

## Truth as Literature: Ethics of Journalism and Reality in the Digital Society

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**Abstract.** Modern journalism emerged in the XIX century based on truth and reality. The rise of Romanticism in that century proposed an approach against the Enlightenment and its pillars: objectivity, positivism and realism. Unlike it, Romanticism claimed subjectivity and the self as the more authentic reality. Thus, it took beauty out of the base of aesthetics and put in its place communication and expression. With the arrival of Postmodernism, the notions of reality and truth have been in crisis too and so it proposes a moral and epistemological relativism. This view has been a permanent attack on journalism. This paper vindicates reality and truth, and so journalism as one of the main institutions based on those concepts, besides science. Therefore, journalism can be seen as the most necessary and genuine aesthetic in the current digital era because it takes and melts objectivity and realism from Illustration, communication and subjectivity from Romanticism, and impact from Postmodernism. In current network societies, journalism has rehabilitated a new narrative and is increasingly more based on stories than on news. That is creating a genuine literature of reality, which gathers both the ethic and the aesthetic project of the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Postmodernism.

**Keywords:** Journalism; ethic; aesthetics; truth; postmodernism; narrative; literary journalism; literature of reality.

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### 1. Reality and language: a relationship of permanent crisis

Reality is the foundation of journalism. Journalism relies on it in its search for the truth. However, the concept of reality has been questioned and undermined from the last 150 years to nowadays. This has eroded journalism as a profession as well as a social institution, whose main task is informing and watchdogging, according to its fifth-state function.

That questioning has not just been very dangerous for journalism and its legitimacy. Also, it has been extremely worrying for the existence of modern democratic societies, especially in the current globalized digital era, because in that kind of society the idea and experience of reality is very weak and eroded (Vattimo, 1990: 43). So, the needs of an institution to settle both reality and truth should be more necessary than ever.

The digital era implies, firstly, that it is getting more and more difficult to have real experiences. Secondly, and intertwined with it, that we never stop getting huge amounts of data and information from all over the world and with a speed never known before. In this context, how can a mere citizen separate what is truth from what it is not? The conclusion of all this cannot be other than it is more necessary than

ever to have an institution whose main task is to reveal the truth and to stick to it, as journalism is.

To understand and tackle any problem it is very useful to go back to its origin. In the case we set out in this paper, this origin is the questioning of the concept of reality. This research proposes that, firstly, it started due to a misunderstanding caused by the excess of scientism addressed to literature, journalism and cultural sciences in general, fields that were put under natural science methods. Secondly, because of the application of the modern scientific positivism that emerged in the XVIII and XIX centuries. Thirdly, due to the influence of the Postmodernism point of view on science, arts and ethics, especially from the 60s onwards.

The link between journalism and reality is language. More specifically, written language in the case of that kind of journalism. In this regard, George Steiner (1989: 117-118) has pointed out that the relationship between language and reality suffered a breakdown point at the end of the XIX century. He explains that

the decisive question has been this one: until the crisis of the meaning of the meaning started at the end of the XIX century, even the most severe scepticism, the most subversive of the anti-rhetoric, were committed

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to language [...] Scepticism accepted the contract with language [...] that contract was broken for the first time, in any meticulous and consequent sense, in the speculative conscience and the European, Central European and Russian culture, between the decades from 1870 and 1930. This breakup of the alliance between the word and the world is one of the few revolutions of the spirit truly genuine in the Western history and define the Modernity itself.

The consequence of this, Steiner continues (1998: 121), is that with this breakdown, “what gives the word ‘rose’, that arbitrary assembly of two vocals and two consonants, its unique legitimacy and vital force is, [as] Mallarmé affirms, ‘l’absence de toute rose’ [‘the absence of the rose itself’, in French].”

Together with this, it also happened in those years that the scientism approach was applied to the so-called ‘culture sciences’ and, of course, to literature and journalism. Following Max Weber (2009, 2010), this research uses the concept of culture sciences in opposition to nature sciences (‘Kulturwissenschaft’ and ‘Naturwissenschaft’, in German.)

The very first movement on language and literature based on that positivist approach was Russian formalism. It started what Gérard Genette called (1993: 23) “essentialist poetics”. By developing that kind of poetics (Aguiar e Silva, 1993: 400):

on the one hand, the formalists react against the impressionist, subjectivist and biased criticism; on the other, they react against academic criticism of a scholarly type, ignorant of the theoretical problems involved in the literary phenomenon, fed indiscriminately by data from the history of culture, psychology, sociology, etc. And that is pleased by the biographies and anecdotal. [This led them to conclude that] science of literature should study literariness (‘literariness’), that is, what gives a work its literary quality.

