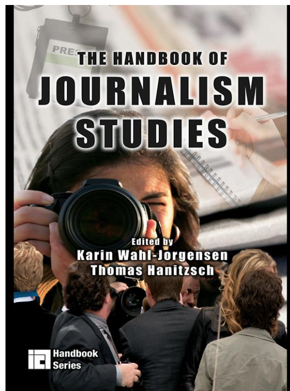
This article was downloaded by: *10.2.97.136*
On: 07 Jun 2023
Access details: *subscription number*
Publisher: *Routledge*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Handbook of Journalism Studies

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, Thomas Hanitzsch

Alternative and Citizen Journalism

Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203877685.ch19
Chris Atton
Published online on: 28 Nov 2008

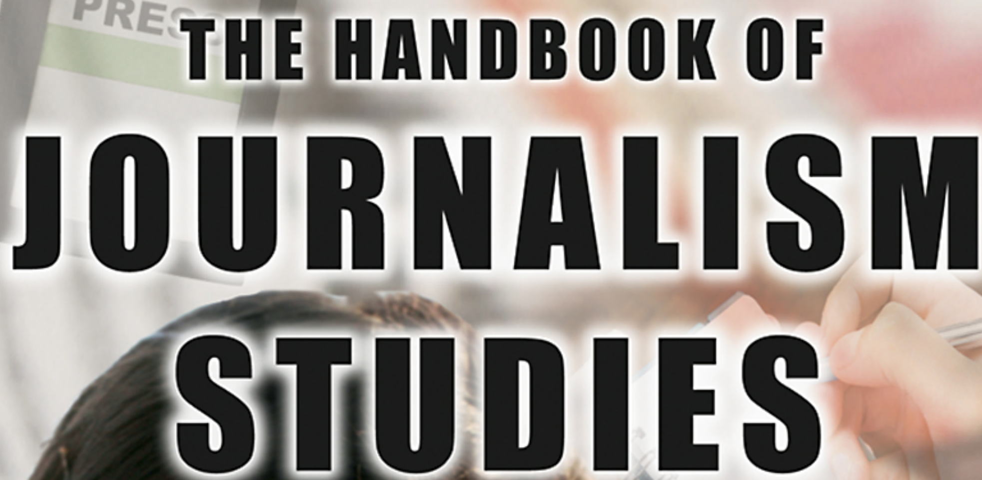
How to cite :- Chris Atton. 28 Nov 2008, *Alternative and Citizen Journalism from:* The Handbook of Journalism Studies Routledge
Accessed on: 07 Jun 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.



Edited by
Karin Wahl-Jorgensen
Thomas Hanitzsch

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

First published 2009
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

"To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's
collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk."

© 2009 Taylor & Francis

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
The handbook of journalism studies / [edited] by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch.
p. cm. — (ICA handbook series)
Includes index.
1. Journalism. I. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin. II. Hanitzsch, Thomas, 1969-
PN4724.H36 2008
070.4—dc22
2008024854

ISBN 0-203-87768-3 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN10 HB: 0-8058-6342-7
ISBN10 PB: 0-8058-6343-5
ISBN10 EB: 1-4106-1806-4

ISBN13 HB: 978-0-8058-6342-0
ISBN13 PB: 978-0-8058-6343-7
ISBN13 EB: 978-1-4106-1806-1

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

19

Alternative and Citizen Journalism

Chris Atton

This chapter examines journalism that is produced not by professionals but by those outside mainstream media organizations. Amateur media producers typically have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists; they write and report from their position as citizens, as members of communities, as activists, as fans. This chapter will show how key writers in the subject area have understood the activities of these amateur journalists. The chapter places these activities in three categories: social movement media and citizens' media; local alternative journalism; fanzines and blogs. It examines the major studies to show how different theoretical and ideological perspectives have influenced the nature of those studies. Examples will be drawn from the key texts in the area including Atton (2002), Downing, Ford, Gil and Stein (2001) and Rodriguez (2001).

The merits and limits of these and other studies will be examined. Methodological gaps will also be identified, such as the almost complete absence of research into audiences and the absence of any detailed, international comparative studies. Finally, proposals for future research will be made, in particular for studies that deal with alternative and citizen journalism as work and that examine how alternative and mainstream cultures of news production might be understood in complementary ways, rather than solely in opposition to one another.

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CITIZENS' MEDIA

What are the features of this amateur journalism? What sets it apart from mainstream, professionalized practices? There have been many attempts to define and conceptualize it, vividly exhibited by the variety of terms employed to summarize its perspectives and practices: alternative journalism; citizen's media; citizen journalism; democratic media; radical media. This section will show how each term encapsulates a structuring philosophy that argues from a distinctive and ideological perspective. Nevertheless, they share a common foundation in their amateurism.

Raymond Williams (1980) highlights three aspects of communication that provide the material for this foundation. For Williams, public communication could only be rigorously understood by considering the process of "skills, capitalization and controls" (p. 54). To apply this principle to alternative media, James Hamilton (2000) argues that we need to talk of deprofessionalization, decapitalization and deinstitutionalization. In other words, alternative media must be available to "ordinary" people without the necessity for professional training and excessive capital outlay; they must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar systems. Such media will

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

then have the potential to more closely reflect the practices of decentralized, directly democratic, self-managed and reflexive networks of "everyday-life solidarity" that Alberto Melucci (1996) finds at the heart of social movement activity. Similarly, John Downing (1984) considers radical media as the media of social movements, produced by political activists for political and social change. This signals an interest in considering media as radical to the extent that they explicitly shape political consciousness through collective endeavour (Enzensberger, 1976). Downing (1984) and Downing et al. (2001) argue that the media of these movements are important not only for what they say but for how they are organized. What Downing terms "rebellious communication" does not simply challenge the political status quo in its news reports and commentaries, it challenges the ways it is produced. This position echoes Walter Benjamin's (1934/1982) argument that, in order for political propaganda to be effective, it is not enough to merely reproduce the radical or revolutionary content of an argument in a publication. The medium itself requires transformation: the position of the work in relation to the means of production has to be critically re-aligned. This requires not only the radicalising of methods of production but a re-thinking of what it means to be a media producer.

