

Manuscript Title: Newswork

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By Mark Deuze, Department of Telecommunications at Indiana University and Professor of Journalism and New Media at Leiden University, and Timothy Marjoribanks, School of Social and Political Sciences at The University of Melbourne.

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The work that journalists do is changing fast. The creation of content in the global news industry takes place under increasingly precarious conditions. In terms of audiences, reporters and editors have to come to terms with those who Jay Rosen calls “The People Formerly Known As The Audience” (TPFKATA)ⁱ as co-producers of news. Regarding content, scholars such as Pablo Boczkowski (2004), Michael Schudson (2008), and others signal increasing news isomorphism and interinstitutional news coherence as the industry digitizes and converges, as the reliance on agency feeds grows, and as journalists are expected to do more with less time, fewer resources and colleagues. But perhaps most crucially for the focus of this special issue, one has to consider the changing contexts of news as work: *newswork*.

Journalists at work today are faced with what to some extent can be called “The People Formerly Known As The Employers” (TPFKATE)ⁱⁱ regarding the firms and companies they (used to) work for. Mass-layoffs, offshoring and outsourcing, and elimination of open positions are now standard managerial practice. Consider for example the 2006 labor market assessment by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ 2006), reporting the rapid rise of so-called “atypical” newswork, defined by the IFJ as casual employment, use of contract work and the rise of the use of triangular, ambiguous and disguised employment – especially among younger reporters and newcomers in journalism. Atypical media work signals labor relations that are often temporary and

always contingent, non-committal (on both sides), generally without contractual or otherwise stipulated responsibilities (or accountability) for either employee or employer beyond the (informally agreed upon) deadline of the project, story, or item at hand (Deuze, 2007). Furthermore one has to consider the worldwide trend towards outsourcing of free labor in the creative industries to consumers, which practices in the news sector are generally grouped under the banner of citizen journalism. Next to competing with audiences for a chance to tell stories, journalists also face increasing use of either news agency feeds or professionally produced newsreels by public relations and marketing firms (as for example Nick Davies reports in his 2008 book *Flat Earth News*) that replace or crowd out original reporting by staff. While several newspapers and local broadcast stations in Europe and North America in particular are facing bankruptcy or closure, the news industry is at the same time innovating its approaches, organization, and management of the production process. Newspapers experiment with online video, broadcasters build communities around their content online, Web sensibilities creep into every aspect of the journalistic endeavor, and news providers increasingly include professionals and amateurs of a wide range of backgrounds. Further to this, news organizations are also experimenting with and developing new forms of internal regulation, for example in the form of readers' representatives ombudsmen, often with a publicly presented purpose of improving standards and accountability, but also often with an unstated objective of regulating and controlling the workforce. Developments such as these raise many significant questions relating to newswork, including fundamental issues around the authority, expertise and professional standing of journalists.

Such challenges are occurring in an institutional and organisational context in which there is increasing popular and industry discussion about the very survival of various media forms and related forms of newswork, with the future of newspapers in particular being the subject of debate. From within the industry, people such as the Federal Secretary of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (the Australian union for media professionals), to give just one example, suggest that "the [technological and economic, among other] challenges journalism faces are rewriting everything we thought we knew about the news media and causing us to question the very basis on which the industry has survived and flourished for a hundred-odd years" (Warren, 2008: 3). Meanwhile, the

2009 sixth annual report on American journalism, *The State of the News Media* published by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism reports that newspaper advertising revenue has fallen by 23% in the last two years, and “nearly one out of every five journalists working for newspapers in 2001 is now gone, and 2009 may be the worst yet” (Pew 2009). Of great significance, audiences are rapidly moving to the internet. In terms of newswork itself, the Pew report identifies a number of emerging trends in 2009, including an increasing focus by audiences on individual journalists rather than organizations, news organizations on the web focusing on getting content out rather than bringing readers in, and an even greater emphasis on minute-by-minute snap reporting and judgments on the political process. Such contextual transformations, not confined to the US, suggest that journalism in various media forms is confronted by significant challenges in which newswork and the people who carry out this labor face a period of intense uncertainty, insecurity and even crisis. This is the case even for those working in the newly emerging on-line journalism domains, as they negotiate their position relative to journalists working in longer established media across a wide range of domains, including professional status and organizational position. In such contexts, boundary struggles among journalists become a critical feature of everyday work practice and process (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003; Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

