

A Few Notes on Networked Journalism

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Response to Van der Haak, Parks and Castells

In their contribution to the *International Journal of Communication*, Bregtje van der Haak, Michael Parks, and Manuel Castells ask why journalism is in a crisis. Journalists feel competition has increased, while it is also said that willingness to pay for content has declined. But instead of placing the usual emphasis on media corporations' declining profitability, the authors stress the role of journalism as a public good. The three think it is "sad to see many journalists close the door to new technological opportunities and refuse generous offers of active citizens." They then provide an overview of new tools and practices in networked journalism, such as "crowdgathering" of news and other use of "user-generated content." Much is happening on the level of data visualization, and the same can be said of Web documentaries and other forms of "visual journalism." Networked journalism, the authors conclude, "is not a threat to the independence and quality, but a liberation from strict corporate control."

This optimistic emphasis on tools and their possibilities prompts the question why have journalists turned conservative and protective about the methods used in their profession? Technological possibilities, which clearly exist, by and large remain unused and circulate mostly as demo design, media artworks, and prototypes at the edge of the media sphere, temporarily displayed in such cultural contexts as festivals and exhibitions. The reason for this cannot be found in some hidden agenda of a gang of backward-looking Luddite executives stuck in the 20th century. To develop, the new tools need both space and time—which are precisely the rarest commodities. To reinvent itself, journalism must first of all free itself of the real-time paradigm. From CNN to Twitter, the news industry is still geared to the rat race of live reporting. This machine is enveloped by an ever-growing parasitic cloud of PR and communication advisers who abandoned the distinction between content and advertisement ages ago.

If networked journalism wants to explore the tools that are out there, it needs above all to take back time (through stretching and decompressing). We cannot lament the decline of investigative journalism and continue our presence on Facebook. Like slow food, slow media should be a passion. Peter Sloterdijk describes it as analogous to physical training in sports: the way to get there is through daily exercise. That is the new culture of information—one that is not merely technical. Once we become bored with real-time status updates, we will soon enough access other forms of knowledge (narrative, visual, political). The question here is one of critical mass. How can we jump-start the demolition of the attention economy?