

# EXTENSIVENESS OF VICTIMS AND PERCEPTUAL INTENSITY OF COVID-19 IN VISUAL EXPERIENCES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND FOLHA DE S. PAULO



KATI CAETANO

*Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná, Curitiba – Paraná – Brazil*

ORCID: 0000-0002-8385-1390

DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v17n1.2021.1339

Received in: August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Desk Reviewed: September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Desk Review Editor: Fábio Pereira

Revised on: December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

Approved on: March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**ABSTRACT** – This article examines the objective and quantifiable data conversion in visual and syncretic discursive forms aimed at mobilizing experiences of the conveyed senses. In addition to making the invisible visible, what is proposed here is to make the unspeakable visible by analyzing the overdetermination of the effect of intensity, proximity, and presence on news content. To achieve this goal this paper uses empirical data obtained from infographics printed in *The New York Times* (NYT) and *Folha de S.Paulo* newspapers on the covid-19 pandemic. This was chosen because the objective data in numbers and figures affect how true opinion is shaped and the infographics were recurrently employed (during our research period) by all media as an effective mechanism for understanding the facts. The empirical methodology is anchored in the perspective of tension semiotics that provides theoretical foundations for studying the sensitive dimension of interactional processes.

**Keywords:** Perceptual intensity. Experience in data journalism. Infographics. *The New York Times*. *Folha de S.Paulo*.

## EXTENSIDADE DE VÍTIMAS E INTENSIDADE PERCEPTIVA DA COVID-19 EM EXPERIÊNCIAS VISUAIS DO *THE NEW YORK TIMES* E DA *FOLHA DE S.PAULO*

**RESUMO** – Propõe-se neste artigo examinar o processo de conversão de dados, considerados objetivos e quantificáveis, em formas discursivas visuais e sincréticas voltadas a mobilizar experiências dos sentidos veiculados. Para além de tornar visível o invisível, discute o modo de se dar a ver o indizível, pela análise da sobredeterminação do efeito de intensidade, proximidade e presença aos conteúdos noticiosos. Para tanto, trabalha com empíricos de práticas infográficas circuladas pelos jornais *The New York Times* (NYT) e *Folha de S.Paulo* sobre a pandemia covid-19, porque nesse domínio os dados objetificados em fluxos de números e cifras atuam sob a forma do parecer verdadeiro e, no período, a infografia tornou-se recorrente em todas as mídias como mecanismo eficaz de compreensão dos fatos. A metodologia de abordagem dos empíricos ancora-se na perspectiva da semiótica tensiva que fornece fundamentos teóricos para estudo da dimensão sensível dos processos interacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Intensidade perceptiva. Experiência no jornalismo de dados. Infografia. *The New York Times*. *Folha de S.Paulo*.

## EXTENSIDAD DE VÍCTIMAS E INTENSIDAD PERCEPTIVA DE COVID-19 EN EXPERIENCIAS VISUALES DE *THE NEW YORK TIMES* Y *FOLHA DE S.PAULO*

**RESUMEN** – En este artículo se propone examinar el proceso de conversión de datos, considerado objetivo y cuantificable, en formas discursivas visuales y sincréticas dirigidas a movilizar experiencias de los sentidos transmitidos. Además de visibilizar lo invisible, lo que se propone aquí es abordar la forma de visibilizar lo indecible, analizando la sobre determinación del efecto de intensidad, proximidad y presencia a los contenidos informativos. Para ello, trabaja con prácticas empíricas de infografías que circulan en los diarios *The New York Times* (NYT) y *Folha de S.Paulo* sobre la pandemia covid-19, pues en este dominio los datos objetivados en flujos de números y cifras actúan como un parecer verdadero y, en el período, la infografía se convirtió en recurrente en todos los medios como mecanismo eficaz de comprensión de los hechos. La metodología del enfoque empírico se ancla en la perspectiva de la semiótica tensiva que ofrece fundamentos teóricos para estudiar la dimensión sensible de los procesos interaccionales.

**Palabras clave:** Intensidad perceptiva. Experiencia en periodismo de datos. Infografías. *The New York Times*. *Folha de S.Paulo*.

### 1 Established forms of journalistic representation

The search for gaining the attention of interlocutors and audiences in communicational processes is a well-known fact, one which has been debated in several fields of study: conversational processes, traditional media, and digital networks. In journalism, this phenomenon is evident not only among its competitors but also with other forms of media coverage such as advertising and television. With the onset of the internet (especially since the 90s)

and with web 2.0 and its interactivity, ubiquity, convergence, and multi-platforms, the potential to distinguish oneself from others has increased.

The currentness of the news used to be the standard of every good newspaper, and today that currentness plays an important role in the increasing demand for up-to-date news. It requires knowing how to mediate and circulate it to gain an edge over competing websites and newspapers which have the same content, audios, images, and other forms of representation.

For this purpose, the media (particularly larger ones) systematically uses multimedia, interactivity, and capabilities to compose singular articles using panoramic images, videos, 360-degree and immersive mechanisms, and live audio recordings from witnesses or participants. Likewise, it replicates or adjusts the content on different platforms, creating a continuous flow (Barbosa, 2013, pp.36–38) of data that kind of self-references the news company through the transit of information, explanations, and justifications on their websites and social media, as well as on their journalists' private digital networks. Given these multiple recurrences, the current scenario balances repetition of the same information, with similar or even identical content, and special productions that break away from the routine. It is within this niche that the experimental nature of making news gains more strength, although multimedia and immersive reports have been standardized to mix the representational treatment of the facts with the user's actions at different levels of interaction.

Representation and action, as Manovich pointed out in the early 2000s (2000, pp.212–233), are two cultural forms of the internet age. The first form corresponds to the narratives and reports in editorials, opinions, and news which are expressed in themes and ways that aim to maintain a certain degree of “fidelity” to the facts. This fidelity is metaphorical and is not to be confused with the “truth” of the facts, although both have or develop complicating consequences. It is a question of discussing the facts using symbolic forms recognized as figures of the world, even if they consist of structures established by culture as expressions that are “representative of the real” (Fontanille, 2005, pp.99–122).

