

PHILIP MEYER: PRECISÃO NA INFORMAÇÃO E QUALIDADE NA GESTÃO

Quatro décadas após a publicação da obra *Precision Journalism*, o uso de métodos das ciências sociais ganha destaque na prática jornalística, como por exemplo na cobertura do *Panamá Papers*

Entrevista com Philip Meyer
American journalist and emeritus teacher of Journalism
at North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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Nesta edição a revista Pauta Geral - Estudos em Jornalismo entrevista o jornalista americano e professor Emérito de Jornalismo da Universidade Carolina do Norte em Chapel Hill Philip Meyer. Com mais de 20 anos de experiência no mercado, Meyer atuou como repórter, correspondente e diretor. É professor desde a década de 1980 e contribuiu de forma notória para as pesquisas do campo profissional, com ênfase em jornalismo de precisão, jornalismo cívico, indústria de jornal, qualidade do jornalismo e tecnologia de comunicação. Desde 2005, o National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting em parceria com a Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication da Universidade do Arizona criaram o prêmio Philip Meyer para prestigiar as melhores reportagens utilizando métodos de pesquisa em ciências sociais.

Rodrigo Menegat¹

¹ Contribuíram para a realização desta entrevista Cléber Moletta, Elaine Schmitt, Felipe Pontes e Paula Melani Rocha.

Desde a virada da década, o termo 'jornalismo de dados' entrou no vocabulário das redações. Muitas vezes, a prática é considerada algo completamente novo e uma possível solução para um modelo de negócios combalido.

Há quem diga, porém, que trata-se de um fenômeno mais antigo. John Snow, epidemiologista britânico que viveu entre 1813 e 1858, é apontado como um dos precursores da prática (CAIRO, 2013; BRADSHAW, 2014), por exemplo.

Já no século 20, Philip Meyer, repórter e professor universitário americano, foi um dos primeiros a sistematizar e propor uma metodologia para o uso de informações quantitativas nas redações.

Em "Precision Journalism" (1973), Meyer defende a aproximação entre jornalismo e técnicas de pesquisa quantitativa das ciências sociais. O livro é, em sua maior parte, um manual para jornalistas – tradicionalmente avessos a disciplinas como matemática e estatística – trabalharem com números.

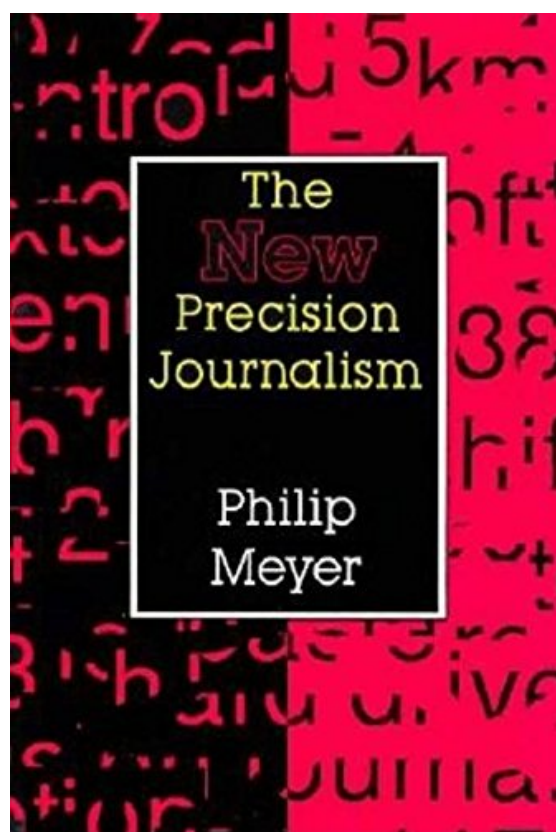


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Entretanto, o mais importante é que o professor defende a adoção de um método verificável e rigoroso para a produção de notícias.

