

Edition and visual culture: Brás Cubas and its multiple incarnations

Edição e cultura visual: Brás Cubas e suas múltiplas encarnações

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Abstract *The article has as an exemplary object the book by Machado de Assis Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, published in different editions and aims at problematising the relations between the texts and the materiality of the media in which they are published. It evaluates the role of design as the praxis of editorial mediation, having in view the framework of visual studies and reading practices. It is a theoretical reflection which is based upon bibliographical research and which appropriates reproductions of pages of different editions as visual arguments articulated with the debated topics. It also presents data about the ways of reading/access to the text which were obtained by means of a questionnaire and interviews.*

Keywords: *Edition; Visual culture; Design; Reading; Brás Cubas*

Resumo *O artigo toma como objeto exemplar a obra de Machado de Assis Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, publicada em diferentes edições, para pro-*

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blematizar as relações entre textos e materialidade dos suportes que os veiculam. Avalia o papel do design enquanto práxis de mediação editorial, tendo em vista o âmbito dos estudos visuais e das práticas de leitura. Trata-se de uma reflexão teórica que tem como fundamento a pesquisa bibliográfica e que se apropria de reproduções de páginas de edições da obra como argumentos visuais articulados aos tópicos debatidos. Apresenta também dados acerca de modos de leitura/acesso ao texto obtidos por meio de questionário e entrevistas.

Palavras-chave: Edição; Cultura visual; Design; Leitura; Brás Cubas

Resumen *El artículo tiene como objeto ejemplar la obra de Machado de Assis Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas, publicada en distintas ediciones, para problematizar las relaciones entre textos y materialidad de los suportes que los transportan. Evalúa el papel del design como práctica de mediación editorial, teniendo en cuenta el ámbito de los estudios visuales y de las prácticas de la lectura. Representa una reflexión teórica que tiene como fundamento la pesquisa bibliográfica y que se apropia de reproducciones de páginas de ediciones de la obra como argumentos visuales articulados a los tópicos debatidos. Presenta también datos sobre modos de lectura/acceso al texto alcanzados por medio de cuestionario y entrevistas.*

Palabras-clave: Edición; Cultura visual; Diseño; Lectura; Brás Cubas

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Introduction

Brás Cubas tells us his story for the first time in 1880. Published in the form of a roman-feuilleton in the third volume of the first year of the *Revista Brasileira* [Brazilian Magazine], it required that, from March to December of that year, the readers followed the seventeen parts which composed *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* [The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas – Title of the translation into English: *Epigraph of a Small Winner*] in order to know the denouement of the narrative. In the work written by Machado de Assis, the main character presents his “theory of the human editions” by defending that the human being “is a thinking erratum”. According to him, “every season of life is an edition which corrects the anterior one and which will also be corrected until the definitive edition the editor gives to the worms gratuitously”⁴ (ASSIS, 2001, p. 120). At that time, maybe the apogee in the life of a work was to incarnate itself in a book, which occurred in January of the following year, in an edition of the *Tipografia Nacional* [National Typography], which presented modifications in its arrangement. If for Brás Cubas the edition was like the body and the body like an edition, which at the end of his life would be eaten by the earth, he would certainly be impressed by the trajectory of his flesh which survived for more than 120 years.

If you search the title of the work on Google search tool, within 0.21 seconds, it presents 334,000 links. Among the first sites that are listed there are *Wikipedia*, the *Guia do Estudante Abril* [Abril Publisher's Student's Guide] which publishes the summary of the book, as well as *Vestibular Brasil Escola* [Vestibular Brazil School – Vestibular is an examination high school graduate students must pass to gain the admission to a Brazilian university] hosted on portal R7. There are also pictures of the covers of the edited books and of the film with the actor Reginaldo Farias, besides access links to files which promise to lead to the whole text.

⁴ In the book *Brás Cubas autor, Machado de Assis leitor, [Brás Cubas author Machado de Assis reader]* Regina Zilberman dedicates the chapter “*Minha teoria das edições humanas*” – *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas e a poética de Machado de Assis* [“My theory of the human editions” – *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas and Machado de Assis' poetics*] to the analysis of this subject in the author's work.

Only on the second page with search results, we find the site of some bookshops which offer the printed book and share the space with videos of classes of literature professors who comment the work. There are at least 334,000 forms of incarnations, which include the media book, but are not limited to it.