What newspapers do, in general, is give credence to these referential standards. We shall focus here solely on the visual aspect: a tragedy or disaster is associated with people who suffer or die and

with the destruction of identifiable things such as houses, plants, cars, or movable property. Instead of this, if an environment appears unrecognizable, vague, or blurry its meaning will be investigated by the reader, who will try to attribute recognizable traits to it such as the dust that a disaster raises or a recording captured in the heat of the moment, thus granting some truth value to its effect. The symbolic processes of representing the world, therefore, fluctuate between highly figurative, iconic forms and more abstract forms, which appear as thematizations of the facts. They are predominant in certain discourses (such as thematization in essayist discourse or representation in photojournalism) and can equally create perceptions of visualities and subjectivities or intermingle in the same discourse; this is what Merleau-Ponty shows us when examining Paul Cézanne's use of silhouettes and blurred figures (1984, p.117, emphasis in original): “[...] Cézanne will follow the intumescence of the object in a colorful tone and will mark *various* outlines in blue”.

The second form (the action, as described by Manovich) concerns how users participate through control menus and other corporeal and extracorporeal mechanisms, such as image enlargement, circulation through its surface, fixation (when in motion), return, fragmentation, and, in some cases, changes or insertions, in addition to the various types of immersion that demand degrees of freedom of movement within virtual space (Degrees of freedom: DoF) (Pavlik, 2019, p.86).

Manovich (2000, pp.212–233) refers to these two procedures as cultural forms and highlights the permanence of the structure that came from photography and cinema, and the logic of computer-based production, mostly because of its 2.0 potential. Since these resources are still being mobilized to this day, it is expected that news products will also transit through these different modalities, fluctuating between the traditional form of news and formats that associate the syncretism of languages, multimedia, and the multi-competence of enunciation: the enunciator and enunciatee. Syncretism supports a mixture of verbal and non-verbal quantities and plastic and sound, with different materiality.

Multimedia allows one to combine still and moving images, two-dimensional or three-dimensional resources, sound, and video, as well as the “objects” in which these statements circulate, including the possibility of everyone being able to operate in

one single medium with media convergence and multiplatform productions (Jenkins, 2006; Barbosa, 2013). The technological potentials at hand do facilitate this process, one can say that they feed sophisticated projects like larger teams and long-term employment, as in productions from *The New York Times* (NYT) and, to a lesser extent, from *Folha de S.Paulo* (FSP), *The Guardian* or *El País*, but they are not restrictive, as we shall see with the examples below.

The purpose of this article is to focus on one aspect of the communicational process, not just a journalistic one, but one connected to the socio-discursive field, namely the recurrence of traditional procedures and procedures that use advanced digital technology, both of which aim to enhance the news experience. Our hypothesis is based on the sensitive dimension as a condition of communicative logic, which itself is a part of the information domain.

This is a small section from a broader investigation on the value-experience in journalism<sup>1</sup>, in this case, as it pertains to data visualization. A selection of samples was extracted from a set of systematic news items from January to July 2020 which focus on the covid-19 pandemic issue as this was, for obvious reasons, the main agenda for all newspapers. Each of these news items (represented here by four cases) is part of a paradigm of so many other similar enunciative maneuvers. Our selection was based on the perception that the involvement with a referenced fact is part of spatiality experiences in two-dimensional or three-dimensional structures, both interactive and non-interactive, in movements that aim to figuratively mobilize the intensification of a quantity.

Our analytical focus is on the discursive semiotics surrounding the discussion of the meaning and its manifestation of both content and senses for which expressive materiality is fundamental. Our line of investigation, which does not adopt a hermeneutic methodology of analyzing texts in a message, is split into different perspectives, yet all work together in the common principle that the intellectual and sensitive components are articulated. Among such epistemic perspectives, the categories of extensiveness and intensity postulated in tensive semiotics have become most relevant as they contemplate the dynamic movement between quantity and quality in the expression of the senses.

The figurative extensiveness acquires its aesthetic shape from the forms, the sensory traces, the intense compression, and the tonic punctuality of the emotions. Thus, they express a theoretical-analytical process that is formalized *avant la lettre* in the empirical works; it is not a case of providing examples for a theory, but rather theoretical reflections that have been shown to think about the forms of affection manifestations in visual realizations based on quantitative databases. We try to see (and feel) what was constructed discursively to understand and describe the living moment without defending or upholding any particular theoretical view.

These aspects of intensity and extensiveness, together with the concepts of tonicity and atonicity, constitute fundamental categories of the tensive semiotics analyzed by Claude Zilberberg (2012), based mainly on the postulations of Danish scholar Louis Hjelmslev on the importance of an approach to the sensitive factor when studying meaning. By inserting qualitative values into the examination of texts, Zilberberg paves the way for the study of tensivities by adopting an aesthetics bias in the field of semiotics, as Discini rightly points out when emphasizing the definition given by the author that: "Tensivity is the place, or the frontline, where intensity as the sum of states of the soul and extensity as the sum of states of affairs meet".<sup>2</sup> (Zilberberg, 2012, p. 17 as cited in Discini, 2019, p. 2, note 3)

In short, we ask how the aspects of sensitive dimensions are formalized in visual structures and how they correlate with the quantities/qualities expressed in the verbal discourses that they are based on. In our case, the main reason for the textual content is the subject of the growing impact of the invasion, increase, and lethality of a virus.

The keyword in recurring productions has been the value attributed to sharing experiences of facts, activating the reader's/user's sensitivity to the communicative act (Longhi & Caetano, 2019). The NYT newspaper has explained in its reports the success and failure of certain experiments, highlighting the fact that the newspaper needs to be increasingly focused on the experience of the reader, which is evident in the sections "Reader Center", "Times Insider", and "Network Learning". The *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper has a similar focus in sections called "Folha Lab" and "Arte Folha".