If the aim of radical media is to effect social or political change, then it is crucial, Downing says, that they practice what they preach. He calls this "prefigurative politics" or "the attempt to practice socialist principles in the present, not merely to imagine them for the future" (Downing et al., 2001, p. 71). To achieve this, Downing proposes a set of "alternatives in principle" that draw on anarchist philosophy. This leads him to emphasize the importance of encouraging contributions from as many interested parties as possible, in order to emphasize the "multiple realities" of social life (oppression, political cultures, economic situations) (Downing, 1984, p. 17). Radical media thus come to constitute a major feature of an alternative public sphere (Downing, 1988) or, as the diversity of projects suggests, many alternative public spheres (Fraser, 1992; Negt & Kluge, 1972/1983). Thus, the global Internet-based news network, Indymedia, may be considered as a multiple of local alternative public spheres that together comprise a "'macro' public sphere […which] offers geographically dispersed participants opportunities to debate issues and events […and] to collaborate on activist initiatives of a global reach" (Haas, 2004, p. 118).

Downing privileges media that are produced by non-professionals, by groups that are primarily constituted for progressive, social change. He draws on an extremely wide range of forms drawn from two centuries of political activism. Whilst the most detailed examples come from leftist newspapers and radio in Italy and Portugal and from American access radio, reference is made to 18th and 19th century political cartooning in Britain, German labour songs of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and 19th century African American public festivals. Woodcuts, flyers, photomontage, posters, murals, street theatre and graffiti are also presented for their radical methods and messages.

Like Downing, Clemencia Rodriguez (2000) argues that independent media enable "ordinary" citizens to become politically empowered. For her, when people create their own media they are better able to represent themselves and their communities. She sees these "citizens' media" as projects of self-education. She draws particularly on Paulo Freire's (1970) theories of conscientization and critical pedagogy, and Chantal Mouffe's (1992) notion of radical democracy. Rodriguez argues, as does Downing, that alternative media do not only have a counter-information role. For Rodriguez, the term "citizens" is particular: it refers to those members of society who "actively participate in actions that reshape their own identities, the identities of others, and their social environment, [through which] they produce power" (Rodriguez, 2000, p. 19). Her studies of Latin American media (Rodriguez, 2000, 2003) demonstrate this. For example, Rodriguez notes how the production of a video by striking women workers in a Colombian ma-

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

ternity clinic led to "shifting power roles […that] facilitate[d] a creative collective dynamic that […] challenge[d] institutionalized leadership roles" (Rodriguez, 2001, pp. 123–124).

These "citizens' media" are aimed not at state-promoted citizenship but at media practices that construct citizenship and political identity within everyday life practices (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1947/1991). Rather than relying on the mass media to set the boundaries of political involvement (Dahlgren, 2000), citizens use their own, self-managed media to become politically involved on their own terms (Norris, 1999). To become an active participant in the process of media production is a political education in itself. For Rodriguez, however, to become a producer seems at times to be more important than what is being produced. In her study of a Chilean community radio station she approvingly quotes a respondent: "It's more important to get five new people to participate than to get a thousand new listeners" (Rodriguez, 2003, p. 191). Downing too seems to privilege process over product, organization and engagement over words on the page and circulation figures. For both, political or civic self-transformation seems to be, if not the sole end of radical and citizens' media, at least its primary function.

Downing and Rodriguez demonstrate how such practices can create local, empowering public spheres. A study of Australian community broadcasting by Forde, Foxwell and Meadows (2003) similarly proposes that we should consider alternative journalism as a "*process* of cultural empowerment […where] content production is not *necessarily* the prime purpose [and] what may be as (or more) important are the ways in which community media outlets facilitate the process of community organization" (p. 317, original emphases). Carroll and Hackett (2006) argue that such practices constitute "a reflexive form of activism that treats communication as simultaneously means and ends of struggle" (p. 96). This accounts for the building of identity (whether individual or collective) and of counter-publics, as well as the addressing of wider audiences. They do acknowledge, however, that media activists are "especially prone to 'getting stuck' at the first stage […] with its own inherent satisfactions" (p. 98).

What do these studies tell us about journalism? Many of the media projects analysed by Downing and Rodriguez seem to have methods and ends so removed from the norms of mainstream journalism as to be unrecognizable. We learn little about these projects in terms of journalism practice: What do the participants do? How do they do it? How do they learn their practices? Do they even consider themselves as journalists? Hamilton is right to argue that amateur media production does not rely on professional training, large capital outlay and an "institution," but this is not to say that amateur journalism practices magically become independent, "free spaces" of the type idealized by Melucci (1995). Amateur media practices are always embedded in everyday life practices; they are therefore already located in broader political, economic, social and cultural contexts. For this reason, I use the terms "alternative media" and "alternative journalism" to describe these practices (Atton, 2002, 2003a, 2004). As Nick Couldry and James Curran (2003, p. 7) argue, "alternative" functions as a comparative term to indicate that "whether indirectly or directly, media power is what is at stake."