Therefore, it consists in studying written language (so, journalism and literature included) as if it was a cell or a mere stone, and not what it is: a social, cultural and human phenomenon, and not a natural one, which is, in Weber’s definition (2009: 133), one “detached from all values and at the same time totally rational, that is, a monistic knowledge of all reality and freed from all individual accidents.”

That positivist approach on culture sciences started not only the ages of the so-called ‘autonomy of language’ or ‘linguistic turn’, according to the terminology proposed by Albert Chillón (1999), but also, and intertwined with it, the philosophy of the *art for art’s sake*, which claimed that art has nothing to do anymore with any moral commitment, reality nor social and utilitarian function. The only reality for art, its followers would defend, is just art itself. In the same way, the ‘linguistic turn’ implies (Chillón, 1999: 25) that language is a reality itself, and not a sophisticated tool to expose a previous thought or tell the reality.

Thence, if language is a reality itself, art, literature, has nothing to do anymore with the beauty of the reality or even the reality but with the artist’s self as a genius creator, who appears as a demigod.

All this happened with Romanticism and under the special influence of Fichte philosophy, which was super-focused on the ‘self.’ The consequences of it, as Jürgen Habermas has described (1993: 30), are that

modern art manifests its essence in Romanticism; form and content of Romantic art are determined by absolute interiority [...] Reality only reaches artistic expression when refracted in the subjectivity of the sensible soul (reality is then only a mere appearance through the self.)

This position, of course, helps to get the liberation of the artist, meaning too the writer, firstly, and later on, journalists. From who? Mainly from the patron but also from the state and the bourgeoisie. As Escarpit points out (1971: 49)

If it were necessary to set a symbolic date as the date of appearance of the man of letters, one could quote the year 1755. It is the date of the famous letter written by Samuel Johnson to Lord Chesterfield to refuse the help that some years before he had requested in vain, when he was preparing his *Dictionary* [...] it is the death knell of patronage. [In Great Britain, until then] there was no possible legal control before the appearance of authentic publishers, that is, of people who exploited commercially and with responsibility literary property, a fact that occurred towards the middle of the XVIII century. The French Revolution gave the signal of this reform.

That way the artist was completely free. From now on, he/she is just for his/her genius and inspiration, and directly connected (in an economic way too) to the public, the first public of readership (market of readers) in history.

So, the beginning of the city as a Modern (industrial and bourgeois) project brought in the XIX century the mass but also the public and, with the appearance of the first modern newspapers, public opinion. It was not a mere coincidence that all of these situations could be achieved because of the boom of newspapers in that century. They were, in fact, the refuge of many that wrote in their pages and could get some money to make a living. Moreover, newspapers is where journalists worked and whose main function was to inform about reality, to tell the truth and to verify facts, in order, as we have said before, to develop itself as a fifth-state institution.

Here a paradox can be described: ‘art for art’s sake’ writers who denied the reality and put art reality above reality itself, society and morals, very often got their freedom inside the institution whose main function is telling real facts and fixing the truth, meaning, journalism. Yet, it is indeed more than curious that all of this happened in the first years after the birth of

journalism, which was trying to produce news, to tell the world, to fix reality and facts with ‘objectivity’, the basic concept and rule for this institution as well as field of study and a profession.

The above-mentioned positivist-scientific approach on language and literature continued until the second part of the XX century, when it was even more boosted by Postmodernist theories, which yet mixed it with a renewed scepticism on reality, and all this despite the very real experience of Auschwitz.

Anyway, Postmodernist theories keep defending that reality is just a narrative, meaning, a fiction. That way, any attempt to tell it would be impossible too because it would suppose creating a mere representation of the reality but not the reality itself, so, finally, it would be another fiction. That is why, as 50s existentialism defended, human beings are condemned to not being able to communicate among us, that is, to solitude.

Later on, as the Situationist International in France warned in the 60s, with the advent of mass-media-based society that would lead to a society of spectacle, reality would be increasingly confused with fiction. Thus, as Gianni Vattimo describes (1990: 153-154)

the society of the spectacle that the Situationists speak of is not only the society of appearances manipulated by power is also a society in which reality occurs with weaker and more fluid characters, and in which experience can acquire the features of oscillation, of uprooting, of the game.