Em uma era em que são postos em dúvida alguns dos valores fundamentais da profissão, entre eles o antes inquestionável ideal de objetividade, a contribuição de Meyer faz sentido para reforçar o rigor metodológico e o esforço para alcançar transparência na prática jornalística. Muita coisa mudou: amplia-se a oferta de dados estão disponíveis e as técnicas para trabalhá-los se tornaram mais sofisticadas (HOLOVATY, 2006; HOWARD, 2014). Ainda assim, pode-se dizer que os princípios do ofício seguem os mesmos.



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Pauta Geral: The increasing number of reporters and newsrooms doing data journalism, or at least using some of its techniques, does effectively helps to bring journalism closer to the social sciences?

Philip Meyer: I hope so. But I fear that there is a tendency to believe that use of computers alone is sufficient to make an investigation scientific. The purpose of scientific method is to ask a question of your data without being fooled by the answer. If carelessly used, the power of computers just enables greater mistakes.

PG: Recently, Pro-Publica launched its data store, which sells clean and optimized datasets for third parties. Will data journalism become, eventually, a reliable income source for news organizations?

Meyer: Could be. The search for a stable business model is still ongoing. We are in a period of experiment and exploration and will have to try many things before we can know what works.

PG: How do you evaluate the current state of policies concerning access to information and governmental accountability [in a global level]? Are they enough to provide the range of information required for practicing data journalism?

Meyer: No. Government information will never be enough. Journalists must know how to collect data as well as analyze it.

PG: How important is it for journalism to be methodologically strict? Is there any difference, regarding the method, between investigative reporting and the daily beats?

Meyer: The standards for discovering and imparting the truth should not vary. But some truths are more difficult to obtain. That is why we have investigative reporting.

PG: On The Vanishing Newspaper, you claim that daily newspapers might disappear by 2043 since the younger generations aren't used to reading them. Does this also apply to the 'new media', such as on the internet and in mobiles? How will those younger generations consume news from now on?

Meyer: Sorry, but that's not what I said. If the present rate of decline were to continue, the last every-day newspaper reader would indeed vanish in 2043. But such straight-line trends do not persist in the real world. I reported that hypothetical zero point only to show the steepness of the decline, not to make a prediction. Nature does not like straight lines.

PG: Do news organizations that function [work] outside the traditional business model favor the practice of journalism which is closer to the needs, desires and expectations of local communities?

Meyer: I wish that were so. The beauty of the industrial-age business model was that wiser publishers found profit in community service. Using a newspaper's social influence to benefit the community made its commercial influence, its advertising, more valuable. There might be a way to apply that model to non-traditional forms of journalism, but much experimentation remains to be done in order to find it.

PG: Could you list some examples of online news organizations that fulfill the interests and needs of smaller local communities?

Meyer: The scene changes so quickly, that any list is at risk of becoming obsolete as soon as it is posted. As a general rule, I believe that the most narrowly specialized online operations have the best chance of survival. Craigslist is a good example.

PG: In the five decades since Precision Journalism was released, did journalism become any better?

Meyer: Everything has changed. The first edition was published in 1973. Changes in both the news business and technology motivated me to bring out new editions in 1979, 1991, and 2002. The biggest change in journalism has been its decentralization, induced by the Internet, and I do not think it has been for the better. Powerful and profitable newspapers were important stabilizing forces for democracy. The media environment today is relatively chaotic. Who or what makes the best use of the tools of journalism remains to be seen.

PG: Has the journalistic method changed due to the increasing range of information available today?

Meyer: Of course. That's why we need precision journalism. For a historical parallel, look at food production and the transition from a hunter-gather economy to agriculture to food industry. See chapter 11 of my "The Vanishing Newspaper," 2d edition (2009).

PG: Might journalists also vanish, or could at least their skillset change? Why?

Meyer: Journalists will always be needed, and the economy will always discover a way to support them. But that discovery process could be long and painful. This is an interesting time to be a

journalist, and that is both a blessing and a curse. For today's young journalists, it is a wonderful opportunity.

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