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"All the News That's Fit to Circulate" Reframing Journalistic Practices after Journalism

People will be absorbed in streams of information. (...) Computers will die. They're dying in their present form. They're just about as dead as distinct units. A box, a screen, a keyboard. They are melting into the texture of everyday life.

Don DeLillo *Cosmopolis*

1 Introduction

When computers were turning from an expert gadget into a household item in the early 1990s, the technology seemed less than appealing for the leisurely user: coarse VGA graphics, hazardous radiation from monitors, and slow dial-up connections, not to speak of command-line input in MS-DOS. Desktop publishing was only gradually finding its way into publishing houses and newsrooms. The private user was lucky if he or she could get a printer to fix a minimally edited text on paper. Despite these humble beginnings, today computers and data processing units have become ubiquitous and more or less absorbed into most acts of communication. Users are no longer vexed with technical details and processing routines, but see themselves confronted with the endless iterations of potential uses of mobile information technologies. The etymological root of 'cybernetic' – a closed feedback loop of performance and its evaluation – has transitioned from a fad of artificial intelligence prophets to a commonplace mechanism of management and control in the network age.¹

¹ In his essay "Ecran Total," Jean Baudrillard reflects on the control metaphor of 'cybernetic' in relation to the perceived interactivity of machines and their users. Although his Lacanian inflection of subject and object is highly debatable, his definition of cybernetic as "phantasm of ideal performance" nicely supports the present discussion. "Cela s'appelle la cybernétique : commander à l'image, au texte, au corps, de l'intérieur en quelque sorte, de la matrice, en jouant avec le code ou les modalités génétiques. C'est d'ailleurs ce *phantasme de performance idéale* du texte ou de l'image, cette possibilité de corriger sans fin qui provoquent chez le 'créateur' ce vertige d'interactivité avec son propre objet, en même temps que le vertige anxieux de n'être pas allé jusqu'aux limites technologiques de ses possibilités. En fait, c'est la machine (virtuelle) qui vous parle, c'est elle qui vous pense" (1996; emphasis added). Cf. his essay "The Ecstasy of Communication," which further elaborates the monadic control metaphor of the computer terminal, describing communication as "a perpetual test of the subject's presence with its own objects, an uninterrupted interface" (1998: 127).

The rapid increase of computer-mediated communication (including mobile phones, tablets, terminals) and the connection of individual devices into a global network might be a surprising starting point for a discussion of the crisis of American journalism. Although technology is driving the rapidly changing patterns of journalistic selection, production, and distribution, journalism's public role is usually measured in normative terms or assumed as integral to a democratic society of checks and balances between the three branches of government and the so-called fourth estate. The current development in American journalism, however, points to a more fundamental crisis in the authority of journalistic representations of the social world. This crisis is especially pronounced in the United States, where the dependency on advertising in news publishing has traditionally been very high² and where new information technologies have often enough been adopted early. But the oft quoted rapid migration of classified advertising from the pages of newspapers to the free environment of online services exemplifies a more general transition from a form of mass public to specialized "networked publics" (Ito 2008). The mere publication of documents does no longer match the interactive possibilities of online platforms – Twitter, Facebook, blogs, wikis, and (video-)chat on Skype or ICQ – which are explicitly designed as environments for communication and interaction. Despite well-meaning calls for a reaffirmation of journalists' public role through a subsidized system of private endowments and public funding (Schudson and Downie Jr. 2009), such calls miss the problem of journalism under networked conditions because they present the problem in terms of the very institution which they seek to reform. The path of this institution can be sketched briefly.

In the nineteenth century, the beginnings of mass media were characterized by increasing commercialization of the formerly semi-private business of relaying random news items to a very limited scope of (local) readers of newspapers. The commercial model of publishing newspapers increasingly relied on advertising from businesses while lowering the barrier of access for readers through very low pricing policies. If the crisis in journalism today were only a crisis in the revenue scheme, new models for advertising should be easily at hand. Although the aggregation of user data from social networking platforms and similar data-mining of consumer behavior are pointing in the direction of more focused advertising expenditure, mass media are slow to overturn their concept of serving audiences with a "one-size-fits-all" product. The conflict between losing some of the comprehensiveness as a catch-all medium, while gaining readers and viewers with more specialized interests

² Reliance on advertising as the main source of revenue is especially high in the U.S. Whereas newspapers in Germany earn a little more than 50 per cent from advertising (in Japan only about 30 per cent), U.S. newspaper publishers rely on advertising for 87 per cent of their revenue (*Special Report* 2011: 4). For a short analysis of the crisis in the revenue scheme of journalistic enterprises in the U.S. see Tunstall 2008; Ruß-Mohl 2009: 15-32, and the excellent collection *New Media, Old News. Journalism & Democracy in the Digital Age* (Fenton 2010).