By taking as a model *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* in different editions, the present article problematises the relationships between the texts and the materiality of the supports which vehiculate them with the objective to evaluate the role of design as a *praxis* of editorial mediation, having in mind the framework of visual studies and reading practices. It is a theoretical reflection which is based upon bibliographical research and which articulates reproductions of pages of the editions of the work as visual arguments with the topics which are debated in the text. We also present data concerning the ways of reading/access to the work we obtained by means of a questionnaire and interviews.⁵

Verbal and visual: textual plots

The editorial market has undergone important transformations, especially during the last decades. In *The order of Books* Chartier (1994, p. 96), quotes Martin⁶, by emphasising that “the book does not exert the power it had formerly any more, since it is not the master of our thoughts and feelings in front of the news means of information and communication we dispose of nowadays”. According to the author, the expression “the book crisis” appeared in France in 1890, when the idea of a book super-production was quite present among editors, observers and journalists, “as if the market, which increased in the second half of the 19th century were not sufficient to absorb the production in the last ten ye-

⁵ Data collected by means of a closed questionnaire via form and interviews carried out with some of its respondent are it is part of André Moraes’ Master’s degree dissertation. The research worked with a small and delimited sample and attempted to constitute a survey study which aimed at identifying the forms of compulsory reading appropriation of the students who took part in the vestibular of UFRGS, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul [University of the Federal State of Rio Grande do Sul] in 2011.

⁶ MARTIN, H. J. *Le message écrit: la réception*, conference held at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques [Academy of Moral and Political Sciences], march 15th 1993.

ars of the same century” (CHARTIER, 2001, p. 20). The contemporary concerns find possible threats to the traditional book production in the electronic texts and in the means of communication.

In the media products, which offer their services to vehiculate Machado de Assis’ work, including sites, films, theatre plays, TV series, outdoors and the very printed books, we observe the proliferation of different forms of visualisation and materialisation of the text. Even in visual arts, Brás Cubas gains life in works such as that of the artist William Kentridge, entitled *De Como Não Fui Ministro d’Estado* [*On how I was not a Minister of State*], of 2012, which assumes the character’s role by self-portraying himself on the pages of a copy of the book (Figure 1) and by afterwards transforming the sequence into a cartoon. In a certain way all these forms present Machado de Assis’ text and very often create new texts based on versions, adaptations and recreations.

In a first approximation, by contrasting the verbal with the visual, we observe distinct movements of appropriation. Whereas, on the basis of the first we proceed from the exact to the polysemic, affirms Catalá Domènech (2011), by means of the second, we pass from the polysemic to the concrete through the understanding of the visual structure of the pictures. According to the author,



Figure 1. Pages of the book *De como não fui Ministro d’Estado* [*On how I was not a Minister of State*], by William Kentridge.

In our civilization, writing is fundamentally based on the transparency of its materiality, whereas the picture is based upon the necessity for this materiality to be opaque, that is to say, that it holds the gaze instead of letting it roaming towards another place. Whereas to learn how to read means to efface the material support of the written element in order to internalise and automate its symbolic mechanisms, to learn how to see implies to make the materiality of the figurative visible in order to construct a new symbology on it. They are two antagonistic cognitive mechanisms, although they both converge towards a similar knowledge process. (CATALÁ DOMÈNECH, 2011, p. 15).

Thus the page of a book, which contains texts and pictures, would allow two distinct entry modes by favouring diverse and complementary cognitive experiences. Nonetheless we are interested in taking its layout, which is a set of elements, as a picture – being only composed of types and also of figures –, which on the basis of its graphical configuration provides reading indices. The reading objects are differentiated in format, colour, layout, etc. and, above all, in their function and usage. In this sense,

the social function of the objects that convey the text translates itself in what we call “codes”, that is to say, in habits of presentation, of format, of layout, the recognition of which is the first stage of the construction of meaning and which define so many different ways of reading: reading on lines organised in pages, for a novel, in columns, with continuation on other pages, for the newspaper; in paragraphs (entries), for the dictionary; in vignettes apparently separated, for a cartoon [...] (CHARMEUX, 1994, p. 78).

Besides these elements, we must consider the organisation of the contents to which they are linked: footnotes, reference indices, relations text/tables, etc., which leads to different reading systems. Thus the reading practices involve the subjects’ proficiency to adapt their own conducts to the objects which convey the text.

