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# METACRITIC PRACTICE: a configuration of new journalistic narratives

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**ABSTRACT** - An ongoing effort is being made in the field of communication to map the possibilities of media criticism, since there are several modalities of study in this area. In the present paper, we propose a glance at the journalistic metacriticism that emerges from work cultures financed by alternative models – an organizational redesign that has made the circulation of new narratives about social life possible. Starting from the counter-hegemonic place that vitalizes this other journalism, methodologically, we resort to analyzing and case studying narratives produced in the context of the project *Ponte: Direitos humanos, justiça e segurança pública*. (Ponte: Human rights, justice and public safety).

**Keywords:** Narratives; Mediatization; Journalism; Criticism; *Ponte*.

## PRÁTICA METACRÍTICA: a configuração de novas narrativas jornalísticas

**RESUMO** - Está em andamento, no campo da comunicação, um esforço para o mapeamento das possibilidades de crítica de mídia, já que são várias as modalidades de estudo nessa área. Nesse caso, propomos um olhar sobre a metacrítica jornalística que emerge a partir de culturas de trabalho financiadas por modelos alternativos – redesenho organizacional que vem possibilitando a circulação de novas narrativas sobre o social. Partindo do lugar contra-hegemônico que vitaliza esse outro jornalismo, recorreremos, metodologicamente, ao estudo de caso em consonância com a análise de narrativas produzidas no contexto do projeto *Ponte: Direitos humanos, justiça e segurança pública*.

**Palavras-chave:** Narrativas; Mediatização; Jornalismo; Crítica; *Ponte*.

## PRÁCTICA METACRÍTICA: la configuración de nuevas narrativas periodística

**RESUMEN** - Está en proceso, en el campo de la comunicación, un esfuerzo para el mapeamiento de las posibilidades de crítica de los medios, ya que son diversas modalidades de estudio en esa área. En este caso, proponemos un exámen sobre la metacrítica que emerge a partir de culturas de trabajo financiadas por modelos alternativos – otro dibujo organizacional que viene posibilitando una circulación de nuevas narrativas sobre la vida social. A partir del lugar contra-hegemónico que vitaliza ese otro periodismo, emprendemos, metodológicamente, un análisis y estudio de caso de las narrativas producidas en el contexto del proyecto del proyecto *Ponte: Direitos humanos, justiça e segurança pública* (Ponte: Derechos humanos, justicia y seguridad pública).

**Palabras clave:** Narrativas; Mediatización; Periodismo; Crítica; *Ponte*.

### 1. Introduction

This article raises reflections on new journalistic experiences that manage to articulate different editorial manifestations, considering the counter-hegemonic values that, at different levels, feed these practices. It is not, however, a question of romanticizing the conditions of production, reception and circulation of these narratives, but of recognizing the mood that distinguishes such work modes from those undertaken by journalistic corporations oriented by financial news and the duty to advise specific political actors.

In the journalism that serves as object of this reflection, the notion of alternative emerges more in the sociotechnical conditions that vitalize its narratives, than, necessarily, in a deontological change in relation to the horizon of expectations of the profession. However, it is undeniable that the structural shifts of a rapidly mediated society have consequences for contemporary journalism's ways of doing so, both in relation to (increasingly global) space and its relation to the amalgam of intrinsic temporalities to the mediated present.

In this scenario, journalism must deal with a multiple and shattered “now”, and still be able to launch social readings that offer

goals to the complex set of contemporary social life temporalities. From this imperative, the notion of the journalist as a critic of social (fractured) reality emerges; a reader of the present capable of proposing hermeneutics in which the crises enunciation can generate not only denunciations, but also myriads of alternatives and possibilities. We understand that in the nature of this doing there is a metacritical action, that is, a structural criticism that, before being directed to an external object, becomes a presupposition that creates a way of doing; a principle that offers ethical senses to the profession's exercise, the ways of relation with the other, the active and transforming dimension implicit to the narrating gesture.

To account for this reflection, we structured this article in three parts: (1) in the first part, we present a preliminary diagnosis of the changes introduced in the world of journalistic work by social mediatization; (2) in the sequence, we discuss some aspects of the critical activity applied to journalism and delineate the notion of metacriticism in this context; (3) finally, we present a case study carried out with the "Ponte Project", in which this metacriticism lays the foundations for another approach to crime and police reporting, evidenced by some productions' configurative elements, such as the sources triggered in the report, narrative voice attribution and the reflective insertion of the narrator-journalist.

## **2. Journalism today**

The process of mediatization spreads in all social spheres by offering different meanings to individuals eager for information and explanations about the world they live in. Reflecting, therefore, on the journalistic field, is also to think the articulation of this field with the symbolic layers that are constituted from the juxtaposed or sequential temporalities of contemporaneity.