is only gradually being implemented in newsrooms.³ These business considerations, however, overshadow the more pertinent question of the role of journalistic practices for the creation and maintenance of social relations, of the altered function of news for interaction within networked publics. Going beyond the business side of news production, this essay proposes a new approach based on practices of cultural production to address the crisis of journalism beyond the terms established by the institution of modern mass media itself. A solution to this crisis needs to start with an understanding of the cultural implications for an altered practice of public communication in the "network society," acknowledging in part that journalism as it was practiced for the later half of the twentieth century is at the "end of an era" (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996) and as yet, there is no discernible institution which could take its place.⁴ In this transitory phase between a changing institution of public communication and a radically heterogeneous ecosystem of blogs, networks, and "commons-based peer-production" (Benkler 287) the crisis of journalism marks the transition from the old system of mass media communications to a more flexible, versatile and also polarized environment for the circulation of information. In this environment, users (as readers, viewers, consumers and producers) engage differently with publicly available information in a globalized network society than in the old days of consuming the same media at more or less the same time (cf. Anderson 2006: 33f.). Manuel Castells aptly characterizes this new phenomenon of individualized but networked communication as "mass self-communication" (2007: 246f.). Through wider access to information resources and the ability to (re-)publish instantly through blogs, facebook messages, tweets, and RSS feeds⁵ a large number of mainly younger news consumers emulate journalistic practices for their private communication. Whatever is "fit to circulate" finds its way into the networks of users. The transposition of practices of cultural production from the domain of professional journalism to the semi-private domain of interaction⁶ in online environments characterizes the current crisis of journalistic authority

³ Christopher Anderson argues that the communication between journalists and their audiences, their advertisers and sources, is becoming increasingly structured by algorithms of user behaviors and page views, sharing little with the past of journalistic reporting. Such "algorithmic communications practices," he argues, "do not easily map onto traditional democratic theory - which is, perhaps, a sign that they represent something genuinely new" (542).

⁴ Although common usage suggests otherwise, the internet itself is not an institution in the sense of either an organization, a company or a public body (cf. Shirky 2008: 56f.). In the context of this paper, internet will refer only to the technical network of digital communication.

⁵ "Tweets" are short messages distributed via the online platform twitter.com, using hashtags as metadata to follow ongoing discussions or individual users. RSS is the abbreviation of "Really Simple Syndication," a subscription service similar to a newsletter which alerts users about updates on websites.

⁶ See Jeff Jarvis, "The Benefits of Publicness" (2010) and "The Progression of the Public" (2011) on the gradual blurring of such distinctions as private and public in networked environments.

beyond considerations of business plans for newspapers and similar media conglomerates. Detaching the news from the paper is just the first step to acknowledge that the social function of news in daily interaction can not be captured by intricate content analyses either, a still popular method in empirical journalism studies. Strengthening instead the perspective of practices of cultural production will emphasize the historical contingency of forms of public communication within discrete settings of media and their audiences.

This essay will first consider the innovative potential of crises in general before specifically addressing the crisis of journalism from the network perspective through a comparison of the emergence of the penny papers in the 1830s with the present. The following section will develop a new model to regard practices of cultural production, i.e. journalistic practices, within the tradition of Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, and more recent scholarship in sociology and media history. This model will put forward the thesis that the widespread adoption of journalistic practices by amateurs can be regarded as an exemplary case of cultural innovation, where “media-oriented practices” (Couldry 119) are regarded as a new form of cultural production among members of the former audience. The point here is not to restate the case for “citizen journalism,” as has been argued by Dan Gillmor (2004) and others, because the practices of production within a company like CNN or *The New York Times* continue to differ tremendously from those used by individual bloggers. The argument stresses that the moment of crisis offers the chance to acknowledge the altered status of publicly available texts, messages and information among an audience that oscillates between productive and consumptive patterns of interaction (Bruns 2008; Jenkins 2008).

2 The Challenge of Crisis to *Doxa*

In his article on the “Futures of News,” Rodney Benson argues that the perception of a crisis of journalism is based on an “elitist model” of mass communications, which used to rely heavily on advertising but which is now failing in online environments (195f.). According to Benson, the established prominence of advertising has “led the press to conceive of their readers more as consumers than citizens” (ibid.) and has kept them from serving deliberative and pluralist interests of their publics. In order to acknowledge the innovative potential in this moment of crisis, “journalists will need to ... loosen their monopoly on the public sphere” (199). In a similar vein, Pierre Bourdieu characterized moments of crisis as a challenge to *doxa* – the often tacit or implicit, habitualized way of speaking and acting. In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), he argued that “when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon ... the question of the natural or conventional character (*phusei* or *nomos*) of social facts can be raised” (169). The discussion about the changing role of news media is a case in point here because the terms used to describe the phenomenon – the challenge of network media to mass media – are through and through derived from the established institu-

tion of the mass media themselves. Blogs are read as alternative journalistic outlets; twitter feeds are regarded as a faster way to access first-hand accounts of eye-witnesses. But despite a few well-connected blogs and network media outlets, e.g. the technology blog *BoingBoing* or the *Huffington Post*, most blogs do not even pretend to serve a general public like a newspaper or television channel does.⁷ In this disparity between an institutionalized form of public communication and a private practice of “mass self-communication” lies the potential to find a new vocabulary to describe cultural production in terms of practice. The current transitional period exemplifies how a contemporary experience is not adequately represented by the terms used for its description. In Bourdieu’s words, “the relationship between language and experience never appears more clearly than in crisis situations in which the everyday order (*Alltäglichkeit*) is challenged” (ibid. 170). This everyday order of news consumption, the simultaneous consumption of similar or even identical media, has clearly been challenged, overturning many of the long-standing notions about publics and their interaction. Crises thus offer a moment to rethink established notions of habitualized behavior and the schemas used to rationalize such behavior. In his fervent critique of press monopolies in *The Brass Check* (1919), Upton Sinclair underlined that crises always held a potential for innovation, the chance of a “birth” (9).⁸

In a more theoretical vein, Marc Eli Blanchard draws on crisis discourses in the Modernist writers Paul Valéry, Walter Benjamin and André Malraux to propose that crises are accompanied by ruptures in the cultural, the ideological, and historiographic realm. In a crisis situation, the absence of dialogue between different cultures, among or between national communities, leads to confrontation. On the ideological plane, “blocs,” or groups of actors, fail to find a “common code” to communicate their diverging interests. Finally, a given crisis questions the chronology of historiography. Historiography becomes problematic, as it cannot account for the moment of crisis by rationalizing this crisis within the terms of its established discourse (1983: 49f.).