ALTERNATIVE JOURNALISM AND MEDIA POWER

We can examine amateur media practices for examples of how "naturalized" media frames and ideological codes may be disrupted. Nick Couldry (2000, p. 25) argues that alternative media projects result in the "de-naturalization" of media spaces, encouraging amateur media producers to rebalance the differential power of the media and to consider how "the media themselves are a social process organized in space." Pierre Bourdieu (1991) argues that symbolic power is

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

the power to construct reality. Alternative media construct a reality that appears to oppose the conventions and representations of the mainstream media. Participatory, amateur media production contests the concentration of institutional and professional media power and challenges the media monopoly on producing symbolic forms. Therefore, to speak of alternative media and alternative journalism is to recognize the relationship between dominant, professionalized media practices and marginal, amateur practices. The struggle between them is for "the place of media power" (Couldry, 2000). Alternative journalistic practices present ways of re-imagining journalism and not only of adopting media practices for purposes of self-education and community empowerment. They offer a challenge to professional practices through their very recognition of those practices.

There is a further value in adopting the term "alternative journalism." No longer are we limited to thinking about amateur journalism solely as political projects, whose priorities are radical forms of organising, social movements, and individual or collective consciousness-raising. My own work has sought to explore the implications of what is both an expanded concept of amateur media and, at the same time, a more focused one: that of amateur journalism. Whilst not wishing to lose sight of any particular social relations that may be developed through amateur media production, I argue that any model of alternative media should consider equally processes and products (Atton, 2002); it should consider media content as journalism, not merely as accounts of self-reflexivity (Atton, 2003a). It is not only social relations (through organization) that can be transformed, but also the media forms themselves (discursively, visually, even distributively). There may also be a transformation of notions such as professionalism, competence and expertise. Alternative journalism may therefore include cultural journalism, such as we find in fanzines (Atton, 2001), as well as journalism published not by communities and movements, but by individuals (such as blogs). What happens, though, when "ordinary" people produce their own media? What are the features of alternative journalism? In the next section I explore this question by examining key studies in three areas: local alternative journalism, fanzines and blogs. Together they show the nature of the challenges that alternative journalism presents to the mainstream.

CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF ALTERNATIVE JOURNALISM

Studies of local alternative journalism will always be contingent upon particular geographic and demographic situations. They must be responsive to specific cultural and social contexts. Given the limits of the theories discussed earlier, such empirical studies can present valuable insights into journalism practice; insights that might well be missed by an over-emphasis on self-empowerment and radical citizenship.

In general, the commercial press relies on official sources as spokespeople not only for organizations and institutions, but as expert commentators on news events and issues as a whole. This specialist class is a social and political elite through which news values, newsworthiness and the very agenda of the news are defined (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). A hierarchy of access to the media is established that routinely marginalizes those without the social and political power to be deemed worthy of accreditation as sources (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, p. 245). In mainstream news, these "ordinary" people are most often used as material for vox pop interviews and their opinions sought for human interest stories (Ross, 2006). By contrast, the local alternative press actively seeks out these people as expert sources. This does not only challenge mainstream sourcing practices. To bring the voices of the local community into the center of journalism is an ethical decision (Atton, 2003b). This decision not only considers the local community as important (after all, the commercial local press makes the same

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

claim), it also places these voices "from below" at the top of the hierarchy of access, a practice that acknowledges ordinary people as experts in their own lives and experiences.

We find examples of this throughout the world. A study of the Bolivian miners' radio stations that flourished from 1963 to 1983 (but which first appeared in 1952, the year of National Revolution) emphasizes the value of participatory media production in highlighting the rights of workers in a politically marginalized region of a country (O'Connor, 2004). Similarly, the Movement of Popular Correspondents that developed in revolutionary Nicaragua in the 1980s and 1990s produced reports by non-professional, voluntary reporters from poor, rural areas that were published in regional and national newspapers alongside the work of professional journalists (Rodriguez, 2000). The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan reported on the abuse of and execution of women under the rule of the Taliban, producing audio cassettes, videos, a Web site and a magazine (Waltz, 2005). Afghan women produced and distributed these clandestinely, using, for example, secretly-filmed camcorder footage of abuse. The South Korean *OhmyNEWS* (Kim & Hamilton, 2006) has adopted a hybrid approach to its Web site. Founded in 2000, the site relies on its network of hundreds of citizen reporters for contributions, though its editorial office is run by a small professional staff.

Participatory media production can be thought of as providing the constituents of an alternative public sphere, where agendas are set and discussion is developed through the journalism of social movements and communities. In his study of the German anti-nuclear media of the 1980s, Downing (1988) argues that they constitute, along with "bookstores, bars, coffee-shops, restaurants, food-stores," fora in which an alternative public sphere of discussion and debate may arise. He emphasizes social movement media that encourage "activity, movement and exchange [...] an autonomous sphere in which experiences, critiques and alternatives could be freely developed" (p. 168). Similarly, Jakubowicz (1991) adapts the concept of the public sphere to a more inclusive vision of communication and media. He identifies two alternative public spheres in his study of Poland in the 1980s, an alternative public sphere and an oppositional public sphere. These worked together against the Soviet-backed government of the day, "alternative" describing the activities of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, its newspapers and periodicals, whereas "oppositional" refers to the *samizdat* publications of the Solidarity movement.