Again, in the late XX century the same crisis of reality and again the impossibility for human beings of having real experiences, of telling the reality by language, finally, the impossibility of both communication and humanization. In the case described by Vattimo due to the spectacle society and the influence of the mass-media (then, the internet and the digital era had not even emerged, though.)

The question here is: what has Postmodernism to do with this and Romanticism and so with the above-mentioned crisis of language? The answer is the crisis of Modernity, which is the crisis in the faith in progress and science based on a profound criticism addressed to the Enlightenment project, which was based on the notions of a lineal progress and the emancipation of human beings.

Enlightenment thought of a new society where all human beings would be equal living in a regime of social justice where the power would be shared by the whole community (democracy) and where decisions would be made based on science, objective knowledge and goodness. Isaiah Berlin (2000: 31) has explained this well. He describes Romanticism as a change that occurred between 1760 and 1830 and a reaction to the Enlightenment.

“The particular turn given by the Illustration was [...] that any answer cannot be gotten by revelation”, argues Berlin, who adds that (2000: 143)

Enlightenment supposed [...] that there was a perfect and closed model of life, a specific form of life and art, sensitivity and thought that was the right one, the right one, that was true and objective, and that, if we knew enough, we could teach it to people. Our problems had a certain solution and if we were only able to construct an adequate structure for that solution, and then, so to speak, adjust man to that structure, we would obtain answers for both the problems of thought and those of action.

That led to the notion of objectivity. Thence, both science and art go to that goal, objectivity. Science with propositions derived from its method of observation and art with realism. As Berlin points out (2000: 49), “the dominant aesthetic theory of the early XVIII century argued that man should raise a mirror in front of nature”, and there was the well-known Stendhal sentence applied to writing: “A novel is a mirror walking along a main road”. In this regard, Berlin adds (2000: 86-87) that

for the aesthetics of the XVIII century [...] the value of a work of art lays, in general terms, in being what it was. The value of a painting was in its beauty. What made her beautiful could be discussed: whether it was beautiful because it gave pleasure, or satisfied the intellect, or because it maintained some peculiar relationship with the harmony of the spheres or the universe and was a copy of some Platonic original that the artist had access to moments of inspiration; in all this there could be disagreements. But what everyone agreed on was that the value of the work of art consisted in the properties it possessed, in being what it was, in being beautiful, symmetrical, well-formed, or whatever it was.

On the contrary, and when it comes to romantics, affirms Berlin (2000: 88), when someone appreciates a work of art, it puts us in some way in contact with the person who created it; and the work speaks to us: “This is the doctrine of art as expression, the doctrine of art as communication [...] Some things are made by individuals, and other things are made by groups.”

Two centuries later, Postmodernism, as Vattimo describes it (1990: 79-82), goes in the same way, and it is not any coincidence at all. The Italian philosopher states that, firstly, with the appearance of the mass-media society and later with the current digital one, the media

makes the idea of a reality less and less possible. Perhaps the prophecy of Nietzsche is fulfilled: the real world, in the end, will become a fable [...] If we do not make an idea of reality today [...] it cannot be understood as the objective data that is below, or beyond, the images that the media provide us with. How and where could we access such a reality ‘in-itself’? [...] Therefore, instead of an emancipating ideal (realization of the Hegelian absolute spirit, or of the man not enslaved by Marx’s ideology), an emancipatory ideal opens up



on the basis of the oscillation, plurality and erosion of the reality principle.

That is where Vattimo sees the key of current aesthetics: if the reality is weak, he points out, the main function of art (and, as we see later in this research, of journalism), is to create an ‘impact’, understood as a real experience. From this, it can be concluded that, prior to postmodernists, romantics made a huge criticism of the concept of reality and, more, of a reality that can be apprehended by science. As Berlin (2000: 161) says:

There is no structure of things. There is no model to which we must adapt. There is only one flow: the endless creativity of the universe. The universe should not be conceived as a set of events, nor as a guide to events, or as a set of bodies in space, three-dimensional entities linked by certain unbreakable relationships, as taught by physics, chemistry and other natural sciences. It is a perpetual process of pushing forward, of self-creation, which can be conceived as something hostile to man.

In that sense too, German philosopher Rüdiger Safranski (2018) considers that the main pillar of Romanticism is its fight against some consequences of the Enlightenment, such as scientism and utilitarian morals. For them, they both went against life and its unique expression.