As Roger Silverstone (2010) puts it, mediatization can be described "as a fundamentally dialectical, if not always equal, process in which institutionalized media outlets are part of the general circulation of symbols within social life" (p. 168, our translation). This definition raises the question of the role of journalistic practice in this context since, a few decades ago, media had brought prominence to information circulation. New conditions, provided in particular by new technologies and new forms of interaction,

establish procedures that include diverse communicative relations within society and inscribe the subject upstream and downstream in its social writing.

In the wake of this perspective, we can observe that contemporary journalistic practices break with old parameters and concepts derived from organization forms already overcome by the flexibilization trajectory delineated in the work world. Journalistic making, at least during the twentieth century, had as a point of support of its productive routine, the localized space of the newsrooms of the great communication vehicles. We can say that today, in the second decade of the 21st century, there is a reversal of this structuring logic.

Notwithstanding the widespread reduction in the role of newsrooms in the journalistic field, it is necessary to note that the functions are subverted, disjunctive processes that mitigate the remnants of the formal environment of these traditional spaces, destabilizing organizations and promoting new field reconfigurations.

Post-industrial labor processes (Deuze & Witschge, 2015) have an acute impact on the information production process, leading us to reflect on the frontiers between previously defined and stable working conditions for more flexible and deregulated working conditions. Given this scenario, as Deuze and Witschge (2015) warn us, journalists have to overcome conventional organizational references and go “beyond journalism”, which leads to tension of the real, as they, deprived of the security and benefits that the profession previously had, had to face, in an engaged way, the adversities and new perspectives arising from this situation.

A scenario that, for Eric Neveu (2010), can be described from at least five main aspects, namely: 1) alteration of the journalist's identity profile, now less specialized and not very concerned with the verification process *in loco*, subsumed to an “information worker”; 2) Increasing professionalization of sources, which broaden and reinforce their influence on the information production process; 3) the advent of mega-corporations in the media field, participants in the global process of labor flexibility and eager for profit and profitability; concerned, therefore, with the reduction of production costs; 4) the emergence of the so-called media convergence, which activates the capture from the various media and is strongly conditioned by the speed of the information flow and 5) the existence of narratives that seek to break with the bureaucratic coverage in progress.

As Klinenberg (2005) notes, if it is agreed that media products are central to the operations of different action fields, and it is surprising that sociology has stopped investigating how the organizations responsible for creating and disseminating information work: research on media work sociology, according to the author, has been “outdated for decades and no longer reliable to describe the journalistic newsroom routine” (p. 49). Klinenberg realizes that, since the 1970s, the largest North American media companies have evolved through four key development strategies: first, taking companies out of private hands (usually resulting in the end of the monopoly of wealthy families linked to journalistic work), generating capital with public stock offerings, and reforming the corporate mission in order to meet the goals and demands of shareholders. Then, bringing new corporate managers to streamline production systems within newsrooms and reduce labor costs. Third, making massive investments and digital communication technologies and remaking the corporate infrastructure. Finally, by establishing lines of horizontal integration in the company, “which meant acquiring or merging with other content providers and distributors, such as television stations, magazines and Internet companies, linking both marketing and news divisions through subsidiary firms” (Klinenberg, 2005, p. 52).

In the case of Brazil, data corroborate this diagnosis. Research carried out between 2009 and 2012 by the Center for Research in Communication and Work of ECA-USP, led by researcher Roseli Fíguro, points out changes in the work world of journalists in São Paulo. Although it uses the study of the conditions of a specific country state as a cutout, it presents some data that can be more generally considered. Fíguro (2013) points out that:

The productive restructuring that took place in the labor work, especially since the 1990s, has transformed labor relations. It was from this decade onwards that the number of journalists hired without professional registration increased, leading to the emergence of new ways of hiring, such as outsourcing, fixed-term employment contracts, cooperative and freelancers, among others. (pp. 8-9)

The impact of this new trend on the job market is directly related to the expansion of news production institutions (Neveu, 2010). Closure, in some cases, and the reduction, among others, of large journalistic newsrooms lead to a type of independent entrepreneurship on the part of many journalists who have been excluded from

this process or who have not even integrated it. New narratives break the reality from this perspective and will be the subject of further analysis. On the other hand, we see a boom in information produced by highly professional sources, whether by influencing journalists or by producing far-reaching institutional materials.

It is the event that Klinenberg calls the “news cyclone”: the time cycle for the production of news in the era of digital production has become radically different, resulting in a tangle of endless, erratic news patterns. The temporal boundaries of the journalistic day were eradicated by 24-hour news channels on television and instant sites, creating an informational environment in which there is always breaking news to produce, consume, and—for reporters and their subjects — react against” (2005, p. 54). As the author stresses, concerns about efficiency pressure journalists to abandon traditional ways of finding the easiest and most accessible way to get information: news already available online. This practice often results in incomplete reports with false and incorrect data. “Reporters, particularly when they are working against the clock, are susceptible to Internet misinformation” (2005, p. 56).