Mathes and Pfetsch (1991) show how an alternative news agenda can spill over into mainstream media. In their examination of "counter-issues" from the mid-1980s in the former West Germany (the 1983 census, ID cards and a faked terrorist attack) they found a significant "intermedia" effect: the established West German liberal press tended to adopt both the topic of the issue from the alternative press as well as its frame of reference. Key to this process was *Die Tageszeitung* (or *taz)*, a large-circulation, nationally-distributed alternative daily newspaper, founded in 1978. By the mid-1980s, *taz*'s reach went far beyond any alternative public sphere: it was read by prominent intellectuals and numerous mainstream journalists. It explicitly sought to "initiate a multiplier effect" (Mathes & Pfetsch, 1991, p. 37) by highlighting counter-issues to the mainstream media and actively moving these issues into wider public fora beyond the activist left.

There are two journalistic consequences of this ethos: the novel nature of many stories and the opportunity for sources to become journalists themselves. First, as Harcup (2006) shows, many stories in the local alternative press are unique to that medium (though the commercial press might subsequently report them). Stories tend to arise because of the highly varied pool of experts available to the alternative press. These experts might be factory, agricultural or shop workers, pensioners, working mothers, minor government officials or school children. This variety of sources might not only provide leads for stories, it can often bypass the event-driven routines of mainstream news practices: "[w]hereas mainstream media tended to notice health and safety stories only when there was a disaster [… *Leeds Other Paper*] exposed potential health

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

risks before even the workers or their trade unions were aware of them" (Harcup, 2006, p. 133). This "investigative journalism from the grassroots" (p. 132) results from going beyond the typical "beats" of the local press (such as the emergency services, the courts and local council meetings) to privilege issues above events. The second consequence of this socially inclusive approach to reporting is that "ordinary" sources often become writers: "such journalism not only finds common cause with its community through advocacy; its explicit connections with the public sphere of that community serve as its rationale for seeking amongst that community for its news sources" (Atton, 2003a, p. 270).

These consequences may be used to build theory in the study of alternative journalism. Alternative journalism recognizes what might be achieved through challenging the rules and routines of normalized and professionalized practices. Its ethos of inclusiveness might well lead it to develop a network of "native reporters" (Atton, 2002). This is to expand the editorial group beyond the left-wing political activists who typically seem to be the initiators of such projects (Dickinson, 1997; Whitaker, 1981). Editorial inclusiveness also leads to organizational inclusiveness; Downing's prefigurative politics tend to be played out in anti-hierarchical, collective editorial groups. These methods, however, often work to the detriment of efficiency. Editorial copy might be argued over to such lengths that editions might be delayed and some reports might never appear due to lack of consensus. Comedia (1984) and Landry, Morley, Southwood and Wright (1985)—in an explicit echo of Jo Freeman's (1972) classic critique of structurelessness in the women's movement—argue that these methods, however "progressive" they might be, can only disadvantage the alternative press because they are adopted for ideological, rather than for instrumental, ends. Organizational problems are not universal, however. Blogs, for example, tend to be single-person operations, at least in their amateur form. Fanzines, too, tend to be run by individuals. Either they are overseen by one person, in the manner of an editor or, as is often the case, written entirely by one person.

FANZINES: ALTERNATIVE CULTURAL JOURNALISM

The fanzine shares much with its professional counterpart, popular cultural journalism. For instance, the roots of the popular music press in the UK and the US lie not in professionalized journalism but in the amateur, underground press of the late 1960s (Gudmundsson, Lindberg, Michelsen, & Weisethaunet, 2002). There is a significant similarity between the fan as amateur writer and the professional writer as fan. This says much about expert culture in popular musical criticism, where knowledge and authority proceed not from formal, educational or professional training but primarily from autodidactic, amateur enthusiasm. Simon Frith (1996, p. 38, n. 40) argues that "critics of popular forms (TV, film and to some extent pop) need know nothing about such forms except as consumers; their skill is to be able to write about ordinary experience." Once again, we see the privileging of the "ordinary" voice. In the case of fanzines, however,—and their online counterparts, ezines—these ordinary voices tend to be self-selected, rather than sought out and encouraged as in the alternative local press.

Fanzine journalism shares with its professionalized counterpart a perspective based on consumption. This is not to say that the two forms are identical. Fanzines often arise because the objects of their study (which may include football, film, comics and popular television series, as well as popular music) are ignored by mainstream journalism. This might be due to the novelty of the performer or genre (fanzines often draw attention to new and emerging cultural activities) or because they have become unfashionable (Atton, 2001). Fanzines also challenge critical orthodoxy; they may arise because their writers believe that "their" culture is marginalized or

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

misrepresented by mainstream tastes. Consequently, fanzines and ezines become "cultural fora for the exchange and circulation of knowledge and the building of a cultural community" (Fiske, 1992a, pp. 44–45). The circulation of this knowledge within a like-minded community further develops expertise and cultural capital. Such a display of expert knowledge can challenge professional notions of expert authority (Atton, 2004, Ch. 6).