The materiality of the texts and the process of editorial mediation

In the configuration of the book, “the divisions of the text, the typographic conventions and the punctuation are invested with an ex-

pressive function” (CHARTIER, 2005, p. 7). In the edition process, but also in the development of other media products, this function is contaminated by questions which go far beyond purely aesthetic issues. The vehiculation of a text corresponds to a universe which involves an economic system and a communication process, in which people (writers and readers), social classes (capitalists and workers), professional categories (printers, editors and advertisers), technologies and objects participate. In this context, the object book is equivalent to its material facet. According to Zilberman (2001, p. 113), “due to its nature, the book confers materiality on the actions it allows and it influences writing and reading as well, as if we went back to the beginning of the way, drawing a circle”.

The publication process implies a plurality of spaces, of techniques, of machines and of individuals. Against the abstraction of the texts, we must remember that the ways which allow us to read, hear and see them thoroughly participate in the construction of their meanings. The “same” text, set in letters, is not the “same” in case the devices of its writing and of its communication change. The production not only of books, but of the very texts implies, besides the writing gesture, diverse moments, techniques and interventions, such as those of the copyists, of the editors booksellers, of the printing masters, of the typesetters, of the reviewers and nowadays of the designers of the printed and digital books, among others. A publication is the result of a work which requires various actors. Even if the digital technologies and the informatics networks had an impact on the traditional structures and procedures of the editorial production, thus modifying the supply chain of the book, stages and functions which are associated with the development of publications imply different possibilities of intervention.

According to Cardoso (2012), almost every object visually transmits information about its nature and, even before it is being manipulated, it induces the determined position on the part of the one who approaches it. The treatment, which is reserved to each one, reveals an accumulation of judgments, creeds and values which derive from anterior experiences and memories as well as from information which

was obtained indirectly. According to the author, we have a tendency to naturalise such meanings – that is to say, to consider that they derive from the nature of the object and that they have been the same since always –, but the fact is that all of them were constructed and are continuously being reconstituted by means of culture and their symbolic exchanges. He affirms that each meaning exists only within a larger system. On this basis it is possible to understand that formal meaning is more a process than a thing. According to him, it would be better to speak of “significance”, that is to say: a process by means of which meanings are being added, subtracted and transformed with regard to the total set of the significant forms.

In the supply chain of the book, the designer is responsible, and the editor together with him, for the decisions relative to the configuration of the text and to the materialisation of the book as object. According to Gruszynski (2008), this professional is also a mediator, because he acts as a visual articulator of messages which are previously conceived by writers and directed towards readers, according to the target audience to whom the object is destined. He will give shape to the author’s text by using elements such as typography, grid (composed of marks such as margins, columns, and page markers), colours and illustrations. All this occurs by having in view a specific printing process, on a kind of paper and with binding processes that are chosen among those which are available on the market, in the case of a printed edition; or by considering a kind of reading device (tablet, mobile, e-reader etc.), in the case of digital editions.

Thus the editorial mediation process presupposes, besides the editor’s involvement, different other agents, among them the designers, in the configuration of a text. Thus there are numerous layers of meaning which will be added to the originals after they left the writer’s hands until the book will be distributed – from the first reviews, the inclusions and exclusions of some passages to the design and the printing or file generation in digital format for reading. All these ways to configure a text belong to the final object which will be presented to a reader who has been imagined since the beginning of these procedures.

Brás Cubas in multiple editions: from the printed to the digital edition

Various researchers of Textual Criticism, of the Sociology of Reading, of the History of Literature in Brazil and abroad affirm the importance of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* by Machado de Assis (1839-1908). As we saw it, the text was first published as a roman-feuilleton and it took the form of a book in 1881 when it was published by the same publisher as that of the *Revista Brasileira* [*Brazilian Magazine*], the Tipografia Nacional [National Typography], a State Company. Fifteen years later, in 1896, Editora Garnier [Garnier Publisher] launches the third edition, which is the second book edition. In 1899, Garnier—that now has the copyright of Machado de Assis’ complete works —, launches another edition, the last one the author followed. From then on, the effects of *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* have not stopped manifesting themselves,

when we consider the encouraging and accumulated critical fortune, the various editions which were produced in Brazil and abroad, the transpositions to other means of communication, the impact it has had since its appearance on Brazilian novelists; an example of this are *Memórias sentimentais de João Miramar* [*Sentimental Memoirs of João Miramar*], by Oswald de Andrade. (ZILBERMAN, 2012, p. 11).

