

CRITICAL STUDY OF FAST IMMERSIVE JOURNALISM:

the Enemy as a paradigmatic case of slow and creative journalism



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ABSTRACT – In order to underscore the imperative for cultivating an immersive journalistic language, we advocate for adopting the frameworks of slow journalism and creative journalism as optimal arenas for its conceptualization, exploration, and formulation. We critically assess the current landscape of immersive journalism and delve into the virtual reality journalistic venture *The Enemy*, positing it as an exemplary and pioneering instance of immersive nonfiction storytelling.

Keywords: Immersive journalism. Virtual reality. Slow journalism. Creative journalism. Communication.

**ESTUDO CRÍTICO DE FAST IMMERSIVE JOURNALISM:
jornalismo lento, jornalismo criativo e The Enemy como um caso
paradigmático**

RESUMO – Para demonstrar a importância de desenvolver uma linguagem imersiva no âmbito jornalístico, propomos os marcos do slow journalism e do jornalismo criativo como abordagens ideais para sua exploração e estudo. Realizamos uma análise crítica da situação atual do jornalismo imersivo e utilizamos o projeto jornalístico em realidade virtual The Enemy como um exemplo paradigmático e pioneiro nessa área.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo imersivo. Realidade virtual. Jornalismo lento. Jornalismo criativo. Comunicação

**ESTUDIO CRÍTICO DEL FAST IMMERSIVE JOURNALISM:
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RESUMEN – RESUMEN – Para demostrar la importancia de desarrollar un lenguaje inmersivo en el ámbito periodístico, planteamos los marcos del slow journalism y el periodismo creativo como enfoques ideales para su exploración y estudio. Llevamos a cabo un análisis crítico de la situación actual del periodismo inmersivo y del proyecto periodístico en realidad virtual The Enemy como un caso paradigmático y vanguardista.

Palabras clave: Periodismo inmersivo. Realidad virtual. Slow journalism. Periodismo creativo. Comunicación

1 Introduction

Immersive audiovisual content is the heir to the longstanding relationship between journalism and cinema, a dynamic most notably discernible within the documentary genre and postdocumentary practices. The historical lineage of this association traces its origins back to the very inception of the silver screen, intertwined with documentary filmmaking, cinematographic newsreels, and current affairs coverage, now accessible online (Martins et al., 2021). Subgenres, including social documentaries, activist and interventionist documentaries, propaganda, direct cinema, cinema vérité, and militant cinema, exemplify the historical interplay between documentary filmmaking and audiovisual journalism (Marín, 2019). Leveraging the

parallelism between two pivotal junctures in the annals of journalism – namely, the advent of cinema and the emergence of the video format – affords a perspective shift to contextualize the present state of immersive journalism amid its developmental trajectory.

The revolution engendered by the emergence of video found particularly pronounced manifestation within the documentary genre and the broader, encompassing scope of nonfiction – an apt label for hybrid products resulting from digital convergence, which has rendered the once-delineated division between fiction and nonfiction obsolete. This transformation in the audiovisual landscape led to shifts in aesthetics, content, production methodologies, and experimentation with electronic imagery. Embedded within this audiovisual renewal are qualities that have imprinted discernible patterns on digital journalism, particularly in contemporary documentary-making: interactivity and engagement.

The advent of video and television constituted a media revolution that catalyzed the development of audiovisual journalism and journalistic documentaries. Novel dynamics of consumption and genres indigenous to the television medium emerged, concurrently spelling the decline and vanishing of cinematic journalism (Montero & Paz, 1997). A new medium begets a new language (Weinrichter, 2004), as its intrinsic attributes differentiate it from other forms of media: immersive technologies construct a digital reality that elicits the illusion of non-mediation (Chabert, 2012). The medium's perceptual disappearance occurs during immersive experiences, eradicating visual references to the screen and transforming the viewer from a passive spectator of narrative to an active participant within a first-person experiential reality. Moreover, the audiovisual narrative space spans 360 degrees, with the user dictating focal points, shunning traditional montage principles, given the absence of compositional framing or out-of-frame existence. Here, we perceive montage as assembling elements to guide users through an audiovisual journey rather than presenting a traditionally narrated account.

Drawing from the parallelism linking the video's emergence and the current state of immersive nonfiction audiovisual content, we delineate the imperatives of immersive journalism and propose a conceptual space for its cultivation and evolution. This case study's overarching goal is to underscore the imperative of studying and experimenting with immersive journalism, to develop a distinctive language of expression.

