

# FROM EVERYDAY PARADOXES TO THE RHYTHMIC NOTATION OF NEWS:

a theoretical-conceptual pendulum-like  
model<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** – Drawing from a critical reading of the bibliography on newsworthiness in the last decades, this article proposes a theoretical model based on a metaphor of a pendulum. This refers to the relationship between two complex social processes: news selection and the cultural construction of everyday regularity. The construction of news narratives can be considered a result of the correlation between two processes rooted in a symbolic dimension: everyday paradoxes emerge as parameters of newsworthiness whilst journalism's mode of narrating reality might "dissolve" (metaphorically) the most dissonant aspects that can be found in the immediacy of facts. I understand that the spreading of news narratives is linked to a Western pattern of regularity, which establishes itself on the everyday experience of modernity (Martin-Barbero, 2003). This results in a circular process that entails a process of transcoding and the spreading of rationality parameters that serve as guides for modern sociability (Sodré, 2009).

**Key words:** Journalism. News selection. News narration.

## DOS PARADOXOS COTIDIANOS À PONTUAÇÃO RÍTMICA DAS NOTÍCIAS: por um modelo teórico-conceitual pendular

**RESUMO** – A partir de uma leitura crítica da bibliografia sobre noticiabilidade construída nas últimas décadas, propõe-se um modelo teórico-conceitual – uma metáfora pendular – para a relação entre dois processos sociais complexos: a seleção noticiosa e a construção cultural da regularidade cotidiana. A construção da narração noticiosa pode ser considerada a partir da correlação de dois processos enraizados no plano simbólico: a caracterização dos paradoxos cotidianos como parâmetros de noticiabilidade e a consolidação de um modo jornalístico de narração da realidade que possa "dissolver" (metaforicamente) os aspectos mais dissonantes por trás da imediatividade dos fatos. Compreende-se que a disseminação da narração noticiosa encontra suporte em um padrão cultural ocidental de regularidade que se estabelece na experiência cotidiana

moderna (Martín-Barbero, 2003). Resulta-se, por conseguinte, em um processo circular que envolve a transcodificação e a disseminação de parâmetros de racionalidade que servem de guia a para a sociabilidade moderna (Sodré, 2009).

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo. Seleção noticiosa. Narração noticiosa.

## **DE LOS PARADOXOS COTIDIANOS A LA PUNTUACIÓN RÍTMICA DE LAS NOTICIAS: por un modelo teórico-conceptual pendular**

**RESUMEN** – A partir de una lectura crítica de la bibliografía sobre noticiabilidad en las últimas décadas, propone un modelo teórico-conceptual – una metáfora pendular – para la relación entre dos procesos sociales complejos: la selección noticiosa y la construcción cultural de la regularidad cotidiana. La construcción de la narración noticiosa puede ser considerada a partir de dos procesos arraigados en el plano simbólico: la caracterización de las paradojas cotidianas como parámetros de noticiabilidad y la consolidación de un modo periodístico de narración que pueda ‘disolver (metafóricamente) los aspectos más disonantes detrás de la inmediatez de los hechos. Se comprende que la diseminación de la narración noticiosa encuentra soporte en un patrón cultural occidental de regularidad que se establece en la experiencia cotidiana moderna (Martín-Barbero, 2003). Es el resultado un proceso circular de transcodificación y diseminación de parámetros de racionalidad que sirven de guía a la sociabilidad moderna (Sodré, 2009).

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo. Selección noticiosa. Narración noticiosa.

### **1 Situating the debate on newsworthiness**

This article starts from a critical reading of the bibliography on newsworthiness produced in the last decades. It encourages reflection on the existing relationship between the symbolic ordering of everyday life and the re-signification of everyday paradoxes caused by journalism’s particular mode of narrating the world<sup>2</sup>. Here is my premise: Herbert Gans (2004) suggests that the dynamics of selecting news involves two basic stages, that of news availability and that of the adequacy of news coverage. Similarly, if we look broadly at the phenomenon, we can see that the construction of news narratives can also be measured by taking into account two complementary processes that acquire a symbolic dimension: 1) an understanding of everyday paradoxes as being characterized by newsworthiness criteria (and, here, my understanding of the word “paradox” is based on its Greek etymology, which means something that is located beyond the “*doxa*”, or beyond common belief); 2) the establishment of a style of narrative that is able of going through a resignification process (in a metaphor for “dissolving” in a symbolic dimension) in terms of its most dissonant aspects, which go beyond the

immediacy of facts (in a phenomenal dimension). In this way, cultural patterns of regularity and rationality constitute news narratives, whilst such patterns also shape everyday experience in modernity (Martín-Barbero, 2003)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, I am referring to a circular process which involves a process of transcodification, on one hand, and the spreading of journalism's mode of narration (with its aesthetic and expressive patterns), on the other hand. Such mode of narration is associated with parameters of instrumental rationality (as a cultural pattern) that shape modern sociability in its various ways of symbolic organization of everyday life.

