

## APPROXIMATIONS AND DISTANCING. DISASTER VICTIMS IN *BRUMADINHO: A ENGENHARIA DE UM CRIME* AND *TRAGÉDIA EM MARIANA*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we discuss two books that deal with catastrophes that occurred in Brazil recently: *Tragédia em Mariana* (Tragedy in Mariana) by Cristina Serra (Record, 2018) and *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* (Brumadinho: The Engineering of a Crime) by Lucas Ragazzi and Murilo Rocha (Letramento, 2021). Although these works share similarities in formal and thematic aspects, we understand that they indicate different modes of journalistic approach to the world, with distinct ethical implications, particularly regarding how the victims of these catastrophes emerge in the reports. We consider that journalistic characters have a double existence: inside and outside the text. Furthermore, it is an ethical responsibility to reflect on how they are constituted, considering possible connections between one and the other. We propose, therefore, to discuss the modes of journalistic approach to such events from three articulated, analytical dimensions, using the two works. On the topic of “Indications of Listening and Authorial Presence”, we focused on how the authors checked the information in their books, listened to the victims or investigated other catastrophes’ records. In “Characters With(out) a Plot”, we discuss who they are, whose stories are told in these books, how it is done, and possible effects. In “Project and Paratexts”, we address the intentions declared by each author-reporter. We also examine whether or not they explore a book’s potential as to the specific aspect of character development. Finally, we compared the approaches of other reporters to the representations of their characters to reflect on how each author-reporter of the works we analysed faces the catastrophe. We also examined what kind of journalistic record their postures reflect.

### KEYWORDS

reporting book, journalism, catastrophe, character, victim, ethics

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# APROXIMAÇÕES E DISTANCIAMENTOS. VÍTIMAS DE CATÁSTROFES EM BRUMADINHO: A ENGENHARIA DE UM CRIME E TRAGÉDIA EM MARIANA

## RESUMO

Neste artigo, abordamos dois livros-reportagem que tratam de catástrofes ocorridas no Brasil, recentemente: *Tragédia em Mariana*, de Cristina Serra (Record, 2018) e *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, de Lucas Ragazzi e Murilo Rocha (Letramento, 2021). Embora estes trabalhos compartilhem similaridades tais como aspectos formais e temáticos, entendemos que indiciam diferentes modos de apreensão jornalística do mundo, com distintas implicações éticas particularmente no que concerne ao modo como as personagens vítimas dessas catástrofes emergem nas reportagens. Consideramos que os personagens jornalísticos têm dupla existência: no texto e fora dele, e é uma responsabilidade ética refletir sobre as formas como são constituídos tendo em vista possíveis passagens entre um e outro. Propomos então discutir, valendo-nos das duas obras, os modos de aproximação jornalística com tais acontecimentos a partir de três dimensões analíticas articuladas. No tópico “Marcas de Escuta e Presença Autoral”, damos atenção a indícios de como os autores e autora apuraram as informações que constam em seus livros, colocando sua escuta junto às vítimas ou apurando outros registros das catástrofes. Em “Personagens (S)em Enredo”, discutimos quem são aqueles cujas histórias são contadas nesses livros, como isso se faz e com que possíveis efeitos. Em “Projeto e Paratextos”, abordamos as intenções declaradas por cada autor-repórter, bem como o quanto exploram ou não as potencialidades de um livro-reportagem no aspecto específico do desenvolvimento de personagens. Por fim, cotejamos abordagens de outros repórteres sobre as representações de seus personagens para pensar como cada autor-repórter das obras que analisamos aqui se posiciona diante da catástrofe e que tipo de registro jornalístico sua postura reflete.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

livro-reportagem, jornalismo, catástrofe, personagem, vítima, ética

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## 1. PRESENTATION

In this article, we will cover two books about recent disasters in Brazil: *Tragédia em Mariana* (Tragedy in Mariana; Record, 2018) by Cristina Serra; and *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* (Brumadinho: The Engineering of a Crime; Letramento, 2021) by Lucas Ragazzi and Murilo Rocha. Such works share similarities in the theme since both deal with the tragic events caused by the ruptures of mining tailings dams in the state of Minas Gerais; and the formal organisation under the names of the reporting books. Our premise, to be verified, is that despite this, they show different modes of a journalistic perception of the world, with different ethical implications. We are interested in discussing their approaches to the events they narrate, emphasising the conditions they offer for the emergence of disaster victims in these stories.

