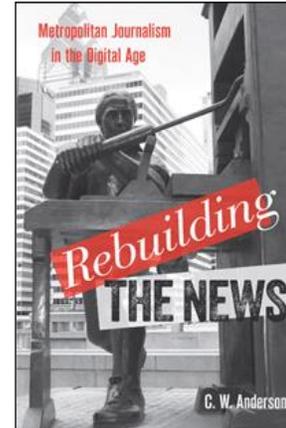


C. W. Anderson, **Rebuilding the News: Metropolitan Journalism in the Digital Age**, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2013, 236 pp., \$26.55 (paperback).

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Chris Anderson's book **Rebuilding the News: Metropolitan Journalism in the Digital Age**, represents a major contribution in understanding the profound changes in the landscape of news production and in showing us *how* to study these changes. Based on ethnographic research at traditional and alternative media organizations in Philadelphia, the book traces the decline of the city's traditional print media and the uneasy and often painful transition to the age of convergence. The book is not unique in charting the failure of traditional journalism through such means. It is part of a new and important wave of ethnographic research which documents the lived experience of newswriters coming to terms with a radically altered media landscape, where the business model of journalism, as well as its production, texts, and consumption, have undergone intense transformation over the past few decades (for a useful overview, see Domingo & Paterson, 2011). For example, David Ryfe's recent book, *Can Journalism Survive?* (2012), based on his long-term ethnographic work at U.S. regional newsrooms, presents a devastating picture of a profession in terminal decline, in part due to its inability to respond to the challenges of the Internet.



What sets Anderson's book apart is its emphasis on seeing news organizations not as isolated and singular institutions, but rather as part of a larger journalistic "ecosystem." This term captures the complexities of newsmaking in the era of digitization and convergence, where news production can no longer be understood as concentrated in the material space of the newsroom and carried out by specialized professionals, but rather as a radically diverse and dispersed set of activities involving a broad range of organizations, groups, and individuals in many places and on varied platforms (e.g., Cottle, 2007). The notion of the journalistic ecosystem also offers an organic metaphor which advances an understanding of journalism as a living, breathing, constantly evolving organism—one that is capable of both death and rebirth; processes that are painstakingly documented in this book. Indeed, the concept of the journalistic ecosystem has gained purchase as a result of Anderson's work, and the book poignantly demonstrates that understanding news in the networked age requires a networked approach. The book is underpinned by an engagement with ideas of actor network theory, suggesting that "social categories should not be approached as obdurate macro-structures; rather, they should be seen as the contingent assemblage of networks" (Anderson, 2013, p. 173). This means, first of all, that Anderson's methodological approach has been shaped by network ethnography (see also Hemingway, 2007; Howard, 2002). Second and related, the book understands journalistic work as an "assemblage," arguing that journalism "can be envisioned and described as the continuous process of networking the news" (Anderson, 2013, p. 172).

Although the theoretical framework and the methodological approach are both carefully developed and highly innovative, and inform the empirical work and analysis presented in the book, the discussion of these contributions is confined to a methodological appendix. The book as a whole is written in a highly accessible and engaging manner, with the weighty theory only making an occasional, brief appearance. Nonetheless, the actor network theory approach underpins *Rebuilding the News*, translated into an ethnographic study which delves into the swiftly evolving journalistic practices not only of traditional media and their newsrooms (in this case, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News*) but also online journalism and blogging. Anderson studies Philly.com—which becomes the online site for the two newspapers' content—as well as the activist Philly Independent Media Center (IMC) and a range of local area blogs. The book is partly historical in its narrative, opening with the beginnings of online media in the late 1990s, chronicling the 2009 bankruptcy of the jointly owned *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News*, which dealt a devastating blow to the city's journalism, and ending in 2011 with attempts to reinvent a local journalism fit for the challenges of the digital era.