I suggest that the everyday meanings of modern life resonate with everyday life's ordinary and contradictory sense: the instant reordering of the world, commenting on the absurdities of the day, sitting down to talk about everyday events, amongst other things. In this context, news narratives represent a mode of narration that is typical of everyday life in modernity – regular, rational and instrumental (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1985). This contributes to the proliferation of a cultural trait that places in order the most paradoxical senses contained in daily experience. In other words, this creates a way of narrating the world that aims to break away from the ordinary expectations of the “*doxa*”, translated in consonance with common sense (a mixture of senses that is widely shared and that confers meaning to everyday life). The question then becomes: to what extent do the relationships between the practice of journalism and the cultural construction of everyday regularity manifest in a narrative dimension? The answer is not simple and it involves a series of symbolic components and narrative resources that cut across content and result on news narratives' aesthetic and expressive dimension. In sum, focusing on this debate, I wish to argue that newsworthy events can be understood as reference points that can break away from the symbolic ordering contained in common sense. At the same, because of their intrinsic cultural patterns of regularity and instrumental rationality, which are both able to carry out a process of transcodification of information, news narratives are able to mitigate the “bifurcations” that can be found in everyday life.

In this context, I suggest that we use a metaphor of a rhythmic nature as a way to structure the debate. This is a legitimate effort as I propose an interpretative model to explain the triad between journalism, rationality and common sense (“the *doxa*”). My theoretical premise here is that both the selection of news events and the spreading of journalism's narrative represent processes that relate to a cultural pattern of regularity. Thus, the most adequate metaphor

to describe these processes is that of a pendulum. Historically, the pendulum represents a tool that has been used to set the pace of a capitalist mode of production. It conveys an idea of regularity, which derives from a circular conception of time, and which situates itself in a context of linear routines that characterize capitalist production. In what follows, I will discuss the establishment of a theoretical and conceptual model that draws from this rhythmic analogy.

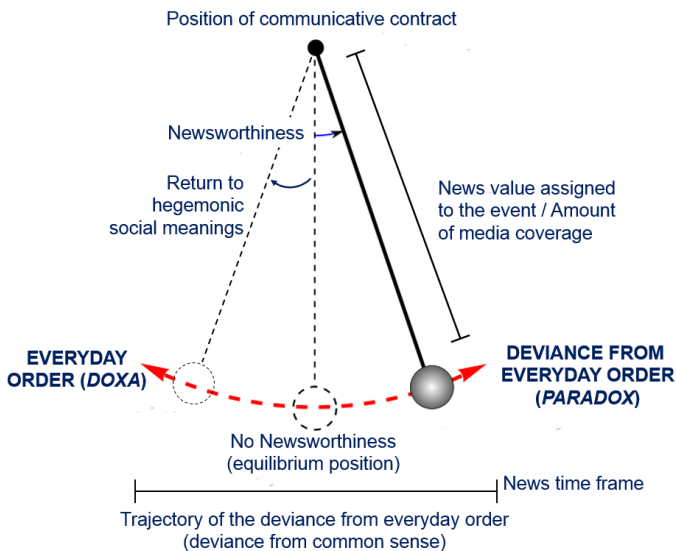
## **2 A pendulum metaphor: journalism, common sense and *everyday paradoxes***

The history of science has been marked by the frequent use of analogies and metaphors as tools to illustrate theoretical models. The conception of “revolution”, borrowed from social theory by Thomans Kuhn (2009) illustrates this. It consists of an illustrative image, which has its own, albeit analogous meanings that can be found in this author’s history of science epistemological perspective. More specifically, in the field of journalism research, metaphors have always been part of the theoretical traditions that have shaped the study of journalistic practice. This also applies to the vocabulary that is shared within the professional *habitus*, as it can be inferred from Bourdieu’s field theory (Bourdieu, 1997). David White’s work provides another example of this. In the first half of the twentieth century, and inspired by Kurt Lewin’s model, White incorporated a series of analogies into his theory of gatekeeping (White, 1950)<sup>4</sup>. The Danish scholars Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965) have also employed an analogy – that of the dial of one’s radio receiver<sup>5</sup> – in their study of news selection. The inverted pyramid metaphor, which has been de-constructed on a theoretical and conceptual level by Genro Filho (2012)<sup>6</sup>, might represent the most relevant analogy to shape a theoretical model of journalistic practice. As decades have passed and theoretical studies of journalism have become more refined, new and complex analogies have been introduced in the field (here, in this sense, I refer again to Genro Filho’s “*The Secret of the Pyramid*” (*O Segredo da Pirâmide*, in Portuguese). In this context, I focus on theoretical models that aim to explain the relationships between journalism and the conceptions of common sense (in a broad sense of this expression) and everyday life. In this scenario, I echo an analogy proposed by Muniz Sodr  when he analyzes journalistic practice and the rhythmic notation of a musical composition. As the author puts it:

“just like musical notes, the micro aspects of a fact flow rhythmically following a ‘metric’ system, which, in turn, represents the temporality of news as ‘everyday life’” (Sodré, 2009, p. 92). These rhythmic notations allow for different cyclic intervals, which then prompt news to have “a cycle whose duration varies according to the news values that are assigned to that particular fact” (Sodré, 2009, p. 94).