By emergence conditions, we understand that the victims' condition should not be taken as clear evidence to perceive the experiences surrounding such events. The epistemological shifts between dealing with knowledge based on someone's direct experience of a given situation and witnessing as a way of knowing (Leal & Antunes, 2018) need to

be considered. In journalism, these seem to imply the formation of a true community of characters.

We know from Serelle (2020) that journalistic characters have a double existence, unlike those that are purely fictional: in the narrative and the historical world. Their construction must observe possible limits and connections between the one and the other since what surfaces in the narrative can impact the lives that inspired them. Moreover, concrete existence imposes restrictions on the composition of the characters (Malcolm, 1990/2011). Attention to this trait is expressed, for example, in the reflections that Brum (2018) makes about his work, “A Casa de Velhos” (Old Folks Home). The author says that “no report is more important than a person”, and “I have, sometimes, missed the best quotes of a story for the sake of this fundamental attention to the other” (Brum, 2018, pp. 111–112), pointing to the ethical horizon of her work.

Reading Mônica Martinez (2017), Serelle (2020) highlights the centrality of life stories in narrative journalism, which encompasses texts with formats such as profiles, major stories or books that articulate elements of literary prose. Through life stories, what would appear in daily coverage as merely “a number or a statistic, or even reduced to a single facet of the personality that serves the reported event” gains “biographical perspective, psychological complexity and social context” (Serelle, 2020, p. 45). We would add that this dynamic becomes particularly sensitive in the clipping of stories about catastrophes. In *Hiroshima*, by John Hersey (1946/2017), the entire narrative is structured around the stories of six characters presented to readers more than a year after the well-known explosion that decimated the Japanese city. The text “did not provide technical revelations or unknown data on the effects of the atomic bomb. Its impact came from Hersey’s choice of focus and approach. ( ... ) The horror had a name, age and sex” (Suzuki, 1946/2017, p. 168). In her speech, when awarded the Nobel Prize for her lifetime’s work, Svetlana Aleksievitch (1997/2016), whose texts investigate major events in the Soviet Union, like the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, at the scale of ordinary individuals, said that what attracted her was “that small space – man... human being. In fact, that is where everything happens” (p. 372).

We emphasise that *Tragédia em Mariana* and *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* cannot be completely seen as works written in the “literary journalism” tradition. Both have passages where typical narrative resources of a certain realistic tradition are recognised in narrating the facts, especially the description of entire scenes (Wolfe, 1970/2005). However, they are mainly books with stories that seek to denounce a crime, in the case of Serra’s book, and document a police investigation, as Ragazzi and Rocha do, with no overt literary investment. However, as reporting books, they are expected to present a different approach from that characterising daily journalism, including regarding the characters in their stories.

In addition, the reporting book seems to have been constituted as a privileged, cultural object among reporters. In the story about the “new journalism”, Tom Wolfe (1970/2005) says that the special reporters of the essays aimed precisely to conquer the conditions to leave them behind and then, idyllically isolated, to write “the book” that

would give them fame and wealth in return. Indeed, the reporting books were able, at this time, to cross geographic and linguistic boundaries that even the great stories of authors such as Gay Talese, Truman Capote and the above mentioned Tom Wolfe, published in magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Playboy* and other great magazines, did not cross easily. In Brazil, what was translated from these authors, and many others were primarily their books.

Then, the reporting books resulted from agendas that were better refined and developed than the stories prepared for periodical publications, and with the privilege of being done with more time, more resources and enjoying a more structured framework for dissemination and discussion. Through releases, criticisms and debates, they were constituted as journalistic objects from which we can expect more than we usually do from those made to inform us in the heat of the moment or keep us updated on different situations.

The understanding that the reporting books would be special objects among those that journalism circulates is updated in contemporary Brazil through speeches such as that of Daniela Arbex. According to her, one of her works, the *Holocausto Brasileiro* (Brazilian Holocaust), would be closer to historical document status than to that of fleeting, journalistic coverage. “The *Holocausto Brasileiro* is timeless. Some 50 years from now, when someone reads this book, it will remain current; it will remain necessary and fundamental”, she said (Amorim, 2020, para. 43). Still, for the author, the book is detached from certain practices of the press, taking a supplementary path:

I think it is part of our job to give visibility to important and distressing topics. It is a shame that the press cannot do it more often. Our coverage has deadlines and dates, so I see an advantage in my work because I have no deadline. After all, a book is timeless. (*Autora de ‘Todo Dia a Mesma Noite’*, Daniela Arbex diz: “*Eu não abandono a minha pauta*”, 2021, para. 4)