Unlike the local alternative press, fanzines offer opportunities to create, maintain and develop taste communities across geographic boundaries. They are less interested in reaching out to broader audiences, preferring to cultivate and consolidate a specialist audience. This consolidation often employs similar methods to mainstream cultural journalism such as interviews and reviews (or match reports, in the case of football fanzines). Fanzine writers, however, tend to write at much greater length than the "capsule" reviews that are now common in newspapers and specialist, commercial magazines. In some cases, particularly in ezines, a kaleidoscopic approach is obtained by publishing multiple accounts of the same event or product (Atton, 2001). The credibility and authority of a music fanzine will often enable it to obtain interviews from artists directly, bypassing public relations professionals. Newsgathering is a different matter. Fanzines will often have erratic publishing schedules; this infrequency militates against the timely reporting of news. My own study of football fanzines (Atton, 2006a) identifies three typical approaches to news: stories reproduced verbatim from professional news media; stories summarized from the professional media; and original journalism. The latter were in the minority and usually embedded in interviews. Hard news stories were usually sourced from commercial news providers. Unlike local alternative journalism, there was no evidence of original, investigative reporting. Instead, the fanzines drew mostly on local and national mainstream media, as well as press releases from the football clubs. There was little evidence of agenda setting. The lack of original news reporting is not necessarily a weakness, however. As John Hartley (2000) points out, public communication is becoming increasingly redactional, particularly through the proliferation of news providers on the Internet. The specialist audience might be well served by the news digests produced by football fanzines. These digests provide a backdrop against which the primary function of the fanzine is presented: expert, amateur commentary and opinion founded on the accumulation and display of detailed information.

BLOGS: PERSONAL-POLITICAL JOURNALISM

In its ideal form, the blog combines the individual approach often found in fanzines with the social responsibility of local alternative journalism. Blogging may be understood as a number of practices. These include the publishing of personal diaries by professionals (such as journalists and politicians), amateur investigative journalism, comment and opinion (such as American Matt Drudge's the *Drudge Report* and the British blogger, "Guido Fawkes") and eyewitness reporting by observers and participants. Amateur blogs have been credited with breaking news in advance of mainstream news organizations: for example, Trent Lott's resignation as the US Senate's majority leader in December 2002 followed his comments expressing "indulgence towards the racist policies of the Old South" (Burkeman, 2002). These comments, Burkeman notes, were first picked up and commented on by bloggers some days before the mainstream media ran the story. The Gulf War of 2003 saw a variety of bloggers supplementing mainstream media coverage. "Smash," the pseudonym of an American military officer serving in Iraq, posted chronicles of his experiences (Kurtz, 2003). Professional reporters used blogs to post commentaries that their employers would not be prepared to publish. A blog run by "Salam Pax" claimed to be written by a Baghdad resident and the US journal *New Republic* ran an online diary by Kanan Makiya,

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

a leading Iraqi dissident. Blogs were posted from professional journalists "moonlighting" from their day jobs. The BBC and the British *Guardian* newspaper established "warblog" sites during the conflict. Blogs were also employed by NGOs such as Greenpeace.

The blog has become both an alternative and a mainstream practice; this demonstrates the contested nature of media power. Lowrey (2006) argues that the incorporation of blogs into professional journalism "repairs" the perceived vulnerabilities of professional journalists. Considering bloggers as occupational rivals, professional journalists reassess their professional processes. However, the incorporation of the blogs into news organizations and the use of bloggers as sources are not the only possible strategies: "the journalism community may try to redefine blogging as journalistic tool, and bloggers as amateur journalists or journalism wannabes (rather than as a unique occupation)" (Lowrey, 2006, p. 493). Lowrey does not develop this last point further, yet his claim offers an embryonic critique of the development of the present chapter.

Rodriguez's notion of citizens' media emphasizes media practices not as journalism, but primarily as projects of self-education. The community of professional journalists, Lowrey argues, might also consider practitioners of alternative media not to be journalists, but for different reasons. Their reasons would derive from the claim that it is only within professionalized and institutionalized media structures that journalists may practice. The ideology of such these structures places boundaries on what is to be considered as news, approaches to news gathering, decisions about who writes such news and how it is presented. We can characterize this ideology as the "regime of objectivity" (Hackett & Zhao, 1998, p. 86, cited in Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 33). Rather than acquiescing to this regime, alternative media practices challenge it. Their challenge has both a normative and an epistemological aspect. The normative ideal of professionalized journalism emphasises the factual nature of news. It is based on the empiricist assumption that there exist "facts" in the world and that it is possible to identify these facts accurately and without bias (the journalistic norm of detachment). The normative ideal of alternative journalism argues the opposite: that reporting is always bound up with values (personal, professional, institutional) and that it is therefore never possible to separate facts from values. This leads to the epistemological challenge: that different forms of knowledge may be produced, which themselves present different and multiple versions of "reality" from those of the mass media. These multiple versions demonstrate the social construction of news: there is no master narrative, no single interpretation of events. The regime of objectivity is only one of the many ways in we might construct news. Once we acknowledge the social construction of news, why should we then reject alternative journalism simply because it is not subject to the same normative and epistemological limits of mainstream journalism?

MERITS AND LIMITS

We have seen how alternative media have been characterized by their potential for participation (especially in Atton, 2002, Downing et al., 2001; Rodriguez, 2000). Rather than media production being the province of elite, centralized organizations and institutions, alternative media offer the possibilities for individuals and groups to create their own media from the social margins. Studies such as those by Downing and Rodriguez show how radical and citizens' media may be used to develop identity and solidarity within social movements and local communities. The democratic purpose of these kinds of media production is a valuable corrective to the "models of failure" of Comedia (1984) and Landry et al. (1985). Furthermore, they show how the notion of the "active audience" and its oppositional readings (Fiske, 1992b) can be developed radically into the notion of "mobilized audiences" (Atton, 2002, p. 25). To think about alternative media

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

in this way is to consider them as far more than cultural aberrations or marginal practices. At a theoretical level such thinking encourages critiques of media production in general, to challenge what Nick Couldry (2002) terms "the myth of the mediated centre."