These dimensions can also be found in the current crisis in journalism. On the cultural and ideological side, promoters of free content and collaboration in network media (Surowiecki 2005; Shirky 2008, 2010) encounter fierce opposition from copyrights holders and defenders of professional status in the old media (cf. Meyer 2004). Both spheres seem to be speaking in different tongues and with different objectives. Advocates of open source software refuse to accept the “lock-in” of either proprietary software (Lanier 2010) or the

⁷ The *State of the Blogosphere Report 2010*, compiled by the blog aggregator Technorati, finds that almost 70 per cent of all English-language blogs run by “hobbyists” have less than 5,000 page views *per month* (Technorati.com 2010). The disparity to corporate media outlets becomes apparent when compared to e.g. CNN.com with 100 million page views *per day* or the video portal Youtube with 2 billion page views *per day* (Companies’ websites: CNN.com, youtube.com).

⁸ “The social body to which we belong is at this moment passing through one of the greatest crises of its history, a colossal process which may best be likened to a birth” (Sinclair 1919: 9).

preprogrammed communications routines in “walled gardens” such as on-line social networks (Dekker and Wolfersberger 2009). Historiographically, the adoption of journalistic practices by amateurs on a gratuitous basis questions the traditional rationale of journalism history that the advancement of democracy was closely tied to the development of a free but commercially organized press (cf. Payne 1925). Crises situations realign resources and cultural schemas along emergent calls for adaptation to a changing social and technological environment. Especially the development of new information media has repeatedly challenged established habits of communication and their practical implementation. The deliberative potential of new media is a recurrent trope, especially in American discourse, as it rejuvenates a dream of community (cf. Rheingold 1993). James Curran highlights that in the 1980s and ‘90s, the emerging potential of satellite transmissions and computer hardware gave rise to a number of futurologist visions on how these new media might contribute to changing society for the better. “The recurring tenets of this tradition of US futurology – that new media would create wealth, rejuvenate local communities, and empower the citizens – connected to central themes in the American Dream” (2010: 29).⁹

New media were and are still central to the identity of the United States: from the Stamp Act controversy in 1765 against the taxation of printing paper to the indirect subsidy of newspaper exchanges between publishers in the Early Republic and the propagation of radio, television and eventually the internet in the twentieth century. Westward expansion in the nineteenth century depended on effective means of communication for settlers to stay in touch with the administrative center as much as with those left behind.¹⁰ As Paul Starr writes in *The Creation of the Media*, the early promotion of a postal network made exchanges of papers easier and established the “first national news network” after 1792. The indirect subsidy of newspaper circulation through extremely low postal rates, made cheap print a “public policy in America” (2004: 125). The ubiquity of local newspapers in the U.S. astounded Alexis de Tocqueville in 1836, prompting him to claim that there is “scarcely a hamlet which has not its own newspaper” (2002: 214). But Tocqueville also

⁹ See also James Carey’s essays “Changing Communications Technology and the Nature of the Audience” (1980) and “The Internet and the End of the National Communication System” (1998).

¹⁰ In *A Fictive People. Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*, Ronald Zboray argues that sending newspapers to those left in home communities served several functions: local papers from the destination of migrants, proved that a family member had made it to a desired spot and allowed a glimpse at the local circumstances there (1993: 110-15). Reading the same articles, novels or magazines “could be one of the few experiences correspondents shared” when they were physically far apart. Especially newspapers were a cheap and welcome item to send to family members and friends (119). Although the world of print connected distant individuals, the introduction of news from other places also put the pastoral ideal of home in conflict with the changing times. Driven by increasing internal migration in the 1830s and ‘40s the world of print became a “surrogate for community on a national scale” (121).

pointed out that papers depended on the support of their regular readers: "a newspaper can only subsist on the condition of publishing sentiments or principles common to a larger number of men" (ibid. 636).

Writing in a time of the beginning industrialization of the journalistic enterprise, Tocqueville witnessed a shift in journalistic practices, which initiated the institutionalization of "the press" as a distinct public agent, who became slowly independent of government printing contracts or other direct subsidies from political parties. Whereas newspaper publishers had to rely on correspondence from either readers or other publishers to fill their columns, the active solicitation of news became common among the penny papers of the 1830s in the urban centers of the East Coast. Benjamin Day, printer of the first successful penny paper *The Sun* in 1833 in New York, and his competitors, made it a mission to condition and habitualize their audiences to reading a daily paper. The penny editors created demand by "emphasizing news both as something that the reader had to have *today* and with the understanding that such news was perishable, needing to be replaced *tomorrow*" (Brazeal 411). The first issue of *The Sun* appeared on September 3, 1833 and it bore the oft-quoted, programmatic paragraph:

The object of this paper is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of every one, ALL THE NEWS OF THE DAY, and at the same time afford an advantageous medium for advertising. (original typography)