So, Romantics claimed against the disenchantment of the world due to its rationalization, against a Modernity where, as Weber denounced, the spheres of life and work are organized more and more according to the form of an instrumental rationality (Safranski 2018: 174). They feared that the room for the self and humanization was getting smaller. Therefore, Romanticism reacted by putting “the artistic on the defensive against the spirit of realism and utility”, as Safranski (2018: 178) has pointed out. That is why Romanticism (Berlin, 2000: 156) calls for a way out, which is

to confuse reality and appearance as much as possible, to break the boundary between illusion and reality, between sleep and wakefulness, between night and day, between the conscious and the unconscious, and, thus, give the feeling of a universe without barriers, unlimited and in perpetual change, in perpetual transformation, of which any man with will can, even if transitorily, make of him what he pleases. That is the fundamental doctrine of the romantic movement [...] From these certain romantic conclusions are derived; that is, conclusions that affected anti-rationalism.

The anti-rationalism promoted by romantics and postmodernists (who considered art as a communication and creations based on oneself and not connected with the outer reality) led, as it has been depicted, to a crisis of language, in the sense of being suspicious of its capacity of representing reality and, more especially, of being able to access reality and, therefore, to access and tell as truths human experience in its depth, complexity and totality.

So, there are two notions: on the one hand, the Romantic-based criticism of language and its non-capacity to represent reality (the objective exterior and the subjective personal); on the other hand, the in fact anti-Romantic positivist focus even when it comes to culture sciences. Both of them were mixed and on those foundations a scientific approach was built.

That was, this paper argues, the origin of a misunderstanding that has often led cultural sciences and, more concretely, journalism and literature studies to a huge number of wrong conclusions. That approach can be considered too as typically postmodernist. And Postmodernism can also be considered a modern version of Romanticism, as we have also proposed. That is why, in Western culture at least, thinks Richard Löwenthal (Safranski, 2018: 345), among others, a “romantic relapse” happened in the 60s and 70s, especially after 68 (Vietnam, May in Paris, existentialism, etc.) Again, a “rejection of the entire system” (Safranski 2018: 346), the aspiration, of a Romantic base, “to the historical moment” (2018: 349), “the recovery of the tradition of the romantic rejection of industrial society” (2018: 349), so nature against the artificial, and community against society.

All of this led in 1968, Safranski recalls, “to announce the death of literature” (2018: 351), as had happened in the XIX century, which is also supposed to imply the death of language and so journalism, a profession that has to be developed with language and reality, both of them denied by postmodernists.

Therefore, the new postmodernist literature recovered again from the 50s onwards the scepticism about language, abandoned reality and defended that literature cannot tell reality but can only talk about itself, about literature, about language, and this was the birth of the meta-literature and experimentalism and the rejection of literary realism and, of course, journalism.

## 2. Truth, journalism and literature: same root, a new perspective

This research defends that the philosophical and epistemological conclusions of those approaches have been completely harmful for culture sciences and, as a part of them, for journalism and literary studies. The scepticism on language implies a scepticism regarding communication processes that happen inside any given kind of society because telling is as old as human being are, because language is what made us human.

However, the criticisms against that postmodernist approach have also been widespread. The starting point of this criticism is the fight against the scepticism about reality and language in order to defend that of course there is a reality existing outside us and it can be both known and told (and it must be, journalism would add). On the contrary, science itself would not make sense nor have results. But it does

and so we see every day and indeed, we benefit from them.

Reality, thus, cannot be considered anymore as a mere fiction or as a social agreement. Neither can truth. Although we can find this kind of approach in recent researches (i.e. Christians, 2005; Buoziš & Creech, 2018; Waisford, 2018). Even, authors like Sambrook (2012: 11) have argued, contrary to what this paper argues, that news objectivity has to be replaced by transparency: “Objectivity was once designed to engender trust in news, now transparency is the means to achieve that (openness about sources, means, and interests.)”

This paper vindicates the notion of reality. In this vein, the American pragmatic philosopher John Searle affirms (1997: 175) that human beings “do not make worlds, we make descriptions that may or may not match the real world. But all this implies that there is a reality that exists independently of our concepts system. Without that reality, there is nothing to apply the concept.”

How does it apply to science? Here, we are going to use Alan Sokal’s point of view in his critique of scepticism against reality and science (2009: 151): “Unfortunately, there are those who, starting from the undoubted fact that it is difficult to determine truth (especially in the field of cultural sciences), have jumped to the conclusion that there is no objective truth at all. The result is extreme epistemological scepticism.”