In their way, the authors of *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* seem to indicate that they recognise the conditions given by the reporting book, as they write “from a privileged viewpoint, [there is] the intention to understand the role of each character in the gears of an environmental and human disaster with immeasurable consequences” (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 12). In Serra’s (2018) words, it is the book that would make it possible to overcome a repetition of the periodic coverage:

when I thought of writing a book about the disaster of the Fundão dam, there was one number I could not get out of my head: the nineteen killed in the tragedy. This number was repeated in the news along with many others that tried to translate the extent of a socio-environmental calamity never before seen in Brazil: 34 million cubic meters of iron ore tailings dumped in nature; about 660 kilometres travelled by mud along the course of the Doce River; 38 municipalities affected; 14 tons of dead fish collected in the river; hundreds of thousands of basin dwellers without drinkable

water. Journalism loves numbers. And, without a doubt, they are important. However, they cannot translate the human dimension of a catastrophe like this. They do not give a face to the story. It was necessary to show these faces, reveal their identities, and give them a voice. (p. 14)

*Tragédia em Mariana* proposes to tell, as the work's title states, "the story of the greatest environmental disaster in Brazil". In 51 chapters, it addresses the collapse of the Fundão tailings dam in November 2015 and the story of its licensing, construction and operation. The book also reflects on mining history in Minas Gerais and its relationship with politicians and oversight bodies. It dedicates several chapters to the victims of this catastrophe — those who survived and those who succumbed, those directly affected by it and those indirectly suffering its impact (Serelle & Pinheiro, 2021). Some 3 years after the disaster, the publication investigates and puts some facts in perspective. Therefore, one of our hypotheses is that, due to this timeframe, it is quite different from *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, written and launched in the same year as the catastrophe it focuses on, 2019.

We propose, therefore, to discuss the modes of journalistic approach to such events from three articulated, analytical dimensions, using the two works. Initially, we reflect on possible implications, from the time of this writing and investment in the journalistic investigation, that reveal *indications of listening and authorial presence* — indications of how the authors and author checked the information in their books. Then, we use the observation of traits in both works as to what they offer as elements for understanding how victims emerge as characters in these stories and the ethical implications arising from the choices made by each author. Thus, we deal with the following aspects: *characters with(out) a plot*, in which we will discuss who they are, whose stories are told in these books, how it is done, and with what possible effects. We also examine the *project and paratexts* as axes through which we will discuss the intentions declared by each author-reporter (Marocco, 2020) and how much they explore, or not, the potential of a book for the specific aspect of character development. Finally, we direct our final comments, comparing approaches from other reporters on the representations of their characters, to think about how each author-reporter of the works analysed herein stands in the face of the catastrophe and what kind of journalistic positioning these positions reflect.

## 2. INDICATIONS OF LISTENING AND AUTHORIAL PRESENCE

Certain contemporary news reports present metanarrative elements through which their authors can reflect, for example, on the ethical, investigative and writing challenges they faced in conducting their work. In the news reports that we addressed in this paper, we were interested in these metanarrative elements according to what they indicate: the quality of the time devoted by their authors to produce the works. It is also important to note that these elements reveal the reporters' listening to each story, considered here not merely as a passive gesture of listening to other people's stories followed by their transcription and formatting in a text that claims to be journalistic. Listening, as Eliane

Brum (2021) suggests, would be closer to the common construction that reporters and their sources make of a story, with personal implications included for both parties:

to listen is to “lend” my body to the words of another<sup>1</sup>. It is an experience that resembles possession, but it is not. My body, me, is an active mediator of the other voice. Clearly, making that voice a word written by me requires delicate mediation. It is the narrative of another, the experience of another, the words of another after they cross my body. However, my body is not an absolute void through which another’s narrative passes unaltered by the experience of passing through me. (p. 60)

For example, in a chapter in *Tragédia em Mariana*, Serra reports a Christmas spent with affected families, the year the Fundão dam collapsed, 2013. Working at that time for the television program *Fantástico* (Fantastic), the author was committed to covering the catastrophe from its onset, could actively listen, as we mentioned, and bring to this narrative a series of elements indicating the families’ conditions in that circumstance. Maria Lúcia

couldn’t get used to the rhythm and noise of the city. “I miss my airy house, feeling the air rushing through the windows...” It was also strange to use things donated by anonymous persons or bought by Samarco. On a few trips to the ruined village, she recovered small pieces of her shattered daily life. The gas cylinder cover, dishtowels, tablecloths, quilts, a blender, a thermos, crockery, and a duvet. “I washed, bleached, and am happy to use things I used in Bento Rodrigues”. (... ) Before lunch, Mrs Maria Lúcia said her prayers. “We have to thank God because we are alive. We won’t forget, but we shouldn’t just dwell on the past, either. We had a life lesson, and we have to be strong to start over”. (Serra, 2018, p. 100)

