

## Research Article

# Reporting and Journalistic Ethics as an Ecological Issue in Contemporary Times

Vera Marta Reolon\*

Professor (UFRGS), Psychoanalyst, Psychologist (CRP 07/7654), Journalist (MTb 16.069). Co-editor of the website apolíneo.net, specialized in cultural criticism and aesthetic experience. Doctor in Philosophy (PUC-RS), Doctor in Education (UFRGS), Master in Letters and Regional Culture (UCS), Graduated in Psychology – Psychologist Training (UCS), Bachelor in Accounting Sciences (UCS). He also graduated in Chemical Engineering. Author of “mulheres para um homem...para O Homem, A Mulher” (Edipucrs, 2018)

\*Corresponding author: Vera Marta Reolon

Received: March 23, 2022; Accepted: March 28, 2022; Published: April 04, 2022

## Abstract

The report is a narration of the present. It distinguishes itself from the literature by its commitment to informative objectivity. At the same time, cyberjournalism, presenting new possibilities of “storytelling”, also ends up transforming the practice of print journalism and its genres. In this scenario, the ethics of the press, the journalistic work and the journalist’s function become a field of study and investigation for a lifetime, even thinking about how the function agitates and influences the social work, the well-being of man, the oikos. It is implicitly investigated in what sense the cyberjournalist is still a journalist, indispensable to society, or has become a “virtual gossip”. In this context, it is questioned how journalistic information, journalistic ethics and their actions, what of the facts that we are now narrating actually reach the population as facts and sources of real information and self-care, ecologically present in the life of society. As ecology, as we understand it today, is much more than just thinking about the environment, but all life in society, we believe that the journalistic function becomes essential for ecologically well-being. How much ethics necessarily present in all our doing makes life and this good living ecologically active. Without ethics there is not even the idea of ecology.

**Keywords:** Journalism, Desertification, Transport, Energy, Technology, Water

First of all, we must explain that the understanding today of what ecology is expanding enormously, transforming what was previously thought to be the study of the environment, of felling trees, of fires, of studies of the ozone layer and, as a consequence, of a super-invasion of UV rays, it becomes the broad study of living in society, but not only, a care of the self, a search for good living in a broad way. Thus, we resume some concepts of journalism and its expansion nowadays, cyberjournalism, fake news and the discomfort caused by the misuse of information or even flawed and inaccurate information that reach the large number of the population.

Journalism has always lived in constant transformation. Sometimes in terms of form, sometimes in terms of content, journalistic narrative founded styles, influenced literature, disseminated facts, informed, formed public opinion, provoked controversies, incited disputes, transformed the world by transforming itself. It is the report – where the news is told, narrated – a privileged journalistic genre. It is a narrative – with characters, dramatic action and description of the environment – separated from literature by a commitment to informative objectivity. This mandatory link with objective information reminds us that, whatever the type of report, the “pure direct style” is imposed on the writer, that is, the narration without comments, without subjectivations. The exemption of subjectivity, or the supposed neutrality, is increasingly utopian, unattainable, almost impossible.

Cyberjournalism, with exponentially expanded platforms, unlimited spaces and the possibilities of hypertext, has transformed journalism and, consequently, journalistic narrative. After all, cyberjournalism is not just a transposition of cool printed texts and images to the Internet environment. Journalism ends up different, with singularities and particularities to this new “storytelling”. Cyberjournalism, in a “competition” for the reader, thus also modifies print journalism and its genres, especially news and reporting. In this sense, reflecting on journalistic ethics, the ethics of the press, is an indispensable task for everyone who is enrolled in this field of work, a task that is reflected in the very practice of the profession. The analysis of the journalist’s role, of the formation of this professional, in this scenario, is relevant.

From the transformations of journalistic work, a fact that is clearer in the face of changes in the media, since one ends up imposing ways of operating on the others - especially after the emergence of cyberjournalism - what is the role of the journalist today and therefore their ethics : he remains indispensable to society, or has he become just a “virtual gossip”, in which reality ends up being submerged in a “subreality” of “facts”, in which the real is only what is conveyed by the media, distorted or even invented?

