Title:
Aporias of Digital Journalism

Abstract:
The Internet poses, in certain ways, a problem for journalists: on the one hand, it is evidently a marvellous tool for investigative work, for the rapid dissemination of information, and for creating new news platforms with new constituencies; on the other hand, these constituencies, habituated to the real time coordinates of internet communication, are impatient with the old rhythms of the news cycle, and impatient with forms of journalistic authority that were formed in the era of one way mass medias. The very status of the journalist as reporter or opinion maker has been put into question as the bar to entry for creating a mass media audience has lowered dramatically – which was first noticed when bloggers of all types rose to prominence. This paper will present an account of journalism that relates thematically to the idea that the future of journalism lies primarily in the journalist as editor, moderator, and curator. We will, however, suggest that these accounts need a twist in order to incorporate the critical ethos of journalism. Journalists should not merely be thought of as those who edit, moderate and curate already ongoing dialogues. Journalists should also help showing the blank spots of ongoing dialogues, in order to make the silent voices heard. Journalists should facilitate an awareness of which voices are not heard in the ongoing dialogues. In order to show this, we will articulate a Derridean deconstruction of the situation of journalists, hereby showing that that the founding aporias of journalism (the aporia of giving and denying voices) has been replaced by an aporia of giving and denying rooms for dialogue.

Keywords:

Aporias of Digital Journalism

I.

The development of the Internet in the 90s in various ways altered the conditions for journalism. Newspapers like the New York Times and the Guardian (U.K.) jumped online with Internet editions, reaching a much vaster global audience instantly.

It soon became apparent that the new technology at the same time calls for new kinds of journalism (Starr 2009). The very status of the journalist as reporter or opinion maker was put into question as the bar to entry for creating a mass media audience lowered dramatically – which was first noticed when bloggers of all types rose to prominence. The only credential needed for creating a blog was access to the net. This is not to say that all blogs were created by amateurs, but it is true that the established media was slow to catch on to the blog format, while others – academics, low level journalists, college students, or just plain people – did latch onto the blog format. It turns out that the opportunity to upload one's writing to a potentially international audience, or even for a restricted circle of acquaintances, tapped a previously unsuspected desire to write held by hundreds of thousands. Blogs constituted a new platform where non-professional writers could (and sometimes did[1]) reach a larger audience, thus thrusting themselves into an attention space previously monopolized by the analogue mass media.

The traditional (pre-Internet) journalistic institutions, after initially either ignoring or deprecating the blogosphere, then began trying to incorporate Internet platforms into their standard operating procedures. By now, all major journalistic institutions have Web-based publication platforms – either exclusively or as a supplement to the paperbased or broadcasted platforms (Elkjær 2010, ch. 1). This makes it possible for them to produce content within interactive, multimediated and hyperstructured presentation forms. Secondly, the workflow and exchange of information within the journalistic organisations has had to incorporate a faster news cycle, in competition with the multitude of realtime outlets, which has made for a more efficient delivery of content through Internet based services. The efficiency comes at the expense of long-term projects, such as investigative journalism. Thus, thirdly, it is in this area that experiments are now being made to adopt investigative journalism to the capability provided by the web to 'dump' data, and to create collaborative crossnational partnerships that provide a sort of 'open source' fact collecting and checking (data-driven journalism).[2] Fourthly, the fact that the audience is now interactive have forced journalists to rethink their positions as gatekeepers of information. Thus, journalistic institutions have to move towards dialogical relationships with their audience – by leaving room for comments to the products, and to some extent relying on user-generated content (Stuart 2006, ch. 8; Gillmor 2004).

That journalists have operated as gatekeepers has long been one of the pillars of social control in democratic societies. News organizations have always filtered the information that reaches the audience. This system depended on the monopoly of news held by news organizations – a monopoly that is seriously eroded by universal access to the Internet. Journalists can no longer claim a monopolistic position, mediating between the newsmaker (be it a celebrity or a politician) and the audience (Sambrook 2006). It has therefore sometimes been suggested that the importance of journalists consists in their skills of filtering and selecting among the huge amounts of available information (Stuart 2006, pp. 36+156; Bardoel 1999, p. 386). However, the emergence of news-bots, like Google-news who trawl the web for news, and present them in an accessible manner, sorted through criteria defined by the users themselves, turns relevance into a matter of end user choice. And the rise of alternative voices, signalled by the blogs, enlarges the limits of public opinions in unexpected ways that the news organizations have difficulty capturing (Stuart 2006, p.

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1 One of the most famous examples being Matt Drudge's website, http://www.drudgereport.com/, who made no pretence of being a professional writer, but merely wrote about the rumours circulating CBS Television where he was working as a runner.
2 For example the presentation of Wikileaks-material by *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *Der Spiegel*. Another, more classical example is http://politifact.com/

176-9).

