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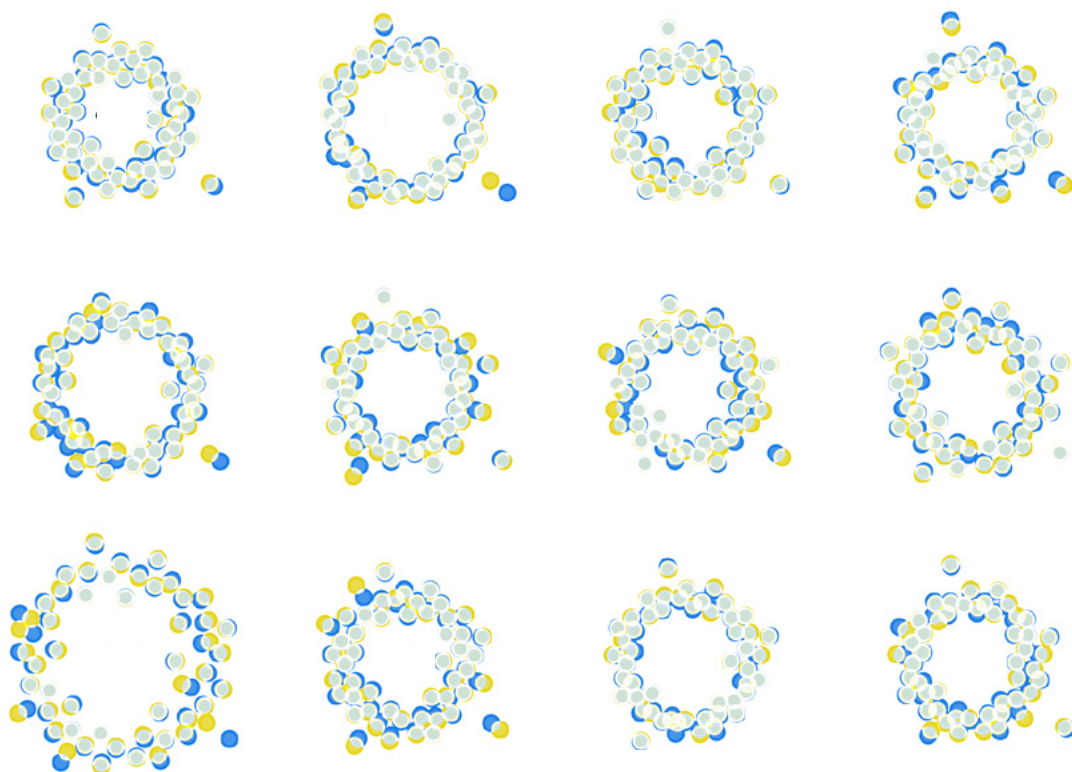
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Colophon

diid
disegno industriale
industrial design
No. 75 — 2021

Year
XIX

diid is an open access
peer-reviewed scientific
design journal

diid is published
three times a year

Registration at Tribunale
di Roma 86/2002
(March 6, 2002)

www.diid.it

Print subscription
(3 issues)
Euro 60,00
Subscription office
ordini@buponline.com

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Publisher



Bologna University Press
Via Saragozza 10
40123 Bologna
Tel. (+39) 051 232 882
Fax (+39) 051 221 019
www.buponline.com
info@buponline.com