So, at the end of the XIX, Nietzsche claimed in his *Notebooks* (Summer 1886–Fall 1887): “Against that positivism which stops before phenomena, saying ‘there are only facts’, I should say: no, it is precisely facts that do not exist, only interpretations.” But more than a century later, Sokal reacts against that misunderstanding (2009: 285) saying that of course not, it is not only interpretations, of course there is a reality, there are facts, “a fact is a situation that exists regardless of the knowledge we have (or do not have) of it; specifically, regardless of any consensus or interpretation.”

Nothing new because that there is a reality is something journalism knew from the start. Without reality journalism would not exist. But it does. That solved, there remains the problem of scepticism about language. There are too many philosophers that have been working to fix this hole. Thus, as José Antonio Marina has described (1999: 51): “It is not true that the word is only the use we make of the word. It is chosen because it goes well with its purposes, because the common concept that constitutes its common meaning protects the expansion it wants to introduce.” Marina has explained his criticism as follows (1999: 146):

Linguistics often suffers from a rare type of paralysis. It is reflected in the presence of the structure of language and forgets the acts that are making it possible. It moves then in a phantasmagorical terrain. It is as if I decided to live in a dictionary or an encyclopaedia

and think that everything is there [...] The meaning of words, said Peirce, is an infinite chain of words. If this is so, a dictionary is an infinite entanglement of infinite chains of infinite words. I do not think so. At some point the dictionary has terms that can only be clarified by referring not to a word but to an experience.

He links reality, subjectivity and language. How? Through experience. That is the key in all this debate, the key that has long been forgotten and excluded. Experience did not seem very scientific to fanatics of positivism, of course, but it is the core of social science and it can be studied and researched inside a scientific and systematic framework. Which one? The one offered by nature science? Of course not. Which one, then? The one that culture sciences give us.

Experience too is the link between journalism and literature. Experience leads not only to reality but also to senses. That is, in literature, realism, the pillar of the modern literature in the XIX century. And it is here where both modern literature and journalism share a common origin, which is the so-called ‘coffee poetic’, according to the notion offered by Martí-Monterde (2007). The coffee-house, says Martí-Monterde, is the place of the writer, writer of novels or articles for a newspaper or both at the same time. This author says (2007: 273) that the idea

that the café is the work cabinet of the writer [was] developed throughout the XIX century, but the XX century adds the character of refuge of which the window would be guarantor and viewpoint at the same time. The return to the coffee-house of the ‘flâneur’ was restless, and the crystal, transparent but solid, will be the last distance, the essential distance that the individual can maintain to avoid its dissolution in nothing at all.

A viewpoint, says the quote. But, what for? To see life, to experience life in order to further describe it. These are at the same time the main function of literature and journalism and this implies a tale of reality. From XIX century, it is a fragmented and a complex one, perhaps a more complex and faster reality than ever in history, but a real one than can be experienced and told by writing.

Therefore, the coffee poetic is the poetic of being inside the coffee-house and from there seeing and writing in order to become a witness of reality. Therefore, the coffee poetic is the root of modern literature and journalism. In fact, both seeing and writing are the soul of journalism.

### 3. Aesthetic of the truth: impact, journalism and reality in the digital era

We have talked so far of the notion of beauty as a link between journalism and literature. We will further develop this notion. However, now, we should say that in the XIX century, the years where modern literature and journalism were born, the notion of beauty was changing.

The notion is more open now and it can be linked not only to formal notions, as described by Berlin, but also and according to Vattimo, to the belonging to any given community (of readers, for instance, in the case of journalism and literature) and, finally, to physical notions, a view of aesthetics which is typically postmodernist.

This process can be briefly described as follows: firstly, art lost his aura, Benjamin points out in his classic *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, published in 1935. That mechanical reproduction can be achieved because of the rise of technical means, the same that will allow the rise of mass media: reproduction and dissemination of images (through television, first, and internet, later) and news (through newspapers, first, and later within the digital sphere, all with the rise of new printing techniques, new technologies to spread information, etc.).

Therefore, and secondly, years later the publication of Benjamin's essay, the spectacle society enters into Western culture, and so Guy Debord wrote *The Society of the Spectacle*, a work of 1967. The consequence of this, says Vattimo, is an aesthetics more based on the notions of 'shock' (Benjamin) or 'stoss' (Heidegger). Both of them, kind of physical notions.