New organizations themselves, and some critics, have suggested that the journalist profession still retains its function of, as it were, endowing information with credibility (through objectivity, neutrality and fairness – Stuart 2006, p. 83; White 2008). This suggestion has, however, been challenged by defenders of citizens-journalism who claim that a not only do news organizations do a poor job of filtering the credibility of information that flows from public figures (as for instance in the WMD claims made by the Bush administration before the Iraq war), but that the better way to check the credibility of information is to not censor it – to, in effect, unleash the plurality of voices that constitutes the cyber-public sphere. (Gillmor 2004, pp. xvi-xviii).

This paper will, through the reading of philosophers like Derrida, Hardt and Negri, present an account of journalism that links up with the argument that the future of establishment journalism lies primarily in the journalist as the editor, moderator, and curator of the information flow (Stuart 2006, pp. 156-7; Bardoel 1999, pp. 386-8; Karp 2009; McAdams 2008). This may seem like too dismal and passive a picture to some – as though we were attacking the aura of the journalist. However, the real problem is that we still need for journalists to take a *critical* stance to established power of all types. How to accomplish this? One way is to construct an activist image of the moderator's task. Journalists should not merely be thought of as those who edit, moderate and curate already ongoing dialogues, but also as interveners who bring out the blank spots of ongoing dialogues, who question the rhetoric used to frame issues, and who actively seek out those voices that are not being heard. Journalists should facilitate an awareness of which voices are *not* heard in the ongoing dialogues.

In order to show this, we will articulate a Derridean deconstruction of the situation of journalists, hereby showing that that the founding aporias of journalism (the aporia of giving and denying voices) to some extent has vanished. In order to maintain her crucial role, the journalist should thus situate herself within a new aporia – namely the aporia of giving and denying rooms for dialogue. Through her training and experience in framing a story, access and assess sources, and comprehensive knowledge of the media landscape and the many different types of agents that collectively inhabit it, the journalist has an expertise that may help mediating voices in a dialogical space in which they can interact fruitfully, with suitable amounts of respect and disrespect for one another.

II.

In order to articulate this suggestion and its implications, the Derridean notion of *aporias* will become decisive. This notion is, however, essentially unclear. It is therefore necessary with some clarifications as to how it will be used in the following. In *Apories : mourir, s'attendre aux "limites de la vérité"* aporias are presented as that what makes it possible to transgress the limits of truth:

> How can one cross the borders of truth? And what "defect" would this betray, what "general defect"? Crossing this strange border and "letting oneself be carried beyond the limits of truth" must be possible, indeed inevitable, in order for such a defect to exceed the singular cases, and thereby spread its contagion to the point of becoming "general." In sum, the truth is not everything, one would then say, for there is more, something else or something better: truth is finite. Or worse: truth, it's finished. (Derrida 2000, 1)

Derrida presents aporias as examples of such "defects" that lead us beyond the limits of truth. In his deconstructivist approach he seeks to demonstrate how our limiting embeddedness in practical, epistemic and linguistic outlooks is unavoidable, but, on the other hand, not fixed. We can always become aware of our embeddedness and thereby contemplate and re-configure (deconstruct) it. This awareness has to come *through* our practical, epistemic and linguistic outlooks. It must be immanent. There is no outside perspective from which we can have the limitations of our perspectives neatly and absolutely pointed out to us.

An important aspect of our practical, epistemic and linguistic outlooks is to offer systematic

unity in our approaches; systematic unity is important to be able to navigate. If we were not able to approach the world in systematic ways, it would become indefinite, confused, and unpredictable. Systematicity is based on reduction; I can understand the vehicle outside my office as a "bicycle" in the same way as I understand the other vehicles that fall under this description. Even though bicycles may differ from each other in many ways (colour, age, form, etc.), they still share, in relevant ways, the salient characteristics of the set. If I am to approach bicycles in a practical way, it is important that I focus on the sameness, and ignore the differences. My understanding of bicycles – and even of my singular bicycle – presupposes a reduced approach to the actual entities.