For Stephen Reese (2005), it would be useful to consider the media content within a variable analytical framework in communication research. The problem lies in the fact that traditional field studies are marked by surveys and controlled experiments, isolating an effect of interest - the sphere of media sociology, however, “is much more diverse, messy, and ranges across many levels of analyzes and research traditions” (p. 33). The concept of professionalism, for example, is unique and basic within media sociology, but it contains in itself broadly distinct aspects of meaning. According to the author, professionalism can be considered an individual value adopted, or a characteristic of individuals that indicates the degree to which they are committed to the norms and shared company perspectives. Or, the extent to which the individual incorporates in his work practice the reporting procedures in a “ritualistically strategic” way - that is, “it is “professional” to the extent that they adhere to the procedures, the accepted practices of deadlines, and simply getting the work done. Following the procedures provides a useful fallback “professional” defense when challenged by audience members or other critics”. (pp. 35-36).

At this point, the author suggests that globalization has so affected social and institutional practices that we can say that

journalism has become globalized to varying degrees, breaking old paradigms and reconfiguring them in ways that cannot be taken into account only by local practices or national news production. More specifically, Reese notes the emergence of a “global news arena,” where information is more synchronized in space and time, “news practices are more transparently open to world scrutiny and evaluated against more universally available normative standards’ (p. 40).

These changes can converge to a significant change in the capturing process and even in information editing. For Eric Neveu, a new field professional emerges, the “information worker,” who would be better able to portray or recycle news in circulation. This worker “does not do much of the field work, but works with the news agencies’ communications, the statements of the institutions, companies and government officials” (p. 41, 2010). At the same time, the author presents some possibilities and journalistic practices that question this *modus operandi*, such as the creation of new genres and the use of creativity in productions of the area. Some questions, therefore, are highlighted by this diagnosis: what mechanisms are triggered for news production? What is the impact of this new way of work organization on current journalistic narratives? How are narratives configured from this scenario? Is it possible to create new ethical-political-editorial articulations from this scenario?

The answers are neither simple nor definitive, but they can be sketched out under the mediatization spectrum, which points to the expansion of narratives and ways of narrating<sup>1</sup>. As Paul Ricoeur points out, one must believe that “new narrative ways, which we still do not know how to name, and which are already arising, will attest that the narrative function can metamorphose, but not die” (2010, p. 50).

This view is in line with the reflection proposed by Bruno Souza Leal (2013), which points to the expansion of new ways of narrating (in particular, through non-fictional reports and books) in its action dimension, in which “the ‘Receiver’ is not the end of the narrative, but the condition for its perpetuation (...) It is like ‘receivers’ - listeners, readers, etc. - that we also become narrators” (p. 33). From this perspective, we propose a closer look at a daring journalistic experience (among many others that could be presented here), which humanizes the violence narrative by broadening the sources of the so-called “police journalism”, which, at least in traditional media,

presents conservative traits and very sensitive to the use of official sources, in this case, police authorities.

The work proposed here is based on this rapid diagnosis of the journalistic field, on the role of current criticism and on the innovative production of the information channel *Ponte: Direitos Humanos, Justiça e Segurança Pública* (Human Rights, Justice and Public Security), having as methodological north a case study and analysis of journalistic narratives based on the transparency of the collection methods and the identification of the main sources of the material and reports produced by this collective of journalists.

### 3. Criticism today

From the diagnosis outlined in the previous item, we propose a reflection on journalistic criticism in the face of the changes engendered by the accelerated social mediatization. To do so, we raise three fundamental aspects for the installation of the contemporary debate on the notion of “criticism”; opaque term that shelters a less self-evident signifying universe than common sense does. These are: (1) the failure of the metaphysical notion of criticism in view of the poignant need to place reflexivity within the experience empirical framework; (2) the relevance of a criticism cartography as a strategy for field knowledge and the proposition, at the epistemological level, of a metacriticism (cf. França, 2014); (3) the formulation of a *narrativity* [our emphasis] capable of putting in place a critical office that is not only judicative or hermeneutic, but also and, above all, practical (Silva & Soares, 2013). It is important to note that the notes here recorded focus on the exercise of criticism in the context of contemporary journalistic practice, although the analysis of such processes can be traced to the broader context of media practices.

Regarding this argument, we highlight the intrinsic proximity of this properly contemporary epistemology to the sociotechnical conditions immanent to the current mediatized societies, as recorded at the beginning of the paper. We approach, therefore, the direct object of this analysis: journalistic criticism. To do so, it is necessary to take into account the complexities involved in the work cultures and news circulation modes that characterize today's



societies, in an advanced state of mediatization. In view of this objective, we outline a summary mapping of the forms of criticism in the journalistic context, in order to outline guidelines for criticality with a view to the future.