What do these procedures consist of? They are intended to give space to the thematic choices of readers, to their opinions on published articles, but also to examine the procedures and objectives behind the newspaper's elaboration of a particular story. In short, they examine the metalanguage used to add affective values to the news, emphasizing the purposes of certain thematic options, the discursive strategies idealized for the project, and the aesthetic solutions valued in the communicative act. Aesthetics in this case is understood as the condition of connecting people into an affective community to provide understanding, which is not based solely on intellectual and rational data (Lopes, 2007, p. 37-49).

While journalism researchers, for the most part, still think in terms of journalism as information, many multidisciplinary journalistic teams have tried to show their involvement with the facts (of both actors in the enunciative process, readers and writers) without falling into the exacerbation of sensations that excite our minds and bodies. They aim to focus on productions committed to the ambivalent human condition of knowing and becoming emotional, without sensational appeals of mere visual attractiveness. This is the case for the empirical authors of both newspapers chosen for discussion, the NYT and *Folha de S. Paulo*, who call for the creative and critical participation of readers by seeking their interaction in the educational formats for learning to read and making different formats, understanding and using images with the power of expression equivalent to verbal speeches.

It is clear that the experience targeted by journalistic creations, either supported or unsupported by sophisticated digital technologies, cannot be confused with the experience of the fact, which is at the center of events. They can simulate situations of calling our sensitivity to the perceptive capacity in the face of the world, but in this dynamic, circular relationship with the physical environments, they articulate as symbolic performances of the institution of the senses (in both conceptions, meaning, and sensorialities) that are already imprinted in the act of perceiving itself. As Valverde postulates (2017, p.30, emphasis in original), "the perceptive activity itself comes close to the form of understanding that we experience in language and we can say that perception *is already an expression*, because what we perceive, more than representing the world, expresses the very movement by which we inhabit it".

For this reason, studies focused on communicative acts cannot do without the analysis of language structures since their productive instances of meanings can formalize both the contents to which they report and the diverse logics of perception, sensitivity, and aesthetic materiality. They do this either by a collective endowment in the social use of language or by intuition and personal experimentation of its potentialities. As a collective manifestation, acquired historically, each symbolic medium is loaded with values that are interpreted differently, according to cultural patterns and circumstances. While building a subject in the use of language possibilities, procedures can be adopted consciously or unconsciously to better suit the limited representations of the lived experience. This phenomenon explains the importance of perception in the body's contact with the world, of its expressive nature as its own movement of language, and its material institution in symbolic choices and uses (Fontanille, 2016).

However, we cannot infer that technical and technological conditions are exclusive determinants of sensitivities, or "hybrid sensitivities" in the context of contemporary times. Valverde (2017, p.43) also states that we corroborate the idea that there are no "new sensitivities" as proclaimed by certain theories or authors, but that "different forms of sensitivity are different patterns of reception acquired by habits introduced by different means, supported by different technologies" which are not, however, exclusive to sensory processes as they act "in a discursive environment and according to a disposition (*pathos*) which translates into certain uses and customs (*ethos*)" (Id., p. 43, emphasis in original). They are historically conditioned and are likely to trigger our ambivalent sensitivity.

We have been working on a broader study of current journalism and information creators and their user/reader experience such as the NYT, which explains its focus, or other newspapers that express it in other ways like the Mexican newspaper *El Clarinete*, which uses the expression "*Se ve y se siente*"<sup>3</sup> in its name. The use of the term "value-experience" (Longhi & Caetano, 2019), which is clearly an analogy for the more common term "news value", has proven adequate to explain this intention of calling attention to a procedure, which is not new but has been accentuated in the last decades due to technological and interactional potential, which is to imprint to the informative content the aggregation of the act of



experimenting with content (which should not be confused with interactivity, as will be shown with the empirical ones).

Both experience the praxis of doing journalism and aim to help the reader/user experience by apprehending meanings, feelings, and sensitivities. To this end, it explores the basic elements of the expression plans of different media so they can materialize the content conveyed by specific resources to be experienced in the plastic performance (in visual speeches of a spatial-temporal character), in its progress (acceleration/deceleration), in its tensiveness (intensity/extensiveness), and others (such as the sound element in oral discourse, but we shall not address that here). The cases examined below favor these variables with different emphases. The impression of experiencing something can be obtained through more straightforward operations in the current creations when the effective intervention of the reader is requested by some reactive attitude.

The second component of digital culture discussed above by Manovich (2000, pp.212–233) is an action which, however, should not be seen exclusively as an interactive component interfering in the production process, but also as reacting to certain requests made by sources whose competence is legitimized through their actions and opinions. The editorials from the aforementioned newspapers and their social networks contribute to this, providing a behind-the-scenes look at their creations or that of other colleagues, as we shall see in the first empirical data in this paper. The infographics we selected on the escalation of covid-19 are perfect for guiding our reasoning because they are usually apprehended, especially by common sense, as objective elaborations based on numerical data and therefore used to help understand and prove the events.

The first empirical data come from the NYT and the last one is a montage made by *Folha de S.Paulo* of a photo and an infographic showing different processes of visual formalization and how the figurative image of the photography and the abstract of the graph, together on a double-page spread, give additional emotional meaning to the numerically-expressed data.

We conducted research on empiricals how they can “work” to express subjective states in certain emotional situations; in other words, how do they manage to print a large number of quantifiers into one space. Now with the pandemic, infographics have begun to dominate news screens, newspapers, and social networks as

they can present the percentages, flows, acceleration rates, and information about the disease on a global scale more effectively and immediately. Multiple studies on infographics and information design confirm the importance of data visualization in big data, including contemplating the sensitive aspects of these processes (Teixeira, 2007, 2010; Rinaldi & Teixeira, 2015; Engebretsen & Kennedy, 2020; Simpson, 2020; Weber, 2020).