Sodré’s metaphorical relationship leads me to the development of a new metaphor based on a kinetic analogy. In this way, I will refer to a symbolic pendulum-like motion, which I describe as follows: as journalistic practice depends on everyday paradoxes (presented by events with news values) to establish its narrative structure, it emerges as a meaningful cultural practice that helps consolidate everyday regularity. Journalism transcodes information and, at the same time, disseminates the cultural patterns of rationality, which derive from modern experience. At the same time, it represents a social activity inscribed in the “*doxa*” (Barthes, 1988), or in common sense (Sodré, 2009). Consequently, journalism contributes to the mitigation of everyday life’s paradoxical senses by rationalizing them and returning them to a consensual symbolic order (Silva, 2018). In what follows, a graphic model illustrates this article’s key premises with metaphors (figure 1).

**Figure 1** – Graphic model representing the relationships between journalism, the “*doxa*”, and *paradox*



Source: Silva (2018)

I understand that the idea of newsworthiness, a concept that concerns us here, has a complex nature. When we look at it from a historical point of view, the concept is often understood by drawing from patterns of “deviation”. This means that we consider that an event will only become newsworthy if it violates a moral or probabilistic norm. Indeed, this premise has been shared by various studies in different historical periods, from the German scholar Tobias Peucer’s *De Relationibus Novellis* (Peucer, 2000) to the mathematical typology formulated by Danish researchers Johan Galtung & Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965), amongst others. Over time, the concept of newsworthiness has been refined, presenting more and new nuances. Authors such as the North American scholar Herbert Gans (2004), for instance, suggest that the existence of guiding criteria in news professional practice is based on ideological elements that are widely shared by journalists. Referring to an European context, Mauro Wolf (2003) and Nelson Traquina (2008) stress that the values involved in selecting news are present through the entire news making process: from choosing the newsworthy events to constructing its narrative. Pamela Shoemaker (1996) also turns her attention to the different aspects of deviation (probabilistic, normative, and for social change) and takes into account other dimensions of newsworthiness, such as “social significance” (the political meaning, the cultural meaning, the economic meaning, and the public meaning). Additionally, the author works with the notion of “complexity”, interpreting it as the complex combination of deviation and social significance dimensions, which characterize a particular event (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006).

Although I find these theoretical and conceptual discussions essential, I wish to suggest an interpretation of the concept of news as a “hybrid narrative” that cuts across boundaries that shape both the singularity of journalism events and the symbolic parameters of everyday life (Faro, 2011). In this way, the conception of newsworthiness starts to be understood in parallel with the idea of everyday paradox. Specifically, if we center our analysis on the graphic model of the news pendulum presented earlier, newsworthiness starts to represent the “amplitude” of the angle that the pendulum makes, marking the distance between the “*doxa*” and its *paradoxical* deviation. Consequently, we can infer that the more *paradoxical* (deviant from the regularity of common sense) an event presents itself, the more newsworthy aspects it is likely to possess. The absence of newsworthiness is represented in the graph as the non-existence of deviation in everyday regularity.

In the graph, the idea of newsworthiness is positioned in relation to the point to which we can refer to as “the communication agreement”. In literal terms, a pendulum is always suspended from a fixed point, and its motion is influenced by several factors, such as the materials of the pendulum’s base, the friction generated by them, as well as by external conditions, such as the atmospheric pressure, for instance. However, in analytical terms, the pendulum represents a kinetic metaphor for a symbolic type of motion. In the meantime, I understand that the conceptions of “*doxa*”, and, consequently, of paradox represent sociocultural constructs (Bourdieu, 1977; Barthes, 1988; Sodré, 2009). This leads to the acknowledgment that the parameters that shape “common sense” circumstances (meanings that are socially shared) within a particular social group, or within a particular social and historic context, might not be the same as in other groups or social situations. These relationships are also linked to the concept of “communication agreement” and to the position that this agreement occupies in the social system (the fixed point, to use the analogy of the pendulum). According to Patrick Charaudeau (2003), the transition from a crude event, as it has been interpreted by the enunciator, to an event constructed as news and exchanged by the enunciatee, is ruled by complementary processes of transformation (between something that signifies, in a phenomenal dimension, to something that is signified in a symbolic dimension) and by processes of transaction (between the two poles of the communication chain – enunciators and enunciatees). This happens in consonance with a dynamic transition that happens in both macro and micro levels. To return to my metaphor, the fixed point in which the pendulum is held up, being located in social and discursive systems, is helpful in understanding the conceptions of “*doxa*” and paradox, which, in turn, result from the dialogue between news narrative and cultural construction in everyday regularity. Also using the pendulum metaphor, we can infer that the idea of the “news value that is assigned to a particular journalism event” constitute the length of the pendulum. Then, this can be combined with the amplitude of the angle that illustrates “newsworthiness”, which, graphically, will illustrate the “symbolic trajectory between the *doxa* and the paradox”. If we analyze this symbolically, we will realize that every event with a certain degree of newsworthiness is assigned a particular news value that will position the event in a certain way on the different media “pages”.