Given the applicability of the notions handled, we draw a brief mapping on the exercise of criticism in the context of journalism. To begin with, we share the feeling that, in the case of the Brazilian experience, journalism has not yet used sufficiently strong forms of criticism. There is, in this point of view, a primary factor that would justify the weakness of the relationship: the commercial and political complicity of an expressive part of the traditional media that puts us before a framework in which (self) criticism was subsumed by “privatization” of the profession. It does not seem to us coincidental that our journalism is so unrelated to ombudsman practices, or that media regulatory proposals are widely used as gestures of censorship.

We are, however, betting on the mapping of these critical manifestations beyond the economic narrative of traditional journalistic products. We consider that the explicit political service of most of these narratives is not only to the precariousness of Brazilian journalism, but ultimately to collaterally stimulate the emergence of critical-analytical work within the field itself, as well as in society in general. In our view, there resides, particularly in this second dimension (broad socio-mediatic processuality), a powerful relationship between criticism and the mediated configuration that characterizes contemporary communication flows. According to mediatization theorists such as Eliseo Verón (2004), José Luiz Braga (2006) and Antônio Fausto Neto (2008), the structural changes implied in these processes have displaced the production and circulation dynamics of narratives, which allows society to rework the work generated by traditional information agencies. Thus, according to Fausto Neto, it occurs “the dissemination of new technical protocols in all extension of social organization, and intensification of processes that transform technologies into means of production, circulation and reception of speeches” (Fausto Neto, 2008, p. 92).

However, to understand the diffuse social criticism in its journalistic dimension, we consider all the work developed around the social information management as practices inherent to our understanding of journalism; which allows us to point out that the displace-

ments provoked by increasingly mediated experiences are allowing a kind of critical action that evidences the disputes and opacities intrinsic to the information market. It is a critical-interpretive activity capable, in the context of social mediatization, of reaching extended visibility circuits, a process in which Braga (2006) sees emerging a possible "Social Response System", responsible for the interaction processes of society with mediatic products.

Because of these increasingly unsatisfactory gaps, we can read the power of critical work developed by the journalistic field itself - as, for example, through the counter arranging that alternative media interposes to the flow orchestrated by the media-corporative system or from the diffused actions organized by new narrators who, contemporally, integrate the pragmatics of our media culture. We highlight some projects whose existence occurs precisely in the middle of this so-called Social Response System and the Productive System, traditionally settled. We refer to alternative initiatives to the great media and collaborative (*Ponte, Mídia Ninja, Jornalistas Livres, A Pública*, among others), journalistic manifestations that arise from the conditions intrinsic to social mediatization and that, more and more, advance towards the professionalization of their work cultures.

In the case of this journalism, unleashed from the major news agencies, we emphasize that the criticism exercise occurs explicitly (evidencing the biased frameworks, concealments, suspicious lexicon used by conventional media), and in adopting postures compatible to expectations from these professionals in relation to the information market. This performative criticism action - based not only on the negativity of what is refuted, but mainly on the orientation of what is placed as practical value - can be perceived in the very selection of the guidelines that compose the news typology of these collectives (type-lodge, in general, underprivileged by conventional coverage); as well as in the adoption of work cultures and forms that embody other functional and expressive logics (in technical, aesthetic, administrative terms).

Another important dimension of journalistic criticism can be seen in the *press observatories*. These spaces - usually fed by professionals or intellectuals debating over the production of information - play the role of articulating a specialized criticism, anchored in the experience of subjects familiar with the journalistic field and its textual genres. As an effect of this shared intentionality (the reflection

on journalism practiced in different social contexts), these observatories reveal strategic spaces for uplifting a community of interest in which information is processed, socially and individually, in a suspicious and complex way.

In an analogous way, we could not fail to cite the criticism that this text seeks to functionalize: the criticism of academic character. As in the case of the observatories, it is a criticality impregnated with the linguistic constraints that restrict part of its effectiveness to the dynamized relations in a certain narrative circuit. In relation to this criticism of academicism - salutary and unequivocal positioning - it is worth adding that it is from this circuit, at the first view closed, that the processes of journalists of the future training rise. Thus, rather than considering the academic discourse based on the tautology that nourishes part of its peers, we opted for the focus on the critical work directed not only to theoretical reflection, but which also reveals itself capable, from these surveys, to establish a pedagogy equally critical and reflective to journalists in the process of professional training.

To finish this mapping, we point out a well-known form of criticism to the profession practice: the figure of the ombudsman. On this topic, we resigned ourselves to the inexpressiveness of this agent in the context of news production in Brazil, a fact that shows the insufficiency of interactivity between society and its informative vehicles, as well as the lack of reflexivity intrinsic to the field. However, we could not diminish the ombudsman's foundation to the subservience of professionals who assume for themselves the expectations of the work of those who lead them and who, therefore, resigned from the civil service.

From this mapping, summarily plotted, we place ourselves at the service of reflection on journalistic criticism beyond the notions of judgment and interpretation, seen now, particularly as a mode of action. We think along with Silva and Soares (2013, p. 835) in the sense of understanding that "the ultimate purpose of any criticism, which it wishes, by extrapolating the effort of understanding, [is] to promote some world transformation action."