Vattimo (1990: 84-85) argues that what interests us about this is that behind that effect of, let's say, *estrangement*, shock beats the idea that the encounter with the work of art is a way of experiencing different ways of life, thus aesthetic experiences make us live other possible worlds.

According to Vattimo (1990: 130-144), it is in this interpretation that 'stoss' and 'shock' appeared and they overcame the traditional metaphysical definition of art as a place of conciliation and of catharsis, of the exterior-interior correspondence, proper notions of Illustration (Kant) and Romanticism (Hegel).

Both concepts are, indeed, not only a link between journalism and literature but also a link to one of the main pillars of the so-called aesthetic of journalism, which is based on truth and its impact ('shock', 'stoss').

It is the truth a real experience and also implies a physical and a moral one. Is not this way that the scoop works, the way breaking news works, the way journalism itself works in its main function to reveal the truth and the hidden reality and to disclose it and denounce it?

#### 4. Journalism or Truth as Literature

Truth is the stuff that journalism is made of. As Kovach and Rosenstiel state (2007: 36): "Journalism's first obligation is to the truth." That is, in fact, the first of the ten theses they present in their modern classic work *The Elements of Journalism*. Thus, written journalism belongs to the non-fiction sphere. On the contrary, fiction invents facts, characters and actions. It can show facts, persons or places that have happened in reality, but the whole story is an inven-

tion. Fiction, consequently, is not stuck to facts, its function is to create an invented narration, totally or partially. So, a narrator is a creator of the story that he/she has made up. Therefore, journalistic narrations, since they are factual, can be verified unlike fictional ones. Which is not a problem, it is just a definition of both spheres.

As the Spanish writer and columnist Antonio Muñoz Molina has exposed, narration and fiction have not to be taken as the same thing (Ruiz Rico, 2012: 104). What happens, he explains, "is that very often fiction gets confused with narration, and it's not exactly the same, because a text can be a very solid narrative construction and not be fiction." Essentially, the only difference between written journalism and fiction (do not confuse 'fiction' and 'literature') is the truth. Nothing weird because truth is the main purpose of journalism. The opposition, thus, is not anymore between journalism and literature but between fact and fiction. Factual narrative as well as fiction can be considered literature. In fact, since the 60s with the so-called American new journalism (Wolfe, Breslin, Talese, etc.) and especially in the last 30 years there has been a non-fiction rise in literature (Neveu, 2014), or, we could say, a rise of factual literature or literary journalism.

From the point of view of the rhetoric, style, etc., it is possible to detect differences between written journalism and fictional texts, of course, but they are differences linked to cultural practices, social institutions, their different history, etc., not related to the essence of both spheres and their aesthetic and ethic qualities. So, the difference between journalism and literature is not the truth. Again, as Muñoz Molina has said (Ruiz Rico, 2012: 156) literature is "the large universal memory of human beings." To describe it in short, is kind of the 'store of the written' that has been produced in every culture, language, country or community. Literature is, thus, composed of all the texts that have been written and have been preserved literally because of their aesthetic conditions, which always implies an ethical part too. And, of course, that recognition can be assigned to journalistic and factual texts at the same level as fiction texts. That's why non-fiction novels belong to literature too.

That recognition can change through years or centuries. This is a very complex process that is not the main purpose of this essay to get into. However, it can be summarized the process by recalling Steiner's words (1989: 84-86):

How do we do in practice? Appealing, more or less openly, to the dominant opinion, to the cultural and institutional consensus that has evolved over time, we have heads and we count on years, over millennia of reception, mimesis and Western thematic variation, over millennia of pedagogy, Homer and Virgil have been considered exemplary. In our 'civilitas', Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe are the nucleus of recognition [...] Of these recognitions and needs, of its formulation. Canons are not invariable [...] However, the force



of the canonical is massive, it works cumulatively in our primary and secondary education, it generates the consensus of presentation in the museums. and the concert halls of the world [...] The canonical is supposed to be the result of a dynamic process, really sent gradually, men and women with reception capacities and normal (normative) responses give testimony of a shared sense of excellence over time. Each generation testifies again. Slow, but at the end, decidedly, an elaboration of common spiritual values and needs arises.”

The filter described by Steiner is made by social institutions that are in charge of it. In the case of literature: academics, universities, prizes, critics, media, museums, readers, researchers, etc. This filter, of course, chooses both fiction and non-fiction works and that is the way that any journalistic text (a column, a feature story, an interview, a reportage-at-large...) can be considered as literature. That is to say that it can be literature.

