

# ANY ROLE FOR MOCK NEWS?

## Normative journalism through Barcelona's and The Daily Show's critical narratives

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**ABSTRACT** - From the characterization of a normative discourse of journalism, this article seeks to investigate the role played by contemporary meta-journalistic media outlets that question this normativity. With examples of an Argentine print publication and an American TV show, we wonder how such products used textual forms and narrative strategies that could be recognized as "typical journalistic" to confront, through irony and parody, the ways in which the hegemonic journalistic outlets configure their realities. Our hypothesis is that the narrative techniques of these publications serve as indices of a depletion of journalistic objectivity procedures.

**Keywords:** Normative Journalism. Meta-journalism. Barcelona. The Daily Show. Parody.

### **QUAL O PAPEL DAS NOTÍCIAS SIMULADAS? Jornalismo normativo através das narrativas críticas da revista Barcelona e *The Daily Show***

**RESUMO** - A partir da caracterização de um discurso normativo acerca do jornalismo, este artigo busca investigar o papel desempenhado por mídias metajornalísticas contemporâneas que questionam dita normatividade. Com exemplos de uma publicação impressa argentina e um programa de TV estadunidense, nos perguntamos como esses produtos se utilizam de formas textuais e estratégias narrativas que poderiam ser reconhecidos como "tipicamente jornalísticas" para enfrentar, por meio da ironia e da paródia, as formas em que meios jornalísticos hegemônicos em seus respectivos países configuram suas realidades. Nossa hipótese é que as técnicas narrativas dessas publicações servem como índices de esgotamento dos procedimentos da retórica da objetividade jornalística.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo normativo. Metajornalismo. Barcelona. The Daily Show. Paródia.

### **¿CUAL ES EL ROL DE LAS NOTICIAS SIMULADAS? Periodismo normativo a través de las narraciones críticas de la revista Barcelona y de *The Daily Show***

**RESUMEN** - A partir de la caracterización de un discurso normativo del periodismo, este artículo busca investigar el papel desempeñado por algunos medios de comunicación meta-periodísticos contemporáneos que cuestionan esta normatividad. Con ejemplos de una publicación impresa argentina y un programa de televisión estadounidense, nos preguntamos cómo estos productos utilizan formas textuales y estrategias narrativas que podrían ser reconocidos como "tipicamente periodísticas" para enfrentar, desde la ironía y la parodia, las formas en que los medios hegemónicos configuran sus realidades. Nuestra hipótesis es que las técnicas narrativas de estas publicaciones sirven como índices de un agotamiento de los procedimientos de la objetividad periodística

**Palabras-clave:** Periodismo normativo. Metaperiodismo. Barcelona. The Daily Show. Parodia.

## Introduction

In contemporary times, we can see many media products in print media, on television, but notably on the Internet that are capable of, in a very particular way, critiquing some of the concepts and regulatory practices that have been sustaining journalism as an “ism” (NERONE, 2009, 2013) for almost a century in a specific normative way. These products, which can be found in different countries and in diverse media environments and news systems, have the peculiarity of constructing “news” in a very fictional way, mixing absurd facts and real characters in ironic narratives. Therefore, they use textual conventions that could be described as “typically journalistic”, generating doubts about the veracity or not of the events that were told and proposing other relations with the audience. Instead of telling an irrefutable truth in a pedagogical and neutral way as proposed in normative models, the ironic style claims for a more active participation and also possess evaluative edges (HUTCHEON, 1985), which combines said and unsaid meanings to create new ones far away from an idea of objectivity and reproduction of reality.

This initial characterization seems to fit in products such as the American magazine *the Onion* and the television show *The Colbert Report*, or Brazilian websites like *The Piauí Herald* and *Sensacionalista*, or the Venezuelan website *El Chigüire Bipolar*, among many others. Such publications, to a greater or lesser extent, resort to expressive resources such as parody and irony to satirize public figures, social topics, politicians, and especially journalism, its narrative conventions and its ways of configuring realities. It is worth mentioning that countries like Brazil, Argentina and the United States have a large tradition of ironic broadsheets throughout their histories (such as *El Mosquito*, *O Pasquim*, *O Binômio*, *The Great Moon Hoax* etc.). And even within the mainstream media it is possible to find spaces - for instance, editorial cartoons-, where irony is largely used to caricature the powerful. However, the “novelty” of the analyzed products here is that, differently from their predecessors, their main target seems to be the journalism itself, its conventions, and its news monopolies.