To this end, we assume that criticism should not only rely on the ethical imperative responsible for regulating and prescribing ways of acting in contexts already determined by political action, but rather should be empowered as a way of (re) seeing contexts which they determine. Applying such reflection to the journalistic context,

we defend the importance of criticism to rise not only against the moral weakness and technical incompetence of many self-proclaimed journalistic manifestations; but that it can also be anchored in a reflection, gestated in its production modes, capable of positively referencing its own future.

It aims, therefore, to break with the criticism that only puts itself in position of externality in relation to its objects. On the other hand, a self-critical and self-reflexive notion of journalism emerges, which fearlessly evokes the generation of conflicts in the materiality of its textualities, within the scope of its own discursive modulation. In this direction, we could try to read this journalism, in the perspective of Rancière (2012), as a journalism, in fact, political (different from a journalism oriented by political subjects): narrative capable of not only generating a visibility figure, but also of inscribing, in its appearance, the procedural opacity inherent in its constitutive mediations.

Considering the perspective of the inscription of these mediations, we can understand that this possible journalism, critical about itself, would be not only a resource in favor of the criticism of the present, but also, a mechanism that generates the historiographical power of these narratives. In this approach, we suspect the idea of journalism as a “shorthand writing of the present,” a perspective that once offered historical-documentary value to journalism produced in a certain time. Considering also the challenges posed by today’s mediated society - including the issue of legitimacy and the official character of the sources, as well as the revision of the historical episteme of metanarrative character - it seems to us ethical and political to consider that the posterity value of the narratives will be all the greater the more evident the multiple forms of authorship “inscribed in their writing”.

This condition, in turn, can only be reached from the moment that the critic puts the nature of his discourses and narratives in social and individual perspective; and also, from the critical capacity to generate amplified perceptions about the reality and, mainly, to operationalize the transformations coming from these perceptions. For this purpose, formal criticism must break with the administrative view that seeks to functionalize cultural products from a superficial reading of social experience, being more powerful the more it assumes for itself the political sense of aesthetic activity: a way of generating dissensions (conflicts or disagreements)

capable of breaking with the habituality of the regulating flows of daily life; strategic ruptures that intersect, in the context of narrative (and, analogously, of criticism), possible ways of relating temporalities in a textual becoming situation.

#### 4. A bridge to the future

Among the various modalities of criticism today, we have, as proposal, in this work, the analysis of an innovative meta-critical practice that, in the terms indicated by Silva and Soares (2015), “undertake a criticism to what is established as a standard, realizing it not as an analysis on the media, but on the mediatic doing itself “ (p. 3). Although we discussed at the beginning of the text the reconfiguration of journalistic newsrooms in general, by restricting the analysis to the *Ponte’s* narratives, we resist the temptation “to pose questions about journalism at the global level, given the increasing transnational quality of the practice” (Reese, 2005, p. 29), admitting that the global reconfigures spaces and reconstitutes relations already in operation, and that in search for the perception of these spaces, the consultation to more basic models of research and media structure can offer a cautious step toward a macro-dimensional understanding of new ways of doing journalism.

From this perspective, we chose the case study in consonance with the analysis of the site narratives of the site because in our understanding this object of specific study can contribute to the broader understanding of the journalistic exercise itself. Magda Ventura (2007) briefly outlines the advantages of case studies: “they stimulate new discoveries, because of the flexibility of their planning; emphasize the multiplicity of dimensions of a problem, focusing on it as a whole (...), in addition to allowing an in-depth analysis of the processes and relationships between them” (p. 386). The negative aspect presented by the same author, meanwhile, points out limitations in these procedures: “The most serious one seems to be the difficulty of generalizing the results obtained” (p. 386). It is assumed, however, that this work is still at an exploratory stage, since this subject is relatively recent in field studies. In order to do so, we opted for the use of specific analysis techniques and criteria, such as the study of specific cases, and the analysis of narratives as already pointed out in the Introduction.

The journalistic site *Ponte*<sup>2</sup>: *Human Rights, Justice and Public Safety* aired on June 26, 2014, founded by a team of journalists who, for the most part, have extensive experience in Brazilian traditional newsroom vehicles. In its presentation letter<sup>3</sup>, it said that the initiative “came from the conviction of a group of journalists that quality journalism from the point of view of human rights is capable of helping to build a more just world.” The authors express in the text the objective of making issues “omitted by the commercial media” visible, giving the public “information about what is silenced and hidden”:

Stories such as Jose, 17, a black man, arrested in his own house for a crime he did not commit and whose evidence attesting to his innocence was ignored by the police, the prosecution and the court. Or that of a twenty-year-old Jose, who, according to the police, shot his own head even though he was handcuffed with his hands behind him. And of so many other Joses, Amarildos and Claudias. We intend, via investigative journalism and free of economic commitments, to schedule public debate, to lead the State and society to seek solutions to inequality, injustice and oppression. (Retrieved from <http://ponte.org/contact/>)