All the central elements of a modern, commercial daily paper, seem to be mentioned here: a general public, an affordable price, and especially the comprehensiveness of the news medium. To attract advertising customers, Day copied advertising from mercantile papers like the *Courier & Enquirer* and published them at no cost to advertisers, e.g. ferry announcements, to lend an air of prosperity to his new venture.¹¹ The penny press effectively ended the problem of unpaid subscriptions, which had put publishers of papers in dire straits in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, by charging for papers directly upon purchase. The new business model changed the nature of the newspaper and its daily production and ended the curious situation, where "readers pretended to be subscribers, and publishers pretended they had paying customers" (Leonard 44). In 1823, the weekly *Village Register* from Dedham, Massachusetts, termed the problem of "pecuniary depletion" of printers "the grand malady" of newspaper publishing of the time. The paper ridiculed subscribers who believed that "printers live upon old newspapers, and fatten upon type metal, and that a little pure cash will jeopardize their constitutions."¹² But despite the frequent complaints about defaulting subscribers, the cash problem continued well into the 1830s. A printer-publisher

¹¹ The obituary for Benjamin Day details the printing process of the first paper, where Day employed what was a common practice among publishers of newspapers at the time and is ironically again so today – copy and paste: "Mr. Day procured a copy of the *Courier and Enquirer*, scissored out the news of the morning, and put it in type himself" (n.a. 1889).

¹² *Village Register and Norfolk County Advertiser*, 7 Mar. 1823: 1.

from New York is quoted in 1833 in the *Daily National Intelligencer*: “[M]en who think printers can live on air, deserve themselves to live on skunk cabbage tea, flavored with assafoetida [strong variant of fennel, *Devils Feet*].”¹³ The penny papers overturned the established notion that a daily newspaper served only the needs of an elite readership of politicians, bankers and merchants through turning their eye on the rapidly changing, and at times horrifyingly chaotic, urban sphere. They supplied daily updates on stories, especially in the form of human interest and murder mysteries, while continuing to publish verbatim reprints from other publications. Within the admittedly small segment of daily papers in the 1830s,¹⁴ the penny press laid the foundations of American newspaper businesses today, instating journalism as “the sense-making practice of modernity ... a product and promoter of modern life” (Hartley 33). But this institutionalization of journalism also entailed that the journalistic enterprise came to depend on a large pool of material, organizational and economic resources in order to invest in new printing technologies and further increase circulation. While James Gordon Bennett famously started his penny *The Herald* in 1835 with savings of not more than \$500 (Carlson 1942), a few years later, the price of entry into the news business had risen to astronomical heights. Along with economic concerns, the form of news also became increasingly formalized.¹⁵ Later in the century, narrative conventions of news reports such as inverted-pyramid reporting were by and large motivated by unstable telegraph connections and limited bandwidth, reporting first the core message and adding detail in following paragraphs (Stephens 253); the narrative form itself became “political” in placing topical information in a graphic hierarchy (Schudson 1995). The challenge of the penny papers to the established mercantile dailies, among others, holds a lesson for the present discussion. While the pennies were created out of a crisis in the printing business, they also affected the entire system of correspondences and (unattributed) reprints, seeking instead news from their environs and propagating the daily consumption of such news on their pages. The pennies challenged the *doxa* of the age that news was an infrequent, mostly specialized and generally boring read.

¹³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 30 Apr. 1833: 3.

¹⁴ Cf. Nerone (1987) for a historical contextualization of the penny press and his critique of its “mythology” in American journalism history.

¹⁵ Contrasting older narrative forms like the epic or the novel, with news accounts typically found in newspapers and journals, Walter Benjamin staked out “prompt verifiability” as a characteristic feature of information. Against the accumulated authority of a tradition of texts, information or news had to be “understandable in itself” without prior knowledge (89).

3 Against Commodification: Journalistic Practices after Journalism

From today's perspective, this move towards an industrial production of news can be seen as the commodification of communication, transforming the informational tie between readers and printers of newspapers from a semi-private exchange into a market transaction. The current proliferation of instant communication with peers and direct contact to producers and communicators through emails, blogs and news feeds appears as a partial reversal of this commodification process. The possibility of interacting with producers of content differentiates users of online news technologies from the classical audience of mass media. From this point of view, the crisis of the institutionalized news journalism is driven by a different conception of "news" altogether. Internet pioneer Clay Shirky has characterized this development as a shift "from news as an institutional prerogative to news as part of a communications ecosystem." Users of network technology and on-line publishing tools employ the same technological resources, although on a smaller scale, as established media and are for the first time in the history of modern media competing within the same network. "The individual weblogs are not merely alternative sites of publishing; they are alternatives to publishing itself," understood as a revolt against the elitism of a professional class of publishers (2008: 66).¹⁶ The one-on-one connectivity of the Internet makes a mediator like journalists virtually obsolete. Journalistic practices in this 'communications ecosystem' refer to the more or less regular selection and presentation of news to readers or viewers who need not be personally known to the author of the message or to each other. In his *History of News*, Mitchell Stephens proposes a similar general definition of news as a "new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public" (9). The crucial difference, however, between professional journalists and journalistic practices employed by amateurs is that these forms of public communication are not necessarily an alternative form *in* journalism, even if blogs get included in major news sites, but *to* journalism as an institutionalized form of public communication.