It should be noted, however, that this is not an article aimed at updating the theoretical-analytical discussion about data visualization in journalism, and even less so about systematizing a bibliography review on digital journalism or the like. This article focuses on one aspect of semiotic studies on experience and senses that proved relevant to the analytical approach of the cases we observed.

## **2 More of the same, between excess and lack**

With the spread of the virus, the “more of the same” position (Zilberberg, 2012) becomes more prominent: the agenda is virtually focused on the health and economic crisis, for good reason, but here in Brazil it is peppered with the political problems that add, *paripassu* to the new coronavirus, to people’s anxiety about what the future holds<sup>4</sup>. However, when we put aside these crises caused almost on a daily basis by the Brazilian administration and its contrasting numbers on the cases and deaths related to the disease, what we have is a paradox between a lack and excess of informational data.

The lack is attributed to the little knowledge we have about the virus; its evolution, behavior, variation, the underreporting of cases, the uncertainty of the longevity of its presence and effects, and ultimately, our lack of knowledge about the country’s economic situation. The excess lies within numerical records, percentages, the geographical reach of covid-19, and its ability to last, putting us in a semiotic state of waiting (not reassuring) for the curve to lower. The situation is structured from a tensive point of view in a very unstable and uncomfortable spectrum between more and less, between extent and intensity.

With the extent, there is an implication of what is already known, but with intensity, the problem becomes an occurrence (Zilberberg, 2012; Fontanille & Zilberberg, 2001) because, although it is known, it can always be more impactful. It is this dynamic and

its effects of meaning that journalism needs to transit in order to not “asphyxiate the image” since, in the perspective of Didi-Huberman (2018, pp.52–54), “destroying and demultiplying are the two ways to make an image invisible: through nothing and excess [...]. What can be done against this double constraint that wishes to alienate us from the alternative of seeing absolutely nothing or seeing only the clichés?”

In short, in this article we are analyzing how different types of infographics trigger strategies that use more traditional resources or digital technology to give affective value to the quantifying data, thus obtaining the effects of extent and intensity, of the proximity of the virus, and the expansion of the pandemic across the planet. It is not just a matter of transforming invisible data into visible data (Rodrigues, 2012), but of converting quantifiers into emotional events; understanding the event through the language (Agamben, 2016, p.66).

Data infographics can be created from extracting, accumulating, and systematizing algorithmic procedures, but it presupposes a more or less effective rhetorical construction that depends on creativity and aims to persuade and have an effect on the reader/user. This rhetoric of information is first treated here as a kind of rhetoricity, posited by Fiorin (2020) as a generalized process aimed at the performative and expressive efficacy of all kinds of discourse, which operates through procedures different from expression and content. Discursive rhetoricity is directly involved with possible effects of meanings attributed to symbolic manifestations – truth, objectivity (or subjectivity) – which can be obtained strategically or “independent of the enunciator’s conscious intent” (Fiorin, 2020, p.4). In this author’s perspective, they are thus responsible for the relevance of the argumentative and tropological dimensions of the texts.

In this sense, in addition to the flow of material in raw data values indicating the intensification/reduction of a problem, the forms of data visualization can endow graphs and their syncretic compositions with certain sensations of feeling an experience in the light of information. As spatial-temporal axes constitute the symbolic quantities they are worked organically, hybridizing digital data and subjective interventions in a range of materials such as lines, colors, points, topologies, and plasticities. In addition to presenting data, infographics symbolize ways of visualizing the

values and flows they express which are distributed over space-time axes and require a specific reading of both. Such rhetoric strategies act as a poetic way (Postema & Deuze, 2020) of seeing and conceiving information.

### **3 Ways of registering intensity**

#### **3.1 The poignancy of a trait**

The way a page is laid out and how the contours of the spaces that separate the different types of content and editorials may be (dis)respected can create significant breaks in the interpretation of quantifying data. In addition to resources more in line with the availability of information and communication technologies, there are thought-provoking ideas for the interrelation between graphics and other elements of a newspaper's printed or online discursive space, creating an unusual infographic spread on the page. This is the case of the front page of the print version of the NYT, from April 8, 2020, under the title "How the Coronavirus Toll Grew"<sup>5</sup>, which featured a sequence of four vertical maps of the United States, each registering deaths on March 17, March 26, April 2 and April 6, respectively, with an increasing amount of red points and spikes as the number increased.

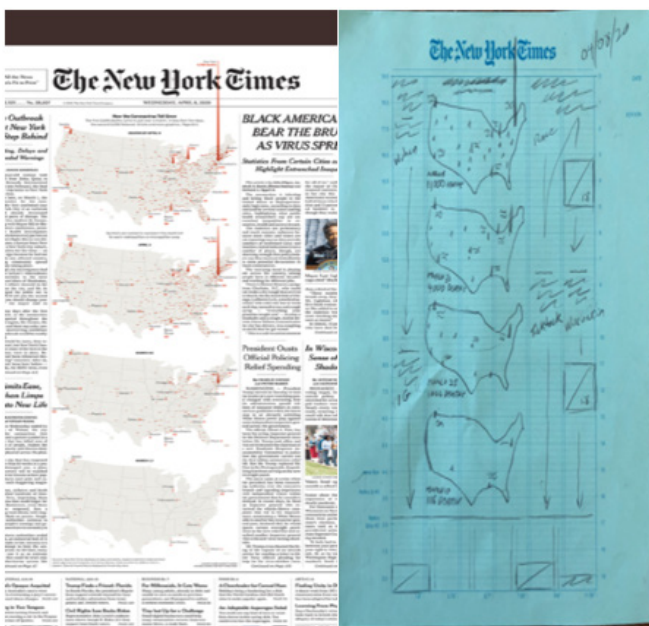
When comparing the maps there is a noticeable increase in the number of cases shown by the visual increase in the numbers and height/width of the spikes (especially as of March 26), and there is also a break from the basic layout, on both printed pages and television screens, where the spikes were shown rising and pushing the letter "K" up and out of the headline New York, thus breaking from the normal routine it presents. A sketch of this visual was published by the newspaper's planning editor, Josh Crutchmer, on his *Twitter* page on April 7, the night before it was printed on the front page, highlighting and encouraging positive comments on the project.