All of these issues warrant significant scholarly attention to the working conditions and labor practices in journalism – some of the best examples of this kind of sorely needed academic work is presented in this special issue on newswork. The various authors tackle the precarity of contemporary media work from the perspective of the journalists themselves, and explore how their work is changing in a wide variety of contexts, including online journalism, sports journalism, video journalism, television and newspaper reporting. In the process of editing this special issue, we have been overwhelmed by the volume of expressed interest, sent abstracts, and submitted manuscripts. Although we started out with a sense of “underreporting” in journalism studies when it comes to the labor relationships and working conditions of journalists, it is now clear to us that this is a vibrant and burgeoning field of study, for which this special issue hopefully functions as a benchmarking or agenda setting instrument. In particular, we believe that the papers in this issue bring together an exciting array of

theoretically informed empirical research, from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, also revealing the great potential for studies of newswork to provide a means for collaboration among researchers across disciplinary boundaries. Although the different papers speak eloquently for themselves, the work as submitted to us enables us to make a couple of observations that seem to be key to a (critical) understanding of contemporary professional media practices in the news industry.

Overall, the authors tend to suggest that the demands of the marketplace (for news and news labor) can be or are expected to be met by reporters and editors if they perform a more flexible, adaptive, multi-skilled, mixed, or even “liquid” occupational role and professional identity. Yet all of this fluidity in one’s work as a journalist should not come at the cost of upholding journalism’s traditional set of ideological values, such as the public service ideal and a commitment to objectivity and ethical standards. The ideal newsworker should be flexible and rigid at the same time, or so it seems. The problem with this perception – often shared by journalists, scholars, and educators alike – is another conclusion we can draw from the literature, which is that the social system of journalism is almost completely naturalized by its principal components – the newsworkers themselves – including, but not limited to, the gendered structure of the workplace and its news values, the oppositional relationship of owners/ directors/ managers versus reporters/ editors/ staffers, and the generally contested nature of interdependence between journalists and their publics. On the one hand we can observe a field that is losing its traditional bearings and casting its practitioners in a new entrepreneurial ideal of being free agents, on the other hand all these professionals are not perceived to have any individual or collective power to enact some kind of meaningful change to the system. This is exemplified in research showing how journalists tend to (and like to) identify with their colleagues and other journalists, rather than with their employer(s) or the specific medium they work for. What is missing, as documented in this special issue, is a sense of shared identity, collective belonging, and common purpose that equivalently translates into some kind of collaborative agency vis-à-vis the changes and challenges media professionals undoubtedly face.

A second tension we observe in the research relates to the casting of journalists as either individuals or as a collective. To some extent, the authors in this issue suggest that the professional ideal of journalism is experienced and enacted by journalists within the distinct context of rather hermetic organizations: newsrooms and media firms. Regardless of idiosyncrasies, these organizations function in different ways to effectively socialize and structure that what journalists do. Such structuring capacities of organizations can be observed top-down (as for example through directives from directors or managerial strategy documents) as well as bottom-up (through the ways reporters and editors give meaning to their working environment); yet both tend to function in the same way. This structure of newswork does not seem to operate as a provider of common purpose, as signaled earlier. The primary function of the organization of newswork is not so much the liberation of the media professional from the constraints of technology and the market so she can do her best work, but rather to prevent the individual voices and talent of journalists to be heard, seen, or featured at all. At the same time, the various studies on the changing working conditions of journalists also suggest an ongoing casualization and individualization of labor, inspiring readings of journalism as acts of individuals, taking individual responsibility for each story or item. Although such a perspective can slip quickly into less than responsibly neo-liberal territory where structures do not exist and every person is left to fend for herself, it stands in stark contrast with other perspectives that maintain intra-institutional coherence in journalism.

We think these tensions between, first, journalism as a structure of newswork and the agency of newsworkers, and second, journalism as a self-organizing social system and as an ensemble of individualized acts, may provide crucial markers for further analyses and mapping of newswork. What, for example, would we find if we study the various ways in which journalists collectively organize outside of the professional structures of unions? How may the agency of reporters and editors function in a context of completely fragmented, decentralized, and perhaps even virtual media companies? In other words: perhaps we should start asking a new round of questions of newswork that may unlock different ways of doing journalism – not just for the citizen reporters and amateur newsmongers online, but for the media professionals most people still rely on to provide a check on power.