Although this represents a symbolic evaluation, it can be translated into three empirically verifiable aspects: 1) how prominent is the event (volume of news items, the space and airtime that these occupy and their hierarchical position in the media outlets); 2) which sources have been used (the number of specialists cited, the space devoted to these specialists to explain a news event and the degree of rationality and feasibility found in these specialists' opinions; 3) the extent to which news events as attribution (Koch, 1990) are related to the event at stake (the number of secondary events that might impact the complexity of the paradox beyond its initial dissonant meanings – according to journalistic terminology, this is referred to as a running story<sup>7</sup>). The issue here, however, is not merely quantitative. The type of capital that determines this particular news value is essentially symbolic, even though it can be quantified in some occasions. This explains why Bourdieu's theoretical and conceptual framework seems so useful here (Bourdieu, 1997).

Moreover, the idea of “return to the hegemonic social meanings” leads us – in symbolic terms – to processes of attribution of explanatory meanings to the *everyday paradoxes* of journalism that affect the agenda. These are as follows: 1) recognizing the factual as a temporal dimension used to solve daily problems (Sodré, 2009); 2) journalism's segmentation of reality into functional and independent units (pages, sessions, sections, columns, posts, etc.); 3) legitimizing sources according to a hegemonic background in everyday life (which voices are authorized in journalism's public spaces) (Gans, 2004; Sigal, 1973); 4) establishing different levels of meaning making that are based on secondary events that help dilute the paradoxical character of the original news event (Koch, 1990). In sum, I am describing a process of mitigating meanings that are dissonant from the “*doxa*” and from this symbolic motion's return to everyday regularity. Graphically, this refers to an identical but opposite angle to the angle represented (metaphorically) by the “newsworthiness” concept in the pendulum. This helps us understand the dynamics through which a particular event vanishes from the media pages and is replaced by another event as it incorporates a hegemonic explanatory meaning and loses its *paradoxical* condition (the subject becomes “old news”, “dull” and “uninteresting”, amongst other terms in journalism jargon).

Finally, I understand that the symbolic motion from the “*doxa*” to its *paradoxical* deviation consists metaphorically of the



total distance covered by the pendulum (using the graphic analogy, it represents the “symbolic distance between the *doxa* and the paradox”). In other words, this motion refers to an event’s deviation in relation to common sense regularity and to its return from a news narration attribution in an explanatory sense. As it results from the combination between an event’s degree of newsworthiness (the angle of the pendulum in the graph) and an event’s news value (the length of the rod), this trajectory, even if it is symbolic, reflects the duration of the journalistic coverage. In metaphorical terms, the trajectory of the pendulum can be completed independently from the pragmatic detachment of everyday paradox. Thus, when producing potential meaning effects beyond its reality effects (Gomes, 2009), a journalism event can attain a new symbolic status without altering its state in a phenomenal dimension. With an airplane accident, for example, the unveiling of its causes might weaken its paradoxical meanings and make it vanish from the media main pages. Yet, this weakening of its paradoxical meanings will obviously not change anything in terms of its pragmatic real effects, such as death, destruction, etc. In any case, these effects in terms of news meanings will start to constitute new effects in terms of reality. The trajectory from the *doxa* to the paradox (and vice-versa) consists of a rhythmic motion, which helps order the modern cultural patterns of everyday regularity.

I consider the pendulum metaphor is helpful because it illustrates two stages in the process of construction of news narratives: firstly, the condition of being everyday paradoxes characterize news events, and, secondly, the same news narrative resources contribute to weakening such paradoxes. Here, I will once again cite Gomes: “with news, the world is no longer a complex of things and people that comprise my existential circle. Beyond this, it becomes a horizon” (2009, p.15).

Such horizon – or the world’s symbolic reordering – however, is dependent upon a “tacit agreement between consumers of news and journalism” that “aims to establish the limits between what exists and is worthy of mention and what does not exist or does not deserve attention” (Gomes, 2009, p.15). Therefore, this represents a discursive type of contract, according to which “with no perception subjects, there is no event” (Sodré, 2009, p.34). In this way, it is worth noting that although we might recognize the symbolic relationship between journalistic activity and the mitigation of everyday paradoxes, such

relationship also depends on the discursive negotiations between the news outlet and its community of meaning.

In this scenario, the conceptions of *paradox* and consensual order (which constitute the pendulum-like motion of journalism) do not project themselves into phenomenal reality in a constant or unequivocal way. Rather, they are culturally constructed from different social and cultural variables as well as distinctive forms of communication agreements (Silva, 2018). In any case, I must stress that, in this context, I am not neglecting the contemporary “postindustrial” model of journalism. Indeed, temporal production cycles, the computer-led process of news reception, and the prevalence of digital networks in newsrooms production routines, and the decline of newspapers as the main sources of information in relation to websites characterize such model of journalism. I will discuss the latter in the next section of this article.

### **3 The limits of functionalism and its differences in relation to a broader culturalist approach**

In terms of rhythmic analogies, I turn to a French expression – *pot-pourri*, commonly used in the music field – to refer to the peculiar and sometimes random combination between distinctive and not necessarily complementary rhythmic elements (that might not necessarily belong to a coherent common thread). Taking part in an epistemological debate, Douglas Kellner (2001, p. 131) uses this expression to alert us against this type of academic approach. Being marked by high degrees of eclecticism and adopting a critical multi-perspective led stance, scholars might be creating a type of theoretical “*pot-pourri*”.