The explanation or emphasis on some of the mechanisms that the NYT staff has used to create different ways of presenting the facts has become a regular practice at the newspaper, as well as justifying its choice for the agendas or formats it uses. This is why we consider the special sections designed to meet the

demands of readers so relevant to our research, such as “Reader Center”, “Times Insider” and the educational section “The Learning Network”, which includes some types of literacy lessons designed to help read and prepare infographics under the title “What’s going on in this graph?”.

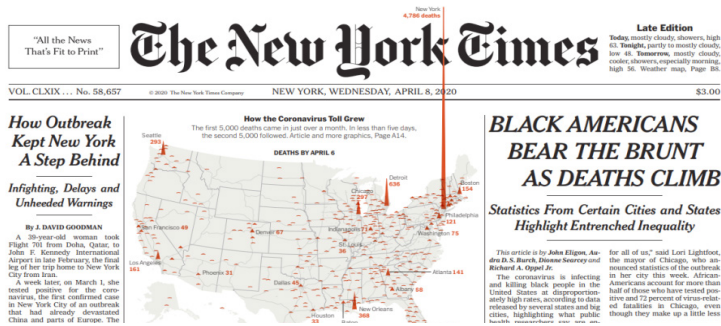
It is a seemingly simple idea of an elongated red line piercing the traditional contours of each story on the first page which has repercussions that cannot be voiced because it materializes the semiotic effect of the intensive-extensive aspect of the tragedy and its specific repercussion in the city of New York. Its size is not predetermined by any geometric scalar parameter that forces it to go beyond the page; in fact, it does not appear on all platforms. It is equivalent to the sensitive valuation of an emotion that affects citizens and the newspaper in its routine stability, portraying a disruption in the more than one hundred and fifty-year-old impenetrable headline of the newspaper.

**Figure 1** – Copy of photo posted by Josh Crutchmer on *Twitter*



Source: *Twitter* @jcrutchmer (04/07/20)

**Figure 2** – Detail from the NYT headline “How the Coronavirus Toll Grew”



Source: nyt.com (08/04/2020)

In order to prepare this visual grouping, quantitative data are combined with qualitative resources. In view of the staggering amount of numbers readers (and journalists) see every day, this grouping gives the idea of a significant increase in the numbers, it provides a diagnosis on its evolution and predicts an escalation that can be reproduced on other points of the map. The space used for the maps represents discourse; verbo-visual statements framed by the unchanging upper part of the newspaper that gives it its identity (Floch, 1995), where name, date, origin, and ownership are printed. To exceed this upper part means invading well-delimited spaces and projecting this into the reader's enunciative field.

How does one make the reader/user experience the emphasis that the creator intended, or how does one make the other feel the perception of the greatness of a number that he or she is feeling? The vertical red pointer that extends over the top of the newspaper is a good example of this since the rising vertical line and the overlap are culturally recognizable indicators of elevation, either positive (as superiority) or negative (as imposition). But the rising of a line is not the only thing that can portray this kind of dysphoric effect (as we shall see with the following empirical data), a horizontal spread can also invade the enunciation space, bringing qualitative facts to the reader.

As previously explained, the axes of space and time constitute quantities of equitable depth that endow the status of narrative to a sequence of actions. The narrative of the spread of the pandemic

is built on these procedures, repeated in several manifestations throughout the year 2020, and pointed out in this article in its representative constitution.

### 3. 2 Density and tangibility of tracking

The previous empirical data constitutes a case of intervention on two fronts. In the example below, both traditional resources and digital interaction potentialities, in their various levels of immersibility (Pavlick, 2020), are mobilized, thus providing a more sophisticated complex from a technical-aesthetic point of view. This is the NYT interactive infographic (05/27/2020) entitled “An Incalculable Loss”, aimed at giving a different visual to mark 100 thousand covid deaths. Designed by a team of journalists from the newspaper, in conjunction with more than 30 collaborators, the article gathers the names and details of the lives of a thousand people in the United States who died as a result of the coronavirus. The data was extracted from hundreds of obituaries, news articles, and paid death notices published in newspapers and digital media over the previous months.

Composed of a drawing of human figures that multiply on the screen by scrolling down through the names, the infographic shows the surprising increase in deaths not only in the vertical axis of time but also in space since the figures occupy the entire surface of the screen and appear to spread beyond its lateral limits. The projection effect of the statement represented by the infographic in the space for the statement, supposedly occupied by the reader, creates the perception of the fact’s presentification.

However, in addition to specifying a number, the list of a thousand people with brief descriptions of their lives that overlap the figures on the screen gives the tangibility of quantification for cases that might otherwise lose the anonymity of the figures. The project involved consulting more than 250 newspapers and entities, relying on multicompetent team projects, and handling the available database.

A list of the sources is placed at the end of the article, allowing the data to be accessed, or checked, for credibility. This visual data combined with the entire creative process led to building a project capable of adding affective intensification to the quantifiers based

on trust and sensitivity. On the first page of the same newspaper, the resource is adapted to the publication's characteristics. The presentation of the fact (100 thousand deaths) materializes in the form of a large full-page infographic with the names of a thousand victims spread out over the entire surface of the page.

Figure 3 – Front page of the NYT.



Source: nyt.com (24/05/2020)



In this case, the extent of the information in the spatial dimension shows the value of the quantity, and the impression (as a mark that is left) of each of the names gives it tangibility. Individuals are extracted from the anonymity of the figures and their lives are detailed through their names.