Through descriptive passages like this, Serra talks about being with those affected during their first reflections and shows us some of them. These are words of pain, quite typical of those who have just suffered a catastrophe, but also of resilience, able to put into perspective something as devastating as the loss of their homes and the various bonds with the community they lived. In the book, besides the excerpts that indicate Serra’s listening during the first months following the catastrophe, there are also passages through which one can perceive the continuity of this work. For example, in the final chapter of *Tragédia em Mariana*, the stories of some people whose trajectories were told in the news report are resumed. Among them, Maria Lúcia’s:

in Mariana, the family would be accommodated in a house on Santana Street, near the historic centre. They received there the visit from the still-CEO of Samarco, Ricardo Vescovi. He wanted to know if they were well settled in. “He apologised to us. He was desolate. I felt sorry for him”, said

<sup>1</sup> The author word “outré” in the original Portuguese version as part of an inclusive, non-binary language.

Maria Lúcia. However, as investigations revealed the mining company's management's knowledge of the dam's risks, feelings changed. "I didn't feel pity anymore, no. But I would welcome him back. I only completed the fourth grade, but ignorance is a word that's not in our dictionary. You don't take the law into your own hands". (Serra, 2018, p. 444)

The continuous listening to which we refer seems fundamental to us, so speeches like Maria Lúcia's are brought to light and allow her construction to be complex as a character in a report in a book. She is a victim who does not intend to forget what was done to her but will not dwell on the horror. She changes her perspective about those responsible for the catastrophe that changed her life, but she keeps her values. Through the speeches dispersed throughout the book, she appears as a character full of nuances — just as we imagine in the historical world. Although this complexity has been present since her first statements, we understand that the extended time of journalistic listening has allowed her unique characteristics to emerge once again, as if in confirmation.

In *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, the entire process is concluded in the same year as the catastrophe narrated, 2019. The indications of listening and authorial presence of Ragazzi and Rocha are scarce. In this work, the self-referencing excerpts seek to highlight the sources on which the authors based their work, such as when they write that the "sequence of events narrated in this chapter is essentially built by the crossing-referencing of data done by the team of the deputy Luiz Augusto Nogueira" (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 73). Later, they state that

to write this reporting book, the authors relied on the abundant documentation raised by the investigative bodies, especially by the task force of the Federal Police through inquiry 62/2019, chaired by deputy Luiz Augusto Pessoa Nogueira, and interviews and depositions by persons directly or indirectly involved with the routine management, monitoring and validation of the conditions of the Dam I of the Córrego do Feijão mine, in Brumadinho. (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 209)

There are few passages in this book dedicated to the catastrophe victims, among which Chapter V, "Enterrar Seus Mortos" (Burying Their Dead), stands out. It tells the story of Maria de Lourdes and her family. She lost her sister and son-in-law in the landslide and, sometime later, saw her nephew being taken away from the city where they lived because the child's father could no longer live there. "Another dam fell on us" (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 60). Such stories, however, are exhausted in these terms without being resumed or put into perspective. Therefore, we do not know what happened to the victims following the disaster from reading the text. Moreover, we cannot observe them beyond what they feel when the pain of the loss is still more acute. Thinking about the metanarrative aspects in this regard, we have very few elements for knowing about the ethical guidelines that professionals have sought to follow, such as obtaining informed consent of the victims to report their stories and make them public domain and taking

possible care to avoid so-called re-traumatisation. Nor can we understand, from these passages, whether the authors stood next to the victims to listen to them.

Although both reporting books, *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* and *Tragédia em Mariana*, show signs of very different authorial and investigative investment. Attention to documentation is significant in both works. However, Serra's book shares space with an extensive follow-up of the victims, which allows them to appear more complexly in the text. They appear as nuanced characters who suffer and put the catastrophe in perspective because it is expected that other feelings are manifested regarding the trauma after a time of initial shock. In Ragazzi and Rocha's book, it seems that the victims appear as if they are fulfilling a previously designated role, which is smaller than the other interests of the book. In this work, the authors' listening takes the police investigation as the guide and emerges with a structure similar to daily coverage.