In this sense, in this article we will deal particularly with two media outlets that seem to be seminal for this type of narrative configuration in the United States and in South America: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and the Argentine magazine *Barcelona*, respectively. These products, which appeared almost simultaneously (*Barcelona*

was planned in 2001 and launched in 2003, and Jon Stewart has hosted the show at *Comedy Central* since 1999 until 2015) and that have been persisting in the media market for more than a decade, are capable of problematizing journalism “from inside” and use typical narrative conventions, pointing to conflicting dimensions and spaces of uncertainty existing in journalistic narratives, and operating what we call a critical meta-journalism.

It is necessary to clarify that the concept of meta-journalism, despite the scarce literature, has been approached by some authors such as Oliveira (2007, 2010), Paredes (2013), Campos-Dominguez; Redondo-García (2015). In general, the meta-journalistic function is often described as a deontological evaluation of journalistic procedures, and it is strongly linked to an ideal of public scrutiny of the media. In this perspective, therefore, what is commonly understood as “meta” in journalism tends to be associated to those practices and criteria for assessment of procedural dimensions of the news, proposing correction of deviations, identifying lacks of quality or indicating a better way to reproduce reality. This conception of meta-journalism has a strong normative characteristic and that is why it is linked to two main types of products (PAREDES, 2013, p.7): those ones specialized in the debate of journalism (as *Editor&Publisher* and *Observatório da Imprensa*), and also specific sections in the media outlets such as the *ombudsman*, letters by the audience, or an space for dismissing mistakes of prior editions. As Oliveira (2007, p.8. Translated from Portuguese) pointed out, meta-journalism “seeks access, vigilantly, to rebates and fatigues of media discourse.” Therefore, the criticism of this type of meta-journalism almost always triggers the professional values and ethical codes to denounce the “failures” of certain media coverages that would have not followed the operating rules of “good journalism.” Once again, what we have here is a reinforcement of the normative conception of the *watchdog role*, based on a deep belief in journalism, its supervisory capacity and its neutrality as an objective observer.

Thus, this thin and conventional conception of meta-journalism seems not able to characterize the strategies employed by media outlets such as *Barcelona* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. As we will see, these publications critically recognize naturalized conventions of journalism to rearrange them, exposing the cracked and contradictions of the journalistic realistic mirror. They do not believe in a supposed purifier capacity of journalism, by

questioning the reality shaped by mainstream media. So as a way to extend a conceptualization of “meta-journalism” from the experiences proposed by this specific kind of media, we are particularly interested in the inversion of journalistic conventions made by these products and the implications for ideas such as objectivity that have characterized journalism’s modern version as the “discipline of news” par excellence. In this paper, we analyze some of their meta-textual strategies in order to understand the role played by these products in their relation with normative models of journalism.

### **The “modern” journalism**

As pointed out by John Nerone (2009; 2013), what makes journalism an “ism” is a belief system that defines what would be the most appropriate practices and values of news professionals, news media and news systems (NERONE, 2013, p. 447). A belief system, therefore, should be able to create barriers around a good exercise of the profession and separate it from other ones that should be highly avoided (as sensationalism, tabloids news, melodrama etc.). For more than a century, “modern” journalism has been part of a hegemonic belief system, whose roots can be observed, particularly in the US, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a moment that the press departs from a typically partisan model of reporting towards a modern and professional ethic (KAPLAN, 2010).

The word “modern” here seems to be important, inasmuch as at this moment, journalism tends to adapt and incorporate scientific methods to gather the facts and reproduce them in the daily’s pages with the highest accuracy. As postulated by Latour (1993) and Sousa Santos (1995) the dominant paradigm of modern knowledge is structured on the assumption of an apparent fission between nature and society. It’s from a dichotomy between the knowledge of facts and political actions that modernity is edified (LATOURE, 1993). Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1995) and Mary Poovey (1998) also argue that this new episteme, based on scientific rationality, is the responsible for this modern idea of *fact*. In science, it means the separation between two instances: the initial condition, where the scientist would select the “fact” to be observed, and the regularity kingdom, nature’s laws learned from an accurate and systematic observation of those “facts”. This model that appeared first in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was developed in

the domain of nature sciences, but was reflected in other areas of knowledge. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century and more prominently in the 19<sup>th</sup>, it was wild extent to emergent social sciences (SOUSA SANTOS, 2003, p.10) in a complex overlapping process.