A name, although arbitrary and personal, is characteristic of an individual. The phenomenon is the same as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1983, as cited in Floch, 1985, pp.15–16) perceived in what he called the “small mythologies” of a speaker, concerning the denominations of his language; that is, incorporating sound into its meaning. These “small mythologies” can be the result of meanings given socially or the perception of each one by their own experiences.

Corroborating this connection that speakers give to the sound forms of their languages and the names designated to them, we would also mention the emphasis given by Tzvetan Todorov (1982) that the Spaniards immediately substituted all the indigenous names given to things and people by its “equivalent” in the colonizer’s language. These and many other examples that could be listed attest to the adherence of names to their designated objects, in addition to a mere semantic and social (or even legal) identification. The name becomes the *arché* and *ethos* of human individuality; transforming a number into a name implies giving it life and a footprint in the symbolic space of representations.

As you scroll down the screen on the online version, the number of human figures multiplies, according to the number of registered covid deaths. Their names and professions are revealed when touching the individual figures.

**Figure 4** – Screen prints from NYT (05/27/2020)



Source: [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/24/us/us-coronavirus-deaths-100000.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/24/us/us-coronavirus-deaths-100000.html)

Due to their predominantly vertical nature, the screens are navigated by scrolling downwards or upwards, keeping the lateral framing fixed, but, as was the case with the printed version, the surface area of the images can also be operated horizontally, which gives it its circular look. As we move towards the figure of 100 thousand

(remembering that that number has increased greatly) the information for each individual reduces because it is impossible to contain all that information on the screen together with the phrases that overlap the anonymity of the figures: “A number is an imperfect measure when applied to the human condition. One. Hundred. Thousand”. We observed that the discursive sources for each platform contain the same components of articulation for extent and intensity.

It should be noted that these sets represent, in their design, the expansion and further development of the health crisis, creating true iconizations of this process. The last empirical materializes this idea, giving us the idea that what is expressed in photographs and creative dialogue deserves our attention as a closure.

### **3.3 Meanings of death in black/white photos and the classic setting of infographics**

When Brazil reached the 100 thousand death mark, the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper published a large photo of Lalo de Almeida on its front page. The front page photo takes up the entire length of the vertical space on the page, stretched across two columns of lateral-running texts, and shows the image of graves in the São Luiz cemetery, in São Paulo; an area designated for covid-19 burials. The photos were taken in black and white, similar to other images shot by the same photographer of the pandemic and its effects, highlighting the author's choice to purposely avoid using color, most evident in the contrast between light and shadows that is heightened in the gray nuances.

Only a small infographic appears on the left side column at the top of the page, but its purpose is not to illustrate the escalation of the pandemic but to compare it with other tragedies such as traffic deaths and murders in Brazil in 2019, in the Paraguayan War, or the aftermath of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, which the number of victims due to covid-19 has now surpassed. In addition to the newspaper's various infographics published over the six-month time frame since the virus started to spread in Brazil, it also takes a brief look at the 100 thousand death mark through a large photo that commands attention.

The intensity of the number is not the focus here, instead, it is the intensification of the effect of the disease achieved through the use of the black and white image which gives it a dramatic feel; a fear of the future. Also of note is the fact that the allusion to death through a space that represents the inevitability of death itself (the cemetery)

and a place where the memory of loss is kept alive (expressed by the two rose bouquets laid down on the soil) are recurrent and is successful at reminding us of the finite state of all living beings.

The event is once again expressed by its extent inside the newspaper's pages, not through figures in graphs but through rows of open graves, representing a space to be filled, taking away the anonymity of covid deaths for each of the readers. As we have seen, the resources may be different, but the logic of concentrated intensity and pervasive extent is used through the use of photos; images of Lalo, achieved by the contrasts of light and the shadows of black and white.

However, the photo in the middle of the pullout on covid-19 of rows of graves placed next to an infographic containing data from the pandemic encourages an important comparative reading of both the photo and the infographics. A two-page printout (B6 and B7), the large-sized photograph is from the same Lalo series, in b/w, and the infographics occupy the entire vertical extension of the right page running alongside both the photo and the text of the article, with the title "The path of the 100 thousand", by Simon Ducroquet (Figure 4).

Whether consciously or unconsciously planned, this montage evokes historical-cultural importance for addressing the facts as the option to not use color images dates back to a long tradition in which black and white photos used in contemporaneity force the reader to perceive an affective value within. The color issue is that it no longer represents just a figure in the world; it imposes its interpretative value as a classic attempt at intensifying.

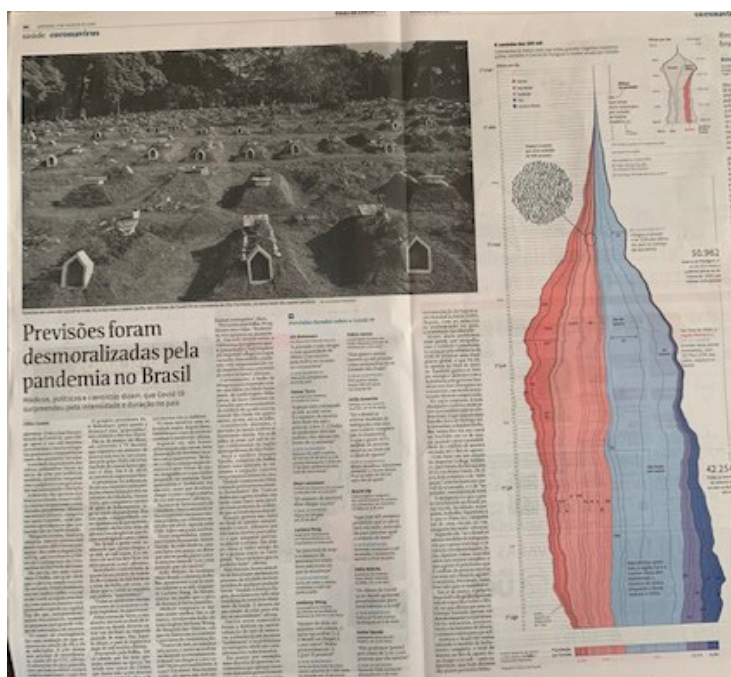
The feeling of spaciousness is also given by the open shot at the base of the frame, which adds the sense of proximity and pervasiveness in/by the photo, which uses the image's visual resources to provoke feelings of emotion. The environment is captured, however, in its immediacy and totality, the intensive manifestation of quantity is addressed in a general view. In terms of the composition of the page, the large format and the image which spills over onto the other page, together with the columns of verbal text, account for the extent of the problem. Conversely, the figures for the number of deaths are not prevalent in the infographic, but the accuracy of the data is, and adding value/experience to them will recover this classic composition of numerical and geographical information in association with the title indicating a path to 100 thousand.