If the 17th and 18th centuries were those of publicist journalism and the 19th century, that of educational and sensationalist journalism, the 20th century was that of testimonial journalism [1]. It

doesn't mean that everyone (citizens, journalists, press entrepreneurs) understood them that way. Social representations endure beyond the conditions that gave rise to them: as much as the publicistic vision of journalism, they survived the sensationalist and educational visions, as well as journalistic practices that fall into each of these categories.

The fact, according to Lage (2003), however, is that information is no longer just or mainly a factor of cultural addition or recreation to become essential to people's lives.

Information thus becomes a fundamental raw material and the journalist becomes a translator of speeches. In short, the reporter, in addition to translating, must confront different perspectives and select facts and versions that allow the reader to orient himself in the face of reality. The public's right to information is a fundamental rule for journalists, not for many of their interlocutors, even liberal ones. It is also (cf. Lage, 2003) the basis of any ethics acceptable to journalists: "however, what is informed to the public is what is of their real interest, not always of their curiosity" (p.94-95). As far as sources are concerned, ethically, their right is to have kept the content (not the form) of what they reveal. This means not only respecting the semantic value of what is informed, but also the inferences that result from the comparison between what was informed and the context of the information. It is up to the journalist to pursue the truth of the facts in order to inform the public well. In this sense, journalistic activity fulfills a social function before being a business. [2] also adds that objectivity and balance are values that underpin good reporting. The discussion of journalistic work, based on applied ethics, press ethics or journalist ethics, is thus essential to the practice of news and reporting:

Corroborating this idea of journalistic practice and ethics, an example of an ecological question postulated back in the 20th century is taken, more precisely in 1957, when the magazine *Seleções* carried out an extensive report on Lithium, an abundant metal on Earth, when studies on its exploitation and use began: "Having recently appeared on the industrial scene, hundreds of applications will be able to help in the operation of thermonuclear generating plants of the future". Continuing on the spectrum of the published report, it says that in 1817, Johann Arvedson names the metal silvery white and, 125 years later, the metal was considered useless. The common textbooks of industrial chemistry did not even publish it. The metal is found in the crust of the globe. Every shovel of earth we dig up in our garden contains traces of it. No one knew what to do with matter of singular characteristics. If not kept immersed in oil or in an airtight container until a solid piece of metal decomposes. The metal is used in many thermonuclear materials and as a fuel in intercontinental rockets.

Let's talk a little about metal: lithium is the lightest solid in existence. It is the third among the lightest elements by atomic weight in the universe. Only hydrogen and helium, both gases, have a lower atomic weight. In gasoline, lithium floats. When a match comes to it, it burns with an intense white flame and melts. A knife cuts you like cheese. It has an insatiable appetite for water and air. Immersing it in water it effervesces like soda. Before World War II, it was used as an ingredient in the Edison accumulator, used in mine locomotives and submarines, where it contributed to providing a constant surge of

energy. As you can see Hydrogen when combined with water, packs of lithium hydride were placed in rescue cases to inflate balloons like radio antennas, marking the place where pilots of downed planes and life rafts were [4-22].

Compounds were used in submarines to purify the air, sucking in carbon dioxide and other noxious gases, and to de-icing aircraft wings, as lithium's freezing point is low. It has an affinity for water. LiOH is also used in the manufacture of lubricants for hotter, colder and wetter climates where other greases melt, freeze or become saturated with water.

In 1948, there was a new surge in the use and studies with lithium, with a view to the manufacture of air conditioning and refrigeration; the lithium present in these devices absorbs moisture like a sponge. Bathrooms, refrigerators and enamelware of all kinds are manufactured and lithium is used in them. Lithium compounds are also used in the production of synthetic vitamin A and antihistamines. Added to skin creams, lithium keeps them solid in the heat and soft in the cold. It is also present in the manufacture of items such as optical lenses, phonograph records and blackboards. With it, the chalk slides without noise. Added to oil, it acts as a detergent, cleaning the engine while lubricating it. In 1952, there is a shortage of material with large orders for LiOH by the US Atomic Energy Commission, which proved to be a mystery as lithium is neither radioactive nor fissile. Lithium reserves in the Earth's crust, in ocean waters are inexhaustible. They also serve as high-energy fuel for rockets and guided projectiles. There are lithium deposits all over the globe, but its biggest reserve is in North America. Today lithium is widely used in medicines used to combat the disease of the century, depression, the old PMD (today bipolar processes) and, amazingly, in computer and cell phone batteries (in all the technological components of the so-called "wonderful future" that presents itself to us).