It means that journalism, as pointed out by Nerone (2013), is relatively recent and also “late”. The word took its *modern* meaning just in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>, and came to refer to the “active investigation and verification” and the “discipline of observation and balance” (NERONE, 2013, p.449). This new ethos was possible thanks to social and economic factors, such as new printing machinery, more abundant display advertising, and cheaper paper (KAPLAN, 2002; SCHUDSON, 1978). And the ideal of objectivity and professionalization appears as an answer to critics of the “yellow press”, as the sensational mass-circulation newspapers were called. According to Nerone, the media owners were pressured “to ensure the independence of their news operations by building a wall of separation between news/editorial departments and their business offices and to publicly commit their operations to fairness and balance, which came to be called objectivity” (NERONE, 2009, p. 33). Under objectivity, journalists could adopt the pose of a scientist (KAPLAN, 2002) and, by using specific techniques, they could eliminate their values and beliefs to be able to gather the “facts” with no bias and reproduce them in the dailies’ pages.

This objective and normative model of journalism was born in the US and then exported to and adapted in many countries, associated with the idea of the “free flow of ideas” and “free market of ideas” (BLANCHARD, 1986). The professionalization was promoted by the creation of college carriers worldwide, by unions and by specific institutions that spread this idea (ROGERS, 1994). Especially in South America, the American Model of Journalism was the inspiration for the modernization and professionalization of journalism in many countries (MELLADO, 2010; RIBEIRO, 2002; ALBUQUERQUE, 2010). Of course, it was remodeled in different ways, but it has a truly international existence (NERONE, 2013) and can be understood as an American commodity (KAPLAN, 2002; ROSEN, 2003). Journalism as an “ism” is a set of values that also involve a storytelling way, a form of news and a self-legitimation discourse associated with a normative perspective. From this perception, the commitment to the truth and professional competence are values that founded journalistic rhetoric in its claim to tell an unbiased reality and to defend the “news” as a fragment of an external and monolithic reality. In this sense,

this normative idea of journalism can be observed in at least three complementary levels (JACOME, 2015):

1) It is a conception or a way to define journalism by its “objective nature” and its attachment to the “fact”, completely external from the narrative. Accordingly, deviance from realistic aesthetics, like sensationalism and melodrama, for example, are taken as lower objects.

2) In this view, we can identify a set of values with which journalism tries to distinguish itself from other narrative modalities for its “ability” to portray an ontologically defined truth. Thus we have a separation of fiction from journalism, journalism from literature, truth from invention etc.

3) Conception and values are engendered in operating procedures, which regulate a certain way of doing journalism. Linked to this, we also realize the configuration of a journalistic format, which ensures the support of argumentative plans through a series of narrative conventions (such as the inverted pyramid, the lead, the idea of hearing two sides etc.).

The three levels above mentioned engender objectivity as a good journalism parameter and allow the professional or the news media to be presented as impersonal and impartial, taking forward its delusional obsession in reporting the “facts”, creating normative models to be followed.

In *Normative Theories of the Media* (CHRISTIANS et al., 2009), for example, we are presented to different modes of action of journalism that vary according to their business model, their relations with the instituted powers and their own perception about their practices. This book is an attempt to expand the possible models of journalism and their understandings, which has been thought since at least the 1950s with the release of *Four Theories of the Press* (SIEBERT et al., 1956). An expansion of these idealizations of journalism and how journalism should be is certainly important to characterize a broad ecology and promote tools to understand its various facets. Thus, the book by Christians et al. represents an important effort to understand different places occupied by different media. Those roles vary from the monitorial (strongly associated with the watchdog idea), the facilitative (embodied in phenomena such as community journalism and public journalism), the radical (in which the journalist is often seen as an activist) and the collaborative (which has a collaborative relationship with the State) ones. These models, however, share –more enthusiastically in some cases and less in others- the same belief system of modern journalism and the idealization of a totalizable reality (albeit complex) to be revealed.