Besides their importance as a mark of Brazilian literature, the objects which served the publication of the text *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* stimulate a graphical analysis because it is a work which suggests the perception of the importance of the materiality of the editions on Machado Assis’ part. The theory of the human editions we presented at the beginning of this text is also valid for Cubas to develop the thesis that one could understand the human being as the picture of the book. In the chapter “Volta ao Rio”, [Back to Rio] he affirms “we are not an audience in-folio, but in-12, little text, big margin, elegant type, golden edges and vignettes... mainly vignettes” (ASSIS, 2001, p. 113).

By speaking of graphical design elements such as the format (in-folio, in-12), the size of the margins and the illustrations/vignettes, Machado

de Assis manifests his attention to the material facet of his texts through the character of the novel. A reader who is searching the book today will find hundreds of book editions. Each one followed an editorial trajectory, from the publisher's decision to publish the text to the moment in which the book gets into the reader's hands. In order to identify the influence of design and of the process of editorial mediation in different situations, we selected six editions for our analysis: the first which was launched as a roman-feuilleton (1880) and the first book edition (1881), both by the Tipografia Nacional [National Typography], the Cem Bibliófilos do Brasil [Brazil's Hundred Bibliophiles] edition (1944), the editions for vestibulandos [the students who must pass an examination to gain the admission to university] of *Leitura XXI* [Reading XXI] publishers (2009) and *BestBolso* [Best Pocketbook] (2012) and an edition in Epub of the *Projeto Obra Completa* [Complete Work Project].

In Figures 2 to 4, there is the composition of the text which was done by the Tipografia Nacional [National Typography]. On the first page of

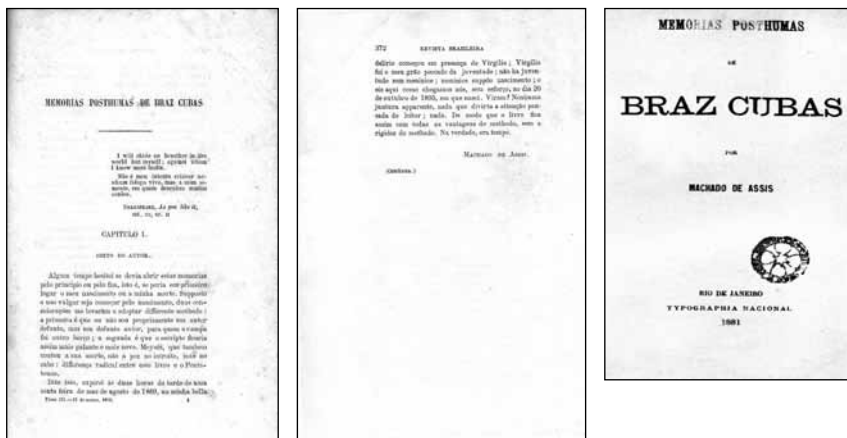


Figure 2. First page of the feuilleton text. Published in the *Revista Brasileira* [Brazilian Magazine] (1880), year 1, volume III. **Figure 3.** Last page of the feuilleton text. Published in the *Revista Brasileira* [Brazilian Magazine] (1880), year I, volume III. **Figure 4.** Cover sheet of the first book edition. Edited by the Tipografia Nacional [National Typography] (1881).

the *feuilleton* (Figure 2), with regard to the hierarchy of the disposed elements, we notice that the title stands out in sharp relief. On this page, Machado de Assis takes advantage of the fact that the signature of the authorship of the texts is at the end (Figure 3) in order to confer the function of author upon *Brás Cubas*. Since it is presented in the middle of other texts, the *feuilleton* follows the pattern format of the magazine, 16x24cm, as well as its visual identity. But in the first book edition (Figure 4), the format is 12 x 18 cm. In this case, the strategy for the signature of the text also changes: *Brás Cubas* gains emphasis on the cover sheet and Machado de Assis appears immediately beneath, on the second plane. The book cover is hard and the inside, with 390 pages, presents narrower margins than the *feuilleton* does⁷.