In his book *Cultural Chaos*, Brian McNair tries to differentiate weblogs from mass media by three main points: subjectivity, interactivity, and connectivity. Weblog authors are avowedly personal in their approach to information, they link across a vast spectrum of actors and relate content beyond the boundaries of an editorial policy. Within this chaotic environment, only some actors are able to achieve mass appeal and become more reliant on trustworthy authors and, eventually, also on advertising (121-34). Scale and reach continue to matter in network environments and it would be misrep-

¹⁶ Journalism researcher Marc Deuze looks at weblogs from the changing occupational profiles of journalists themselves and finds that converging technologies in online media are the basis of "a discernibly different media ecology ... which to some extent offers each and every individual the hardware, software, skill and post-materialist will to self-publish" (2009: 93).

resenting the point to assume that small news outlets of specialized interests are only embryonic forms of future conglomerates, as seems to be the rationale behind Eric Klinenberg's confusion of two different spheres of news production. He argues: "While bloggers have enriched the cultural content of the Web, there is little reason to believe they will provide an adequate alternative to mainstream news" (2005: 11). Against this confusion, it can be argued that the network itself, on the basis of its commercial and technical infrastructure, is governed by "power-law distributions" of links and traffic. Few websites get most of the traffic. The network is far from being an egalitarian space, where every communicator has an equal chance to be read and noticed. In his book *Linked*, Albert-László Barabási referred to companies like Google, Amazon or Yahoo, as 'hubs' because they are the most linked-to sites and hence get far more traffic than an individual blogger. "The hubs," Barabási argued, "are the strongest argument against the utopian vision of an egalitarian cyberspace" (2003: 58). Instead of contrasting alternative news forms and practices with their established forms, journalistic practices in amateur contexts should be regarded as a form of productive interaction among members of the former audience,¹⁷ not in terms of generic qualities of news reports or practices of their production themselves. Although blogs continue to attract attention as an alternative platform in the process of democratic opinion formation, the majority of blogs do not step in to correct the shortcomings of classical mass media (cf. Barlow 2007), but are dedicated to the smaller things in daily life.

The blog form, as an easily updated, personalized website does not lend itself only to political writing or activism. Providers like wordpress.com or blogger.com offer their service on a non-exclusive basis, designing tools and protocols, which are understandable to laypersons. From cooking recipes to self help advice, vacation reports and leisure activities, the blog seems like a welcome way to communicate publicly about more or less private things. But passing this threshold of publication requires the ability to present thoughts in a structured way, pay attention to stylistic concerns of readability and after all, addressing an unknown audience in an approachable style. Even if the theme is "adventures of housewives with their kids," a thriving new genre in recent years, such private reminiscences need a focus that is at least potentially inclusive of readers unfamiliar with the subject or the author. In his analysis of blogging practices, Jan Schmidt argues that blogging can be seen as "semi-journalistic practice," where "rules, relations and code" function as structured and structuring elements in communication among a given community of bloggers (2007: n.p.).

These dimensions are nicely illustrated by this example of a personal blog which is typical for millions of similar sites. Written by "a 22 year old female from the great State of Colorado," the author publishes a personal review of Amazon's reading device for ebooks, the Kindle. The article implements the

¹⁷ See Jay Rosen "The people formerly known as the audience" (2006) and "What I think I know about journalism" (2011).

rule of topicality by choosing an issue of contemporary public interest, similar to technology reviews in magazines and newspapers. The article expresses a personal yet balanced viewpoint, arguing the benefits and downsides of ebook readers. To this day, the entry has attracted more than 151 comments from other readers, also because it was featured on the main site of the provider of the blogging software. What starts out as the private page of an individual and a private musing on an issue of contemporary interest, ends up as a contribution to a wider public discussion. This development depends in large part on the journalistic quality of the entry itself, its avoidance of outrageous statements, its argumentative and informative tone, and, above all, the choice of its subject. The comments' section is not only an addendum to the article but reflects an interactive conversation between the author and her readers, the relations of producers and readers, who are in turn producers of online content themselves. Interspersed with additional links to similar websites and discussions, the comments' section links a single expression to the wider network and is as much part of the actual article.¹⁸ This short example is especially worthwhile to consider as a typical blog entry, because it underlines the embeddedness of individual utterances in a network of social interactions.

While opening a new channel for communication, blog authors, however, tend to follow a rather small segment of publications, which is not surprising in face of the sheer number of blogs available. Eric Gilbert et al. have found that blog commentators are more likely to write comments on posts when they agree with a particular position. This behavior underlines a monadic tendency in online behavior which is associated with specialization (2009). Interestingly, the output of mass media companies plays an important role in networked communication. In a recent study of German-language messages (tweets) in the short message service twitter.com, Axel Maireder found that more than 70 percent of all tweets linked back to content from classical mass media outlets (newsrooms, editorial content) or from sites of organizations or companies directly (2011: 12). Half of all tweets linked to any kind of news, serving either soft consumer or hobby interests, hard political news or special interests (13). Tweets furthermore showed a great level of self-referentiality by equating the content of a tweet with its author (about 30 percent) using this communication platform as a way of self-promotion (16).