2 Communicational landscape and theoretical aspects of immersive journalism

Immersive journalistic content production began modestly in 2010 with the early experimental works of Nonny de la Peña. After the release of Oculus Rift in 2014, media outlets rushed to publish short, easy, and quick content. However, the current trend shows a decline in interest in this technology, leading Spanish media to gradually abandon the production of immersive journalistic content. This decline was even exacerbated during the onset of the pandemic (Sidorenko-Bautista et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the global XR market (encompassing virtual reality and augmented reality) grows yearly. It is projected to reach \$296 billion by 2024, with an annual growth rate of 21.6% between 2020 and 2027 (Rodríguez-Fidalgo & Paíno-Ambrosio, 2019). Immersive journalism can be distinguished into two phases: a first phase (2015-2017) marked by the birth and development of experimental productions, and a second phase (current) characterized by stagnation in production. Two main trends exist within the production of these contents, both internationally (Watson, 2016) and within Spain (Barreda-Ángeles, 2018).

On the one hand, the most common modality involves using socially immersive videos in a 360-degree format, as mentioned earlier. However, producing journalistic or hybrid content in virtual reality is quite limited. Despite intending to promote immersive content, most Spanish productions are limited to recording spaces in 360-degree videos without considering narrative, informational depth, interactivity, and user experience. This situation mirrors the international scenario (Watson, 2016).

On the other hand, the minority trend that we advocate in this text is the creation of well-crafted pieces with a journalistic or documentary focus. Nevertheless, evidence supports the hypothesis that journalistic production, for the most part, has yet to fully exploit the potential of virtual reality for journalistic purposes, except in a few cases.

2.1 The challenges faced by immersive journalism

Researchers and creators have identified distinct weaknesses within the domain of immersive journalism:

1. Users necessitate immersive visualization technologies for optimal consumption.

2. The technology needs to be more mature to ensure comfortable viewing (Fajnzylber et al., 2021).
3. High-quality technology is not readily accessible.
4. Both media outlets and audiences need more knowledge in this field.

Despite concerted efforts and investment in immersive content production (Pérez-Seijo, 2021), we assert that significant errors are being committed. Allow us to analyze the etiologies and consequences stemming from this prevailing circumstance.

2.1.1 Lack of understanding and visualization challenges

Various authors, including Gutiérrez-Caneda et al. (2020), have highlighted the media's confusion over immersive formats. This confusion has been evident since the inception of academic studies in this field revealing a significant lack of comprehension. Media organizations that produce and distribute these contents lack clear foundational concepts, resulting in an information gap about the qualities of these formats, thereby hindering their proper utilization. The terminological confusion found in publications and the incorrect usage of terms related to immersive technologies further exacerbate the existing lack of information and public confusion. These deficiencies also contribute to compatibility and dissemination errors (Barreda-Ángeles, 2018; Gutiérrez-Caneda et al., 2020), leading to viewers misusing the technology and consuming content inadequately. Concerning immersive video sections and apps in Europe, the authors note that the complexity of access makes consumption challenging. Immersive content is scattered or lacks clear identification, complicating content consumption and its study.

2.1.2 User experience and squandered interactive opportunities

The strength and distinctive value of immersive audiovisual content lies in its ability to transport the user to another place, one they might not otherwise have access to, placing them at the heart of a new reality as though physically present (Marín, 2019; Herrera-Damas & Benítez de Gracia, 2022). However, first-person narrative

is inherently limited and users often struggle to achieve emotional immersion within the story. Only select media outlets like the New York Times and The Guardian have constructed content employing narrative resources to craft a sensory-immersive virtual reality experience. Immersive narratives are in their infancy within the media landscape; many productions focus solely on spatial immersion, failing to evoke emotional engagement in the viewer (Colussi & Assunção-Reis, 2020). There exists a pressing need to embrace innovative initiatives that explore narrative approaches and user journeys, an area that has thus far received insufficient attention within the media realm (Wu, 2022).