Chapter 1 traces the emergence of online media and related shifts in understandings of the journalistic public in Philadelphia by focusing on the experience of Philly.com as the online presence of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News*, both owned by Knight-Ridder at the time of the site's launch. The attention to the changing public is also prominent in chapter 2, which shifts attention toward alternative media by examining the online activities of the IMC movement and the emergence of local blogging in Philadelphia. To Anderson, the IMC is a crucial actor, in part because of its centrality to the Philadelphia news ecosystem, but also because many of the innovations and transformations in newswork he came across appeared to "find their antecedents in practices and processes of the larger Indymedia movement of which the Philly IMC was a part" (Anderson, 2013, p. 35). The attention to the varied alternative journalistic practices online allows Anderson to examine not just "the growth and hybridization" of journalistic venues and practices, but also, more conceptually, how understandings of journalism's publics—previously often taken for granted and universalized—are now increasingly problematic and fractured along the fault lines of progressively diverse venues for mediated news consumption and participation.

Chapters 3 and 4 take us into the world of everyday journalism in Philadelphia, tracing its practices and routines in the context of an emerging rhetorical tension between the traditional journalistic activity of news reporting and the increasing prominence of news aggregation. Chapter 3 focuses on an average day of newswork, documenting how new technologies (including what was apparently the first instance of a smartphone photo used to document a breaking news event in the city) informed changes in reporting practices. More fundamentally, in the newsrooms Anderson studied, resources committed to and attention paid to acts of news aggregation were dramatically increasing. Referring to aggregators as "second-level newswriters" he defines them as "hierarchizers, inter-linkers, bundlers, and illustrators of web content" (Anderson, 2013, p. 70). The chapter investigates how the tension between conventional reporting practices and aggregation play out in the reporting of a traditional "hard news" story of a car crash. The chapter suggests that blogging represents a hybrid form of reporting and aggregation.

Chapter 4 represents a strikingly original and painstaking contribution in taking a closer look at the diffusion of a single news story—the contested and wrongful arrest of four Philadelphia homeowners—

across the city's journalistic ecosystem. It documents how emerging hybrid forms of newswork, including blogging, contributed to new means of circulating a breaking and swiftly evolving news story. On one hand, the chapter demonstrates increasing "institutional hybridity" (Anderson, 2013, p. 98) and porousness of professional boundaries, as amateurs act as sleuths and professional journalists participate in blogging the news. On the other hand, traditional reporting continues to be valued as the core of newswork. But reporting is carried out under increasing stress, caused by the relentless speeding up of the news cycle as well as decreased resources for traditional journalistic work. The result, in the news organizations Anderson observed, was that "reporting was becoming more reactive, less specialized, more prone to speed-induced errors, more dependent on the 'culture of the click' and the desires of the active audience and, consequently, less autonomous" (Ibid.). This theme is explored in more detail in the book's final chapter and highlights how changes in journalism's technological affordances cannot be viewed in isolation, but must be understood with reference to larger trends in the economics and production practices of news.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore how actors in the Philadelphia journalistic ecosystem grappled to come to terms with the networked nature of news. Chapter 5 illustrates, through three case studies, the challenges entailed in the move from traditional news production to networked media. The chapter demonstrates that despite the good intentions of individual actors and news organizations, there was overall a failure to achieve the ideal of networked news, in part because the rationalized nature of news production, linked to a view of the public as "enclosed within a particular series of digital walls," pushed news organizations away from networked collaboration (Anderson, 2013, pp. 130–132).

Chapter 6—the final chapter—documents a stormy period in the history of Philadelphia journalism—the period during which the two long-standing city newspapers went bankrupt and, once emerging from the aftermath of bankruptcy, were compelled to reinvent themselves for the digital age. It traces how this period saw the increasing influence of the audience on news production, through Web metrics, user comments, and a general obsession with website traffic and click counts. This "click thinking" informed news judgment and underscored the "networked fragility" of contemporary newswork.

Overall, Anderson's book is a significant intervention into debates in journalism studies, offering several lasting and important contributions. For those of us at the coal face of journalism studies, the conceptual innovations of actor network theory and the idea of the journalistic ecosystem have been hugely influential and transformative. More broadly, however, the book shows us the value of nuanced and careful analyses of complex changes in the professions we study. Anderson steers clear of simple technologically determinist or utopian arguments. Instead, he shows us that just as journalism is being buffeted by winds of change more severe than ever before seen, there is an enduring core of stability, for better or worse. As Anderson concludes, what he has ultimately told "is the story of a simultaneous vortex of external events and the complete lack of change of any kind . . . Everything seems different, and yet everything remains the same" (Anderson, 2013, p. 159).

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