*Ponte* is structured under a productive model distinct from that of the large newsrooms, of which many members of the project come from. The channel has its bases in the “formation of a collective of professionals” who organize themselves “around an ideal, in a nonprofit project, without any kind of partisan affiliation and open to dialogue and society collaboration”. It is interesting to note the occurrence of the term “ideal” in the journalists’ introduction letter, since this is a forbidden word when it comes to preserving the mythological mask of objectivity worn by traditional journalistic enterprises, or as the authors of the letter call it, “commercial media”. *Ponte* renounces the alleged passivity of the reporter figure in the face of events, admitting his meeting around an *ideal* - not denying the influence of his individual and collective ideologies in the process of news production.

The channel has the financial support from the Public Agency for Investigative Journalism, which organizes “the strengthening of the right to information, the qualification of democratic debate and the promotion of human rights”.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the site has as supporters more than 40 institutions and 52 individuals divided among artists, intellectuals, independent journalism companies, NGOs and national collectives.

Currently, *Ponte* has 13 fixed reporters on its team, plus six occasional collaborators. The formulation news process also occurs through interaction with readers: the organization accepts news reports proposed by journalists and photographers, for which the channel intends to “become a lightning rod for the best and most sincere collaborations”.<sup>5</sup> There is no remuneration - all work produced for the site is voluntary.

In an interview with the site “Casa dos Focas” published on August 26, 2015, one of *Ponte*’s founders Bruno Paes Manso, criticizes some police programs:

Programs such as Datena’s and Marcelo Rezende’s are great evils of São Paulo’s soul: they increase *fear*, reinforce stereotypes and a simplistic view of reality. (...) They are exploiting the people’s fear and morbidity to make money. At the same time, they make sensationalism. I think it is lousy, *they do not do Journalism: they do morbid entertainment*. (Retrieved from <http://www.casadosfocas.com.br/nunca-tivemos-tanta-possibilidade-de-discutir-jornalismo-como-hoje-afirma-bruno-paes-manso>) [Our emphasis]

Paes Manso’s speech refers to the idea of “memory of fear” proposed by Leticia Matheus (2011) when dealing with sensational journalistic narratives. According to the author, certain media coverage uses elements of theatricality and drama to construct panic that spreads temporally and spatially in the media representation of violence. In the case of the programs cited by *Ponte*’s journalist, sensationalism is more noticeable because its melodramatic elements (Amaral, 2007) are more blatant - the news is recited in a hyperemotional way, between interjections of outrage and inflamed speeches.

In the case of traditional vehicles, melodrama still exists, but in a very simple way, camouflaged under apparently objective textuality, “neutral” language and narrative glaciality. When analyzing the coverage of the newspaper *O Globo*, Matheus identifies a common resource in the media reports that relate to urban violence - the creation and attribution of roles to the characters of their constructions. It is not uncommon for media outlets to materialize almost archetypal figures to the perpetrators and victims of violence, usually associating fragility to the ordinary citizen and to the figure of the drug dealer as the personification of evil, the agents of chaos responsible for the increasing and endless violence waves denounced by bold headlines. Such characterization contributes to

the consolidation of a popular imaginary that names heroes, martyrs and villains.

Matheus goes even further, considering the media as an instrument of social control that uses fear to emphasize racial and class prejudices. Fear would originate from the sense of vulnerability experienced by elites, oppressed by violence. In this way, the newspapers would contribute to the production of an indestructible and inexorable idea of evil, projected in the faceless figures of the “drug dealers, underdogs and vagabonds.” In this way, it is possible to infer that the narratives of the fantastic and the sensational are not an exclusivity of the so-called “popular journalism”. This symbolic construction of the figure of the marginal - one who lives around civilization - denotes a process of stigmatization, especially of the black individuals. In fact, the favela's resident does not exist as a source in the media, and its figure is only invoked when associated to the previously mentioned role of intruder, whose actions generate consequences for the homeostasis of the centers, that is, for the life of the elite citizens. Be it the figure of the drug dealer in current journalism, or the figure of the communist of the 1960s before and during the military coup, the press selects and generally names the societies' evil.

Matthew Matsaganis and J. Gregory Payne (2005), in researching the *modus operandi* of traditional media in dealing with panic-generating crises (especially terrorist attacks), also identify in the North-American press the separation between “we” (American citizens) and “they” (the immigrants), and note how the media dangerously widens the gap between the two poles. “The creation of two camps, the good and the evil, us and the others, is a powerful rhetorical tool that this and other administrations, here and abroad, have used on numerous occasions” (p. 389). Whether it is to identify allies and opponents in conflicts or to distinguish members of the malevolent axes of those who choose war in the name of freedom, media creates the roles and allows the public arena itself to decide who will play them.