The flow of data over time shapes an image that expands as the cases continue to grow and ends up drawing a picture of parallel paths, with narrower or wider intervals, according to the numbers of

positive cases in several Brazilian states. A large path with several lanes is outlined and “helps to visualize” the pandemic’s progress through different geographical spaces and length of time. The quantification of the number of graves in the photo and the realization of that value in numerical data are therefore synthesized in the performance of the “path”, such as the extensive route that crosses over cities and months and ends/stops in the image of the waiting open graves.

The effect of duration is practical as it materializes in the figurative and plastic constituents of the visual and arouses emotions and passions. Expressed in other terms, the “paths” of death are expressed through the design of the infographic, just as in the photo the open graves and the rows of graves bring traces of something symbolically invisible that try to visually formalize the unspeakable extent of the damage reported in words and condensed into the article’s title “Expectations crushed by the pandemic in Brazil”.

**Figure5** – *Folha de S.Paulo*, pages B6 and B7, Healthpullout – Coronavírus (08/09/2020)



Source: Photo of Lalo de Almeida and infographic from Simon Ducroquet. Data source: Brazil.IO, *Our World in Data*, archives from *Folha* and the Chamber of Deputies. *Folha de S. Paulo*, photograph by the author from the printed version of 09/08/2020.

#### 4 Conclusion

This empirical data shows a kind of journalistic treatment that does not fit the fast-paced, albeit daily, production of information. On one hand, it reveals interactions between human beings and algorithms, man and machines, which require elaborative adjustments as well as productions of chance. Exploring vertical space-time experiences have an effect on the programming/layout of the newspaper; on the reduced sensations of numbers of deaths obtained by the vertical/horizontal expanse of the screen/page, and on the figurative formalization of these losses through b/w photos with few resources as an attempt to rescue the absence of color that highlights the gray tones of ash (there is no way to avoid the association with the idea of ash). These are singular mechanisms of these examples but have a recurrent direction – expressing emotions in conjunction with information on facts.

For the latter, photos and graphs complement one another, each one reinforcing the semantic values expressed in the other, including the spectrum of colors on the graph and the lack of colors in the figurative scenes where the emptiness of the dark background contrasts with the strong effect of the outlines of the graves. This effect between emptiness and crowdedness which carries strong, upsetting feelings with it imposes a double distance on us which has previously been explored by Didi-Huberman (2010, p.77). In other words, if acts of communication materialize in the double intelligible/sensitive articulation of symbolic potentialities, then informative environments also increase more and more resources so that affections and emotions are formalized in the dimensions of space.

Just as time is inscribed in the spatial dimension of images by chronotopic anamorphosis measures (Machado, p.58-74), compositions of graphs, photos, and diagrams created from large databases implement affective traits to conceptual operators (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009, p.164-201), rinting forms of experience that inscribe both an “order of intensity and extent of the topic” (Didi-Huberman, 2010, p.218). The unusual actions of plastic constituents are likely to induce feelings in us in the spatial-temporal experience of life. We are interested, as scholars of languages and their injunctions in communication processes, in the discursive equivalences to “represent” passionate or emotional states identifiable by their marks in these productions.

It is not a matter of looking for direct and fixed relations, it is rather the creative potential of languages, as mentioned by Chomsky (1972, pp.13–41) when talking about the constitutive function of human language: “Thus, the creative use of language [...] accompanies any act of the creative imagination and is underlying it, regardless of the raw material in which it is performed”. The actors, men, and algorithms also adjust themselves in programming, strategies, and accidents in order to shape experiences in symbolic forms that grab our attention. Ed Finn (2017, p.192), a student of these interactions between subjects and machines, postulates that “the space of imagination exists in the algorithmic context” and proposes to consider such relationships as “experimental humanities”; we prefer to say, and agree with Dewey (2010), that we are facing facts from experience, in the face of which we are mobilized in our sensitive and intelligible dimension.

It can be said that these are all journalism strategies designed to exacerbate fears in the face of reality. The current situation we are facing, however, does not involve writers, designers, and editors solely in the exercise of thought; they are acting participants in a drama. Now, more than ever, perception has become language, and that language bleeds in the face of the terror of reality.

## NOTES

- 1 Approved by CNPQ in January 2020 as scholarship program in Research Production.
- 2 «La tensivité est le lieu, ou le front, où se joignent, se rejoignent l'intensité au titre de somme des états d'âme et l'extensité au titre de somme des états de choses.» (Zilberberg, 2012, p.17 as cited in Discini, 2019, p.2, note 3).
- 3 Retrieved from [www.elclarinete.com.mx](http://www.elclarinete.com.mx)
- 4 A number of texts and works in journalism, politics, science or media at the national and international levels have discussed the problems arising from a lack of responsible and compromised management on the part of the Brazilian government regarding measures for greater control of health, economic and political problems in the country, generating scenarios of anxiety and expressions of displeasure.