ISSN
1594-8528

ISSN Online
2785-245

DOI
10.30682/diid7521

ISBN
978-88-6923-991-5

ISBN Online
978-88-6923-992-2

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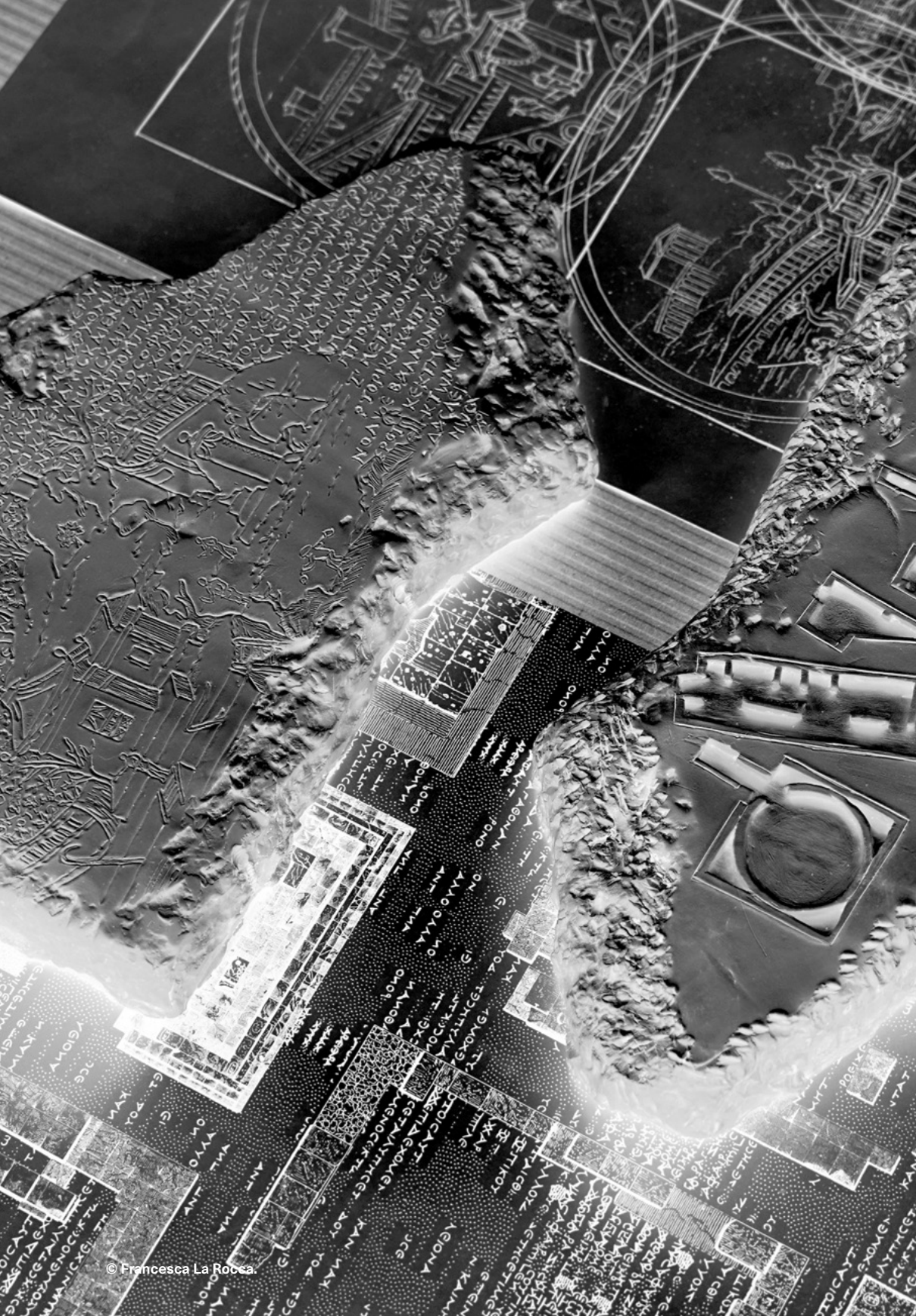
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proceedings and Design
Studies articles by Steven
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Contemporary Magazine-Ness Through the Lens of Translation Paradigm

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Abstract

Within the context of the publishing and media system, magazines can be considered as cultural artifacts in constant transformation, not only for technological changes but also for their strict relationship with the sociocultural context. They reflect and contribute to the construction of reality by disseminating various types of content through different analog or digital media.

In this article, we assume that magazines can be semiotically interpreted as texts and their design (both in terms of content and expression), derives from a series of translation practices. The translation paradigm, in all its interpretations, specificities, brings to our attention the centrality of the contents and the ways in which they are framed, modelled, and transferred.

These theoretical premises led us to question what magazine-ness consists of today, what are the most relevant lines of research and design for the present and the future.

We have identified four different directions open to further investigation: alternative-slow journalism, transmedia journalism, data journalism, and automated journalism.

These categories do not purport to be exhaustive; they constitute a first interpretative model that deserves further development and study both at a theoretical and design level.

Keywords

Magazine-ness

Translation

Slow and fast journalism

Research paths

For more than thirty years, within the framework of the media system, magazines had been undergoing profound transformations to call into question their definition, languages, relationship with the readers, business models, and in particular, their survival after the advent of digitization.