Eduardo Meditsch (2005), in discussing the presence and the cruciality of the sources in journalism, notes a polarization in the way the voices are chosen by reporters from Brazil's largest newscast, *Jornal Nacional*. On one hand, the official sources materialized in the form of specialists and institutional representatives. On the other, the ordinary citizen, who generally serves to illustrate the matter, and



who “hardly provide relevant information to the construction of the news, but are strongly present in them” (p. 39). In the case of police coverage, the author notes that in 44% of the material analyzed the police itself are the outstanding voice.

As Matsaganis and Payne (2005) note, media is a key player in society’s scheduling process, and therefore is not immune to ambiguities, threats and problematic environmental situations. The individual in search of understanding about his or her surroundings turns his or her attention to journalism, which in turn feels the urgency of guaranteeing answers to its public, seeking information from sources deemed relevant by the majority given the subject in question. According to the authors, a veritable flood of ideological *think tanks* “experts” floods newspapers pages in the most varied events, where they are jostled to provide their perspectives. “The ethical task for the media is more difficult as the number of truly credible sources at their disposal shrinks” (2005, p. 385).

The voice of the average citizen, in Meditsch’s study, reveals itself much more as a comfortable element in the framing of a story than in fact as an expositor of compelling and particularized opinions. The “people talk” the preferred method of television news programs for “interaction” with the public, is nothing more than another melodrama feature, in which the lines of three or four people simply serve to corroborate the argument constructed by the report.

In the case of *Ponte*, whose police reports are predominant in the channel production, there is a thinner line. The vehicle chooses to hierarchize its sources and place the minority and peripheral at the top. The narratives produced by *Ponte* do not dismiss textuality and the structure of informative journalism, but its use of narrative sources and resources is much more complex.

In order to understand how *Ponte*’s news production process diverges from traditional journalistic narratives structures, we selected 12 articles published between June and July 2017 by the vehicle and we started to identify its *sources* (in order of appearance, in order to show the hierarchy of the characters consulted), *topics* (through the headline and the fine line) and elements of *subversion and transparency*. By “subversion” we understand unusual resources in the majority press reports in the texts (narrator’s self-insertion, self-recognition and personality traits, reporter’s opinions and interpretations, descriptive scenes of the places or sources and use of emotive language), and by “transparency” the moments in

which the means of capture or details about the calculation process itself are described in the texts, a resource widely absent in the news of more traditional journalistic means. In addition to explaining the methods used and guaranteeing instruments for measuring output, “transparency also contributes to a certain vicious circle of the so-called denunciation in the so-called big press, lack of plurality of sources, excessive use of sources in off and of the so-called declaratory journalism, among others” (Maia, 2008, p. 132). The investigation of these interactions between the narrator process and the way they affect news reception is crucial to understanding the role that transparency plays in the formation of the reader’s citizen conscience (idem).

Of the 12 reports analyzed, six report violence and repression by police institutions, and four report aggression and abuse committed by agents in prisons and resocialization houses. There is also a report on an unjust imprisonment, an unpunished assassination, and the biographical profile of a former detainee. Of the sources consulted for the construction of the reports, 25 are “marginal” sources (inmates, drug users, peripheral communities, women and minority oppression victims), 10 are specialists, 4 are official sources and 8 follow the “Other side” within the denouncements reports - sources that respond for the accused, often being lawyers or press advisors.

We could verify a total of 54 occurrences in which textual elements of subversion or transparency were used in the analyzed reports. 18 times it occurs terms that indicate *present narrators* (use of the first person in the text, use of expressions that place the narrator in the narrated scene and physical descriptions of scenes, objects and subjects), 7 *narrators’ interpretations* appear (personal inferences and assumptions) and on 6 occasions the *narrators’ opinions* (personal and in line with the editorial opinion of the vehicle) are arranged. The *emotive language* is used only once. 4 times, *capture media* used in a report is explicit in the texts and on 17 occasions the *details in the investigation process* are displayed.

The results show that there is a balance in the way in which *Ponte’s* investigations were done, since, as observed in the *corpus*, the vast majority of texts consult at least one marginal source, a specialist and a representative of the “other side”: it is important to point out that in all the reports in which the cited quotation above

appears one of the two situations occurs: either the defendant is consulted and his answer is made available by the vehicle, or he does not respond. In the latter case, *Ponte* provides the complete questions sent to each of them, as well as details about the investigation process (when the questions were sent, why they were not answered, etc.). The overwhelming majority of the sources consulted for the making of the texts come from the “margin”, and the position in which it is hierarchically in the structures of the reports denotes *Ponte*’s concern to emphasize minority voices, not being incoherent with its introduction letter.

