Miguel Island), Lomba do Fogo (Pico Island), Cume (Terceira Island), Ajuda (Graciosa Island) and Pico Alto (Santa Maria Island) (*RTP 50 Years of History*, 2007). In a second phase, two other re-transmitters were installed in Pico Island, in Urze and Geraldo (*RTP 50 Years of History*, 2007). With this infrastructure, the most populated islands of the archipelago were linked. The Western group, composed of Flores and Corvo islands, received the RTP signal only in 1988, fourteen years after the other islands (RTP Files, 1995b). By the end of the 1980s, this intimate infrastructure would be operating in all the islands.

The resources were scarce, and for that reason regional television news started as slide sequences. Furthermore, national, and international news arrived at least one day late (*RTP Files*, 1995b). In addition, according to Burnay (2012, p. 133), "from 1977, with the entry into

operation of Marconi's Terrain Satellite Station," owned by Companhia Portuguesa Rádio Marconi (CPRM), "it was possible to send the television signal between the [Portuguese] mainland and the Azores." Nonetheless, "its reception was asymmetric, as not all islands were covered" (Burnay, 2012, p. 133). At the same time, weather conditions were an obstacle in guaranteeing the expeditious arrival of material, which consisted of film reels and videotape, sent from Lisbon (Burnay, 2012). Besides delays, much of the content was censored after arriving, particularly if it was considered to undermine public morals (2012, p. 133).

Advertising material on RTP-Açores was carefully controlled for a long time. No advertising for sanitary towels or tampons was allowed, and no 'provocative' television show content was permitted. *Pantanal*, for instance, was a Brazilian soap opera which started with an introductory sequence showing women's bodies, which most people recall was manipulated.[6] In other words, anything that might relate to sex was 'out of sight' for Azorean television viewers, even if that content was being broadcast on national Portuguese television.

In simple terms, it was from media architectural apparatus such as the Marconi antenna (Figure 6) that the decisions about what was going to be broadcast took place. Once the signal from the Portuguese mainland was received, it was followed by a second phase consisting of the assessment of the programs' prescription: an additional layer of the broadcast scheme. It did not consist in a mere technical operation, as examination was also involved. For that reason, the antenna might be proposed as a hinge device: not simply in terms of the signal transmission, given its connection purpose in the first place, but in relation to the evaluation of the content to be retransmitted. Such judgement was anchored between 'right' and 'wrong,' or 'suitable' and 'inappropriate.' In essence, diffusion was preceded by a management of the visible and the audible. The Earth Satellite Station was therefore a tool for reception, censorship, and subsequent transmission.

The Earth Satellite station operated until 2002, being deactivated following the installation of optical submarine cables. Marconi's closing led to the ending of the productivity of the architectural artifice, whose obsolescence currently remains materialised. The antenna, with a thirty-two-meter diameter dish, which worked in the C Band (4 and 6 GHz), is still there to remind us that, as Sloterdijk (2008, p. 193) claimed, "if telecommunication constitutes a notion endowed with ontological seriousness, it is because it designates the practical concretization of densification."

In 1996, the regional channel had to share "the special window of television" (Moreno, 2018, p. 35) (i.e., the screen) with generalist channels from continental Portugal (SIC, TVI and RTP2). Nevertheless, the RTP-Açores remained popular among Azorean viewers. It was only in 2015 that this waned with the inauguration of cable broadcasts from mainland Portugal. During the same year, the RTP-Açores shared its broadcast of religious festivals with the RTP International channel, reaching the United States of America, Canada, and the Bermuda Islands. And even more recently, in 2017, the regular broadcast of RTP-Açores started in the USA (*RTP Daily News*, 2017).

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[6] I gathered this information throughout several conversations.

Figure 6 – Marconi antenna, São Miguel Island, 2021 (author's photo).