A dialectic was thus opened between different interpretative proposals: those who celebrate printed magazines and their materiality, and those who acclaim the “technological sublime”¹ of new digital platforms and devices; those who counterposes mainstream magazines (dependent on a publisher) to alternative, independent ones; those who contrast house organs (brand magazines) to grassroots magazines (made by ordinary people); those who associate magazines with the paradigm of fast journalism or slow journalism, and so on.

In this article, without pretending to be exhaustive, since the cultural industry and publishing are in constant transformation and evolution, we would like to focus our attention, not on the technologies of reference, but on the content and translation practices that characterise magazines and their transformations.

We start with the premise that content is the foundation of a magazine. Prior to its format or expressive nature, we confirm what Michael Bhaskar meant when he wrote that any comprehension of publishing must be based on an understanding of how content works (Bhaskar, 2013).

Content is always considered within a frame of reference (it is the content of something). They are always related to and influenced by a combination of different causal factors, goals, motivations, and ideological substructures (Bhaskar, 2013).

The content is then mediated, meaning it is subjected to a series of translation processes that can be finalised to different goals, for example: to break with mainstream publishing; to encourage social and cultural values rather than economic gain; to operate in a collaborative, polyphonic, multiverse, multicultural/transcultural dimension; to contribute to dialogue/debate on social or political issues; to disseminate the concept of common good within civil society; to contribute to the definition/sharing of new languages and visual imagery; and to promote forms of active participation of citizens within the social context; to check the credibility and the pertinence of content found in other media on specific topics.

Magazine as Text

To begin to circumscribe our field of investigation, we must make appropriate distinctions of what a magazine is for us.

From our perspective, which is strictly connected to Semiotics and Translation Studies, a magazine is interpretable as a “polyalphabetic and polymorphic text,” and as a communicative artefact that is unitarily and organically conceived. It is characterised by content, including a lexical dimension, and a plurality of codes and expressive modalities (verbal, visual, sonorous, and tactile, etc.).

To consider the magazine as a text (in its material or immaterial form) would mean to conceive it not only as a physical support but also as an “abstract model of investigation” (Marrone, 2010, p.VI), a sort of “metacognitive apparatus” (Dallari, 2012, p.19).

1
To know more read Nye, D. E. (1994). *American Technological Sublime*. MIT Press.

Each element of the magazine-text has “its grammar, and each will determine specific effects of meaning in their relationship with the other planes of discourse” (Lorusso, 2004, p. VII).

Multiple codes can express content: the *iconic code* that refers to the use of images (iconic illustrations, photos, representations, or symbols, etc.) to describe or represent actions, situations, and contexts; the *verbal code* and its relationship with the iconic code; the *graphic code*, or the compositional elements of pages (format, layout, and orientation); the *typographic code* that refers to the choice of paper, form, and application of other materials on the magazine's pages including the binding, care, and quality of the printing process; the *reading method code* that is connected to the content fruition procedures (sequential or punctual); and finally the *relationship code* that is related to the expedients and methods for building a dialogue with readers. The simultaneous coexistence and mutual interdependence of these multiple codes enable us to recognise the transformative potentialities of the magazines both in the analogue and digital environments (Caratti & Baule, 2021).

The concept of intertextuality expresses, in detail, the relationship between magazine-text and other media. Each magazine is located within a series of exchanges and interactions with other texts: a single text contains, refers to, was born from, and produces other texts. As Roland Barthes asserts, a text is not understood as a closed cultural product but as a progress production that is associated with other texts, other codes, and society (Barthes, 1991).

Translation Modalities

These premises allow us to delineate some possible lines of design intervention that are made more explicit by a series of translation processes that consent to the transfer of content from a starting system (*prototext*) to an arrival system (*metatext*).

Here, we refer to the concept of “*total translation*” that was originally expressed by Torop in 1995 and successively amplified and codified by Osimo (2020) and Caratti and Baule (2021):

- A *Mental translation*: the conceptualisation process of the editorial product. The concept itself is a mental representation that shapes, processes, preserves, and transfers knowledge. It has specific cultural characteristics and can be of various types and differing complexities; its borders are indefinite and mobile.
- B *Metatextual translation*: according to Torop, it consists of translating a text in the form of any meta-communicative tool (Torop, 2010). Here, we refer to all texts that are external to the main text; they accompany the text by highlighting aspects of it to facilitate its decoding. This is typical when we use notational tools (the flatplan, for example) for content planning, or when we design the cover of a magazine or teaser as a promotional video.
- C *Intralinguistic translation*: the processes of reformulation of the content that we can find, for instance, in the magazine's index.