And it is precisely in this sense that, in fact, we ask: how to proceed with a strange biweekly magazine/newspaper that takes the contradictions in the journalistic discourse as its point of departure and performance, warning on its front-page that “not all information here published has been accurately checked”? And how to analyze another media outlet that mixes media criticism in a talk show form, with absurd segments that blend journalistic style on a comedy channel with a host who is considered one of the most trustworthy newscasters of his country (TIME, 2009; ANDERSON & KINCAID, 2013) even when he denies his role as a journalist? This is the case OF *Barcelona* and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, respectively. These media products do not seem to easily fit into any normative role. However, they play an important role in the journalistic environment, often satirizing the mainstream news media. What would be their role?

### **Mock news for a “European solution to the problems of Argentine” and “from Comedy Central’s World News Headquarters”**

In April 2003, there first appeared on the Argentine newsstands a publication whose front-page clearly referred to the layout of the country’s leading newspapers (*Clarín* and *La Nación*), but with headlines, like “Now they say that swallow cum is good for slimming” or “Argentina would be going straight to shit” that would be difficult to be thought of appearing in a traditional newspaper. But, at the same time, it had a kind of visual disposition and a writing cadence very similar to other journalistic products, mixing with exaggerated and digitally altered images. This is *Barcelona* magazine, released independently, structured as a mix of formats, ranging from a magazine style to a tabloid newspaper. Its origins date back to an Argentina in the 2000s crisis, one of the most critical period in the recent history of that country, characterized by a strong distrust about the major institutions such as the government, the media, the market etc. Coming from this position of disbelief, *Barcelona* has assumed, since its beginning, a sarcastic position on the “great truths of the world”, doing a satire of various institutionalized discourses. In this struggle against the institutions and against a certain established moral system, one of the main discursive clashes caught by the magazine is directed to ware the media. The subtitle of the publication “a European solution to the problems of Argentina” makes clear the satirical and parodic tone that

assumes, since it refers to the motto of Clarín: “A warning for Argentina solving the problems of Argentina”. In addition, it is quite common to see on its pages direct mention of the leading newspapers. One of its sections, for example, which not accidentally is called “DxT [sports]”, is dedicated to collecting materials of leading newspapers, seeking their contradictions, testing the alleged impartiality and journalistic objectivity. Also, as assumed by one of the *Barcelona*'s publishers and writers,

when we started the project, we were intending a political magazine. We found in *Barcelona*'s form a way to do journalism without having to work too much, that is, without having to go outside, do research or check any data and still remain journalism. When we got along, we liked to read Clarín and La Nación, and between laughter and indignation, also emerged as interesting the idea of making a criticism of the media through parody. (BECK, Ingrid. Interviewed by Phellipy Jácome on April 16, 2012)

A regular edition of *Barcelona* is composed of 32 pages and all sections tend to make a parody of an ordinary newspaper, associating absurd or prejudicial topics to politician's speeches. *Barcelona* also fakes bylines, pictures and data to create its critical narrative. The magazine, however, by using humor, touches on very sensitive topics, like the dictatorship, human rights abuses, and shady business conducted by companies or government. The subjects of its scams are from those most talked about by the Argentine agenda and others “purposely” forgotten by the mainstream media.

At North America, a commanding male voice announced the day's date, which appeared visually on the screen of the television, overlapping a globe. The colors red and blue were predominant in what appears to be a regular opening segment of a newscast. The globe was, then, divided and names of countries or cities appear, while the voice announces “From Comedy Central's World News Headquarters in New York, this is *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart.” Until that moment, the structure is the same to those ones that could be found in any news television program on channels such as *Fox News*, *CNN* or *Msnbc*. Then a more “rock and ‘roll” song imposed itself, and we were led to a scenario that combined what could be understood as a television news program and a talk show one (similar to *The tonight show with Jimmy Fallon*, the *O'Reilly factor*, *Kelly File*, Jô Soares, among many others). The audience was in an uproar. At that moment, Jon Stewart took over to drive his 30 minute show. Since 2015 until now, *The Daily Show* is hosted by Trevor Noah. However, it was with Jon Stewart that



the program achieved a huge success, and the host was listed several times as one of the most trustable people in U.S.