Samuel Weber (1996, p. 114) noted that, in television, "the overcoming of distance… is linked to the ability to transcend the spatial limitations usually associated with the body" and, I ought to add, also with the land. Therefore, television was not the continuation of another medium already in operation – it entailed a radical operation, with no continuation of aesthetic experience, implying the three main operations identified in Weber's (1996) theory: "production," "transmission," and "reception." Fundamentally, one might propose that newspapers, magazines, press and radio did not have the same kind of acceleration in the construction of the archipelago's perception as television did; only through this medium could images be subjugated to multiplication: a propagation whose content disseminated from the media architectural apparatus into the houses and cafes.

From the room to the landscapes, an archipelagic interiority

In the beginning of broadcasting in the archipelago, very few houses had televisions (RTP Files, 1995b). Apart from the wealthy ones, most people first watched television in cafes, shops and communal spaces. The absence of electricity in a considerable part of the archipelago, allied with the obstacles imposed by the sea – such as the land discontinuity – restricted the installation of television inside Azorean homes (RTP Files, 1995b). Some acquaintances of mine told me, a few months ago, that they clearly remember that television arrived at their house, located in Bretanha, in the north area of São Miguel Island, even before electricity. Helena, who was fourteen in August 1975, recalled that due to the proximity of her parents' house to the local church, which had a generator, the priest allowed them to watch those inaugural broadcasts, restricted in time and content.[7] She also added that her

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[7] Helena Rego, interview by the author, Bretanha, Ponta Delgada, São Miguel, 10 August 2022.

father bought a washing machine years before electricity came to the village. This testimony is symptomatic of the islanders' context during the 1970s. The strong emigration to the USA and Canada, in tandem with the geographical position of the Azores, enabled islanders to purchase technologically advanced devices, many of which were not yet common on the Portuguese mainland even though, in that summer of 1975, in the archipelago, most people were still waiting for electricity to be connected to their homes.

With the arrival of television, the nine islands began 'to turn towards each other,' I suggest, constituting a kind of mediated public space which is not equivalent to the more classic public one, such as a street or a square. It is not a physical space, in a material sense, yet it is mediated collectively. Indeed, this new public space seems to have been built from multiple public spaces (from each of the nine islands), at first; and several private spaces after that (the room). I propose that television gave rise to a new, modern, archipelagic interiority.

In that direction, a sense of unity began to be built, along with an identity dissemination project that started to break out in Azorean homes, with the *açorianidade* concept began being broadcast in domestic spaces such as Helena's. Therefore, RTP-Açores was – and still is – a fundamental tool in the consolidation of an archipelagic society. Perhaps the appropriate term is the consummation of an "aquapelagic assemblage" (Hayward, 2012) – in the sense that the sea is what simultaneously connects and separates the *is*-lands – through a common ground or, a common space, which ultimately ended up as this new mediated collective space.

In this case, drawing upon Colomina's (1996) theory on "the modern transformation of the house," "the private is... more public than the public;" and to be "'inside' this space is only to see" (p. 7). Transferring this idea to the Azorean context, when television is showing the regional channel, in a living room or a bedroom, the territory of the islands is being displayed. The habits, landscapes, materialities, histories – in brief, what 'composes' the Azores – is shown through television. From such spaces enclosed by walls, a new window to the public is opened, with a sense of the collective. What relates one inhabitant to another is, therefore, exhibited from their private spaces (Figure 7). In this way, from the enclosure of their houses, their rooms, the viewers are part of the construction of a common space. According to Moreno (2020), "broadcast media engenders a collective in solitude."

Once again, quoting Colomina (1996, p. 210): "the house is now a media center" within which viewers are shown a unique perspective, for almost two decades, in the case of the Azores. The domestication of the viewer's gaze occurs within the household realm, consequently, the contradictory aspect that could take place in a more classic public space does not have much scope for growth. In essence, there is, on the one hand, a manipulation of the network, of the diffusion, of the audience, through the control of the content itself, as Burnay (2012) attested; on the other hand, there is a (physical) space in which viewers receive information, in which they are mediated. The creation of 'mental spaces' through images enabled, in a certain way, a dismissal of their 'actual' construction in the material, societal, cultural, and physical realm. The room, or media center, transmitted the 'reality' of what is to be an Azorean. The concreteness of *açorianidade* was henceforth accessible through the screen.