Within this special issue of *Journalism*, the contributors have begun an important process of engaging with many of the crucial issues confronting newswork in the early twenty-first century, combining theoretical frameworks with empirical fieldwork. Eugenia Mitchelstein and Pablo Boczkowski provide a critical engagement with theoretical debate and research on online news production, showing the emergent tension within existing literature between tradition and change. Through their analysis, they argue that there is a need to rethink dominant approaches to theorizing and analyzing media, for example, by reconceptualising understandings of relations between production and consumption in a context of transformed information architecture of online environments and changes in audience practices. Amy Weiss and Vanessa Higgins use on-line focus groups with on-line journalists in Latin America, North America and Europe to explore how globalization through the internet is transforming newswork. The authors' research suggests that analysis of on-line newswork, including exploration of the relations of newsworkers with the audience, needs to be located within a framework that recognizes the fluidity, flexibility and adaptability of online newswork and newsworkers. In her article on the relations between new technology and transformations in newswork, Ursula Plesner further problematises dominant approaches to newswork, arguing for the importance of actor network theory as a means of exploring changing practices of newswork. In particular, Plesner suggests that actor network theory provides a means of going beyond accounts of the relationship between technology and newswork which privilege individuals, technology or institutions, and instead provides a holistic account of all the human and non-human actors that contribute to the production of media texts.

Continuing the trend of these papers, the next papers in this issue engage with a range of forms of newswork, and reveal how journalists are interacting and engaging, often in very creative ways, with their organizational and institutional contexts. In their paper on female newspaper sports journalists, Marie Hardin and Erin Whiteside use in-depth interviews to examine the continuing significance of gender in everyday news organizational practice and workplace experience. They show that the gendered structures of the news organization are such that a male as norm ethos is built into the

very processes and hierarchies of the newsroom, with significant consequences for the careers of female sports journalists. Analysing television news in the US, Kathleen Ryan uses survey data to examine how freelancers view their position in the workplace and to explore their job satisfaction. Ryan develops a framework of performativity to explore the ways in which freelance workers seek to negotiate and reconstitute the terrain of their everyday work experiences. David Ryfe undertakes participant-observation research in a mid-sized urban newspaper. Examining the relations between deep structures of news gathering and the agency of reporters and editors, Ryfe analyses how the demands of a new senior manager that reporters produce more enterprise and less daily news resulted in a situation in which the reporters did exactly the opposite. Sue Wallace also uses observational methods accompanied by interviews in her research into the impacts on journalistic practice of the introduction of videojournalism into three UK regional television newsrooms. Wallace reveals the ways in which this process had a destabilizing effect on journalism practices, and became a site for contests around understandings of quality and professionalism in journalism. Steen Steensen also uses observational research techniques to analyse the work practices of feature journalists in a Norwegian on-line newspaper. Through this research, Steensen argues that the processes influencing the role and work of online feature journalism are revealing of the unpredictable and liquid nature of labour in modern society. Continuing with a European focus, examining changing journalism practices in three Eastern European countries, Monika Metykova and Lenka Cisarova argue that the specific contexts and transformation experiences of post-communist societies are significant in understanding professional practices and standards of journalists in those countries. Of particular note, the movement to a post-communist market based society has had unexpected, and not always positive, outcomes for the newswork process.

As is evident from this discussion and overview of the papers in this special issue, a diverse range of research methods are being used to provide fine grained and nuanced analyses of everyday practices, processes and contexts of contemporary newswork, while researchers are also engaging with and exploring the possibilities associated with a range of theoretical frameworks. Through this integration of theory and fieldwork, the research also points to the need to understand newswork, and processes of transformation in

newswork, as fundamentally the outcome of contested and negotiated social, political, economic and organisational processes. While many of the papers identify different and significant challenges being confronted by newswriters, which connect to the sense of crisis discussed above, the papers also provide important insights into the ways in which journalists and their colleagues seek to negotiate these challenges, for example, engaging with new technologies in creative and innovative ways. In this way, the research provides important examples of agency, albeit constrained, that journalists and their colleagues seek to mobilise in their everyday work contexts.

As we have, we hope readers of this special issue will not only find much to interest and challenge them in these papers, but also inspiration to contribute to this growing and increasingly significant area of research in newswork.

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ⁱ Source URL: http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

ⁱⁱ Source URL: <http://deuze.blogspot.com/2008/10/people-formerly-known-as-employers.html>