63 years after the publication of the *Tipografia Nacional* [National Typography], there is a volume which draws the attention due to its graphical acuteness. Besides including illustrations by Cândido Portinari⁸ (Figure 5), the first edition of the *Coleção dos Cem Bibliófilos do Brasil* [Collection of Brazil's Hundred Bibliophiles], printed between 1943 and 1944, is a hard cover edition, with dust-jacket cover and differentiated paper between the inside with the text and the insets with the pictures. The Sociedade dos Cem Bibliófilos do Brasil [Society of Brazil's Hundred Bibliophiles] was inspired by the bibliophile associations that exist in France and in England and valorise the book as a precious object and for this reason, they thought that the editions ought to be printed with a limited edition and the control over the quality of each copy ought to be maintained. According to Monteiro and Lima:

Each book was treated as a jewel. Because they are not any books, they are books about Brazil. They are not illustrated by any illustrators; the illustrators are native or naturalised Brazilians. The motto which stimulated the CCB production [*Coleção dos Cem Bibliófilos do Brasil* [Collection of Brazil's Hundred Bibliophiles]] differs from the one used for books that are sold in bookshops. They are unique, personalised pieces and therefore

⁷ It is convenient to emphasise that the rebinding of the analysed copy can have affected the size of the margins.

⁸ Now the original gravures are at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM) [Museum of Modern Art].

expensive. This fact leads us to understand why the hundred bibliophiles were wealthy people who belonged to the *crème* of Brazil's elite. They were all Castro Maya's acquaintances. We can say that, in Brazil, not all the members were passionately involved in literature and bibliophilism. They were entrepreneurs, artists, politicians, physicians and bankers. There are controversies with regard to the reasons for the formation of bibliophilism groups, who published books with extreme craftsmanship and with gravures as illustrations. For many of them to possess copies of this carat was a good business, more than any other literary devotion. (MONTEIRO e LIMA, 2009, p. 3).

Each edition of the collection was different from the others. In the case of *Brás Cubas*, the format is 28x38cm, with broad margins and the text is distributed over 316 pages. The typography which is used is with serif. On the cover, the title is enhanced and the illustrations of the worm which was the first to gnaw Brás Cuba's cold flesh (Figure 6) – to which the text has been dedicated since the 1881 edition. Machado de Assis' and Cândido Portinari's names appear with the same weight.



Imagem 5. *O enterro*, [The burial] eau-forte by Cândido Portinari (1943/1944) used as illustration.

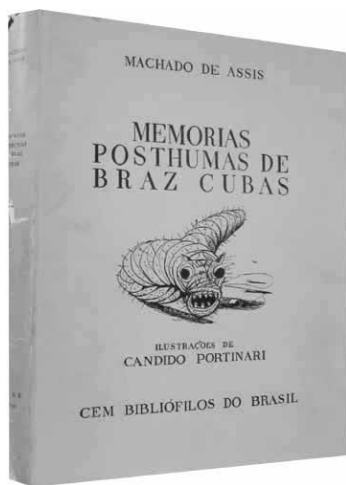


Imagem 6. Cover of the book published by the Sociedade dos Cem Bibliófilos do Brasil [Society of Brazil's Hundred Bibliophiles] (1944).

Among the luxurious editions that had already been published, it is this one which the book collectors most valorise, because only 119 copies were printed.

Compulsory reading for the *vestibulandos* of the main Brazilian universities, the work can be found in more popular versions. In the 2009 edition of *Leitura XXI* [Reading XXI] – specialised in didactic and paradigmatic books – we notice an editorial proposal which is quite different from that of the *Cem Bibliófilos* [Hundred Bibliophiles]. In this case, it is part of a collection called *Clássicos Comentados* [Commented Classics]. On the cover the title is enhanced (Figure 7), followed by the authorship which has less weight. Beneath the author's name, there is the indication of the commentator's name. In this case the main picture is not an ordered illustration, but a reproduction of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's painting *Desiré Dihau (reading a newspaper in the garden)*, of 1890. Belonging to the public domain Lautrec's work is not credited in the expedient of the book. Here the graphic artist is not valorised like in the 1944 edition. The format is 14x21cm, brochure cover with blurbs, 232 pages in recycled paper, with narrow margins. There is a variation of the typographical choice between the cover and the inside, which leads to the lack of visual identity between the parts. On the cover, they used two ty-

pographical families, one for the name of the collection, with traditional serif and another one for the title, which has no serif, is more geometrical and wears the publisher's name. In the inside there is a second typography with serif on the front page (Figure 8) and in the body of the text. For the comments which cut the Machadian text, another typographical family appears, with square, but contemporary serif (Figure 9).