In view of the ubiquity of electronic communications media in everyday contexts, Mark Deuze argues that communications media are "everywhere, and therefore nowhere." The ability to partake in various interactions through different channels creates a "personal information space," which admittedly loses the comprehensiveness of a glance through a newspaper, yet offers a chance to engage more actively in ongoing discussions and to follow specialized interests on a regular basis. Deuze continues that media

¹⁸ "To Kindle or not to Kindle." <http://thestarsandthemoonandthedeepblueseas.wordpress.com/2010/05/26/to-kindle-or-not-to-kindle/#> May 26, 2010 (accessed July 27, 2011).

and everyday life have become so deeply entangled today that a “life lived *in*, rather than *with*, media” represents the “ontological benchmark for a 21st-century media studies” (2011: 139, 137). The implication of such a perspective, however, is that the constant involvement in various forms of private, semi-private and public communication demands a more accrued awareness of the social uses of information in different contexts. If information becomes equivalent or homologous within the structure of a web page or in a channel of communication, this accentuates only more the dependency on context in order to control and manage information for individual users. As much as free information is a liberation of content, the fluidity and non-hierarchical structure of hypertext is only beginning to show its cultural implications.

“Hypertext presents a radically divergent technology,” wrote Robert Coover in a short piece for the *New York Times Review of Books* (1992). They are “interactive and polyvocal, favoring a plurality of discourses over definitive utterance and freeing the reader from domination by the author.” The literary principle of hypertextual writing and reading serves, in the words of Marie-Laure Ryan, as “a construction kit: it throws lexia at its readers, one at a time, and tells them: make a story with this” (589). While these early adoptions of the hypertext genre remain indebted to reader-response theory formulated by Wolfgang Iser and others,¹⁹ the actual application of a programmed hypertext provokes quite literally that blog writers create stories on their websites, which rework and reinterpret the lexia ‘thrown’ at them by the more prominent public communicators like television stations and newspapers. Some writers may achieve the status of commentators or pundits in commercial news channels. But such prominence is often tied to an integrated media campaign of video appearances, books, interviews and the like. Few writers make it over the threshold of mass attention, preferring rather to keep communication within a smaller circle of devoted followers.

What is perceivable as a communicative practice today, “mass self-communication,” does not easily fit into traditional paradigms of media effects or the constitution of political publics. In order to underline the usefulness of a practice approach for an analysis of cultural innovation and production, the current debate about journalistic practices after journalism shall be presented within a more theoretical framework. The writings of Raymond Williams and Pierre Bourdieu show a preoccupation with practice(s) that may prove fertile to analyzing the present problem outside of the entrenched terms of journalism research.

4 Cultural Studies and Practice(s) of Cultural Production

The mass media play an important role throughout Raymond Williams’ work – from his seminal “Conclusion” in *Culture and Society* (1958) to the *Long Revolution* (1961), *Communications* (1971) and his study *Television: Technology*

¹⁹ For a comprehensive overview of hypertext as a cultural condition of the network age and its implications for critical theory, see Landow 2006.

and *Cultural Form* (1975). One of his main concerns is that television and print media continue to work in a mode of "transmission" which assumes that their audience cannot easily answer back to the producers of cultural artifacts. But since the mass media in the twentieth century operate as complex institutions, they require large amounts of capital to be run, which can only be raised by addressing the largest possible audience, that is, a mass market of customers for advertising.²⁰ For Williams, the partial and formulaic representation in the mass media excludes the dimensions of "reception and response" and cannot reflect the "whole experience" of life. Without "reception and response," communication is necessarily incomplete. By contrast, a "real theory of communication," he concludes, "is a theory of community" (1963: 301). Although this may sound retrograde, Williams does not imply a return to premodern, communal ways of social order. It is rather an attempt to take the democratic project seriously and find a way to share experiences across the wide spectrum of the population through a change in mass media representations themselves.²¹ Communication, in Williams' understanding, is separate from *communications*, defining the latter as "the institutions and forms in which ideas, information, and attitudes are transmitted and received, ... the process of transmission and reception" (Williams 1971: 17). The dimension of response, by contrast, is absent in mass communications. Communication in a wider sense also entails a dimension of "describing, learning, persuading, and exchanging experiences" (18). Williams regards mass communications as the commercial exploitation of a basic human trait. The only "practical use of communication is the sharing of real experience" and it seems like a "perversion" to use this fundamental need as a means to sell (32). Although the mass media have gradually brought more people in contact with cultural material, "ownership and control of the means of communication have narrowed" (33) within the same development.

In *The Long Revolution* (1961) the cultural revolution of modernity is characterized by the spread of literacy, education, and communications. In the course of the cultural revolution, the "extension of communications" is affecting the 'whole way of life' and becomes part of "our most significant living experience," Williams writes. Taken together, democracy, industry and especially extended communications "are all means rather than ends" in the process of modernity (1961: xi-xiii). Communication, as already introduced in *Culture and Society*, is further elevated to a central position in the creation and development of culture. In his discussion of the "The Creative Mind" Williams defines communication "in terms of a general human creativity" which is not restricted to specialist discourses in the media or the art world.

²⁰ Concerning the structural dependence of modern media on advertising and its effects on content, see also Williams 1979.

²¹ In both his study of television and *Communications*, Williams devotes ample space to in-depth statistical and qualitative analyses of the content of TV programming and newspaper articles. Along with his advice on policy and regulation, Williams argues for a change of media representations within the mass media themselves and does not opt for propagating alternative media outlets (Williams 1975; 1971).