2.1.3 Unstable audience reception

The primary deficiency highlighted by the Reuters Institute report (Newman, 2020) underscores the need to establish a connection between these formats and digital audiences. A connection that, up to now, is extremely weak. The audience has not had the time or opportunities to develop an affinity for immersive journalism (Wang et al., 2018), and production has declined (Greber et al., 2023). Younger audiences predominantly engage with platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, or Twitch.TV, platforms that do not support 360-degree or virtual reality content (Sidorenko-Bautista et al., 2020). On the other hand, users still encounter negative usability experiences, including physical discomfort, fatigue, disorientation, and even motion sickness (Fajnzyblber et al., 2021; Pérez-Seijo et al., 2022, leading to their ongoing reluctance (Lund-Nielsen & Sheet, 2021). Greber et al. (2023) and Lund-Nielsen & Sheet (2021) provide some insight, suggesting that increasing public familiarity with VR technology could enhance its overall value perception.

2.1.4 Fast immersive journalism: limited investment, swift production, and low quality

Media outlets have exhibited excessive haste in the development and dissemination of immersive journalistic content. This phenomenon has yielded a host of consequential effects, impacting both the quality of productions and their distribution. Despite instances of exemplary work, the prevailing trend leans towards swift adaptations

of conventional journalistic genres and existing audiovisual language, often overlooking the distinctive attributes inherent to this medium. Consequently, a manifestation of “Fast Immersive Journalism” emerges, characterized by low-quality content, rapid production, and constrained budgets, aligning with the accelerated consumption patterns linked to the inherent rapidity of platforms such as Instagram or TikTok.

Barreda-Ángeles’ findings (2018) reveal that two-thirds of the examined content corresponds to what Jones (2017) terms “360-degree social video” – a swiftly produced content category devoid of journalistic treatment. These concise 360-degree videos lack information, structure, and design considerations. In the majority of immersive content, users adopt a passive observer role, and the audiovisual language is often so uncomplicated that it primarily consists of a single, fixed scene. The net outcome of this approach is the loss of both meaning and utility within the very format, rendering it thereby invalidated (De Bruin et al., 2022).

2.2 Slow journalism as a framework for immersive journalism

The immersive format is poised to emerge as the foremost audiovisual medium and, consequently, the leading paradigm in audiovisual journalism in the imminent future. According to Wu (2023), immersive technology has the potential to significantly impact the transformation of the communication landscape. Given its distinctive qualities and production requisites, it presents an opportune prospect for championing journalism that intersects quality and creativity, thereby fostering a new journalism capable of counteracting the logic of rapid production and multi-screen consumption. In light of the attributes mentioned above inherent to immersive media, within the combined framework of creative journalism and slow journalism (Le Masurier, 2016), immersive journalism finds a conducive environment to flourish.

2.2.1 Journalism and creativity

Viewing journalism as an art form grounded in the narration of actual events (Guerreiro, 2017), we perceive immersive journalism or immersive nonfiction as the new eminent format of creative

journalism. As articulated by Guerrero (2017), “aside from invention, journalism can and should employ all the resources of narrative to create a distilled, if possible, perfect essence: the essence of the essence of reality”. In essence, the heart of a documentary lies in the artful presentation of actual events. From this perspective, we envision the future of immersive journalism as a descendant of documentary and in-depth reporting.

A conspicuous exemplar demonstrating the confluence of journalism and creativity was the emergence of New Journalism in America. In the same decade that videographers and documentarians began experimenting with new media, the contemporary narrative journalism movement arose in the United States. This affinity between journalism and literature manifested through authors like Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, and Rex Reed.

The spirit encapsulated by Tom Wolfe, along with the distinct tenets of New Journalism (Bernal & Chillón, 1985), is indicative of a potential fruitful trajectory for immersive journalism: scene-by-scene construction (scene narration), realistic dialogue, character development, faithful reporting without forsaking creativity, hybrid or challenging-to-classify works, heightened formal and expressive attributes, application of narrative and expressive techniques characteristic of literature – or audiovisual creation – and most significantly, the infusion of creativity as a distinguishing feature in conventional informative discourse.

Additionally, the reportage genre offers the most flexibility and breadth in treatment, incorporating other genres within its narrative structure. Due to its inherent openness to creativity, the reportage genre enables greater individual expressive capability and offers the opportunity to experiment with innovative narrative forms. This adaptability results in a genre that is continually innovative, diverse, and pliant (Cebrián, 1992). A realm in which interpretation and artistic form flourish: “The reporter is an artist, as is the painter or the writer” (Julio del Río, 1994, p. 26). Envision the possibilities within an audiovisual narrative, wherein the viewer could assume the role of the protagonist, experiencing the story firsthand, as exemplified by works like *The Enemy* (Ben Khelifa, 2017), *Across the Line* (de la Peña, 2015), *Notes on Blindness* (Spinney & Middleton, 2016) or *Some Inattention on the Left* (Harrison, 2020).