- D *Interlinguistic translation*: the traditional interpretation of translation with regard to content transfer in other languages.
- E *Intersemiotic translation*: the translation that is expressed as content transfer between different semiotic systems such as the process of de-verbalisation, which is from the verbal to the visual, or, vice versa from visual to verbal (according to the ekphrasis), from mental to visual during the writing process and typographic transcription, or from verbal to sound.
- F *Intertextual, intermedial, transmedia, crossmedia translation*: the translation as an expansion of content within other texts or media; in other words, content is the result of a process of reinterpretation of previous content, content is amplified or cited in new texts, or content migrates between/among different media.
- G *Cultural translation*: translation as cultural mediation and transfer; when a magazine verbally and/or visually transfers or synthesises the distinctive features of culture (its characteristics, values, signs, or memories). The translation is always a situated act (Palumbo, 2010).
- H *Automatic translation*: with the advent of information technology, many translation processes are automated based on a series of translation memories, databases, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and web pages. In this case, a collective and interdisciplinary work dimension prevails, and the attention shifts from the author of starting text to the user of final text (Palumbo, 2009).
- I *Fact-checking*: with the proliferation of fake news, deep fakes, conspiracy theories and other types of manipulation of content, the translation may, on occasion, state facts or pronouncements in such ways as to signify either reservation, doubt, or downright refusal.

Applying the translation paradigm to the context of magazine production would imply taking into consideration the magazines' condition of "in-betweenness" (Abrahamson, 2018, p.535) since they are always concerned with something else: starting content, differences in terms of codes, verification of the sources, arrival content and its accessibility, people involved in the process of writing and translation, users of the translations (readers), situations in which they are produced, cultural or geographical contexts of reference, and devices that translate information into the verbal the visual or auditory.

Toward the Future of Magazines

In an attempt to capture the present situation and to prefigure some possible evolutions of magazine research and design, we describe four different paths that characterise contemporary journalism (an activity that finalises the selection, translation, and divulging of the content in all its forms).

These four directions, represented by independent/alternative journalism, transmedia storytelling, data journalism, and automated journalism are the result of a first phenomenological mapping

which remains open to further taxonomies and insights. Translation paradigm constitutes the fil rouge of this work: the categories we have identified are the result of multiple translation practices, but they can be representative of a specific translation typology that is predominant.

2
For further details read
Berardi, B. & Pignatti, L.
(2020). *Adbusters. Ironia
e dystopia dell'attivismo
visuale*. Meltemi.

Independent/Alternative Journalism as Cultural Translation

Despite many predictions about the disappearance of magazines, in 2006, David Renard wrote: "since at least the mid-1990s, a new wave of independent, high-end magazines, fusing elements of ephemeral periodical and the perennial book, has arisen with explosive force" (Renard, 2006, p.15).

Fifteen years later, we can observe that the phenomenon is still on the rise; this is testified by the increasing number of titles that are sold daily on online platforms such as magCulture, Frab's, Stack Magazines, Lorem (not ipsum), Indiecon, Reading Room, Edicola 518, and so on.

We do not allude to the mass mainstream magazine market but to a more cultured typology of editorial artefacts that are experimental and open to innovation in content, writing style, format, layout, and iconographic or typographic apparatus.

They are represented by printed tactile publications, that are characterised by unconventional graphics and a sophisticated integration between form and content (see, for example, Migrant, <https://migrantjournal.com/>), but also by a significant number of print editions that are augmented by multimedia digital enhancements (see, for example, It's freezing in LA, <https://www.itsfreezinginla.co.uk/>) or purely digital magazines that invite the reader to disconnect from the web for a reflexive reading (see, <https://thedisconnect.co/one/>).

A further common denominator of these examples is the value of slowness, which, as Le Masurier asserts, is associable to the adoption of an alternative journalism status that seeks to avoid competitive pressures, takes time and staff resources to thoroughly investigate a more focused range of issues, and uses long-form, narrative-driven modes of storytelling (Le Masurier, 2015).

As the magazine Delayed Gratification declares, "instead of desperately trying to beat social media to breaking news stories, we focus on the values we all expect from quality journalism: accuracy, depth, context, analysis, and expert opinion" (<https://www.slow-journalism.com/slow-journalism>).