- 5 A high resolution copy of the newspaper's front page is available at: <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2020/04/08/nytfrontpage/scan.pdf> | A more detailed and in-depth discussion of this example can be found at Caetano, K. (2020). Des données au sens dans le discours de l'information. La rhétoricité de l'infographie. Interfaces numériques, 9 (3). DOI: 10.25965/interfaces-numeriques.4399

## REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (2016). *L'aveugle*. Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages.
- Barbosa, S. (2013). Jornalismo convergente e continuum multimídia na quinta geração do jornalismo nas redes digitais. In J. Canavilhas (Ed.), *Notícias e mobilidade: o jornalismo na era dos dispositivos móveis* (pp.33–54). Beira Interior: Universidade da Beira Interior (UBI).
- Chomsky, N. (1972). *Linguística cartesiana: um capítulo da história do pensamento racionalista*. Petrópolis: Vozes. São Paulo – EDUSP.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2009). *¿Qué es la filosofía?* Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama.
- Dewey, J. (2010). *Arte como experiência*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Didi-Huberman, G. (2010). *O que vemos, o que nos olha*. São Paulo: Editora 34.
- Didi-Huberman, G. (2018). *A imagem queima*. Curitiba: Medusa.
- Discini, N. (2019). Claude Zilberberg: o semiótico e o esteta. *Actes sémiotiques*, (122), 1–7. DOI: 10.25965/as.6335
- Engebretsen, M., & Kennedy, H. (2020). *Data visualization in society*. Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam.
- Finn, E. (2017). *What algorithms want: imagination in the age of computing*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Florin, J. (2020). De la rhétorique à la rhétoricité. *Actes Sémiotiques*, (123), 1–13. DOI: 10.25965/as.6414
- Floch, J.M. (1985). *Petites mythologies de l'œil et de l'esprit: pour une sémiotique plastique*. Paris/Amsterdam: Hadès Benjamins.
- Floch, J.M. (1995). *Identités visuelles*. Paris: PUF.
- Fontanille, J., & Zilberberg, C. (2001). *Tensão e significação*. São Paulo: Discurso Editorial Humanitas/FFLCH/USP.



Fontanille, J. (2005). *Significação e visualidade – exercícios práticos*. Porto Alegre: Sulina.

Fontanille, J. (2005). *Corpo e sentido*. Londrina: PR, Eduel. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press.

Levi-Strauss, C. (1983). *Le regard éloigné*. Paris: Plon.

Longhi, R. R., & Caetano, K. (2019). Valor-experiência no contexto do jornalismo experiencial. *Galáxia*, PUC, (42), 82–95. DOI: 10.1590/1982-25532019340116

Lopes, D. (2007). *A delicadeza: estética, experiência e paisagens*. Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília/Finatec.

Machado, A. (1997). *Pré-cinemas & pós-cinemas*. Campinas: Papirus.

Manovich, L. (2000). *The language of new media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1984). *Textos selecionados. Os Pensadores*. São Paulo: Abril.

Pavlik, J. V. (2019) *Journalism in the Age of Virtual Reality: How Experiential Media Are Transforming News*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Postema, S., & Deuze, M. (2020). Artistic Journalism: Confluence in Forms, Values and Practices. *Journalism Studies*, 21(10), 1305–1322. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2020.1745666

Rinaldi, M., & Teixeira, T. (2015). Visualização da Informação e Jornalismo: proposta de conceitos e categorias. *Revista Estudos de jornalismo*, 1(15), 106-121. Retrieved from [http://www.revistaiej.sopcom.pt/ficheiros/20150209-revista\\_3.pdf](http://www.revistaiej.sopcom.pt/ficheiros/20150209-revista_3.pdf)

Rodrigues, A. (2012). Visualizar o “invisível”: era da infoestética no jornalismo de dados. Proceedings of the 10<sup>o</sup> Encontro nacional da SBPJor. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/2950068/Visualizar\\_o\\_invis%C3%ADvel\\_era\\_da\\_infoest%C3%A9tica\\_no\\_jornalismo\\_de\\_dados](https://www.academia.edu/2950068/Visualizar_o_invis%C3%ADvel_era_da_infoest%C3%A9tica_no_jornalismo_de_dados).

Simpson, J. (2020). Visualization data: a lived experience. In M. Engebretsen & H. Kennedy (Eds.). *Data visualization in society* (pp.155–168). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctvzgb8c7.16](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctvzgb8c7.16)

Teixeira, T. (2007). Metodologias de pesquisa sobre infografia no jornalismo digital – uma análise preliminar. Proceedings of the 5<sup>o</sup> Encontro Nacional de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo. Retrieved from

sbpjour.org.br/admjor/arquivos/coordenada\_2.\_tattiana\_teixeira.pdf

Teixeira, T. (2010). *Infografia e jornalismo: conceitos, análises e perspectivas*. Salvador: EDUFBA.

Todorov, T. (1982). *A conquista da América: a questão do outro*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Valverde, M. (2017). *Pequena estética da comunicação*. Salvador: Arcádia.

Weber, W. (2020). Exploring narrativity in data visualization in journalism. In M. Engebretsen & H. Kennedy (Eds.). *Data visualization in society* (pp.295–312). Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvzgb8c7.24?](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvzgb8c7.24?)

Zilberberg, Cl. (2012). *La structure tensive*. Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège.

**KATI CAETANO**. Full Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Communication and Languages at the Tuiuti University of Paraná – PPGCom/UTP. PhD in Letters from FFLCH/USP with postdoctoral training in semiotics and language sciences at EHESS/Université de Limoges and Université Paris 7/École Normale Supérieure/ENS-Lyon, France. Leader of the INCOM Research Group – Communication Interactions, Images, Digital Cultures/UTP/CNPQ and researcher for productivity in research at CNPQ. E-mail: [katicaetano@hotmail.com](mailto:katicaetano@hotmail.com)

TRANSLATED BY: LEE SHARP

One of the reviews used in the evaluation of this article can be accessed at: <https://osf.io/xgh57> | Following BJR's open science policy, the reviewer authorized this publication and the disclosure of his/her name.