2.2.2 Slow journalism and long-form journalism

Slow journalism, an outgrowth of New Journalism and narrative journalism, movements rooted in written journalism, is conceived holistically to produce quality digital journalistic content (context, analysis, interpretation, and rigor) (Le Masurier, 2016; Benaissa-Pedriza, 2017). This phenomenon is exemplified in the Ibero-American media landscape through prominent digital publications like Jot Dow, as well as other platforms such as 5W, La Marea, Yorokobu, Diagonal, Anfibia, Cuarto Poder, CTXT, and Gatopardo (Rosique-Cedillo & Barranquero-Carretero, 2015; Zabalondo et al., 2021; Marín, 2016). The slow movement entered the communication arena in the late 2000s (Rosique-Cedillo & Barranquero-Carretero, 2015), advocating for values such as journalistic quality, reflection, depth over immediacy, and creativity over standardization (Barranquero-Carretero, 2013).

As articulated by Benaissa-Pedriza (2017), slow journalism is not a genre but a process, a professional approach applicable to any journalistic genre. This approach has been defined across four categories: its identifying values, practices, expressive forms, and societal commitment (Mendes & Marinho, 2022). As these authors illustrate in their systematic review, slow journalism is largely defined by what it is not or what it opposes: the homogenization and standardization of journalistic products and practices, fundamentally challenging fast journalism. Thus, it is a media counter-culture that resists dominant production logic and mass production.

Quality emerges in the Slow Media Manifesto (David et al., 2010) as a *sine qua non* for publications and works aligned with this approach. Quality is all-encompassing, spanning from content to aesthetic form, fostering an authentic audience relationship and a lasting product (Zabalondo et al., 2021). Mendes and Marinho (2022) further incorporate audience commitment as a defining facet, emphasizing a sincere relationship with citizens and audience participation across various journalistic phases.

In terms of genres, it unequivocally advocates for long or grand-format journalism and the hybridization of journalistic genres, with a constant focus on elevating the quality of content. "Slow journalism is not about time, but it cannot be understood without it" (Mendes & Marinho, 2022, p. 15). Time is the pivotal, overarching term within this movement, aligning temporal needs appropriately

with quality journalistic production across diverse stages: research, contextualization, conception, and production.

3 Methodological approach and attributes of immersive audiovisual media

Distinctive attributes of this medium include subjective visual representation, the perceptual dissolution of the display, the perception of spatial dimensions and volume within imagery, a palpable sense of physical immersion, the ability to freely explore the perceived image as a spatial entity, multisensory engagement, and both virtual and physical displacement. A profound comprehension of their integration with journalistic or documentary narratives will contribute significantly to the delineation of an authentic, progressive form of immersive journalism. It is opportune to outline these essential distinguishing characteristics and to note that there exists a gradient in the sensation of immersion based on the utilized technology, image nature, narrative, and the role of the user-viewer (Marín, 2019).

Within the “Framework for the Immersion-Journalism Intersection” developed by Hardee and McMahan (2017), four axes intersect to ultimately define four types of immersive journalism, comprising two axes concerning immersion and two concerning journalism: immersive technology, immersion fundamentals, journalistic genres, and journalism fundamentals. The foundational immersion aspects influencing user experience include the sense of presence, body ownership, user inclusion, and narrative. Through their coordinated integration, the experience attains a high level of immersion, thereby enhancing the work’s capacity to engage the audience and evoke a positive emotional response (Greber et al., 2023; Aitamurto et al., 2022; Kukkakorpi & Pantti, 2021; McRoberts, 2018; Narciso et al., 2019; Sánchez-Laws, 2020). Guided by these foundations, we have conducted a visual and qualitative analysis to study the case *The Enemy* employing the following categories.