BestBolso [Best Pocketbook] publisher, of the Publishers *Grupo Editorial Record*, betted on the Machadian classic published in a popular edition by using the slogan “the greatest authors in the smallest formats”. The format is the same as that of the 1881 edition 12x18cm, but the graphical strategies are quite different. On the cover of the 2012 edition, we see the valorisation of the author's name (Figure 10). Differently from the first book edition, the character of Brás Cubas has less space than Machado de Assis. It is obvious that the audience the editors want to reach is composed of the *vestibulandos* [the students who must pass the examination to gain admission to a Brazilian university], having in view the inclusion of the yellow seal, which says: “*vestibular FUVEST 2013*”



Figure 7. Cover of the book published by *Editora Literatura XXI* [Literature XXI Publisher] (2009). **Figure 8.** Front page of the book published by *Editora Literatura XXI* [Literature XXI Publisher] (2009). **Figure 9.** Page with comments in the book published by *Editora Literatura XXI* [Literature XXI Publisher] (2009).

[Fundação Universitária para o Vestibular – University Foundation for the Vestibular]. The cover picture is a collage of various superposed photographs, including a landscape of Rio de Janeiro in the background, the baroque statue of a winged figure and calligraphic writings out of focus. All this is in a sepia tone which refers to the aesthetics of ancient photos. Again the photographs as originals are not credited, but it is possible to find the designers' names of the cover in the expedient. The typography of the cover is different from that of the inside, but in both cases the option which is used is traditional serif. Differently from the 2009 edition, there is no commentator. The cover is brochure and there are no blurbs. The margins which are used in the 240 pages of the inside are narrow (Figure 11) and the paper has a weight of 56g/m² (whereas in the other editions we analysed the weight is at least 90g/m²). This low weight makes the paper less opaque. So if we are reading page 100, for example, we see a stain of the text of the following pages, at least until page 102.

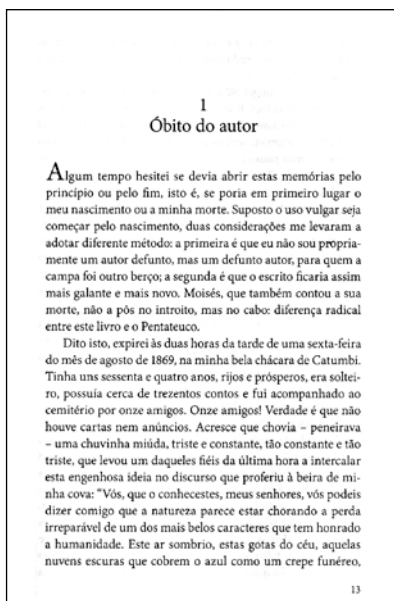


Figure 10. Cover of the book published by *Editora BestBolso* [Best Pocketbook Publisher] (2012). **Figure 11.** Page of the inside of the book published by *Editora BestBolso* [Best Pocketbook Publisher] (2012).

Since the popularisation of the personal computer and of the internet, besides the printed books, the work got a form in the so called digital books, available in diverse formats. Nowadays we have access to e-books, which unite text, pictures and larger degrees of interaction (beyond turning over the printed pages), to others which give priority to the text as a main content, such as those in EPub format, for example. When we search the editions of *Brás Cubas* in this format which are available for a download free of charge on Google, the first non-sponsored link directs us towards the site EbookBR⁹. There we find Machado's text published by the *Projeto Obra Completa*¹⁰ [Complete Work Project] of the Ministério da Educação [Ministry of Education]. On Figure 12, we see two possible layout tests on the application iBook which is available on iPads. The two examples offer possibilities of modifying the typography, as far as the design of the letter is concerned (typographical family and source), its size, (body) and the colour of the background of the pages. The use of the page is identified with vertical orientation, like in most of the printed novels. Besides the reading possibility with the device in the vertical position, this file format also allows the reading in the horizontal position by adjusting the format of the page.