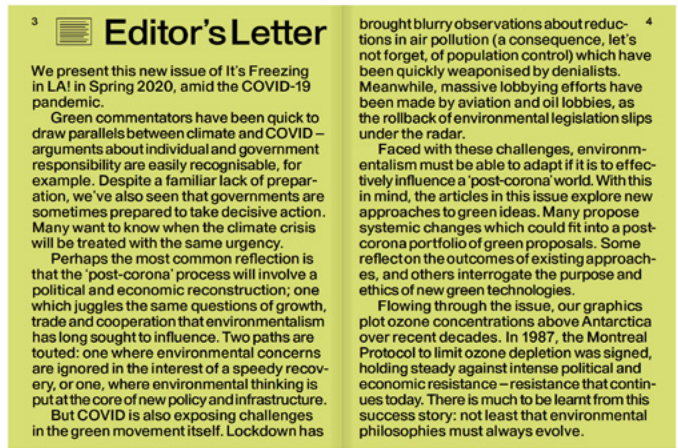
As Le Masurier writes, the quality is conceived in terms of in-depth research, explanation, context, and a well-crafted long narrative (Le Masurier, 2015).

Particularly significant is a form of 'mobilised slow journalism' that is linked to the idea of commitment (Neveu, 2018). In this sense, a notable and well-known example is represented by Adbusters (<https://www.adbusters.org/>): one of the few non-homologated magazines in the world. It is a model of culture jamming and international activism that does not receive advertising funding, corporate sponsorship, or government or private subsidies².

These examples can be representative of what we mean by cultural translation: an empirical, analytical, translational, interpretative, practical work, in which culture, in all its manifestations and languages, is systematized and transferred within unifying syntheses which contribute to the construction of collective memory.³ More in detail, journals have on the one hand an intrinsic cultural dimension relating to iconic, verbal, graphic, typographical codes, methods of reading, culturally specific narrative models; but also an extrinsic cultural dimension strictly connected to the context, to the historical period, to the cultural identity of a specific national or social group on the other.

3
The notion of collective memory was addressed by Lotman in the book Lotman, J. M. (2014). *La cultura come mente collettiva e i problemi dell'intelligenza artificiale*. Guaraldi.

4
See Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.



Transmedia Translations for Reader Engagement

According to Jenkins (2006)⁴ and the reports of Canavilhas, a story can be considered as a transmedia content if it reflects one of the following: First, the story is expanded through different media, format, and languages; Second, each of the story contents is autonomous, has a proper meaning, and can be used as an entry point into the narrative; and third, the audience participates in the story through the aggregation of elements and their sharing (Canavilhas, 2018).

In transmedia journalism, the various parts of the content are spread among different media to create a unified and coordinated content-consuming experience, where the most relevant aspect is the audience's participation. From this perspective, each media has a specific role, and a magazine (printed or only digital) is one of the involved media of the transmedia system.

As Canavilhas observes (2018), the relationship between media and content is equally fundamental: content translation can be finalised to expand and enrich the original story, to adapt the content to another medium or platform (through, for example, re-transcription processes), or to reverse the content according to another interpretation, or to act as a symmetrically counterfactual proposition.

In addition, owing to the multiplication of media and offer of content, the public is expanding in ever greater numbers, thus

Fig. 1
Cover and Editor's Letter of the magazine *It's Freezing in LA*, Issue 5 May 2020.

increasing the process of social inclusion. It becomes more aware of the information it receives within the communicative flow to which it is exposed and, based on it, it is enabled to differentiate (Casagrande, 2018).

An interesting and great transmedia documentary design project is represented by Eldorado Experience (<https://www.folch-studio.com/eldorado/>). It was born from a magazine (Eldorado) that collected the travel experience of filmmakers, writers, designers, artists, and photographers from across the world. It was printed in the form of a travel diary with three different covers. Eldorado Experience soon became “a transmedia editorial environment that celebrates the sublime aesthetic of the outdoors and seeks intimate travel”.

The complementary digital platform, Eldorado Experience (<https://eldoradoexperience.org/>), is aimed at allowing a new reading experience by combining the printed version of the magazine and multimediality: “you can choose to start reading the story you are most interested in, and it will then lead you to the next chapter or to another story, recreating in digital the natural circularity of reading”.

This is an excellent example that summarizes the assumptions of translation that must be considered in relation to multiple factors or simply something else such as the source text, differences between languages, native texts that are produced in the target language, people who translate, machines that translate, users of the translations, situations in which the translations are produced, culture of arrival, and so on (Palumbo, 2010).