There is no prescription in journalism as to how to approach an episode. For example, it can be done using authorial, documentary, anthropological, psychological, or police investigation as resources. In this sense, the solutions adopted both by Serra and by Ragazzi and Rocha are journalistically validated. In these works, we seek to observe whether there is a difference regarding the emergence of the characters when one chooses one path or the other and what deserves attention. In this sense, we call attention to the effect of reporters committing their presence and listening to the victims. It serves as the recognition that the words of these people have value in themselves, without intermediation, together with the reporter's words. We should remember that the stories produced journalistically can recur on people in the historical world. In these cases, people had a trajectory of struggles strongly marked by the catastrophe that shook them. It is, therefore, worth reflecting on whether a certain mode of emergence positions them to the readers more as what they are in a context of disputes, agents or subjects, or as what they are according to a simplifying mediation such as a police investigation report, as something close to deponents, people whose statements have a more limited purpose.

### 3. PROJECT AND PARATEXTS

The privilege we mentioned in *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, being given for the police investigation and the investigators who worked on the case of the collapse of the B1 dam in Córrego do Feijão, is explicit from the book's cover. Besides the title and a photograph showing an office stained by mud, it reads that the book is "based on the investigations of the Federal Police deputies Cristiano Campidelli, Luiz Augusto Pessoa Nogueira, Rodrigo Teixeira, [and] Roger Lima de Moura". The names are in bold type as if they were signing the work's authorship, together with Ragazzi and Rocha. These police officers' photograph opens a series of images as the book ends, preceding another with the journalists and a firefighter. There are no pictures of the victims. In a session entitled "Por Que Este Livro?" (Why This Book?), prior to Chapter I and after the acknowledgements, the authors write that

there is no search for punishment or revenge in the narrative, much less the purpose of electing or impersonating heroes and villains. There is, rather, from a privileged point of view, the intention to understand the role of each character in the gears of an environmental and human disaster with immeasurable consequences. The content published in this book is not confidential under the law and has been obtained through interviews and authorised access to public documents, depositions and parts of non-confidential judicial proceedings or already published in the press. (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 12)

The paratexts or the passages of *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* do not appeal to an “untold story” or the “catastrophe victims’ perspective”. In this sense, the book is straightforward in fulfilling what it proposes: to approach the story from what the police investigation provides. The absence of mention indicating close listening to the catastrophe victims gives us elements to think about the questions we raise in this work about their emergency conditions. If they are not even considered in the book’s proposal, there would be no reason to read the work, considering how they appear in the text. However, the problem is that, despite the focus declared by Ragazzi and Rocha, the characters of the catastrophe’s victims appear, in formal terms, as described in the previous section. They are only mentioned in lists more than once.

*Tragédia em Mariana*, on the other hand, highlights the victims of the catastrophe it narrates in several of its paratexts, besides, as we said, the chapters that focus on their stories. The cover shows a vast area covered by mud where some rescuers work. Its first lines read, the “book is dedicated to the victims of the greatest socio-environmental tragedy in Brazil”, directly mentioning two of them — Romeu Arlindo and Paula Geralda Gomes. The introduction, the content and the photographs draw attention to these characters. In the introduction, for example, Serra (2018) states that

understanding a tragedy of this magnitude, from its multiple perspectives, would not be within my reach without the extreme generosity and trust of those who told me their life stories before and after November 5, 2015. Among them are the relatives of those who were swallowed up forever by the waves of mud; the victims who survived, injured in body and soul; and the dozens of residents of the Doce River basin somehow affected, whether by the loss of community ties, assets, employment or their livelihood previously provided by the river. (p. 14)

The people, as we said, are central to the reporting books. Apart from the stories about catastrophes mentioned in the introduction of this work, they star in famous works such as *O Jornalista e o Assassino* (The Journalist and the Murderer), by American journalist Janet Malcolm (1990/2011); *O Segredo de Joe Gould* (Joe Gould’s Secret), by American writer Joseph Mitchell (1965/2003); and, *Ricardo e Vânia* (Ricardo and Vânia), by Brazilian journalist Chico Felitti (2019). In some reporting books, the characters seem to play a less central role, as individuals whose unique stories stand out and appear well

constructed but appear strong in the text like several others. Some examples include *Fame & Anonymity*, by the American Gay Talese; and, somewhat differently, *República das Milícias* (Militia Republic), by the Brazilian journalist Bruno Paes Manso (2020). In these books, the protagonism seems to be distributed among several life stories, approached in a complex way but without elements presenting greater depth in the biographical characterisation. Clearly, the reporters have the autonomy to approach characters in scope and intensity. We propose to think about how the books analysed have exercised this prerogative. Hence, according to the paratextual elements we analysed, we observed a difference in this endeavour. In *Tragédia em Mariana*, the characters, especially the catastrophe victims, are prominent figures. In *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, this distinction is given to the investigators. It is worth thinking about its effects.