In these options of front page, we see the whole title in the same typography. There is no differentiation between the words “*memórias póstumas*” and the main character's name, as we saw it in the printed editions of the 19th century. The author's name follows in second plane, inserted in the reference to the source-text. When we augment the size of the letter, the elements run on the page, such as we can perceive it in the example of the right of Figure 12. With the source-text in a larger body, the words “*na Revista Brasileira*” [in the *Brazilian Magazine*] went to the following page. Besides these two visual options with typographical variations which are presented for the EPub, there are many other possible variations, having in view that each reading application will present

⁹ Available on: <<http://www.ebookbr.com/2012/04/memorias-postumas-de-bras-cubas.html>>. Access on March 5th 2013.

¹⁰ Available on: <<http://machado.mec.gov.br>>. Access on March 5th 2013.

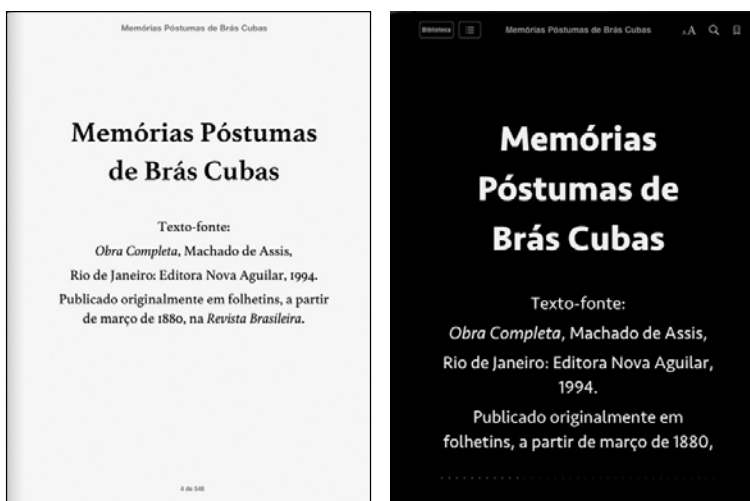


Figure 12. EPub *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* on the software iBook, on iPad.

a more or less large list of possible letters which can be selected and each device (*tablet*, mobile phone, desktop computer, to quote some of them) will have a different screen size.

By means of the evaluation of the selected editions, we observed that, by configuring different objects, the design favours varied reading experiences, which involve distinct functions and modes of appropriation. In this sense, conventions, habits and aptitudes, in their diversity, guide practices of the access to the publications, which are circumscribed by parameters, such as time, place, support and motivations.

Brás Cubas and its multiple readers

Thus the readers are one of the dimensions which are involved, when we undertake an attempt to understand the dynamics between the different materialities of the text and the meaning process. It is useful to present some indications about the process of appropriation such as it occurs in the present context of the technical configurations and of the reading habits. In 2011, a survey was carried out with 263 students matriculated

in the first year of UFRGS – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul [Federal University of the State of Rio Grande do Sul] of nine courses (Medicine, Law, Psychology, Biology, Veterinarian Medicine, Computer Sciences, Civil Engineering, Humanities and Advertising), in which we attempted to observe the forms of contact with the twelve works of the compulsory reading list for the literature test of the *vestibular* of that year, which included *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas*. We mainly attempted to investigate the reading supports, but the observation provided various indications about the relationship between the students and the different titles.

Machado de Assis was one of the focuses of the survey. A selection of the author's tales, which was also included in the *vestibular* list, was the work that had the largest readership of the sample, with 218 readers (83%). *Brás Cubas* was the third, with 183 readers (70%), after *Lucíola* by José de Alencar (187 readers, 71% of the sample). In our survey we also observed how the reading of each title was divided within the different courses. In the sample, 88% of the medicine students, 73% of the law, biology and humanities students, 70% of the veterinary medicine students, 67% of the psychology students, 66% of the computer sciences students, 70% of the civil engineering students and 48% of the advertising students had read *Brás Cubas*¹¹.

The readers of this particular title had an expressive preference for the printed book. This was the support that 172 in 183 students who indicated that they had done an integral reading. Five students said that they had read the whole work in a Xerox copy or in mimeographed texts, three had read it on the computer and one in an audio-book¹². The media distribution was different as far as the title is concerned. 59 readers had read the *Contos de Machado de Assis* [*Machado de Assis' Tales*] in Xerox copy/mimeographed text, maybe because of the smaller size and 32 had read it on the computer.