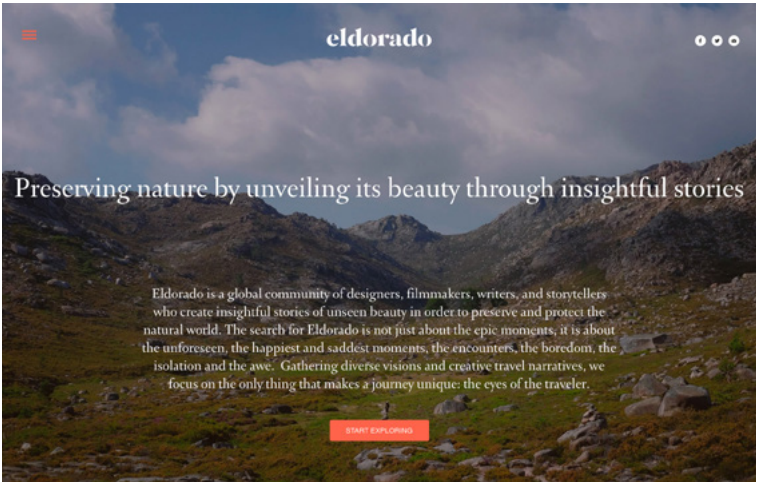


Fig. 2
Homepage of the digital platform *Eldorado Experience* by Folch Studio.

Data Journalism: An Example of Intersemiotic Translation

Intersemiotic translation is characterised by the transition from one semiotic system to another, for example, from verbal to visual, visual to verbal, visual to auditory, verbal to auditory, complex data to images, and vice versa.

This type of transfer constitutes one of the more significant aspects of data journalism in the digital environment, which involves data visualisation, statistical analysis, programming, and dissemination of converged data.

Data journalism can be finalised to different communicative finalities; it can offer insight, explain more easily, communicate more clearly than words can, report several facets in detail that can only be done in an aggregated form in the text, make stories more accessible, reveal deplorable states of affairs, and help people understand the world (Kennedy et al., 2021).

The interaction with the reader, the possibility to change the levels of visualisation (for example, zooming in or out), to have animations that change information over time, to access the information on different screens (mobile first), and to use scrollytelling are further elements that explain the success of data visualisation in journalism.

Looking at the winners of the international Sigma Awards for Data Journalism 2021, we can recognise the impact and social role of data journalism: some projects are a form of truth telling, others work on the process of selection and interpretation, and still others believe that shaping data visualisations through choices is a way to reveal a story and is precisely what journalists should do (Kennedy et al., 2021).

The single project “Kein Filter für Rechts” (<https://correctiv.org/en/top-stories/2020/10/16/no-filter-for-the-right/>) was realised in Germany by Correctiv, which is a non-profit independent newsroom for investigative journalism; it uses technology and data science to detect bias or propaganda in Instagram from the right-wing. Correctiv analysed thousands of Instagram accounts (more than 4500) and found that the Right and Far-Right were recruiting young people on the supposedly apolitical platform without any intervention on the part of Instagram.

The project produced a great impact: many accounts and contents were deleted from the platform, and good journalism informed the society to be aware of this kind of dangerous manipulation (<https://sigmaawards.org/kein-filter-fur-rechts/>). One might include in this category the rising genre of what could be called “fact-checking journalism” which often starts with verifying the source and the reliability of data supporting statements quoted from sources; this is a special case of ‘translation’ to the extent that, instead of merely ignoring the source and discarding the argument the news item or comment deliberately contradicts it.

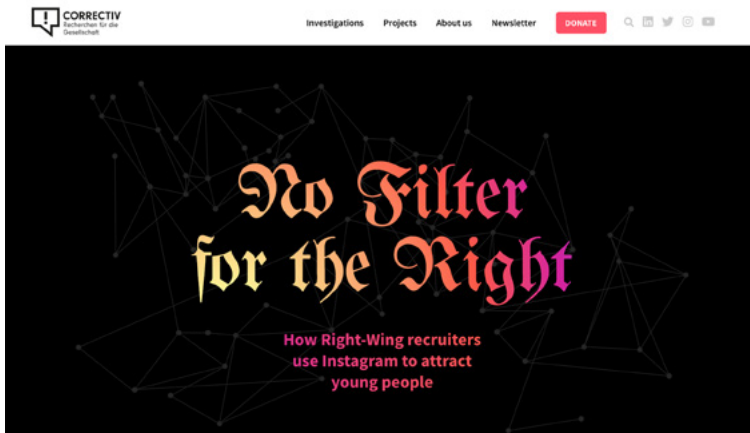


Fig. 3
Homepage of the project
Kein Filter für Rechts by
Correctiv.