#### 4. CHARACTERS WITH(OUT) A PLOT

*Tragédia em Mariana* features a wide range of those who may be considered affected by the catastrophe, but there is also an effort to put their stories into a plot. So, we know that

Marcos Aurélio Pereira de Moura, 34, the chemist, was at a special time of his life. In professional ascension at the company Produquímica in São Paulo, he had recently bought the apartment where he lived with his wife, Lira, 32. They both had plans. (Serra, 2018, p. 63)

Marcos was one of the 19 people dead in the mudslide, and his story is told through his partner as weaving a tribute. Filomeno da Silva, “informal historian of Bento Rodrigues” (Serra, 2018, p. 286) talks about the loss of his house. However, before he recovered several of his trajectory elements, he founded a football club, the Community Association, and looked after the community church. The effort to tell the stories of the living and the dead is a hallmark of this work. The catastrophe affecting all the characters is like the engine of this book, but the unique trajectories of people affected by it are what set the pace. Including the characters in a plot means incorporating their stories into the narrative beyond a pre-established role assigned to them, such as exemplifying a certain phenomenon. It means, in this case, that telling the story of the greatest socio-environmental tragedy in Brazil is also telling the stories of people affected by it. It means giving time not only to the elements most directly linked to the catastrophe but also to events that allow characterising the lives of these characters in a more comprehensive way.

*Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime* does not seem to have this introduction. It even explores narratively events that occurred with the investigators: “on July 9, 2016, ignoring the cold weather of the early evening, Deputy Roger stopped the car near his home and walked into a bar in the neighbourhood” (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 43). However, it only mentions a sequence of ordinary events in their lives when it comes to the victims’ stories. It happens in Chapter XII, “Em Busca das Últimas Jóias” (The Search for the Last Jewels), dedicated to the efforts of the rescue teams searching for the missing more than

200 days after the catastrophe. About Robert Ruan, the assistant general missing during the flood, they write he was

the striker of the Brumadinho Football Club amateur team. He dreamed of being a professional player. He even tried out for Atletico but was turned down by the youth team. Three months before the tragedy, Robert's older brother was murdered. (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 174)

The feature, here, seems to be to approach one life through a sequence of events that, however, do not influence the directions of the narrative. They expire once presented since these characters and their stories do not recur in the text. About other workers, they write:

the welder and mechanic, Renato Eustáquio de Souza, 31, was having an important day; he was full of expectations. After nine years at Vale, he participated in training at the Córrego do Feijão mine. If all went well that Friday, he would be promoted and further assist his wife in raising their two daughters. The 34-year-old machine and equipment oiler, Tiago Tadeu Mendes da Silva, with just a few months of work at the complex in Brumadinho, could not wait to return home to Barreiro, Belo Horizonte, on the last weekend of January to enjoy his children – a new-born boy and a 4-year-old girl. Shortly after noon on January 25, 2019, Tiago, as he always did, went to Vale's cafeteria. On the menu, there was feijoada. (Ragazzi & Rocha, 2021, p. 171)

We understand there is a difference between disposing of a series of events such as the loss of a relative, the lunch of the day, a promotion, and a narrative about them which would seek to connect them, give them meaning, or even articulate a tribute. That often occurs in the reports about people who died — a possibility that probably emerges from direct contact with the surviving victims. In *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, the stories of the victims do not seem to influence the narrative. They are not part of the plot. It seems that, in this book, it would be possible to tell the story of the catastrophe without resorting to the unique trajectories of the people affected by it. When they approach these stories, the reporters do so as if they were police documents, with a listening whose objective is clear: the production of a denunciation piece. The victims are thus revealed from documentary artefacts more related to other fields, such as forensic or medical forensic procedures, featuring in reports or examinations. Details and traces that make the “materiality of the victims” and certify their existence but partly contradict the action of the author-reporter obliterating the elements of another journalistic approach and its ways of interpolating the pain and suffering that one wants to hear.

Through this approach, we know that certain people are victims, but not how they are victims. It is worth saying this has been a known fact since their names were first listed as those of individuals who lost their lives, or people close to them, in the mudslide.

## 5. APPROACHES AND DISTANCING

We understand the unique way many victims are presented in Serra's book, with attention to their trajectories, is related to how the author listens and the proximity she decided to have with them. That is evidenced by passages highlighted in "Indications of Listening and Authorial Presence" and commitments she declares in her book's introduction, such as those indicated in "Project and Paratexts". The reporter places herself in the scene and derives her perspective from there: closer to the people affected by the disaster, we would also say more deeply, in line with what a reporting book can be.