¹¹ In terms of comparison, the order of the reading averages in the sample (from the largest to the smallest) was: medicine, law, psychology, biology, veterinary medicine, computer science, civil engineering, humanities and advertising.

¹² Two respondents did not indicate the reading categories in their forms. This is the reason why the total here is 181.

The survey also attempted to observe which alternative forms of contact with the works the students used. The students could say if they had watched films or documentaries based upon the titles. *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* was the first of the list in this point and it was indicated by 20 students¹³. By the way and as far as this work by Machado de Assis is concerned, we observed an interesting effect of support superposition. Some students indicated that they had used multiple forms of contact with the works in their preparation process for the *vestibular*. A law student said that she had used the following categories: printed book, computer, internet synopsis, printed synopsis, film, talk, as far as *Brás Cubas* is concerned. Besides answering the written questionnaire, this student was later interviewed on the phone so that a qualitative division of the data could be effectuated. She commented that she had first read the work in a printed book and had watched the film later in order to establish comparisons about the script. She also used an electronic version in order to facilitate the consultation.

Machado de Assis' titles were also part of one of the tendencies we observed. Works in public domain had more readers using electronic means than those which have the copyright. Four of the five most read titles on the computer had no copyright, including *Contos [Tales]* and *Brás Cubas*. The five works that were most read in printed books included the most protected titles (three).

We must admit that a sample in a specific social and age group context, such as the students of a federal university who were obliged to read a work for a *vestibular* can only offer very preliminary indicators about modes of text appropriation. Besides this, the *corpus* which is limited by technical questions requires, methodologically speaking, that results be not generalized – which, in this case, are not even representative of the totality of the student groups we investigated. Even though, if we take into consideration a universe of 263 students, it is

¹³The support film or documentary was marked, on the whole, by 83 of the 263 respondents, or 31.56%. *Brás Cubas* led the number of indications equal with *O Primo Basílio [Cousin Basilio]* (20 respondents each), followed by *O Pagador de Promessas [The Keeper of Vows]* with 9 students.

interesting how it is possible to observe certain phenomena, such as the support superposition or the convenience motivation for the choice of some of them in particular. All these effects can contribute to the meaning process of the work in the way in which it presents itself to the reader and they also help to illustrate the complexity which the variation of reading devices and modes introduces in the environment in which the users live, which is the last instance in the supply chain of the book.

Final considerations

The plots between text and picture propose different reading experiences, which are configured on the basis of the mediation of the design that intervenes in an integrated way in a supply chain. On the basis of the configuration of the objects laden with the verbal and visual signs, parameters and conditions of visualisation and world comprehension are being (re)constructed, according to technological interfaces which broaden the diversity of the ways of access to the information.

By means of the analysis of the exemplary editions of Machado de Assis' work *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* we attempted to problematise the relationships between word and picture by taking into consideration that on the one hand a page is reading and on the other hand it is picture and vision, it has common places, possible overlaps and uncertain intersections. According to Machado (2001), in accordance with the philosophical system we refer to, the word seems to be the substance of thought or, even if it were not so, the word only permits the thinker to go beyond the pure physical impression of raw things, to reach the most elaborate abstraction and synthesis levels or even to be able to formulate sufficiently universal concepts so that he can explain all the singular occurrences. By graphically representing the words, writing is similar to an electric current which communicates the sounds of language it evokes to the brain. To the extent that they seem to get instantaneously to the reader's conscience, there is the impression that particularities relative to the graphics are not relevant. The supposed invisibility of the written

word is related to the automatic passage from the visual to the sonorous which occurs through learning how to read and write, to the extent that who knows how to read gradually forgets the letter and sees/hears the word, the sentence, the text.

By treating the typographical signs as a simultaneous part of the verbal and visual codes, our approach emphasised the materiality of the supports as a fundamental part of the processes of meaning attribution. Typography, in its different articulation levels, belongs to a symbolic system of verbal signs which is governed by a series of rules and from the imagetic point of view, submits itself to malleable conventions, thus it can consider subjective preferences as well as contextual adaptations. To the extent that the printed page, as a graphical space, is re-dimensioned according to variable dynamics which are proper to digital devices, new practices of writing, reading and visibility are being instituted, according to the proper movements of a culture which is involved in constant transformation.

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