In this sense, the pendulum-like model that I propose in this article and that has been based on a pendulum metaphor, as it seeks its theoretical and methodological coherence, can also be subjected to this critique. However, the pendulum, with its specific mechanism of isochronal oscillation identified by Galileo Galilei at the end of the sixteenth century – has been historically associated with the functioning of various tools that can measure the regularity of modern sociability. We can find various examples of this, such as the classic pendulum wall clocks devised in the seventeenth

century. Such tools were deemed as being very important for the establishment of new patterns of time, which is, in turn, part of a historical process to which Martín-Barbero (2003) refers to as a “long process of enculturation”. The old metronomes, which were invented in the early nineteenth century and are essential for introducing a constant and measurable rhythm in the music field, represent another example of this.

In this scenario, Martín-Barbero’s (2003) methodological shift from “media to cultural matrices<sup>8</sup>” inspires this discussion. It leads us to an analytical shift in terms of our understanding of the journalistic mode of narrating reality. Instead of thinking about the idea of “mechanism” as the prevalent theoretical and methodological approach, we start to comprehend it as a cultural pattern that represents a form of sociability marked by an emphasis on a typically instrumental rationality that is able to manage everyday life.

In this case, the rhythmic metaphor of the pendulum admittedly represents a mechanical analogy. Yet, it does not result from a mechanistic theoretical and methodological perspective, since it is based on an essentially culturalist approach. According to this theoretical perspective, the metaphor intends to explain the dynamics through which the news (which involve processes of selection, construction and circulation) are intrinsically incorporated into daily life as one of many modes of expression that occur on the basis of modern operational rationality. Therefore, this is not about journalism as an organic system that acquires repairing functions within the social system, as a functionalist point of view would suggest. Rather, this is about observing a system with multifaceted meaning-making properties.

Here it is worth noting that functionalist thinking derives from the early nineteenth century “organicist” sociological tradition, representing one of the oldest and best-known theoretical trends in the Western world. Inspired by authors such as Auguste Comte and, later, Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim, this line of thinking focuses on social taxonomies – or “ideal types” – that can consider the study of society as a “social organism” (Tunder, 1982, p.35). Other scholars such as Robert Merton use functionalism as an interpretative line devoted to exploring in which ways part of the social organism affect its whole, taking into account measurable sociological variables. In this scenario, the concept of “function” concerns the performance

of “effective measures” determined by the “smooth functioning of the system” (Hage, 1972, pp. 192-193).

When contrasted to other approaches that have emerged in the field of social sciences and journalism, this functionalist current of thought has been criticized because of its organic (theoretical) and quantitative (methodological) limitations. In this sense, Adelmo Genro Filho (2012) categorically points to the functionalist thinking’s shortcomings and precarious elements when it comes to understanding journalistic practice. For the author, the concept of “knowledge” represents a mode of apprehending reality that is marked by intrinsic contradictions. With this, the conception of journalism as playing an eventual “organic role” as a way to acquire more knowledge about society is called into question

Here, I consider Genro Filho’s (2012) critique to be relevant as the author stress that we need a mode of interpretation that is not mistaken by and, indeed, that manages to go beyond the functionalist mechanism. For this reason, the graphic representation of the pendulum as an essential element for understanding news represents much more than a simple mechanical analogy that places itself above the complexity of social phenomena: it represents a metaphor that is able to illustrate a substantially symbolic type of motion. Therefore, this represents a typical meaning-making relationship that concerns the opacity of objective reality. Stuart Halls offers a particularly relevant interpretation of this. It is revealing to observe that the Jamaican-born British theorist uses his own noun for “function” in order to reflect upon the correlation between media and ideology. By doing this, he avoids placing his analytical perspective into any type of functionalist category. In this case, ironically, his use of the term serves as a semantic resource for generating a discussion that revolves around culturalist issues. According to Hall (1977, p. 340), the media’s first function consists of a “selective construction of imagery and social knowledge” through which people can reflect on “worldviews and lived realities” that reach beyond their immediate contexts. The second “function” reflects a conception of “plurality” as it helps spread a collection of lexicons, lifestyles and ideologies by undertaking a constant process of objectification of the world. In this regard, the types of “social knowledge” that are selectively conveyed by the media start to be “ranked and rearranged” based on “normative and evaluative

classifications” in culturally ratified ways. In sum, the media pave the way for people’s “knowledge about what happens in the world” and for people’s “making sense of the world” (Hall, 1977, p. 341). Finally, the author’s third “function” refers to the media’s simultaneous roles of “organizing, orchestrating, and aligning voices”. He notes that in a hegemonic scenario, “some degrees of integration and cohesion” must be socially recognized.