The path is different from *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, in which proximity to the victims does not seem to be decisive. In constructing this reporting book, Ragazzi and Rocha favoured another approach to the catastrophe — through the police investigation around it. It also derives its narrative perspective from it and the emergency conditions of the victims. They appear more as deponents whose trajectories do not seem to direct the document they produced, which declared aim is to tell the story of the police investigation. In this work, those affected are not probed even in their position on this investigation — its speed, apparent efficiency, diligence or the impacts it would produce in their lives.

Such differences and nuances relate to internal procedures when doing journalism, and, in the key of cultural analysis, they deal with the perception of journalism as a contextual and situated practice (Escosteguy, 2012; Zelizer, 2017). Both the way of allowing the victims' words to emerge and dealing with the reporting of catastrophic events indicate particular cultural modes crystallised in this journalism embodied simultaneously in the Brazilian reporting book. On the one hand, it stands out as a kind of praise of anonymity, as the celebration of ordinary life. Eliane Brum (2012) translated it as the "in-subordination of the gaze". It is the gesture of "telling the anonymous dramas as epics that they are, as if each average Joe were a Ulysses, not by favour or charity, but because each average Joe is a Ulysses" (Brum, 2012, p. 187). In the reporting book thus adapted, the presentation of a paratheory gains prominence. It seems to touch emphatically on points such as the ethical dimension of the encounter with the other; of the possibilities and impossibilities of language to account for experience in contemporary journalism. In addition to incorporating reflexivity, the reports express less confidence in talking about what is real. We perceive in them the suspension of narrative authority before a world that seems difficult to interpret. Faced with what is complex, the narrator repeatedly asks how to approach it.

From another perspective, relying on approaches and epistemes typical of other fields (judicial investigation; police investigation), the cultural form of the reporting books that report on catastrophes updates the journalistic claim of anchoring the narrative in the "facts", "truth", and "reality" of world events. Thus, it reiterates that its legitimacy is based on the narrative ability to index and reference the world of tragic events based on the presentation of the victims' "story", especially the fatal victims, with accounts that tend to "exalt" the characters from a normativity of the current condition of the victim.

We do not discuss the “accuracy” of the victims’ representations, but we recognise the importance of making them more nuanced. In the books analysed, that is a consequence of proximity, assumed or only “suggested” by the authors, with the people whose stories are told. Ultimately, a journalistic representation will always be incomplete compared to the subject that inspired it, as Fabiana Moraes (2015) acknowledges regarding Joicy, the focus of the report *O Nascimento de Joicy* (The Birth of Joicy). In that book, she followed the gender reassignment and other transformations in the life of this peasant woman. Reflecting on the recognition the work obtained with the Esso Report Award, Moraes (2015) notes that it was given to the media clipping that she produced of the character because “Joicy, of course, is much larger than the series in which I portrayed her” (p. 19). Agee and Evans (1939/2009) also demonstrate awareness of the distance that a journalistically constructed character maintains regarding the socio-historical individual it addresses. However, for the authors, this precariousness of equivalence is no excuse for giving up the attempt to narrate them. They write: “I must mediate; I must try to record the strange, warm human lives of each of you within your world. And this cannot be done lightly: not lightly, or briefly, not at all: nor with any hope of ‘success’” (Agee & Evans, 1939/2009, p. 107).

The proximity to people who have become characters also seems to have a high personal cost for reporters. Mitchell (1965/2003), for example, recounts the personal implications that touched him after the publication of “Professor Sea Gull”, in which he focused on the story of Joe Gould, a poor man who introduced himself as a writer in the bohemian Greenwich Village. When the report was published, the exhibitionist artist never stopped looking for him, asking him to listen more, write more, financially contribute, to share his workspace with him in the newsroom of *The New Yorker* — until they broke up. Similarly, Moraes (2015) reports on Joicy’s demands on him — more: the woman’s mistrust after many months of exchanges and close follow-up.

“Some even say you’ve been keeping all the money you’re supposed to give me”, Joicy said, speaking from a phone nearly 300 kilometres away from me. I was almost used to hearing absurdities of different degrees in our conversations for over a year, but the sentence was fulminant. First, it shut me up. Then it hit me. A sad, measured indignation sunk in, the kind that clearly shows us that, from then on, no action will be profitable or help maintain things. On the contrary: it needs to stop. (Moraes, 2015, p. 91)

Furthermore, for Moraes (2015), pain, sweat, awe and joy “are invariably present in the relationship established between journalist and character — especially when this relationship goes beyond a brief encounter permeated by a few questions, a ‘thank you’ and an illusory ‘see you later’” (p. 17). Like Gould, who recognises having been seen socially in a new light since Mitchell told his life, the characters in a journalistic narrative gain a new layer of existence once they are narrated. Herein lies part of the reporters’ ethical responsibility, so the “see you later” the parties say each other would be illusory. The aspects concerning the victim characters, their conceptualisation, the normative

factors related to their stories' formulation, the affective dimensions and the role of empathy in approaching such subjects, and the ethics in using such accounts are not settled only in the announcement made by these journalistic projects which make listening to the victim's stories part of their practice as an instrument of actions aimed at expanding the public knowledge and repairing rights.