At an epistemological level, to consider the practices of alternative media producers as alternative journalism is to critique the ethics, norms and routines of professionalized journalism (Atton, 2003a; Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Harcup, 2003). Alternative journalism will tend, through its very practices, to examine notions of truth, reality, objectivity, expertise, authority and credibility (Atton, 2003b). Historical perspectives, such as those of James Hamilton (2003), and Hamilton and Atton (2001), may challenge the prevailing histories of journalism. Hamilton finds examples of alternative journalism that pre-date a notion of journalism centred on specialization, professional status and individual identity. In the place of this concept, he argues for a "'multidimensional' [view that] is meant to emphasize […] a conception of media participation as varied, hybrid and, in many cases, not identifiable at all from within an evaluative framework that allows only producers and consumers" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 297).

Existing studies have their limits, however. The bulk of research into alternative and citizen journalism examines political media that are "progressive" in its ideology and aims. There is an emphasis on socialist and anarchist projects. To date there are few studies of what Downing et al. (2001, p. 88) term "repressive radical media" or of the use of alternative media forms for discriminatory ends (for example, Atton, 2006b; Back, 2002; O'Loan, Poulter & McMenemy, 2005). Even fewer studies critically examine "progressive" media in terms of their "repressive" aspects, such as the advocacy of violence (Atton, 1999, is an exception). Furthermore, there is a bias towards political projects in the United States and Western Europe. Rodriguez is the only researcher to consistently work in Latin America (though Huesca, 1995 and O'Connor, 2004 examine Bolivian miners' radio). Whilst there are numerous studies of the *Indymedia* network (such as Downing, 2002; Kidd, 2003; Platon & Deuze, 2003), they tend to ignore the network's specific regional and national practices. There are occasional studies from Asia, such as Kim and Hamilton's (2006) examination of *OhmyNEWS*. Studies of the Middle East, Africa and the Indian sub-continent are few: Gumucio Dagron's (2001) 50 brief "case stories" attest to diversity of citizen journalism projects in Africa and the Indian sub-continent. These cases focus on the use of participatory communication for social change. There is a need not only for these cases to be examined in greater depth, but also for comparative work to be undertaken. This is particularly important in regions where the writ of the western norms of journalism does not run, and where the challenges of alternative journalism might therefore be culturally and politically very different.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Studies of alternative media tend to employ qualitative approaches. This is especially appropriate given the perspectives of these studies. Qualitative methods emphasize the experience of media producers; an internal approach to understanding the culture of participants; and a search for the meaningfulness of production as a process (Jensen, 1991). However, whilst researchers have explicated their theoretical frameworks, concepts and epistemologies, they have devoted comparatively little attention (in their writings, at least) to the design of their methodologies and to the analytical apparatus they have employed in their methods. For example, whilst interviews comprise the dominant method (for example, Carroll & Hackett, 2006; Dickinson, 1997; Downing, 1984; Downing et al., 2001; Rodriguez, 2003), we have little detail about the style of these interviews; how subjects were selected; the contexts and conditions in which the interviews were

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

conducted; and what questions were asked. Some studies (such as Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Rodriguez, 2000) use participant observation, but here too we have little detail of the methods. Lowrey's (2006) characterization of some alternative media studies as discursive is relevant here, at least in the sense that there is often no systematic display of methods, data and analytical procedures. In their place we find critical reflection that, whilst valuable, is often based on descriptive work, the methodological provenance of which is obscure.

These approaches make up the majority of studies in the area. On the other hand, the small number of studies that examine media content (such as news reports) tends to provide a more rigorous display of methods and analysis (for example, Atton & Wickenden, 2005; Harcup, 2003; Nelson, 1989). Generally, though, the paucity of methodological precision is an obstacle to understanding: it makes it difficult to verify, replicate, compare and refine investigations. Furthermore, the lack of methodological rigour in published work prevents the critical evaluation and development of methods. By contrast, the related area of community media studies offers case studies that, through their critical approach to methodology, enable tensions and blind spots to be identified (Jankowski, 1991).

CONCLUSION: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In general, the academic study of alternative media is dominated by an approach that focuses on progressive political value and, in particular, on the capacity of alternative media to "empower" citizens. This approach tends to celebrate alternative media and their achievements. Researchers have paid little attention to how alternative media are produced. They seem to know why practitioners do what they do, but less about what they do or why they do it in particular ways. What existing studies lack are examinations of what can be best termed "industrial practice." Despite its connotations from studies of the mass media, this term encourages us to consider alternative media practices as "work." It is surely this that is being lost—or at least marginalized—when we explore how alternative media come to be produced. The study of "work" in alternative media will include social and political processes such as decision-making processes, the structure of editorial meetings and ideological disputes. We will also need to examine the ways in which people work. How do they learn to become journalists or editors? How do they identify and choose their stories? How do they select and represent their sources? Are alternative journalists truly independent, or are their working methods influenced by the practices of mainstream journalists?

These are questions about media practice that require an understanding of its practitioners: their values, motivations, attitudes, ideologies, history, education, and relationships. They require what, in Bourdieusian terms, is an examination of practice that takes into account the relationship between habitus and field.

The privileging of participation in alternative media—as if it were the sole end of such media practices—is, as we have seen, often to the detriment of any consideration of how alternative journalism seeks its audiences and what use these audiences make of it. Perhaps this explains the enduring absence of audience studies in this area (Downing, 2003). We need audience studies not only to discover how alternative media are used (to what extent and in what ways do these media "mobilize" audiences?), but also to problematize the notion of audiences in contexts where they may take on the roles of producers and participants as well as "users."