The program was structured in three key segments and a short foreclosure. In the first block, Jon Stewart makes a monologue, but unlike other talk shows he's sitting behind the desk, as a newsman, and splits the screen with images that make reference to what is said by him. Furthermore, are shown fragments of other news media that support Stewart's speech or are attacked by him in a rather ironic way. He then analyzes news coming from the mainstream media or other news sources in a very sarcastic way. On December 9, for example, the issue that permeated the American media agenda was the divulgence of the CIA special rapporteurs on torture committed by this organization. In this segment, Jon Stewart used footage fragments of more than six different channels and programs, like *CNN*, archives from *Fox News*, *C-Span*, *CBS news*, *Al Jazeera*, *Msnbc*. His show mixed actual images with digital manipulated images to make his point and criticize almost everything, exposing the "raw" reality of the mainstream media to show their incongruences. In this segment, for example, Stewart showed that Bush lied when in 2007 he said that US government did not use torture as an interrogation method. The records from the CIA are proof that these methods were very common under his administration. Furthermore, Stewart compares CIA methods to authoritarian countries as exposed in his movie "Rosewater", which blurred the American ideal of democracy. In this short segment, Stewart made fun of two presidents, six channels and one representative, using their own discourses.

Another regular segment of the show is the presence of correspondents. Some reporters go to different locations to unveil absurd stories or even very serious ones like wars or riots. They conduct interviews with people related to the topics, but in a very particular way. That's because they emulate journalism procedures, but those lead them to absurdity, with disinterested questions, using profanity, exaggerated gestures, etc. Therefore, the type of format chosen for these interviews with two cameras that sometimes focus on the back of interviewees and the interviewer's profile and sometimes the opposite, could generate doubts about the utilization of chroma key, and decisively break with the referential illusion of a typical journalistic narrative, generating opacity and demonstrating the fictional feature of those procedures. Sometimes, the correspondents appear in a simulacrum of a "live" participation to comment on the topics, always in a very ironic way.

The interview segment could be considered as one of the

mildest parts of *The Daily Show*, although most of the time, the humor remains the dominant strategy by the host (who defines himself as a humorist and not as a journalist). In this section, filmmakers, musicians, authors, actors are invited to comment on their new works. Sometimes politicians also are invited, which helps to deep the climate and the content of the interviews. The final segment is very, very short. A funny video is presented, while the credits are going up to end the show.

*The Daily Show* started in 1996 with host Craig Kilborn, but gained this more political approach when Jon Stewart assumed control in 1999 (ANDERSON & KINCAID, 2013). Since then, the Comedy Central's Show has become a multiple Emmy and Peabody award-winning show (ANDERSON & KINCAID, 2013). Several researches and polls (PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2007) set forth that Jon Stewart is one of the most admired journalists in US or also that "audiences who only watch Fox News, CNN, or MSNBC are less informed on domestic and international affairs than those who only watch Stewart's program" (ANDERSON & KINCAID, 2013, p.2).

As with *Barcelona*, the existence and success of *The Daily Show* format can also be partly credited to a profound crisis of credibility experienced by mainstream media. It is worth remembering in the early 2000s, the scandal involving the collaborative role of American newspapers, especially the *New York Times*, with the Bush administration and the false disclosure of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in justifying the invasion of Iraq. In addition, the beginning of a new decade brought both the US and in Argentina (as well in other countries such as Brazil) a maximization of a dispute between the corporate media and the current governments, generating a very polarized and partisan media environment.

Therefore, in our analysis, we would like to emphasize two specific examples in which *Barcelona* and *Jon Stewart* ridicule two of the main media outlets in their criticism towards their respective governments. In the first case, the dispute involving *Clarín* and Cristina Kirchner is very interesting because in 2010 the government proposed a law to lead to a democratization of access to communication resources (Ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual N° 25.222). This law, among other things, limits the maximum of licenses that could be owned by just one group. This measure affected *Clarín* directly and cut much of its media conglomerate, and with it, its power and control over the media and political agenda. *Clarín* often resorts to international institutions to denounce what it believes to

be an attempt by the government to “silence the independent voices of the countries”, classifying the measures as anti-democratic. In the second case, the systematic attacks by the conservative *Fox News* towards the Obama administration are often exposed to ridicule by Jon Stewart. The critics are possible because *Fox News*, one of the most important journalistic channels, and which should be the bastion of objectivity, would be systematically failing in its “intent”, acting like a very partisan news outlet. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, both products discredit the forms and conventions that have been making this type of “objective” journalism possible. By using these strategies, *Jon Stewart* and *Barcelona* denounced some loss of value of the objective strategies as tools to get “the” truth.