As seems to have been the case in *Brumadinho: A Engenharia de um Crime*, it is possible to maintain an extended distance from the people whose stories are told. In the case of Ragazzi and Rocha, however, what they did through the distinction given to the police document does not create an ethical solution to the problem of placing a representation in the world that, as we know, can recur on these people. In not noticing an emphasis on issues about how to deal with personal stories of victims, about the morally delicate balance between listening to such stories and spreading them through the strategy adopted in the book, victims appear as characters whose unique trajectories are less important, whose speeches have a pre-established place. More like how daily journalism carries out its news coverage than how a reporting book can address a catastrophe.

## 6. FINAL REMARKS

As we pointed out in the introduction to this text, many books produced in the 20th century have dealt with catastrophes. *Hiroshima*, by Hersey (1946/2017), is emblematic — “no other story in the history of journalism has had the repercussions of Hiroshima. The approximately 300,000 copies of *The New Yorker* magazine, dated August 31, 1946, quickly sold out in the newsstands”, Suzuki tells us (1946/2017, p. 161). “From all over the country and abroad, requests for permission to reprint the story were reaching the newsroom” (Suzuki, 1946/2017, p. 161). What was most special about this report was the focus on the lives of six people — among thousands — affected by the bomb. It allowed us to learn more about how the city and people were destroyed by the bomb.

The focus on the lives of the people affected by a catastrophe, such as the Chernobyl nuclear power plant explosion in 1986, gave the *Vozes de Tchernóbil* (Voices of Chernobyl), by Svetlana Aleksievitch (1997/2016), its prestige and recognition. Her work includes other books where the author investigates “the history of ‘domestic’ socialism, ‘internal’ socialism. The socialism as it lived in the human soul” (Kuruvilla, 2016, para. 10) and still made of other catastrophes was awarded a Nobel Prize.

In Brazil today, many reporting books have been dedicated to the catastrophes happening in our country. In fact, the reporter, Daniela Arbex, seems to be specialising in these stories. In one of her books, the *Holocausto Brasileiro*, she tells the story of Hospital Colônia, where about 60,000 people deemed sick or unsuitable for the Brazilian society of the 20s died. *Todo Dia a Mesma Noite* (Every Day the Same Night) is about the fire that in 2013 was ignited in a crowded nightclub in the South of Brazil and caused the death of 242 people. And, *Arrastados* (Dragged) about the collapse of the Brumadinho dam.

In most of these books — here we include Cristina Serra's — the centrality of the sources is remarkable and often declared through statements such as those analysed in

“Project and Paratexts”. Thus, the commitment to telling the surviving and deadly victims’ stories is on the horizon of the disaster-reporting books in Brazil. However, for this horizon to be ethically strong, the intention to narrate them is not enough. Their authors must also commit to how they do it — which we indicate in “Indications of Listening and Authorial Presence”. Through the books that we compare here, we observe two perspectives. One is close to the characters, such as Cristina Serra’s, and seems to pursue this ethically strong horizon we have discussed. The other perspective, addressing the characters without taking their trajectories as defining factors for the story of the catastrophe it tells, such as Ragazzi and Rocha’s, suggests another position. This perspective is anchored in journalistic practices validated in the most common practices in the newsrooms of periodicals. However, it seems to lack the complexity that does justice to the sensitive dimension of the stories it narrates. Both perspectives by claiming, on the one hand, that the journalistic narrative is based on the tradition of presenting the “facts”, the “truth”, and the “reality”, or, on the other hand, that the narrative operates with protocols based on reflexivity, on the strength of subjectivity and engagement, point to the relevance of understanding these reporting books and their journalisms as a cultural form, whose analysis perceives them as contextualised and situated practices.

**Translation: Peter Laspina**

#### **AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTION**

Carlos Henrique Pinheiro developed conceptualisation, investigation, writing – original draft, and writing – review and editing. Elton Antunes developed the conceptualisation, investigation, and writing – review and editing.

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