Neither must we consider alternative media practices as entirely separate from the mainstream. Breaking television news frequently relies on camcorder footage, photographs taken on mobile phones and other forms of citizen journalism (Sampedro Blanco, 2005). Newspapers and broadcasters routinely incorporate blogs into their Web sites; some solicit advice and recommen-

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

dations for stories and programmes from audiences. We might simply see this as the latest manifestation of what has been a longstanding practice in the local press (Pilling, 2006); alternatively, we might ask how amateur media practices might affect the epistemology of professional journalism through the "sheer *awkwardness*, of communication by 'fairly ordinary people'" (Corner, 1996, p. 174, original emphasis).

We need to consider alternative journalism practices as socially and culturally situated work, as well as processes of political empowerment. These practices might be drawn from mainstream practices, from history and from ideology. They might also challenge those practices or effect "new" forms of communication. These are important considerations if we are to take account of how alternative journalism is produced and how it connects to audiences.

REFERENCES

Atton, C. (1999). *Green Anarchist*: A case study in radical media. *Anarchist Studies*, *7*(1), 25–49.

Atton, C. (2001). Living in the past?: Value discourses in progressive rock fanzines. *Popular Music, 20*(1), 29–46.

Atton, C. (2002). *Alternative media*. London: Sage.

Atton, C. (2003a). What is "alternative" journalism? *Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism, 4*(3), 267–272.

Atton, C. (2003b). Ethical issues in alternative journalism. *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics,1*(1), 26–31.

Atton, C. (2004). *An alternative internet: Radical media, politics and creativity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press and New York: Columbia University Press.

Atton, C. (2006a). Football fanzines as local news. In B. Franklin (Ed.), *Local journalism and local media: Making the local news* (pp. 280–289). London: Routledge.

Atton, C. (2006b). Far-right media on the internet: Culture, discourse and power. *New Media and Society, 8*(4), 573–587.

Atton, C., & Wickenden, E. (2005). Sourcing routines and representation in alternative journalism: A case study approach. *Journalism Studies, 6*(3), 347–359.

Back, L. (2002). Wagner and power chords: Skinheadism, white power music, and the internet. In V. Ware & L. Back (Eds.), *Out of whiteness: Color, politics and culture* (pp. 94–132). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Benjamin, W. (1982). The author as producer. Edited translation in F. Frascina & C. Harrison (Eds.), *Modern art and modernism:A critical anthology* (pp. 213–216). London: Paul Chapman in association with the Open University. (Original work published 1934)

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Burkeman, O. (2002). Bloggers catch what *Washington Post* missed. *Guardian*, 21 December.

Carroll, W. K., & Hackett, R. A. (2006). Democratic media activism through the lens of social movement theory. *Media, Culture and Society, 28*(1), 83–104.

Comedia. (1984). The alternative press: The development of underdevelopment. *Media, Culture and Society*, *6*, 95–102.

Corner, J. (1996). Mediating the ordinary: The "access" idea and television form. In J. Corner & S. Harvey (Eds.), *Television times: A reader* (pp. 165–174). London: Arnold.

Couldry, N. (2000). *The place of media power: Pilgrims and witnesses of the media age.* London: Routledge.

Couldry, N. (2002). Alternative media and mediated community. Paper presented at the International Association for Media and Communication Research, Barcelona, 23 July.

Couldry, N. & Curran J. (2003). The paradox of media power. In N. Couldry & J. Curran (Eds.), *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world* (pp. 3–15). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dahlgren, P. (2000). Media, citizenship and civic culture. In J. Curran & M. Gurevitch (Eds.), *Mass media and society* (pp. 310–328). London: Arnold.

Dickinson, R. (1997). *Imprinting the sticks: The alternative press outside London*. Aldershot, UK: Arena.

Downing, J. (1984). *Radical media: The political experience of alternative communication*. Boston: South End Press.

Downing, J. (1988). The alternative public realm: The organization of the 1980s anti-nuclear press in West Germany and Britain. *Media, Culture and Society*, *10*, 163–181.

Downing, J., Ford, T. V., Gil, G., & Stein, L. (2001). *Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Downing, J. (2002). Independent media centres: A multi-local, multi-media challenge to global neo-liberalism. In M. Raboy (Ed.), *Global media policy in the new millennium* (pp. 215–232). Luton, Germany: Luton University Press.

Downing, J. (2003). Audiences and readers of alternative media: The absent lure of the virtually unknown. *Media, Culture and Society, 25*(5), 625–645.

Enzensberger, H. M. (1976). Constituents of a theory of the media. In *Raids and reconstructions: Essays on politics, crime and culture* (pp. 20–53). London: Pluto Press.

Fiske, J. (1992a). The cultural economy of fandom. In L. A. Lewis (Ed.), *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 30–49). London: Routledge.

Fiske, J. (1992b). British cultural studies and television. In R. C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of discourse, reassembled* (2nd ed.; pp. 284–326). London: Routledge.

Forde, S., Foxwell, K., & Meadows, M. (2003). Through the lens of the local: Public arena journalism in the Australian community broadcasting sector. *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism, 4*(3), 314–335.

Fraser, N. (1992). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. In C. Calhoun (Ed.), *Habermas and the public sphere* (pp. 109–142). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Freeman, J. (1972). The tyranny of structurelessness. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, *17*, 151–164.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Frith, S. (1996). *Performing rites: Evaluating popular music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Glasgow University Media Group. (1976). *Bad news.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Gudmundsson, G., Lindberg, U., Michelsen, M., & Weisethaunet, H. (2002). Brit crit: turning points in British rock criticism, 1960–1990. In S. Jones (Ed.), *Pop music and the press* (pp. 41–64). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Gumucio Dagron, A. (2001). *Making waves: Stories of participatory communication for social change*. New York: Rockefeller Foundation.