The artist here serves as a role model for the “organization of experiences” (1961: 31), as he is probing into new ways to represent experience and offers these representations to society as a way to perceive of itself in changing historical circumstances. In this sense, Williams can define communication as “the process of making unique experiences into common experiences” (38). Institutionalized art discourse in the form of museums, galleries and academic faculties, however, “excludes communication, as a social fact” (29). A means of communication, in the above mentioned sense,

organizes and continues to express a common meaning by which its people live. The discovery of a means of communication is the discovery of a common meaning, and the artist’s function, in many societies, is to be skilled in the means by which this meaning can continue to be experienced and activated (31).

In summary, “the ‘creative’ act, of any artist, is ... the process of making a meaning active, by communicating an organized experience to others” (32). For Williams, institutionalizing art as a privileged form of cultural expression is the reason for the dissociation of artistic production from the realm of “ordinary life.”

The abstraction of art has been its promotion or relegation to an area of special experience ... , which art *in practice* has never confined itself to, ranging in fact from the most ordinary daily activities to exceptional crises and intensities... (39; emphasis added.).

The opposition of art and ordinary life, or the “dismissal of art as unpractical” (37), is hence a false one: creative, non-productive, non-utilitarian work can be found in popular culture, hobby activities and everyday life. Williams states, “there are, essentially, no ‘ordinary’ activities, if by ‘ordinary’ we mean the absence of creative interpretation and effort” (37).²² What makes the artist, like a writer or painter, a focal point for Williams’ exploration of the dynamics of culture, is that the artist is in a privileged position to access and “activate” cultural memory and to reassemble it into new forms. The artist’s activity can count as a model of a cultural producer in general. Institutionalization, of art or journalism, may be part of the cultural development, but Williams argues that institutions rely on a “selective tradition” by appropriating and incorporating “actively residual” elements of history to legitimize their power in society and become dominant (Williams 1977: 122-23). Such a ‘selective tradition’ is necessarily reductive and partial, as it seeks to underpin claims to legitimacy and power. In order to grasp analytically the development of institutions, to account for a dynamic concept of culture as process, Williams proposes to distinguish between dominant, residual and emergent cultural elements which are simultaneously present in society.

²² In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams points out that creativity is required in general as well as specialized activities: from “the relatively simple and direct practice of everyday communication” to the classic fields of “creative practice” in the arts, where creativity relies on the “activation of a know model” of characters, settings and plots (1977: 206-11).

Whereas institutions, such as universities, museums, or media companies represent a dominant (or hegemonic) cultural formation, residual elements of culture are something which "has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process ... as an effective element of the present" (1977: 122). The residual is perceivable as detached from the present but may have an "alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture." The emergent is to be distinguished from the residual in its *radically* oppositional, and not merely alternative, character in relation to the dominant order. The emergent produces "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships." To grasp the vitality of culture, Williams points out that "*no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice*" (122; 125).²³ In a general sense then, Williams extols practice, as found in the residual and emergent, as a site of opposition to the dominant order. On account of his inclusive concept of culture, residual and emergent elements stand in a challenging position, contributing to more variety in the sphere of cultural expressions.

The institutional history of journalism is a case in point here, being mostly presented in the form of progress or democratizing narrative. It thus excludes those practices that run counter to the perceived trend. Popular culture is another example of a residual or emergent cultural form which can be defined in terms of its "*difference from common culture.*" In popular culture, the "legitimation of cultural practice is a result of struggle and not merely growth" (Kruger 61).

Practice in Williams' writings on culture is implicit in the sense of being assumed as the antidote to theory. At the same time, the level of practices draws attention to culture as a process, where dominant elements become subject to challenge and change. Communication understood as "making a meaning active" draws on the insight that residual and emergent elements may threaten a dominant order, once they are able to popularize this activation. For Williams, it is the realm of practice that is at the same time host of residual and emergent elements.

Andrew Milner emphasizes that Williams shares a number of concerns with Pierre Bourdieu here, especially in his "attempt to theorize human sociality in terms of the strategic action of individuals within a constraining but nonetheless not determining context of values." But where Williams stresses the experience of living in a particular era, the "structure of feeling" of an epoch, as the basis of cultural analysis, Bourdieu starts out from psychology and sociology to develop his concept of habitus as a "durable disposition" of

²³ The opposition of residual and emergent cultural elements is an attempt to conceive of the Marxist dichotomy between base and superstructure in more dynamic and less deterministic terms: "By 'residual' I mean that some experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and *practised* on the basis of the residue - cultural as well as social - of some previous social formation" (1973: 10; emphasis added). See also (Hall, 1996) on practices in experiences and in culture: "In experience, all the different practices *intersect*; within 'culture' the different practices *interact*" (38; emphasis added).

individualized yet socially embedded actors (Milner 66-67). Bourdieu and Williams emphasize that the perspective of social actors has to be included in accounts of cultural development and are critical of the structuralist abstraction of treating language as a system. For Williams, an abstraction from the social character of language into a system is a form of “alienation,” since language “is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared” (Williams 1977: 166). In a review of Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Williams points out that the logic of practice sees structures and agents in a reflexive relation to each other. To account for this reflexive relation, *habitus* is the key term. In Williams’ words, the *habitus* is

by definition not an individual phenomenon. That is to say it is internalized and operationalized by individuals but not to regulate solitary acts but precisely interaction ... [Habitus is] a logic derived from a common set of material conditions of existence to *regulate the practice of a set of individuals* in common response to those conditions (Garnham and Williams 1980: 213; emphasis added).