In the case of the Argentine magazine, it uses diagrammatic and linguistic resources that should structure familiarity in journalism, but instead generate areas of opacity and strangeness. Images visibly changed, and headlines or subheads that are unreasonably large are frequently used, in addition to a very particular mode of transfer of enunciation, when the magazine gives space to the voices of others. Furthermore, the traditional journalistic form and the rationalization of its resources have led to the modularization of its segments, oriented to repeat the location of the information units. If we compare one specific page of the *New York Times*, for example, we observe a recurrence of the same form, the same number of columns, replaced day after day by the new content. This ensures a certain narrative standard for the newspaper and assists the reader in interpreting the news. In the case of *Barcelona*, there is a reversal of this formula. This is because from one page to another we observe different patterns of columns, which makes the reader experience less transparent and less smooth reading. In addition, its narratives often point to nonexistent pages or are “invaded” by modules coming from other news. This causes a discomfort during the reading at the same time it shows the fictional character of those pages and configured worlds there.

Another very peculiar characteristic of *Barcelona* is how it produces its front-page. The “name of the newspaper”, according to Mouillaud (2002) is an information unit that functions as a kind of signature and marks the newspaper’s commitment to its sponsors and readers. A hierarchical figure, above all others, it is a label on the contents conveyed there. In *Barcelona*, however, this is ironically reversed.

**Picture 1** – *Barcelona* highlights the relations between *Clarín* and Argentine dictatorship



Source: *Barcelona's* front-page from December 23, 2011

As we have said, the text of *Barcelona's* subtitle is a parody of the *Clarín* slogan. In addition, by relocating the name of the newspaper to a city of a distant country, *Barcelona* brings to the scene imperialist and colonialist historical processes, not consistent with the firm tone of a newspaper that speaks to its audience from its own discursive locus. Furthermore, the publication's name is drawn with the typography of *The New York Times*, which can be read as a reference to the American model of journalism. In addition, the Argentine publication reverses the values of the Times' "notice" in order to de-legitimize it. This is because in the US newspaper we read "All the News That's Fit to Print". In *Barcelona* the warning is "not all information published here has been accurately checked".

The credibility, which seems to be a determining factor in the pact of trust between readers and news media, is called into question, in *Barcelona's* nameplate. The magazine rejects moral dogmatism to the extent that it uses some typical textual strategies to criticize it. Its "warning" is followed by "Law 23,444," which is, in our view, a destabilizing use of

this information unit. This is because a first reading could suggest that the lack of information accuracy could be sustained by such law, since memory suggests that a law allocated as a safeguard of information should authenticate it somehow. Surprise is caused from knowing that this law has nothing to do with an authorization of untrustworthy information spreading nor to a “freedom of speech”. The law 23.444 refers to the regulation of tobacco advertising on radio and television. Our first interpretation is given by the same narrative gesture that connects a law to the idea of authentication of reality, since it conventionally functions as an authoritative discourse, which restricts, allows, confirms etc.

Now that the “name of the magazine” has been presented, let’s see an example in which *Barcelona* mobilizes distinct elements to criticize the normative models of journalism, in particular, the speeches of *Clarín*. The front-page of December 23, 2011 (Picture 1) makes reference to another dispute between the *Clarín* and the government of Cristina Kirchner.

In the 1970s, several Latin American newspapers suffered from the high price of paper, which is why the Argentine government decided to support the construction of a factory of this important product. The plant, privately owned, was expropriated during the 70s dictatorship in a very obscure episode. The owner of the enterprise, Lidia Papaleo de Graiver, accused the military government of torturing her so she gave the company to large media groups in the country: *Clarín* and *La Nación*. Both deny participation in the episode, but since then they have been controlling paper production in the country, enjoying the profits and advantages of this venture.