Let's take up, from the example above, how important and absolutely and completely necessary journalistic ethics is. In the discussion of ethics and the press, Bucci (2000) cites Paul Johnson, an influential thinker in contemporary liberal thought. Historian, essayist and journalist, Johnson is the author of articles in the British magazine *Spectator*, which have served as a reference for the debate on ethics in the press around the world. Not for what they pontificate, but for the problems they point out. He proposes an analysis grid for the most frequent errors in journalism: he listed seven deadly sins and, as antidotes, ten commandments.

The first of the seven deadly sins, pointed out by him, is "Distortion, deliberate or inadvertent", perhaps the most crass, followed by the cult of false images: "When journalism moves more than informs, there is an ethical problem, which is the negation of its function of promoting the debate of ideas in the public space". (BUCCI, 2000, p.144-145). One of the main ethical functions of the press – whose obligation is to critically report events – has become to criticize the cult of false images, a function which it rarely takes care of. (p.147). Still, in the list of deadly sins, Johnson lists the invasion of privacy, the murder of reputation, the overexploitation of sex, the poisoning of children's minds and the abuse of power.

Against ills and failures, the journalist lists ten commandments: 1. dominant desire to discover the truth; 2. think about the consequences of what is published; 3. telling the truth is not enough – it can be dangerous without informed judgment; 4. have an impulse to educate; 5. distinguish public opinion from popular opinion; 6. willingness to lead; 7. show courage; 8. willingness to admit one's mistake; 9. general equity; 10. respect and honor words. Lists like this one, by Paul Johnson, are present in studies of ethics and the press, based in other ways, from other references, or even reformulated. Marcelo Leite, former Folha de São Paulo ombudsman, and Ciro Marcondes Filho, in *A saga dos dogs lost*, for example, created other lists, aiming to guide journalists in their work.

Bucci (2000) emphasizes that it is the right of access to information (and culture) that democratically justifies the existence of all forms of social communication. Ethics is present in every decision that seeks quality information. Openly debating ethical issues, in the light of real events, is a public service: it educates the critical spirit of citizens and helps to improve the press. Bucci (2000) recalls the importance of differentiating what is public interest from what is perverse curiosity of the public (which asks for scandal, hurts whoever it hurts). Undoubtedly, no one can draw the universal boundary between one and the other: “there is no abstract recipe that is valid for all situations, but the simple reminder of this caution already brings more elements to a good decision on the concrete cases that present themselves” (p.155).

These issues can be better analyzed, interpreted and explained with practical examples, seeking to identify, from these references and others (philosophical, sociological, psychoanalytic), how ethics applied to the press is involved. Good examples can be found in what is conventionally called “report-books”, more extensive, contextualized reports that allow the reader, sometimes, to analyze not only the explicit content, but also the journalistic practice itself, like Truman Capote, in “*In Cold Blood*” [3].

Lage (2003) states that “what happens to celebrities and type-characters draws the attention not only of journalists, but of anyone” (p.97). Ecology, literally translated, is the study of the echoes, the oikos, the home, the house. What can we say about our Earth/house/home? Based on what we have just brought as journalistic information, journalistic ethics and their actions, what of the facts that we are now narrating actually reach the population as facts and sources of real information and self-care, ecologically present in the life of society?