As Stuart Hall represents one of the key Cultural Studies theorists, his description of media “functions” sets itself apart from the “functions” that one can find in a traditional functionalist approach, such as the functions of “narcotizing dysfunction” and “social repair”. From the perspective of Western science, such theoretical and conceptual formulations, with their various functionalist nuances, have helped shape a hegemonic paradigm for a long period. This leads to an acknowledgment of their strength and wide reach.

Thus, it is not surprising that even the authors who draw from different theoretical and methodological perspectives might refer to functionalist approaches in their analyses of news activities. However, in this article, even though I adopt a multi-perspective point of view, I do not subscribe to a methodological approach that consists of a collage of random theoretical viewpoints (the *pot-pourri*, in Douglas Kellner’s terms). Therefore, even if I use a mechanical and rhythmic metaphor (a pendulum), my conceptions of “instrumental rationality” and “everyday regularity” should not be interpreted as the functional consequences of journalistic practice, which derive from alleged “social disorders” that ought to be repaired within an organic system. Moreover, I suggest that we understand news activity as a social practice that moves beyond a sense of rationalization of everyday paradoxes as news activity helps create a process of transcoding of the hegemonic cultural pattern of rationality in everyday life.

This is how everyday life confers meanings to modern society and turns news narratives into one of its most eloquent modes of expression if we think about them in terms of their metaphorical senses of a rhythmic motion, as Sodré (2009) puts it. By carrying the content of its messages, the aesthetics of journalistic expression follow a regular a movement as a way to ratify the meanings of the “*doxa*” within a type of sociability that is operational and instrumental in relation to its most dissonant

symbols. Consequently, this leads to an “instantaneous process of reordering the world”.

#### **4 From the newsstand to the ‘recycle bin’: the replacement of a *paradox* by another in a scenario of everyday regularity**

“Yesterday’s newspaper is used to wrap paper” is a classic proverb pattern in Brazilian journalism. This has become a characteristic expression in terms of how journalistic practice has historically established a discourse of self-legitimacy. Regardless of how this might be ironic in historiographic studies, this proverb pattern is meaningful if we read the premise presented here in a broad sense. Indeed, it does illustrate in a carefully explained manner the symbolic process in which an everyday paradox replaces another, following a regular pattern that establishes itself as the hegemonic cultural pattern in the realm of everyday life.

In *O Segredo da Pirâmide* (The Secret of the Pyramid), Adelmo Genro Filho (2012) sparks off a complex debate that allows for an in-depth understanding of this. Regardless of how high degrees of subjectivity might characterize the construction of journalistic facts, one can also always find and must not disregard a concrete element of objectivity. The Brazilian theorist’s statement encourages a broader reflection on how a singular event requires a subjective immersion in a particular context that makes sense as a dimension of knowledge from a phenomenal perspective. As the author argues:

Here, we have an issue of adequate language at stake, but also an issue of epistemological focus that will prevail with this language and also allow its effectiveness. There is a minimum degree of objective knowledge that must be provided by the meaning of the ‘singular’ (by the “singular’ significant), which requires a minimum process of contextualization of the ‘particular’. In this way, the news can effectively fulfill its potential as a form of knowledge. Depending on its ideological approach, and from this minimally harmonious relationship between ‘the singular’ and ‘the particular’, the news can become a critical way to apprehend reality. (Genro Filho, 2012, p.202).<sup>9</sup>

In this context, the theorist adds, “every time an event becomes news, it is apprehended according to its singularity, opening up a range of relationships that shape its particular context” (Genro Filho, 2012, p.201). In this study, as a strategy to organize

these theoretical and conceptual debates, I attempt to reflect on how this contextual relationship comes at the forefront of news events' immediacy. This context refers to an expressive aesthetic pattern, linked to a type of news narrative in which one can find exchanges with broad and adherent cultural patterns that are consistent with modern day-to-day experience.

If we then apply this reflection to the specific field of news, we will find resonance in terms of mass culture's process of connecting daily events (Nora, 1979). In this way, one event might replace the other in a symbolic motion marked by regularity. Additionally, as we can infer from Franco Moretti's (2003) discussion, one can also find the everyday possibility of turning a newspaper page in a particular manner, as a rational strategy to move away from reality and to avoid scares for the enunciatee. Thus, we can rationalize and mitigate yesterday's paradoxes, replacing them by today's news (or by a sense of "now"), reserving for them a symbolic space that refers to an immediate uselessness (a process of devaluation) and to the past (the fish market metaphor).

From a broader perspective, people in modern society tend to cope with their everyday obstacles in a way in which they can solve them, attempting to rationally domesticate whatever they can interpret as being "random"<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, in this scenario, journalism devotes itself to a process of transcoding of this pattern of instrumental rationality, reaching beyond the limits of journalism content, and stretching it to its own expressive and aesthetic dimension. As it happens with the metaphor of the pendulum motion and oscillation, journalistic practice tends to identify such everyday paradoxes as newsworthy events before it turns them into explicit events and returns them to the culturally established meanings of the "*doxa*" through specific communication agreements. (Silva, 2018).