Table 1*Summary of the analysis model***Medium characteristics and work technical sheet**

Technology/format

Nature of the image

Duration

Number of possible users

Technical sheets

Interactivity

Image

Narrative

Object interactivity

Social interactivity

Body ownership

Control of viewing angle

2D / 3D image perception

Manipulation of large objects

Movement: digital/physical/free

Character responses

Journalistic storytelling / narrative structure

Enunciation

Information elements and structure

Point of view – ocularization

Rol – viewer involvement

Interactivity (narrative level)

The sense of presence elicited by the work is gauged through the amalgamation of the categories above, as it is not a specific technical attribute that the work may or may not possess; instead, it emerges as a result of synergy. The appropriate and timely management of these interconnected elements significantly boosts the work's chances of impacting the audience, thereby facilitating the achievement of the viewer's emotional engagement (Greber et al., 2023; Aitamurto et al., 2022; Kukkakorpi and Pantti, 2021; McRoberts, 2018; Narciso et al., 2019; Laws, 2020).

Transversely, we focus on analyzing the following aspects:

1. **Image and its Nature:** is determined by the technology employed and the degree of realism contingent on the creation or capture technique (ranging from 360-degree videos to videogrammetry). This directly affects the level of image verisimilitude – impacting the sense of presence and the illusion of reality – and spatial perception, contingent on whether the image is 2D, 3D, or mixed. Consequently, this varies from perceiving a flat yet enveloping image, as in 360-degree videos, to experiencing space and volume in virtual reality.

2. **Interactivity:** another pivotal factor in immersion degree, interactivity directly influences the illusion of reality and the level of experience verisimilitude. Interactivity is assessed based on three aspects: image, narrative, and simulated social interaction. Their combination delineates the level of interactivity within the work. Variables encompass interactive imagery, interactive narrative, interaction with voluminous objects (interaction type), and social interaction.

3. **Viewer's role and engagement (user experience):** a fundamental distinguishing factor in immersive stories compared to other media is the inclusion and crucial placement of the viewer at the center of the visual experience. This is not necessarily synonymous with being the center of the visual narrative, although such a possibility exists. A notable critique of a significant portion of immersive journalism (de Bruin et al., 2022) is the lack of development of experiences that leverage this condition. The viewer can adopt various roles: passive observer, active observer, active character, passive character, active protagonist, or passive protagonist.

4. **Sense of presence and body ownership:** this section encompasses categories that measure aspects inherent to immersive media, such as angle of vision control, freedom of gaze, spatial perception, manipulation of 2D or voluminous objects, user's digital or physical displacement within digital space, "humanization" level of story characters, relationship between characters in the work and the viewer, and ultimately, the degree of viewer independence and experience verisimilitude in terms of the user's relationship with the digital environment.

5. **Narrative:** last but not least, narrative plays a crucial role in coherently orchestrating all previously mentioned elements into a story that constructs an immersive narrative, integrating interactivity and user experience into the story. This takes into

account that the montage and audiovisual narrative radically differ from other audiovisual journalistic formats.

All these aspects collectively determine the degree and type of immersion the experience offers, which we summarize following previous propositions (Marín, 2021; Nilsson et al., 2016; 2018). The literature distinguishes three types of immersion concerning audiovisual works, labeled differently:

- Perceptual immersion (sensory immersion, perceptual immersion) or system immersion pertains to the type and degree of immersion offered by the work based on the technical aspects of the medium. For instance, we can differentiate between enveloping image immersion, interactive immersion, or spatial immersion (Marín, 2021).

- Narrative-level immersion (fictional immersion, narrative immersion, imaginative immersion) refers to the sensation of diving into the story – a metaphorical reading immersion applicable to any story, regardless of the medium used.

- Immersion as a response (challenge-based immersion, tactical immersion, strategy immersion): This concept explores a nuanced form of immersion, emphasizing the user's active and dynamic participation, which transcends mere interactivity to encompass true interaction. It is conceptualized as an adaptive response to alterations instigated by the user's interaction with the material. This form of immersion meticulously addresses shifts in the work's form, its content, and the reactions it elicits from users, thereby providing a sophisticated framework for understanding the interplay between users and their immersive experiences (Nilsson et al., 2016).

4 The Enemy: a paradigmatic example of high-quality immersive journalism in war reporting

The Enemy (2017) combines war journalism with immersive technologies to bring viewers closer to the stories and portray the human side of combatants. The creators leverage these digital technologies to innovate war reporting and provide an individualized experience. This war journalism project takes the form of an approximately 50-minute virtual reality installation featured in museums and festivals. In addition, an AR version allows users to explore the project from anywhere without needing to visit the installation site. However, this comes at the expense of the overall

experience. This version is also designed for individual viewing and offers options for customizing the narrative. In both formats, following the contextualization of each conflict, the protagonists (combatants) appear on the scene and interact with the viewer.