Haas, T. (2004). Alternative media, public journalism and the pursuit of democratization. *Journalism Studies, 5*(1), 115–121.

Hackett , R. A., & Carroll, W. K. (2006). *Remaking media: The struggle to democratize public communication.* New York: Routledge.

Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., & Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order.* London: Methuen.

Hamilton, J. W. (2000). Alternative media: Conceptual difficulties, critical possibilities. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 24*(4), 357–378.

Hamilton, J. W. (2003). Remaking media participation in early modern England. *Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism, 4*(3), 293–313.

Hamilton, J. & Atton, C. (2001). Theorizing Anglo-American alternative media: Toward a contextual history and analysis of US and UK scholarship. *Media History, 7*(2), 119–135.

Harcup, T. (2003). "The unspoken — said": The journalism of alternative media. *Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism, 4*(3), 356–376.

Harcup, T. (2006). The alternative local press. In B. Franklin (Ed.), *Local journalism and local media: Making the local news* (pp. 129–139). London: Routledge.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19

Hartley, J. (2000). Communicative democracy in a redactional society: The future of journalism studies. *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism, 1*(1), 39–48.

Huesca, R. (1995). A Procedural view of participatory communication: Lessons from Bolivian tin miners' radio. *Media, Culture and Society*, *17*(1), 101–119.

Jakubowicz, K. (1991). Musical chairs? The three public spheres in Poland. In P. Dahlgren & C. Sparks (Eds.), *Communication and citizenship: Journalism and the public sphere in the new media age* (pp. 155–175). London: Routledge.

Jankowski, N. W. (1991). Qualitative research and community media. In K. B. Jensen & N. W. Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research* (pp. 163–174). London: Routledge.

Jensen, K. B. (1991). Introduction: The qualitative turn. In K. B. Jensen & N. W. Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research* (pp. 1–11). London: Routledge.

Kidd, D. (2003). Indymedia.org: A new communications commons. In M. McCaughey & M. Ayers (Eds.), *Cyberactivism: Online activism in theory and practice* (pp. 47–70). New York: Routledge.

Kim, E.-G., & Hamilton, J. W. (2006). Capitulation to capital? *OhmyNews* as alternative media. *Media, Culture and Society, 28*(4), 541–560.

Kurtz, H. (2003). "Webloggers," signing on as war correspondents. *Washington Post,* 23 March.

Landry, C., Morley, D., Southwood, R., & Wright, P. (1985). *What a way to run a railroad: An analysis of radical failure*. London: Comedia.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *Critique of everyday life. Vol. I: Introduction.* Translated by J. Moore. London: Verso. (Original work published 1947)

Lowrey, W. (2006). Mapping the journalism-blogging relationship. *Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism, 7*(4), 477–500.

Mathes, R., & Pfetsch, B. (1991). The role of the alternative press in the agenda-building process: Spill-over effects and media opinion leadership. *European Journal of Communication, 6*, 33–62.

Melucci, A. (1995). The new social movements revisited: Reflections on a sociological misunderstanding. In L. Maheu (Ed.), *Social movements and social classes: The future of collective action* (pp. 107–119). London: Sage.

Melucci, A. (1996). *Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mouffe, C. (1992). Democratic citizenship and the political community. In C. Mouffe (Ed.), *Dimensions of radical democracy: Pluralism, citizenship, community* (pp. 225–239). London: Verso.

Negt, O., & Kluge, A. (1972/1983). The proletarian public sphere. Translated from the German by S. Hood. In A. Mattelart & S. Siegelaub (Eds.), *Communication and class struggle, Vol. 2: Liberation, socialism* (pp. 92–94). New York: International General.

Nelson, E. (1989). *The British counter-culture, 1966–73: A study of the underground press*. London: Macmillan.

Norris, P. (1999). *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O'Connor, A. (Ed.). (2004). *Community radio in Bolivia: The miners' radio stations.* Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

O'Loan, S., Poulter, A., & McMenemy, D. (2005). *The extent of sectarianism online*. Retrieved February 10, 2006, from http://www.cis.strath.ac.uk/research/lic/downloads/TESO_Full_04-05.pdf

Pilling, R. (2006). Local journalists and the local press: Waking up to change? In B. Franklin (Ed.), *Local journalism and local media: Making the local news* (pp. 104–114). London: Routledge.

Platon, S., & Deuze, M. (2003). Indymedia journalism: A radical way of making, selecting and sharing news? *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, *4*(3), 336–55.

Rodriguez, C. (2000). *Fissures in the mediascape: An international study of citizens' media.* Cresskill, NY: Hampton Press.

Rodriguez, C. (2003). The bishop and his star: Citizens' communication in southern Chile. In N. Couldry & J. Curran (Eds.), *Contesting media power: Alternative media in a networked world* (pp. 177–194). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Ross, K. (2006). Open Source? Hearing voices in the local press. In B. Franklin (Ed.), *Local journalism and local media: Making the local news* (pp. 232–244). London: Routledge.

Sampedro Blanco, V. F. (Ed.). (2005). *13-M: Multitudes on-line.* Madrid: Catarata.

Waltz, M. (2005). *Alternative and activist media.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Whitaker, B. (1981). *News limited: Why you can't read all about it* (Minority Press Group Series No. 5). London: Minority Press Group.

Williams, R. (1980). Means of communication as means of production. In *Problems in materialism and culture: Selected essays* (pp. 50–63). London: Verso.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 19:02 07 Jun 2023; For: 9780203877685, chapter19, 10.4324/9780203877685.ch19