The Cristina Kirchner government, in 2010, proposed a research report to investigate what would have happened in that period. The report was published<sup>1</sup>, accusing *Clarín* of having actively participated in the company’s expropriation process and to have had close ties to the military government. Such an action was taken by *Clarín* as another attempt at censorship and economic and political pressure on the group. In one of the protests, for example, *Clarín* launched a blank front-page on December 18, 2011, with the article of the Argentine constitution that prohibits the government to limit the freedom of the press, as a metaphor to the alleged censorship. *Barcelona* delegitimizes the actions of *Clarín* during 70s and 80s, when the Argentine biggest daily had a collaborative role in one of the bloodiest dictatorships in South America. With large letters, we see the headline: Militant Journalism. In its ironic stamp, *Barcelona* makes use of a double meaning of the word

militant: in a more literal sense, the term can be understood as a more activist journalism, almost a radical role against abuses of power by the government and powerful elites (it may be understood as a simulacrum of the current role played by *Clarín* nowadays).

However, a figurative sense is added to the word by its relation to the image that is put into play. The photograph (which is real) records the transfer of *Papel Prensa's* shares to *Clarín*. In the photo, the two main characters are the dictator Jorge Rafael Videla and the publisher of *Clarín*, Ernestina del Noble. In a clear display of the cooperative effort between both, the two are toasting to conclude the agreement. Thus, the word “militant” also refers to “military” and to *Clarín's* support of the country's dictators. This gesture by *Barcelona* disallows the current *Clarín's* claim, since it reveals that now the media group denounces possible censorship in a democracy, but it had not done so during a dictatorship. On the contrary, *Clarín* was a partner of a model of power opposed to the freedom of expression. Finally, the text that completes the front-page makes reference to the “monopoly” of *Clarín* and its defense of the economic interests and the discount coupons offered by the newspaper, emphasizing its economic interests and disallowing its interests in social welfare through journalism.

In the case of *The Daily Show*, the criticism made through the journalistic form is perhaps less explicit and it is more evident on the contours of the transformations experienced by television. Several authors (ECO, 1984; CASSETTI & ODIN, 1990; IMBERT, 2003) show in television the passage of a pedagogical TV (Paleo TV), in which the contents and formats were well defined, to another, where the television's flow hinder the identification of specific genres (Neo TV). However, journalism has always sought to differentiate itself from other products more related to fiction and the entertainment, featuring itself as the noble and serious space. In this sense, Jon Stewart is both an index of the hybridization process of television content and formats, as well as an ironic inversion of the “sacred” space of journalism. Also, in the corresponding segment, as in *Barcelona*, there is clearly an exaggerated use of journalistic strategies to construct the truth. The procedures are the same as a mainstream newscaster: going to the scene of events, investigating data for background, interviews with the involved actors, etc. However, in Jon Stewart, it is done in a caricatured way, exposing as ridiculous different statements. However, the most critical stance towards the mainstream media and its way of utterance and construction of news is without doubt located in Stewart's monologue.

**Picture 2** – Jon Stewart and the setting of *The Daily Show*



Source: *The Daily Show* advertising. Available at the official website

In the special program on November 27<sup>th</sup> of 2014, right after Thanksgiving, the main theme exposed was the “denouncement” made by *Fox News* on President Obama not referencing God in his thanksgiving speech. In his talk, Stewart remarks that speech is one of the most important traditions and, then, a fragment of Obama’s address is shown. At that time, a digital background is created and we do not see Stewart. When the host’s image appears again, Jon is taking a nap, a clear demonstration of disinterest toward the presidential address, described ironically by the showman as “very inspiring”. Then he compares the number of views on YouTube between Obama’s speech and a video of sleeping pandas (4,000 to the first video which represents 100,000 fewer than the second one), in a demonstration of a general disinterest. The panda’s video is showed and when the camera turns back to Jon he seems to be “enchanted”. Then, he answers an imaginary question to audience: “No. We can’t just watch that for the rest of the show”.

Just after, he indicates the reactions to Obama’s speech, showing distinct fragments of different programs by *Fox News* “denouncing” emphatically that the president left God out of his address. The “absence” was sharply criticized by *Fox News*’ journalists and commentators that pointed out that Obama had been the first president to not mention God in Thanksgiving speech. In the final stretch, Kimberly Guilfoyle from *Fox* redials the idealization of Thanksgiving as a celebration of a peaceful contact between cultures, which is unmasked by Stewart. Then the host asks, “Seriously, failing to mention God in your Thanksgiving address. Not a huge Thanksgiving faux pas,” and then he says, “I guess it is a little weird that Obama is the first president ever not to mention

God in his Thanksgiving address". Behold, then, we are exposed to *Fox News*' news fragments, in which Jamie Colby says "President Obama is not the only commander in chief recent history to leave God out of thanksgiving." The image then, back to Stewart that, surprised, asks "So, what?" The image flow from *Fox News* is resumed. In the sequence, there is a collection of data that demonstrates the number of times that God was left out of presidential speeches during Clinton's, Bush's and Obama's administrations. All in a very objective language, typically journalistic.