## 5 Final considerations and new perspectives

My theoretical and conceptual perspective takes into consideration the metaphor of everyday life's rhythmic notation in order to demonstrate that the cultural process of spreading news narratives is more complex than it appears. The classic questioning of why an event becomes news – so typical of theoretical journalism

studies – does not do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon of newsworthiness. On the contrary, the insistence on asking this question might lead to a form of parallax, or the displacement of the observed object, and eclipsing a broader and multifaceted symbolic process that lies in the structures of everyday life cultural patterns. This also translates a form of dilution of the peculiarities of news narratives in a sense of the more paradoxical meanings of a news event. Above all, it is essential to acknowledge the existence of a symbolic process in which one paradox replaces the other within a dynamic of everyday regularity. At the same time, it is also key to interpret this as a rhythmic notation for the process of regarding news as legitimate and prominent symbolic goods in Western culture.

Based on this line of thinking, I must highlight a few assumptions. Firstly, I subscribe to the premise that society is organized around an agglomeration of meanings that are socially shared and translated from the idea of the “*doxa*” – or common sense, in an Aristotelian perspective – and this dimension is fundamental for everyday life meaning making. In the meantime, the notion of paradox can be etymologically understood as being something unusual to the nature of the “*doxa*” and it represents a symbolic instance that can be broken by the socially shared order. Therefore, paradoxical issues become relevant in everyday experience precisely because of their deviant nature.

At the same time, the structure of common sense also relates to Gramsci’s conception of hegemony, the dimension through which the dominant ideological aspects become widespread in the ordinary practices of everyday life (Hall, 1977). The idea of an essentially instrumental rationality represents one of such hegemonic aspects. It refers to the cultural pattern in which the elements that break away from the realm of common sense must have their access controlled in modern sociability. Thus, these elements are deemed *paradoxical* and must be subjected to rational explanation and meaning. This symbolic process is deeply intertwined with the nature of news narratives. The latter is often considered an important tool to evaluate the nature of modern daily experience. In this context, we can characterize everyday paradoxes as elements that are capable of shaping news, on one hand, but that, on the other hand, are also worthy of an explanation within the terms and procedures of an instrumental



rational – translated into journalistic rationality.

As this aspect serves as a guiding principle to the *ethos* of modern journalism, news narratives represent a particular cultural meaning-making practice that results in the “dilution” – identifying, singularizing and, in later stages, clarifying – the paradoxes that break away from everyday lives symbolic order, established through common sense. This explanation resonates with the ways in which news narratives employ paradoxical meanings to its criteria of newsworthiness. With the aesthetic and expressive construction of news narratives, for instance, elements, graphs, and specific analytic sections – the famous cliché elements that can be translated into the idea of “understanding the case” – present one symbolically appealing element in common: through a culturally accepted explanation, they offer a return to the consensual meanings that had been previously intact. Similarly, “experts” in different areas – social actors that represent legitimate sources of information – present arguments that are often based on journalistic objectivity and/or scientific rationality in order to “capture” the paradoxical meanings that affect everyday regularity, subsequently returning them to the socially approved meanings of the “*doxa*”.

I understand that the linking of facts into specific thematic sections, and news sections – organized by particular temporal symmetries (such as daily, weekly, biweekly) – helps spread the news narratives in an aesthetic and expressive dimension, assigning a peculiar meaning of regularity and daily order. However, this process can become complex, being incorporated into the journalism culture through a professional *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1997). Such symbolic instance must also be understood as a privileged space for the emergence of hegemonic aspects in society (Martín-Barbero, 2003, pp. 123-124).

Moreover, because it represents a complex cultural construction, the idea of common sense should not be regarded as a universal conception and, indeed, by analogy, this also applies to the concept of *paradox*. In this way, just like the identification of an *everyday paradox* is linked to a particular social, cultural, or temporal context (and might not be the same in a different context), the symbolic practice of clarifying paradoxical meanings in society will vary according to its distinctive instances. In other words, with journalistic practice, an event considered newsworthy in a given scenario might deserve no attention whatsoever in

a different context. Therefore, as Patrick Charaudeau (2003) reminds us, before it expresses the world, the news narratives express a relationship. Here, the answer lies in the concept of “communication agreement”.

I understand that all these processes find their meaning in everyday life. In this dimension, marked by a rhythm of regularity located in common sense, one can find an intrinsic form of knowledge and a fundamental temporal dimension. In this context, journalism represents both an active and passive part of a rhythmic motion. Journalism is both an agent and patient here, assigning a meaning of regularity to ordinary routine with its everyday paradoxes. This represents a form of symbolic oscillation, like a pendulum motion, which is typical of a rational mode of sociability that attempts to dissolve its unpredictable daily situations. In sum, the conception of newsworthiness can be better understood if we incorporate the idea of *paradox* and how this *paradox* only makes sense within the regularity of everyday life. This aspect concerns a symbolic motion, one that has a complex nature and that can be culturally decoded by dialectically related interpretations of the concepts discussed above.

Finally, here, I am not disregarding the ways in which hegemony represents a process that affects new cultural patterns within an industrial-based capitalist logic in a scenario of late modernity. The so-called industrial journalism is based (promotes a process of transcoding and dissemination) on effects of meaning that derive from a cultural pattern of regularity and rationality. At the same time, the so-called “post-industrial journalism” (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2013) resignifies several elements of traditional journalism in a context of emergence of cognitive capitalism, employing new elements in its symbolic dimension (which does not mean that the previous hypothesis is invalid).