Figure 7 - Living room, S. Miguel Island (author's photo, 2012).

As João (1993, p. 27) put it, "the most important feature of the islanders' territoriality is the island itself." In this light, what is uncanny and worth noting, is that the mediated space created by television seemed to supplant the physical public space. This refers, in an explicit way, to São Miguel. The biggest island does not have neighbourhood relations as others do, as I abruptly felt upon my arrival in 2000. Whilst I looked for land on the horizon, I only saw the sea. Only occasionally, when the weather was clement, could I distinguish Santa Maria's contour, in a kind of blueish and greyish shape. The writer Raul Brandão emphasised the significance of looking at other islands. As he wrote during his trip to the Azores in the 1920s:

> *I already realized that the most beautiful thing about the islands and what*
> *completes them is the island in front of each one – Corvo and Flores, Faial and*
> *Pico, Pico and S. Jorge, Terceira and Graciosa* ([1926] 2017), p. 95).

It is not by accident that São Miguel's inhabitants have the custom of referring to other islands as 'the islands,' seemingly demonstrating a sense of differing substantially from the others. In addition, and in a more meaningful way, they usually do not see them.

The ideologues of the audiovisual project seemed to intend to create a microcosm, a sphere – in a Sloterdijkian ([1998] 2011) sense – that would 'feed' itself. The paradox is that if television was an instrument associated with mass culture, it also allowed for a strengthened territorial enclosure. More precisely, I propose, this sense of having a shared 'space,' even if constructed through images, replaced the need to get to know the other islands of the same archipelago or, rather, it superseded the deprivation imposed by the insular isolation. In other words, the narrative transmitted by television appeared to be an adequate response to the obstacles related to travelling between the islands, notably, the travel costs. In fact, television showed what the other islands looked like. The RTP-Açores audience could see, daily, what was happening in other parts of the archipelago. For several years, television was the medium *par excellence* of recognition of both territory and society, considering that mobility between islands was only available to a small part of the population (Carneiro et al.,

2017). In other words, leaning upon the *açorianidade* concept and the *televised* content, to know one island seemed to be enough to extrapolate that knowledge to the others.

It is worth underlining that, even today, there are few connections between the Azorean islands (as of 2023, for example there were no passenger boat routes from or to São Miguel Island). The history of the Azores is profoundly marked by emigration, with the USA, Canada, Bermuda, and Brazil being the most preferred destinations (Carneiro et al., 2017). Indeed, with the families often living apart, it is common to hear that an Azorean went to the American continent but had never visited another island in the archipelago where they live in. 'To know other islands' is a relatively recent phenomenon, which was particularly expressive during 2021, when the Regional Government regulated the maximum cost for Azorean residents to travel in the archipelago at sixty Euros for a round-trip (including taxes) for one year. The so-called 'Azores Fare' is considered to have been successful in stimulating travel and awareness of the archipelagic space (Sata Azores Airlines, n.d.).

When referring to the "somewhat narrow environment in which [the Azoreans] live," Nemésio (1928, p. 170) referred to "the Azorean sociability law." The writer explained that the "small neighbourhood is their aggregation type," and adding that nevertheless, "perhaps with the exception of Ponta Delgada, sociability is an art with a refined style" (Nemésio, 1928, p. 170). Born in Angra do Heroísmo, in Terceira Island, Nemésio expressed some displeasure regarding the biggest city, claiming that whoever "disembarks in Ponta Delgada… will have the impression of a convent of merchants, low-ceilinged, gloomy," which "inculcates a shy rule of laymen or mendicants". He goes to detail that the streets "are narrow, the houses monotonous, the men speak with an irritating resonance" (Nemésio, 1928, p. 166). In this context, the "small neighbourhood" type (Nemésio, 1928, p. 170) evolved into an archipelagic interiority, through the advent of the RTP-Açores, "which allowed the Azoreans to get to know the Azores" (Silva, in Carneiro et al., 2017, p. 246). The archipelagic 'feeling of belonging' was built from inside the home, within the private space.