When the image returns to Jon Stewart, his facial expression is disbelief and sorrow. Then he asks, disallowing the news construction by *Fox News*, "who did you make look like that shit on a holiday weekend." Then a new *Fox News*' extract clarifies "Obama did mention God in his written Thanksgiving proclamation." Jon Stewart rebels and says, "Not only is Obama not the first person to leave God out of Thanksgiving address, he did not even do that..."

The display of different fragments of different *Fox*' programs exposes the critique of the newscaster to ridicule, exposing its partisan orientation and exhibiting it as empty speech. In addition, Stewart discredits the methods by which the information was built. When the *Fox*' lack of self-criticism seemed already absurd, *The Daily Show* presents a new fragment in which a priest is asked to explain and comment on the "failure" of Obama, another that shows the senator Steven Smith praying and thanking God for living in the "greatest country of the world". Very angry, Stewart asks "When did *Fox* become the 700 Club. You know what? F\*ck you. Lets' just watch the pandas for the rest of the show.... Disinterested in the newscaster report, Stewart criticizes and overrides *Fox*' narratives, and makes its news less relevant than a panda's video...

### **A critical meta-journalistic role**

By making explicit reference to other newspapers, and emulating their procedures, the Argentine magazine and the US program confront a whole journalistic discourse based on a normative relationship, demanding that we be attentive to the configuration processes of reality made possible by the narrative. The main role played by this type of media is then a meta-reflection on the processes and journalism parameters. But differently from other meta-journalistic experiences, *Jon Stewart* and *Barcelona* do not want to repair a faith on journalism (at least not in a normative and objective way). Unlike, they criticize this belief,



mocking the textual conventions of objectivity ironically. This is what we call critical meta-journalism. However, at the same time, these products constitute their identities in an ambiguous clash, since their existence is only possible thanks to the procedures of the mainstream media, which are also derided by them. In this sense, the clash of values and their use reveal that both *Barcelona* and *The Daily Show* are also consequences of modern journalism and of normative modes to conceive it.

Notwithstanding, modern journalistic realism and its idea of reality purification seem to mean an attempt to adapt the writing to a single temporal experience plane, whose boundaries are defined by certain professional practices. Accordingly, a reflection about the narrative tends to be ignored, in so far as this functions only as a “vehicle”, i.e. a device for the transmission of clear and concise information to the reader/viewer. There is, therefore, an idea of textual transparency, a kind of mediation that would be supposed to ensure journalistic objectivity. And this is, as we have seen, at the core of the critical narratives promoted by *Barcelona* and *The Daily Show*, since these kind of publications deride the journalistic conventions in their self-reflective procedures.

This is because these media outlets offer a self-stripping that reveals and explains the journalistic “fiction process”, and its configurator act, its “set-in-intrigue” (RICOEUR, 1994). They do it by triggering elements of reference journalism narratives and a sedimented journalistic format, making them opaque by using the same elements that would generate transparency. To direct their efforts to the realities set by reference media, they misrepresent and constrain it, but without cheating their readers/spectators; on the contrary, they are asked to participate in the ironic game. *Barcelona* and *The Daily Show* muddy the referential illusion between them and the readers/spectators, suggesting that their narratives function as a metaphorical mask.

These types of media, therefore, offer us significant questions about the role of journalism as an “ism” in contemporary society. In addition, they call attention to something barely worked on academic research: the configurator role of the narratives, the importance of the conventions and the loss of strength of the realities that come from them. Perhaps their existence does not allow us to describe the journalism that is coming, but they certainly give the contours of a certain journalism that is, happily, no longer ascendant.

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## NOTES

- 1 Retrieved from: [http://www.mecon.gov.ar/basehome/pdf/papel\\_prensa\\_informe\\_final.pdf](http://www.mecon.gov.ar/basehome/pdf/papel_prensa_informe_final.pdf) Accessed on: May.16, 2016

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