If, as Leticia Matheus noted, the “*evil*” in the mainstream press is embodied in the fantastic figure of the slum dweller, the “marginal”, in *Ponte* he appears as the predominant voice. The resident of the periphery that occupies the urban space, which transgresses elite delimitations, ceases to exist as an anonymous shadow and gains flesh, blood and, most importantly, a voice. The “*evil*” becomes a citizen. Márcia Franz Amaral (2007) calls “deformed” the reality expressions created by the daily procession between rational cultural matrices (“serious” journalism) and dramatic (sensational journalism) - in this constant clash (or complicity), the newspaper becomes an arena in which individuals are not recognized as political subjects, but as characters in stories of high mercantile value, precisely because they serve as a decoy to a public thirsty for the same violence that so haunts the imaginary of cities.

Reese (2007) reminds us that when discussing journalistic content, a tendency prevails in asking how “objectively” they reflect reality. For the author, even if the mirror theory is not discussed more seriously and there is no longer any doubt that the distortions in the mirror are real and frequent in the case of news, it is possible to note in the discourse of the professionals of the traditional journalistic companies, a subtle tendency to position itself “neutrally” through linguistic resources, such as the exclusion of the narrator, implied mediations, and an apparent lack of judgment about the events narrated. In the analyzed reports, *Ponte* subverts expectations by relying on individuality elements, reporters’ individual interpretations and descriptions, and even moments of narrative self-insertion. We argue that, by not denying their presence and their particularities, *Ponte*’s reporters, in addition to not harming the information transmission directly (data, numbers, query information are still widely used

in all reports), contribute to a greater transparency in the way the stories are presented.

The results show that it is possible to construct a journalism committed to the different sides of a story without choosing official sources to the detriment of marginalized subjects, capable of balancing the high information load of objective data and the personalities of the journalist's work. The quality and transparency of *Ponte's* texts, produced in an organizational context completely different from the great newsrooms we discussed at the beginning of the work, indicate that "it is possible to think of a more effective, participatory and inclusive communication culture" (Maia, 2008, p. 132), where verifying the verisimilitude could be applied through global values of public access to information.

## 5. Final considerations

Is the information commodification process, in its unrestrained search for news that reaches not only a large public but a high profitability, responsible for the deterioration of journalistic production? Would it be possible to glimpse an apocalyptic scenario in which the journalist no longer exists - with his set of praxis, ethical norms and ideals, but an information worker (Neveu, 2010), a figure who does not produce news, but rather recycles them? According to Neveu, the apex of this process of media auto cannibalism could force public power to develop its own policies for the promotion of agencies such as *A Pública* - or, in an obscurantist scenario, the privilege of informing would belong to the wealthy who would consume news "without any critical control or processing" (p. 44).

In these new ways of narrating the real, in the negation of the instituted, in the journalistic production institute, a metacritical panorama emerges in the field itself, either in the selection of guidelines that compose a map of values deprived by conventional coverages, or in the adoption of work cultures and formats that embody other administrative logics, resulting in what Eric Neveu calls "a return to journalists and journalism" (2010, p. 52). As the author concludes, "a society is not just a system of markets; human societies are also puzzles to be understood, with different experiences to be made visible, injustices to be questioned" (p. 53). If critical and humane journalistic narratives are possible - as *Ponte's* work

and other initiatives show - it is believed that the future of the media offers perspectives to quality, socially-promised, and potentially transformative information.

For this journalism of the future, it is necessary that the good intentions of many professionals who insist on the struggle for the profession values are combined with the communicative competences demanded by the current context of information management. *Ponte's* journalistic activity corroborates this critical experience perspective, in which new sources and voices break with the vicious circle of some conventional productions, suggesting a new way of approaching the contemporary. This experience also explains a new form of professional organization, less marked by market decisions and more occupied with the viability of collective projects financed by alternative models.

In this direction, we emphasize that media contemporary culture, articulated around the mediatization notion, calls for new postures in relation to the critical production of its time. We understand that this criticality must result not only from the historical-dialectical work that means the present from a certain past, but also from the same exercise in relation to the possibilities of an uncertain but desired future. We believe that contemporary criticism, exercising the difficult faculty of placing itself as an object of itself, must turn not only to the externality of processes that precede it, but also, and fundamentally, in relation to the becoming of a society under construction, made by gaps between which the future lurks in the form of possibilities. In this time that is not yet, we hope to speak of this journalistic place without calling it "alternative", aiming that its principles be, in practice, recognized as deontology of the trade - a foundation that makes journalism, journalism.

\*This paper was translated by Audrey Frischknecht.

## NOTES

- 1 It is worth noting that Eric Neveu (2010) is not restricted to the diagnosis, suggesting five ways that can help information producers to face the process of bureaucratization of the profession:

use of public support resources, broadening of experiences of the so-called “public journalism”, use of social sciences in this process, professional creativity from new genres and, finally, the rehabilitation of critical, questioning discourse.

- 2 Portuguese word for “bridge”
- 3 Retrieved from <https://ponte.org/contact/>.
- 4 Retrieved from <http://apublica.org/quem-somos/>.
- 5 Retrieved from <https://ponte.org/contact/como-participar/>

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