Let us cite more examples, to corroborate our ecologically posed questions: for many years the large cattle producers, in order to obtain a better response from the land, used to burn the extension of land so that the grass would then appear more showy (including to better feed the cattle). Many geos scholars said that, in a short time, the response to fires really resulted in a more fertile soil, but in a little longer period, what you got (and get) is soil erosion and, therefore, soil erosion and desertification. They even said that SAARA is the result of that. Even today (and the fires in Brazil, extensively criticized by international bodies and the press, use only information about the burning of the ozone layer). What, effectively, do we do and inform about all the factors involved in the burning of land, trees, soil and its

components? It is known that the use of railways, in addition to being “romantically” more pleasant, pollutes less, brings more savings and less pollution to the environment. Even so, in a country the size of Brazil, more was invested in highways, road transport, more pollution, more spending on roads and almost total dependence on oil for this purpose, since, in addition to gasoline, diesel (highway), kerosene (aviation), we still use waste from oil companies for paving (the holes in the highways and the corruption in the “builders” – who “work” the highways – are just a consequence!). We have reached the absurdity of, in such a city, cementing train tracks instead of reactivating them, at least for the transport of grain production.

The latest news from this pandemic period is that Europe is experiencing a lack of manpower, including for road transport of food, causing shortages for the population. Investments in solar and wind energy, particularly in Brazil, would bring us world dominance in terms of economy and use of clean energy, in addition to climate benefits, since we have sunshine practically all year round and viable winds for the use of wind power. But let's see, what should be researched is the direct use of these energies and not just as a “bridge” in electrical networks (as this leads us to deviations and more corruption). Cutting down trees and planting new ones “in place” of so many replicates have already become commonplace. But nobody says that the tree is a living being, and by cutting it down, we kill. When someone dies, does another replace that one?

It appears that lithium batteries are being replaced by sodium-ion batteries, being produced by Chinese giant CATL, claiming lithium shortages. Will it be? Sodium batteries have a lower energy density, but allow fast charging and are more resistant to low temperatures. We are entering a serious water crisis, even with large extensions of forests. Europe has been suffering from water problems for a long time (see its large perfume industry). Lithium does not “just” suck water from bodies, but from the environment, reducing the water we so desperately need for survival. Lithium is still used by the pharmaceutical industry (for a long time) as a drug to treat complications of what is now called bipolar disorder, but even doctors who prescribe the drug cannot effectively indicate how it works in the bodies.

What are we actually doing with life on Earth? Why does no one think, or even open dialogue, about these issues? Why are these discussions and themes never even brought up in meetings on the climate, on the environment? Do the economic gains obtained outweigh the damage caused?

## References

1. LAGE, Nelson (2003) *The report: theory and technique of interview and journalistic research*.
2. BUCCI, Eugenio (2000) *On ethics and the press*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
3. SODRÉ, Muniz; FERRARI, Maria Helena. (1986) *Reporting technique: notes on journalistic narrative*.
4. Aristotle (1985) *Nicomachean Ethics*.
5. D'AGOSTINI, France (1999) *Analytics and Continentals: A Guide to the Philosophy of the Last Thirty Years*.
6. DELEUZE, Gilles, GUATTARI, Felix (1966) *The Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

7. DERIDA, Jacques (2001) States-of-the-soul of psychoanalysis.
8. HABERMAS, Jürgen (1991) Comments on the Ethics of Discourse..
9. JURANVILLE, Alain. (1987) Lacan and Philosophy.
10. KEHL, Maria Rita (2002) On ethics and psychoanalysis.
11. LACAN, Jacques (1998) Seminar 7: the ethics of psychoanalysis.
12. MARCONDES FILHO, Ciro (2000) The saga of the lost dogs.
13. The social production of madness, 2003.
14. NOVAES, Adauto (org.) (1992) ethics. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
15. OLIVEIRA, Manfredo. (2000) Fundamental currents of contemporary ethics.
16. PENA, Philip (2013) Journalism Theory.
17. PLATO (1991) The Banquet (The Thinkers Collection).
18. RAJCHMAN, John (1993) Eros and Truth – Lacan, Foucault and the question of ethics.
19. RINALDI, Doris (1996) The ethics of difference: a debate between psychoanalysis and anthropology.
20. SELECTIONS. Lithium, the magic metal. Selections, May 1957, São Paulo, Reader's Digest.
21. SODRÉ, Muniz; FERRARI, Maria Helena (1986) Reporting technique: notes on journalistic narrative.

**Citation:**

Reolon VM (2022) Reporting and Journalistic Ethics as an Ecological Issue in Contemporary Times. *Cancer Stud Ther J* Volume 7(2): 1-4.