Being seen on screen (a territorial simulacrum)

With regard to televisual operation in the Azores, I suggest that there is a fulfilment in the overlay between the myth (or, rather, the message transmitted) and the territory. This somewhat spatial incarnation can be considered as a reiterated product of the principle of mutuality between media and territory. That is to say that the content of the regional public channel and the concept of the Azorean realm coincide, as a "territory effect," a concept adopted from Brenner and Elden (2009) who designate the normalisation of "state space as territory," enabling:

> *states to represent the impacts of their manifold spatial interventions as pregiven features of the physical landscape or as purely technical dimensions of the built environment rather than as politically mediated manipulations* (p. 373).

This "territory effect" corresponds to what is broadcast: it transmits the message that the territory 'is what appears on television.'

As Coccia ([2013] 2018, p. 21) argues, "we must begin to interrogate this huge, absolute discourse that every urban society produces about itself without contempt, and not just through the lens of aesthetics or semiotics." We can consider the televisual sphere in a similar

light. After Kittler ([1999] 2019), who contends that optical media (or electronic, in the case of television) involves a profound change in dealing with the symbolic, the RTP-Açores channel appears as the paramount example of iconic management. Kittler's ([1999] 2019, p. 43) provocation, highlighted in the third section of this article, inquiring "what media in general do" seems to require more than a semiotic or an aesthetic approach, as it appears essential to discuss the medial effects of television. More specifically, in this case, I propose that media produces the 'archipelago' in its 'global,' unitary form.

For that reason, the RTP-Açores channel was a new way of using media to deal with the symbolic: as Marshall McLuhan (1967, p. 165) contended, new media are "new environments". The viewers look at the screen, which offers itself as a mirror of their environment, created and repeated – essentially, confirmed – through the broadcast of fictional content, news and events coinciding with their message, which is 'you are part of this territory and society, defined by the characteristics displayed.' Or, in brief, 'you are seeing yourself, your identity.' Indeed, let us recall that this is precisely what José Lopes de Araújo, former director of the RTP-Açores' Regional Center (1984-1995), said about the regional channel: that the Azoreans did not acknowledge their own identity, since "they had not been seen on screen" (RTP Play, 2020). As such, the television screen presents itself as a mirror.

As Weber (1996, p. 120) outlined, the "rendering visible of this [television] coverage takes place before us, usually in our living room, not just on the screen but, even more, *as the screen*." This "convergence of mediality and reality" seems offers a *simulacrum*, raising the concept which Kittler ([1999] 2019, p. 37) picked-up himself from Baudrillard's theory.[8] Furthermore, this case also appears to entail a territorial simulacrum. As Kittler ([1999] 2019, p. 49) pointed out, "Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection in the surface of a pond precisely because this 'simulacrum' made the same fleeting gestures as he did himself." That is to say that the viewers, like Narcissus, fall in love with themselves, but not in the sense of vanity, as Sloterdijk explains:

> We should not *read the myth of Narcissus as evidence of a natural relationship between humans and their own faces in the mirror, but as an indication of the disturbingly unaccustomed nature of burgeoning facial reflection* ([1998] 2011, pp. 197-199)

But simply, for the first time, this televisual simulacrum makes the same fleeting gestures that he did to himself.