Automated Journalism and Automated Translation

Digital publishing is facing a new technological revolution. As stated by Marconi (2020), the landscape is similar to that of the late 1990s when there were major shifts in the news industry that were driven by the Internet boom that forced news organizations to navigate an entirely different consumption paradigm.

With the contribution of AI, new systems of content production, new translation software, new editorial structures, new journalistic praxes, and new systems of consumption are reshaping journalism and conditioning the future of magazines.

As Marconi reported, there are numerous examples of media that deploy AI in the service of journalism: Forbes, The Washington Post, Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, and even China's Xinhua News Agency, which created the world's first AI news anchor, a digital replica that resembled a human journalist (Marconi, 2020).

The AI services automate the functions that are performed by translation in all its declensions (interlinguistic, intralinguistic, intersemiotic, intertextual, intermedial, transmedia, and crossmedia): support the development of content that suggests the most efficient verbal or visual solutions automatically; refer to a series of translation memories or data patterns that simplify the writing process or interlinguistic translation; anticipate the result of events (for example, elections) starting from the available data in real-time; increase the relationship with readers by predicting their behaviour; find the best solution in immediate newsgathering; employ algorithms to find the best media to refer to and switch between media formats (from text to video, or vice versa); rewrite content about the type of reader or the contexts of reference; improve publishing and monetisation strategies.

According to Marconi, journalists become a sort of information officers who must be perpetually responsive to new needs of the audience, develop different story formats, and explore multiple distribution points, all while keeping an eye on emerging technologies that affect how news is produced and consumed (Marconi, 2020).



Fig. 4
The *Washington Post* experimented with Heliograf, an AI technology, to report key information from the 2016 Rio Olympics.

5

For further details read Craig, G. (2019). Reclaiming Slowness in Journalism: Critique, Complexity and Difference. In M. Le Masurier (Eds.), *Slow Journalism*, pp. 23-37. Routledge.

Final Considerations

A magazine is 'the most successful media format ever to have existed' (Holmes & Nice, 2012, p. 1), and its longevity has been based on its adaptability (Le Masurier, 2015).

We are convinced that this capacity to adapt enables magazines to meet the challenges of exponential technological innovation that we witness today. Our assumption is that journalism will continue to operate at multiple speeds and be concerned with different ways to conceptualize space and time⁵ in the future.

Therefore, we will oscillate between our innate desire for a slow and reflective reading that is experienced through the printed medium and our need for instantaneity, ubiquity, co-presence, and collective participation that we find on digital platforms (in particular on smartphones and mobile technologies), that are supported by AI.

On the one hand, despite predictions of the death of print, we will continue to consume alternative printed independent publishing; on the other hand, we will assist in the evolution of technology that will facilitate the interaction with readers through multimedia, promote new practices (a collective dimension of editorial work), and automate content processing.

Magazines will continue to be conditioned by the culture and production systems in which they will operate. At the same time, there will be magazines that will move away from that cultural or production system to represent alternatives. The real big problem for the future is connected to the quality and truthfulness of information, as Marconi asserts:

AI may involve sophisticated algorithms, but the conclusions drawn by machines are not always correct. Journalists must always be questioning outcomes, validating methodologies, and ensuring explainability. [...] The insights generated through AI should be used as a compass that guides reporting, not as a clock that provides infallible information. AI is created by humans, and it can make mistakes, often a result of biases in how the AI was designed and in the data used to train it." (Marconi, 2020, pp. 2147)

In this article, we tried to summarise the different orientations in content production for the publishing industry with a focus on magazines; we have identified four different directions that are open to further transformations and experimentations.

Translation, in all its declensions, constitutes the *fil rouge* of our argumentation; it brings to our attention the centrality of the content and its interpretation, independently of the media.

This perspective is closely linked to the ethical function of journalism in its pursuit of truth, transparency, economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, democracy, inclusion, and non-stereotyping.

According to Ricoeur (2001), there can't be a perfect translation. Still, we can assume an ethical and practical mediation process that focuses on the sense of responsibility on an individual and collective level.

Elena Caratti

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