There is not, thus, any component of characteristics in the text itself than can be used in order to differentiate journalism from fiction. The only difference is truth. That implies that a fictional text has to be concerned with the rule of authenticity in part because, since it is an invention, a creation, it presents itself as a truth, as a story that has really occurred, thus it has to be reliable as a narration in the fiction pact that links the text to the reader.

In the case of journalism, however, that does not apply at all. The reader knows that the story that is being told is true. He knows it because the given text belongs to the journalistic institution, which backs it. All of that implies that the reader of a non-fiction work (reportage, chronicle, non-fiction novel, etc.) does not even consider the authenticity appearance of the text he/she is reading. He/she knows that the actions, persons (not characters) and situations, narrated are true, there is no question about it, and here lies a very big and deep reason of the consideration of journalism as an aesthetic creation, thence, of journalism as a literature.

Obviously, it is also very important in this consideration the rhetoric, the aesthetic quality of a text, the style. In the end, we are talking about beauty and reality (and the beauty of reality), and their relation with writing. The question here is as follows: does beauty have something to do with truth? Of course, it does. We will try to explain it.

The link between truth and beauty is as old as Greek philosophy. In fact, it was Plato who established a link between goodness, truth and beauty, concepts that he put at the same level and intrinsically intertwined (Tatarkiewicz, 1991: 38 and 120; 2001: 164). When it comes to journalism, which is very specifically a phenomenon of modern societies, journalism is an essential way those societies have to know the truth. Truth is yet essential for democracy and freedom. Truth will make you free, reads the Bible, one of the very first texts of Western cultures.

But truth has another asset. Truth and the action to reveal it has in itself a huge aesthetic component

(Ruiz Rico, 2016). This one is related to one concept of aesthetic postmodernism, the already mentioned notion of ‘impact’, in the sense described by Vattimo when he speaks about ‘shock’ and ‘stoss’.

‘Shock’ comes from Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, published in 1936. According to Vattimo (1990: 131), in his essay Benjamin described how the essence of art is modified and loses its aura because of its mechanical reproduction. In this way, Benjamin surpassed the definition of art which traditional metaphysics considered as a place of conciliation and catharsis. Yet, the same year of 1936, *The Origin of the Work of Art* is published by Heidegger, who introduces the similar concept of ‘stoss’.

Thence, both concepts appeal to the notion of impact. That, of course, is not new in the history of art philosophy. As Tatarkiewicz has pointed out (2001: 168), the origin of this philosophical current can be found in Plotinus, who, unlike Plato, considered beauty as an expression of the psyche, of the inner form. That idea of ‘expression’ refers to the notion of impact.

However, as Tatarkiewicz writes (2001: 168), the modern concept of ‘expression’ was not established until the XVII century and the idea of beauty as the expression of the emotions only emerged in the XVI-II century, as we have seen when we tackled Romanticism before. Probably the first modern philosophical definition of it was Bergson’s work *Time and Free Will*, published in 1889. There, Bergson argues (Tatarkiewicz, 2001: 60) that “art aims at impressing feelings on us rather than expressing them.”

As ‘shock’ and ‘stoss’ refer to the physical quality of the art experience since it has lost its condition of the original (aura) or been emptied of its being. Having said this, Vattimo concludes (1990: 151) by assuring that “against the nostalgia of the eternity (of the work of art) and authenticity (of the experience) it is necessary to clearly recognize that the shock is all that remains of the creativity of art in the age of generalized communication.”

That could work in many ways... but not fully when it comes to analysing the relation between journalism and literature and, more specifically, the intrinsic quality of the truth on which journalism relies. Truth does not depend on opinion. What Vattimo forgets is that truth, yet, can link eternity and authenticity with the postmodernist concepts of ‘shock’ and ‘stoss’. And the best scenario where all of those concepts are expressed and intertwined is journalism.

Impact is a key in journalism. Impact lies upon the act of revealing a truth, which is the essence of journalism. In fact, journalists talk about *breaking news*, *scoops*, etc., concepts that appeal to the notion of impact, that is to say *shock* and *stoss*. In written journalism, this impact is as physical (the extension of the news, the typo and design of the page, etc.) as transcendent, I mean, the truth with regard to the content and its implications. It is in that sense that we argue that the truth is beautiful, and this is, of course,

an aesthetic consideration, which implies an ethic component too, the ethic of the truth, since according to Plato truth is linked to beauty and goodness.