Among the most watched of regionally-produced television fiction programs were *Xailes Negros* (1986), *Gente Feliz com Lágrimas* (1988), *O Barco e o Sonho* (1989) and *Crónica de Gente Esquecida* (2001). Burnay (2012, p. 136) wrote that, from 1986, the regional channel established a contract with its viewers regarding the production of fiction, committing to involve Azorean people in the creation, production, and interpretation, in a consistent way. In short, the viewers knew themselves through television and content that seemed to be self-explanatory, as the Azorean inhabitants and territory 'are just like' what was displayed on the screen. This interface, the screen, is the medium that works simultaneously as an exclusion and an inclusion mechanism. *Lá fora* ('out there') is an expression commonly used among Azorean inhabitants, one which precisely accounts for this exclusion mechanism,

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[8] See Baudrillard (1988, pp. 166-184) for an outline of the concept.

which means that the concept of 'territory' is also formed through these instruments and their signs: what is inside, what is outside.[9] What is part of it, what is extraneous.

The screen, acting as a mirror, exposes the very simulacrum of the archipelago. The territory is simultaneously constitutive and constituent of the simulacrum, appealing to the viewers' senses, even though, according to Kittler ([1999] 2019, p. 34), "we knew nothing about our senses until media provided models and metaphors." This is in line with Mondzain's premise that "sharing a cult is not sharing a culture." The French philosopher further clarifies that:

> [w]ithout a true sharing of the view and the word, the transmission of a television and cinematographic culture makes it impossible to share the revolutionary and mobilizing force of all those art gestures that the 'habit' transforms into culture ([2007] 2015, p. 283).

In this sense, there seems to be a cultural identity created and promoted by television, with the utmost goal of constituting an idea of 'community,' a society with common ties, mediated through gazes, images and sounds, which the 'habit,' or the routine, transforms into 'culture.' Television creates and promotes an Azorean cultural identity, *açorianidade*, which, in turn, is associated with that specific territory: the nine islands and the immense sea surrounding it.

Conclusion: the media is the territory

Throughout this article, situated experience was favoured to accentuate the intersection of a first-person account and encounters in a particular environment. This convergence has allowed me to outline the manner in which the unifying political imaginary has used audiovisual technology to mediate its message, which, I contend, was (and still is) the existence of an Azorean identity, an Azorean culture and an Azorean territory. This mass media gesture is far from complete. It is an ongoing process, powered by everyday events and news. Since 1975, the inaugural moment of television's operation, the territorial limits have been drawn and the Azorean territory is the result of these procedures' effects. Consequently, territorial production and media production are intertwined. The relatively recent phenomenon of the Azores 'brand,' created in 2015 (Marca Açores, n.d.) is born from this mediation – after all, the message is that the Azorean territory is unified in cultural and identity terms.

The images of the Azorean landscapes, the sea, the religious festivities, the regional fictional content, and the daily activities that took place throughout the islands (among them, fisheries, and agriculture), were all assembled in a unique audiovisual platform and became the prevailing audiovisual narrative about the Azoreans and their own territory for almost twenty years. Television was telling a single history, and it was focused on what de Araújo called "a cultural project" (*RTP Play*, 2020). McLuhan (1994) asserted that "the medium is the message," Groys ([2000] 2012), p. 69) declared that "the speaking subject can rarely reflect and can never consciously control this statement of the medium." Groys ([2000] 2012), p. 71-72) went further, asserting that McLuhan's claim "means nothing else but that all media at any time are always already absolutely sincere." It should be added that if the medium "really is the message... what is left for us to do or say?" (Williams, [1974] 2003, p. xi). In relation to

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[9] Azoreans commonly say 'out there' to refer to the Portuguese mainland and to the American continent.

the case outlined throughout this article, the argument is that media and territory are mutually constitutive. It is for that reason that it is not as interesting to think about the relationship between the Azorean territory *and* the media, as it is to think about the Azorean territory *as* media. Fundamentally, the mediation of the territory in a unified way was only possible through television and its regional channel.

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