Although *habitus* describes dispositions of individuals, it is a socialized and ‘inculcated’ disposition which is generative of a multitude of practices and learned through repetition and regular interaction with others. Structure and actor are mutually sustained in practices. This logic of practice creates the *habitus* as a “cultivated disposition” (Bourdieu 1977: 15) that in turn can serve as a “generative scheme” for practices.²⁴ These schemes “enabl[e] agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations, without those schemes ever being constituted as explicit principles” (16). Practices are *structured and structuring* modes of action, which are informed by the *habitus* of agents. In Bourdieu, culture then describes a “repertoire of actions”, which encompasses “the everyday symbolic dimension of social life and acting” (Ebrecht and Hillebrandt 2002: 8f.). Culture in this sense *practically* enables agents to act, to create meaning and sustain sociality.²⁵ The contribution of Bourdieu is that the logic of practice can be neither inferred only from individual accounts of agents nor from the social structures in which they act. The reflexivity of practices consists in their capacity to reproduce what enabled them.

Building on Bourdieu’s “*habitus*” and Anthony Giddens’ “duality of structure,” William Sewell criticises that Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* nonetheless “retains [an] agent-proof quality,” succumbing to an equally “objectified and overtotalized conception of society” where social structure accounts above

²⁴ For Bourdieu, practices are “produced by the *habitus*”, and function as a “*strategy-generating principle* enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (1977: 72; emphasis added).

²⁵ This goes beyond Clifford Geertz’ “semiotic” concept of culture, where the analysis concentrates on “webs of significance” between human agents, structures, practices and artifacts (Geertz 1973: 5). As an “assemblage of texts,” cultural forms are conceived as “imaginative works built out of social materials” (1972: 26-27).

all for stability – not change (Sewell Jr. 1992: 15). Sewell's solution is a concept of structure that can recognize the agency of actors while at the same time accounting for change. Similar to Giddens, Sewell argues:

Structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures. In this view of things, human agency and structure, far from being *opposed*, in fact, *presuppose* each other (4).

Social actors are "capable of applying a wide range of different and even incompatible schemas and have access to heterogeneous arrays of resources," Sewell continues. Cultural schemas are generalizable and transposable to new contexts and need not be limited to the context in which they evolved. Agency under these conditions can then be conceived "as entailing the capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts" (18). The conception of structures as both "empowering and constraining" (19) emphasizes that "agency arises from the actor's knowledge of schemas, which means the ability to apply them to new contexts" (20). While agency characterizes social actors in general, varying degrees of access to cultural schemas explain why "structures empower agents differentially" (22).

If practices are understood as routines of acting, which sustain and are enabled by existing structures, such a conceptualization can ground an analysis of journalistic practices outside normative discussion about journalism's public role. This brief outline of a specific theoretical understanding of practices highlights that in the present crisis of journalism, a transposition of schemas from the professional realm of journalism to the private realm of interaction has taken place. This transposition has had the effect that classical news outlets are no longer valued in the sense of providing information to a public, but are now valued for their use in ongoing interactions with other members of networked publics. The possibility to link across a network of descriptions of "experiences" in their most general sense, renews Williams' inclusive concept of culture, wherein the 'activation of what is already shared' can be performed not only by professionals like artists or journalists, but by many more members of a heterogeneous public. In a "search engine society" (Halavais 2009) such an activation of either residual or emergent knowledge and experience starts to become the norm of cultural expression, rather than the specialized task of experts. Yet, if professional experts do not give up their expertise so easily, they will at least need to renew their claim to dominance by opening up to the dialogical possibilities of the network age. As Viviane Serfaty argues in a recent article, blogs thrive as a "dialogical space [which] is enabled by an original use of written language," however, in a form of 'oralized writing' (Serfaty 316). Such a situation of instant communication is reminiscent of the pre-mass media age of the coffee house, as *The Economist* points out in its 2011 July report on the future of the news industry (*Special Report*). Both the early and the late phase of journalism, the 1830s and 2000s, are comparable on the level of practices of news production which lack an institutionalized structure of public communication. But whereas the Habermasian coffee-house still serves as a powerful metaphor

of bottom-up democratic movements, the mediated condition of networked communication, despite its stronger reliance on interactivity and feedback, cannot escape the constraint of space and the localized identity of political actors. In Tony Judt's words, "global communities of elective affinity" are not equal to a political community of actors because "space matters. And politics is a function of space" (121).

The present chaotic situation of waning dominant forms and emerging new forms of public communication, offers the unprecedented chance to give "media-oriented practices" their due share of attention in cultural studies. Beyond reader-response theory, such practices should be seen not as mere reactions of an audience but as a constitutive component of public communication. The novelty of the present situation is not that audiences are actively including public communications in everyday life (cf. Bird 2003), but that such individualized forms of cultural production are now accessible in a common standard on hybrid platforms. When media become embedded into the fabric of everyday life, an institutional focus in research ignores that media are foremost, as Lisa Gitelman puts it, "socially realized structures of communication [where] communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation" (2006: 7). In such a broad conception of media, technology is embedded in a framework of social interactions of production, communication and consumption. While blogs and other network media may serve deliberative ends in the form of citizen journalism, private self-communication or semi-journalistic practices, such media are as easily applied in partisan news sites (Breitbart.com). If professional journalism is allowing the "democratization of truth" (Bennett forthcoming) to become the norm, accepting the chaotic yet emergent potential of a "privatization of truth" in networked communication may indeed offer a glimpse beyond the crisis.

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