In this context, faced with an array of regulating everyday meanings, the “speed fetish”, to use Sylvia Moretzsohn’s (2002) expression, goes into paroxysm. Instead of going through monthly, weekly, or daily cycles, “post-industrial” journalism must follow the demands of what is instantaneous. This leads to an implosion of the news production cycles – aligned with the implosion of other spheres of production of both symbolic and non-symbolic goods within the logic of cognitive capitalism – can be seen even the newsrooms of traditional media outlets. Nowadays, media outlets

that have no presence in cyberspace, in platforms offered by social media or mobile phone apps, for instance, are rare. Therefore, in most contemporary newspapers, the news must be published online first, making it to the paper version, as it happens with the industrial model, on the following day. In this context, both on the internet and on social media, the news no longer has a purely regular and daily cycle as it can recirculate and permit a resignification of information (Zago, 2001). This can also generate a form of “de-ritualization of news” (Peter & Broersma, 2013), which, according to this article’s perspective, refers to a broader and more complex process of transmutation of cultural patterns in everyday life (topic for another debate).

## NOTES

- 1 An earlier and shorter version of this article was presented during the 27th Annual Meeting of the Compós Association (XXVII Encontro Anual da Compós), which took place at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte - MG, between 5 and 8 June 2018. I incorporated comments from Marcelo Träsel, Sílvia Lisboa and Giulia Reis, from Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) into the text. I wanted to thank them for their critical reading of my manuscript. The key premise and arguments that support the development of a graphic model, presented in this article, have been discussed in a chapter published by Peter Lang in the book *Media Scholarship in a Transitional Age* (see: Silva, 2018). However, this is not a translation of the chapter. I am aware that the Brazilian Journalism Research journal represents a high-quality space to further develop and deepen the article’s arguments.
- 2 I understand the narration of facts present in everyday life as a “journalism’s particular mode of narrating the world”, as we can infer from Muniz Sodré’s insights (2009).
- 3 I understand the historic introduction of ideas of regularity and rationality according to the modern Western way to think of how everyday life is structured. Here, I draw from Jesús Martín-Barbero’s reflections (2003) in the chapter “The long process of enculturation” (“O longo processo de enculturação”, in Portuguese), published in the book *From Media to Mediations* (Dos

*Meios às Mediações*, in Portuguese). The author turns his attention to modern ruptures in “ways of knowing” and in the “meaning of time”.

- 4 The sociologist Kurt Lewin’s idea of using metaphors of “*gates*” and “*gatekeepers*” was originally employed in a study of eating habits amongst North American families in the post-World War I period. This metaphor became popular in the field of journalism when David White (1950), Lewin’s former research assistant, decided to adapt the model and use it to analyze the process of news content selection. See: Shoemaker & Vos (2009).
- 5 Having conducted research on the coverage of international crises by European newspapers, Johan Galtung & Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965) were the first theorists, within an academic environment, to set parameters that guide the processes of news selection. In practice, the Danish researchers understand that news is structured as a chain, starting from the world’s chaotic events, and ending on the personal image produced by the receiver. They choose to focus on the initial stage of the process: the perception, selection, and construction of an image of the events conveyed by media. In an attempt to create a system with a list of factors for determining newsworthiness, they use a metaphor: to compare the world with an agglomeration of broadcasting stations; each of them sending their own signal, or broadcasting its program in its own wavelength. Based on this comparison with a radio broadcasting structure, the authors emphasize the need to select the information that is globally available, making it comprehensible (as it happens with a radio dial).
- 6 Adelmo Genro Filho originally published the book “*The Secret of the Pyramid: towards a Marxist theory of journalism*” (*O Segredo da Pirâmide: para uma teoria marxista do jornalismo*, in Portuguese), in 1987. The book became a reference in Brazil because it offers an inventive understanding of journalism as a knowledge form, reflecting on news activities by referring to the Marxist categories of singular, particular and universal.
- 7 In Portuguese, journalists use the word “*suite*” to refer to events that keep unfolding and get continuous coverage.
- 8 As it is demonstrated by several approaches and analyses that

draw from functionalist theories.

- 9 Our translation for the original quote in Portuguese: “Aqui entra em jogo não apenas o problema de uma linguagem adequada, mas, principalmente, o enfoque epistemológico que vai presidir essa linguagem e permitir sua eficácia. Há um grau mínimo de conhecimento objetivo que deve ser proporcionado pela significação do singular (pelo singular-significante), que exige um mínimo de contextualização do particular, para que a notícia se realize efetivamente como forma de conhecimento. A partir dessa relação minimamente harmônica entre o singular e o particular, a notícia poderá – dependendo de sua abordagem ideológica – tornar-se uma apreensão crítica da realidade”. (Genro Filho, 2012, p.202).
- 10 “Men plug the dikes of their most needed beliefs with whatever mud they can find”, as Clifford Geertz (2007, p. 122), metaphorically puts it.

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