The narrative follows three pairs of combatants from three major contemporary conflicts: the Maras in El Salvador, the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In response to the traditional dehumanization of the enemy in wartime conflicts, the work focuses on the human aspects of these opposing combatants, asking them identical questions. The responses allow the viewer to get to know the individuals behind both sides of the conflict and reflect on the human side of the protagonists. The report aims to convey that behind every conflict; these opposing enemies are driven by similar objectives beyond the political realm: family, love, and peace.

The director's trajectory has consistently revolved around the role of war imagery, intending to alter viewers' perceptions of it. As explained during the presentation of the virtual reality installation of *The Enemy* at the Geneva International Film Festival in 2018, this work seeks to change society's perception of war's protagonists by adopting an inclusive approach that restores the lost humanity to these figures, reminiscent of *Promises* (Shapiro & Bolado Goldberg, 2001). This stands as a paradigmatic and referential case for defining and understanding immersive journalism in particular and immersive nonfiction audiovisual creation in its broadest sense.

4.1 Toward a hyperrealistic experience

The work aims to achieve realism on multiple levels: user experience, digital environment aesthetics, and plausible user reactions.

4.1.1 High degree of body ownership

The Enemy achieves a high degree of physical-digital equivalence through 360-degree stereoscopic vision, spatial sound environment calculated in real-time according to the user's location, and free movement (warehouse-scale VR system, free-roaming and location-based). Users have full control and mobility over their field of vision and can enjoy the independence to explore and move

freely within the prepared scene, wearing VR glasses and a backpack without limiting cables. Creating the scene and 3D characters makes the digital image feel like a navigable space. The ability to individually explore the location and observe the combatants enhances perceptual realism and provides a sense of freedom, moving away from the narrative constraints of selection and editing.

According to Kukakorpi and Pantti (2021), the viewer can interpret the space more freely, which involves responsibility and an epistemological challenge, although this illusion of freedom is designed within the experience. These attributes enhance the sense of physical presence, and perceptual realism enhances the possibilities of creating emotional engagement with the viewer (McRobert, 2018).

4.1.2 The Uncanny Valley challenge

The focus of the experience is on the three pairs of combatants whom the viewer encounters, and these are recreations of real combatants who have been interviewed. Achieving hyperrealistic imagery within the documentary production conditions (conflict zones) involved meticulous capturing of the combatants from every possible angle for subsequent modeling (Emissive). The project faces the issue known as the Uncanny Valley (Mori et al., 2012): an aesthetic concept related to robotics and 3D animation, referring to the phenomenon of unease with anthropomorphic recreation. According to this hypothesis, the closer the representation is to human appearance, the more unease and discomfort it generates. High realism isn't directly linked to a high level of immersion. However, if the experience is realistically oriented and aims to portray a plausible scenario, the realism of human characters must surpass this challenge. Otherwise, the perception of experiencing a mediated encounter increases alongside the feeling of uncanniness, diminishing the illusion of reality and, consequently, the level of perceptual immersion. In *The Enemy*, this has proven to be a challenge that has not been completely overcome, as the combatants evoke a response of uncanniness.

4.1.3 Recreating an interpersonal encounter

The viewer's encounter with the combatants is designed to simulate a face-to-face conversation. The verisimilitude of this experience depends not only on the hyperrealistic appearance of the characters but also on their bodily behavior and communication (verbal and nonverbal) being as realistic as possible. The characters' movements and gestures give each combatant's representation a sense of "life", striving to create the illusion of truly being in the presence of the protagonists rather than watching a recorded video of them. One significant contribution found in this case study is the inclusion of social interactivity to achieve creativity in the simulated interpersonal encounter between viewer and character. The combatants interact and respond individually to each user's behavior, thus introducing social interactivity through:

- Gaze: combatants provide personalized visual tracking for each user and maintain eye contact.

- Nonverbal body communication: besides bodily movements and gestures, they make programmed gestures directed at the user, addressing them or reacting to their actions.

- Conversation: a conversation takes place between both parties during the encounter.

The result is a dual sense of presence – the viewer's own presence and the digital other's – both felt as if in the exact spatial-temporal location.

4.2 Viewer's role and individual/group experience

The viewer plays the active observer role. They are not the protagonists of the story and do not have a primary role to perform in the experience, as seen in similar works like *Notes on Blindness* (2016). In *The Enemy*, the viewer is an observer in a virtual world with an active but non-participatory role.