### 5. Journalism as Literature of Reality in the current Digital Era

Truth is the basic element of journalism. The search for truth is a process that begins with the professional discipline of assembling and verifying facts. Basically, writing journalism tells two sorts of stories and news. Firstly, the ones related to its function as a fourth state or watchdog (not only before the state but also big private companies too, such as transnational ones). Those stories focused on the investigation to reveal fraud, actions of the government and enterprises, etc. Secondly, those ones to give voice to those who belong to the bottom or margins of society, those who have no voice to raise their claims and protests. In this case, journalism acts as a loudspeaker to make reports or complaints and to try to put them in the political agenda. Both sorts of stories and news are ethical in essence and aims at guaranteeing democracy, freedom, transparency, information of quality (to fight lies and fake news), knowledge and social justice, pillars of the modern liberal democracies.

However, in the 'network society' (Castells, 1996) truth is very complex. In fact, current societies are like that: complex, chaotic, fast, confused, fragmented, alienated, liquid, saturated, and hyper-connected. That is like that mainly because of the influence of digital and mass media. So, in the network society people have a weak, confusing and indirect experience of reality. In this context, journalism and truth are more necessary than ever.

As Neveu has pointed out (2014) and as Tom Wolfe anticipated in the 60s, in this situation journalism has rehabilitated narrative reporting (in part using and renewing novel techniques) to better create a new journalism narrative more developed in order to tell the current complex and hyper-connected world, a globalized digital network society. That is why journalism texts are increasingly being seen and recognized as literature.

"Journalism has always been a practice of the ephemeral; it slips into the disposable. Longer narrative reporting could produce a 'lasting journalism'", says Neveu (2014). That is what is happening in many ways. Obviously, as Neveu adds, "texts belonging to narrative, investigative and explanatory reporting" are the ones that more easily face that test of time.

Moreover, what this paper argues is that the truth told is in itself a unique asset and has an impact in itself on the reader just for being the truth, and this is a sort of impact proper of journalism and it is impossible for fiction to have it. A huge part of the aesthetic value of any given journalistic text is not just the way the reality and facts

are presented and narrated but also and especially the truth that it contains. That is why we consider, to state several classic titles, John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff*, or Gabriel García Márquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, not only as mere journalistic text but also as great works of literature. If the story they told in those books were mere inventions those works would not be at all at that high level as literary works because the impact of the truth those titles contain would not be anymore. Why is that? Because the (ethic and aesthetic) impact they have upon us comes from real facts. That is the way journalism gives us real experiences, information, stories and facts taken from the real world (have they logical meaning or not; reality most of the times is not logic at all, unlike fiction, that has to be coherent in its own rules) in a world where these kind of experiences are becoming weaker and weaker. Journalism is a basic and necessary work (ethic and aesthetic) in the current digital era and network society.

Finally, the most important conclusion of this research is that in this context, journalism can achieve by itself a synthesis of the three aesthetics: Enlightenment, Romanticism and Postmodernism. Firstly, in its obligation to realism (positivism) when it comes to describing the reality, the truth, with a scientist impulse and instinct. Secondly, through the vindication of the self of the journalist and the capacity to research and apply his/her look on reality as an (very often) inconvenient witness, and by linking its message to a community in which he/she and the media he/she works for. Thirdly, by considering news as impact in order to give the reader reality and facts, which is an experience of truth.

This paper argues that written journalism is the most authentic and genuine way for a given text to be literature in the current world. That is called a 'literature of reality', according to Talese's vindication (2010: 267).

As Christians (2007) has points out, Bauman said "ethics in postmodern times has been replaced by aesthetics." But here again journalism goes one step further: it makes its ethics its aesthetics.

Also, Blöbaum is right in saying (2014) that with internet the real challenge for journalism it is not truth but trust. However, as Nielsen points out (2012: 27), the internet is certainly a challenge to news media, but despite various projections "the internet has not killed the newspaper." Why is this? Because no institution except journalism is in charge of searching for the truth, verifying facts, researching, watchdogging, etc. All of them are tasks linked to truth, reality and facts, which many times are in fact hidden or taken by lies. As Negt warns (2004), "when truth and lies can no longer be clearly distinguished, all culture ceases." Journalism and the literature of reality are the first allies of culture and culture is precisely what makes us human.



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