The experience is individual and personalized but takes place in a group setting. Each user progresses at their own pace, moves individually through the space, explores it personally, and reaches a personalized ending. There is no interaction between group members experiencing the work simultaneously. The viewer cannot fully see other group members, but they can see their silhouettes, locations, and movements.

4.3 Immersive experience with interactive conversational narrative

The information structure resembles a comprehensive creative report with in-depth interviews. Its adaptation to an interactive and immersive narrative format aligns with the conversational model (Gaudenzi, 2013), characterized by interactivity simulating a conversation between the user and the computer. The interactive narrative structure corresponds to the Experienced Physical modality (Gifreu, 2013), referring to interaction as the user's participation in the system through actions on the device driving narrative development. The digital environment responds to the viewer's behavior. There are no controllers or objects to manipulate; interactivity appears as an organic response from the environment. When the viewer approaches specific elements, such as photographs, different parts of the structure begin. In this case, the contextual portion of each conflict narrative starts either when the user gets close to it or when they interact with the combatants' questions.

4.4 Immersive journalism equates to slow and creative journalism

All values and characteristics of slow journalism are ideal for framing immersive journalism, as exemplified by *The Enemy*. It is a practice that is incompatible with immediacy:

- Immersive journalism is still in development, requiring time for idea conceptualization and narrative experimentation to identify the best structure.

- The technologies for producing immersive content are expensive, and their development demands time to achieve visual quality.

- The story, information structure, and user experience must align with chosen technology capabilities, requiring precise planning and design before production begins.

Immersive journalism, like radio or television journalism, is defined not solely by using a specific medium or technology but by the resulting journalistic product and the language features that characterize it. These features are necessary for us to talk about entertaining radio content, for instance, rather than radio journalism.

In this case, discussing immersive journalism means discussing immersive narratives, quality productions, creative works, and journalistic treatment of information. Thus, its alignment with slow movement values (Barranquero-Carretero, 2013; Le Masurier, 2016) and creative journalism is fitting, yielding the following values:

- Freedom for aesthetic and narrative experimentation that fosters the development of a new immersive journalistic language exploiting technology features.

- Independence from traditional journalistic genres and cinematographic audiovisual language to attain creative freedom.

- Revaluation of journalistic and visual quality over content quantity in production.

- Creativity is the primary differentiating trait without relinquishing the informative quality.

- Incorporation of formal, narrative, and expressive attributes characteristic of audiovisual artistic creation.

- User inclusion is a part of the story with an active role and character construction.

- Encouraging viewer engagement and seeking viewer empathy through interaction with narrative audiovisual characters that create commitment.

5 Conclusion

The reportage *The Enemy* is a prime illustration of creative and meticulously crafted immersive journalism that blends journalistic integrity with a societal focus. The capacity to evoke emotional engagement and nurture empathy within users goes beyond the mere immersive attributes of the medium. Similarly, achieving a genuinely immersive encounter, encompassing both technological immersion and narrative engagement, extends far beyond the act of capturing an event with a 360-degree camera. This work showcases how immersive journalism can foster an emotional connection, encouraging social and political awareness through visceral imagery. It effectively humanizes the combatants, enabling them to recount their stories while locking eyes with viewers, thereby establishing a visceral and authentic interpersonal connection.

The proposed analytical framework serves as a cornerstone for this study and provides a comprehensive guideline for dissecting

various immersive journalistic pieces. Through a comprehensive literature review and a thorough examination of immersive works, this framework elucidates critical aspects for both analysis and production.

The chosen immersive report's design serves as a vivid exemplar of how projects of this nature can encapsulate users in high levels of immersion through diverse modalities. This necessitates taking into account the distinctive characteristics of the medium, embedding users within the narrative, and delivering thorough journalistic treatment from the inception phase. As a result, the chosen case stands as a quintessential model of best practices in immersive journalism, born from methodical and thoughtful production. In the face of the prevailing trend toward fast immersive journalism, advocating for alternative approaches that prioritize creativity and journalistic excellence is imperative. Given the incongruity between the fast-paced nature of this approach and the intricacies of immersive storytelling, embracing the principles of slow journalism emerges as an apt strategy to address the current challenges the format faces. Thus, we propose a foundational set of values to guide the evolution of immersive journalism, fostering meaningful narratives that effectively address the format's current hurdles.

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