On the other hand, however, internal systematic unity and coherence is not enough to fully account for our approaches to the world. Our approaches are *directed*, which means that they have not only an *internal* normativity. There is also a question as to whether our approaches are *adequate* in ways that become relevant as we vary our circumstances. If the approaches are based on reductions that make it impossible for me to make certain relevant distinctions, the approaches will inevitably fail as a practical matter. So, if my understanding of the bicycle is only based upon the physical material (iron), then I will probably have problems distinguishing between bicycles and bicycle stands. In this case the systematic unity of my approach has exaggerated. At this point, I need a more distinguished approach.[3]

The urge for systematicity and adequacy thus point in two different directions; systematicity points toward unity, whereas adequacy points toward multiplicity and diversity. Our practical, epistemic and linguistic approaches are thus tensed, which is the source, according to Derrida, of their aporetic constitutions. On the one hand, this dual effort cannot be homogenized. The question of which dividing lines to draw is always an open one (what aspects are relevant).[4] On the other hand, we cannot avoid drawing lines. We have to settle for compromises between the two efforts, compromises that are essentially partial and negotiable. It is necessary that we draw a line, and it is impossible for us to be absolutely sure of the place to draw a line. This necessary and impossible task is what Derrida speaks of as the aporias (impasses, non-passages) of our approaches

It is important to notice that this necessary and impossible task of drawing lines is also essential to understanding how the horizons of our practices have come about. The horizons of our practices are thus essentially created through the aporias. To understand the aporias of our practices is therefore an important way of understanding our practices as such. Derrida does not seek, as a philosopher, to teach us how to *avoid* defects and aporias. On the contrary, he sees them as important sources to crossing the borders of our horizons – from within these horizons. The horizons, as it were, create the conditions for transgressing the horizons – they make us aware, that there is more than what can be seen from within the horizons. In the following we will apply this philosophical insight to the cultural practice of journalism.

III.

Historically, journalism was also founded upon (among other things) an aporia that was connected to the constituencies of prevailing communicational technologies – the printing press and, later, the broadcasting mass media. The printing press and the broadcasting media are essentially mass media – i.e. they facilitate a communicative structure in which few agents communicate to many in a unidirectional structure.

In this technological structure, the journalist profession emerged as a necessary mediator. On the one hand the load of possible relevant information is immense, on the other hand the perceiving

3   This articulation of the relationship between the urge for systematicity and adequacy is, admittedly, quite sparse. I have elaborated the points in my PhD.-thesis (xxxanonymizedxxx 2005).

4   This is also the reason why framing-issues are unavoidable within journalistic practices. As a communicator you have to focus your narrative in order for your content to affiliate with the recipients, but the focus is never undisputable (Johnson-Cartee 2005; Chong & Druckman 2007; Entman 1993; 2008). Aporetic readings of journalistic practices are closely affiliated with framing-analyses. Aporetic analyses can serve as resources to understand the framing of certain practices as such. Aporetic analyses target the foundationals of certain practices – the tensions or dilemmas out of which they have emerged. The aporetic analyses can thus not dissolve the framing of the analysed practices – unless the practices are dissolved or fundamentally reconfigured themselves.

resources of the readers, listeners and viewers is scarce. The job of journalists (in the mass-medial setting) was thus to be 'fair', to investigate, to select and create narratives, and finally to communicate them in a perspicacious manner to the audience. The journalist thus had to navigate between huge amounts of information and the necessity of choosing the right norms of relevance.

The task of the journalist was essentially tensed. The news is, by its very nature, what is new – which means that the 'scoop' and the background in which it made sense, which entailed dealing with a vast amount of material, had to be put into a narrative that the audience would be able to understand in a short time frame. The journalist's product would lose its grip on the mass audience – would lose its position in their attention space – if the journalist created lumpy narratives with too much information and too little flow. The mass audience itself possessed a range of archetypal narrative forms (good guys vs. bad guys, for instance) to process news information, which journalists to a certain extent shared. However, a 'story' often contains information that cannot easily be put into these frames. Such stories are more difficult to process for the audience, and may in consequence be viewed as less interesting, or too complex, or even as untrue if the information did not converge towards expected narrative norms. The journalist was only successful to the extent that she mastered the fine art of deciding what was relevant to the story form, and what could be left out. There could never be a full mastery of this art. There would always be some dissatisfaction among the newsmakers and the audience – because notions of relevance vary.

The practice of journalists was thus situated in an aporia. On the one hand, it was essential that journalists were selective as to what was relevant. On the other hand, it was essential that the journalist presented the content for a multiple and diverse audience. It is important to see that this problematic is not an *indictment*, but merely a *description* of the journalistic enterprise of journalism. The aporias are what makes journalism so important in the mass-media structured public sphere, in as much as journalists are producing content for audiences that have their own narrative templates, infusing this content with as much truth and fact as they can without having a scientific methodology to follow, and are working under pressing time constraints, Journalism thus addresses problems for which there are no perfect solutions, but it can and has been carried out in ways that were more or less fruitful in the constitution of the public sphere.

In relation to the public sphere in a democratic political setting, the journalist's role as a conduit for voices – while at the same time shaping these voices – has played a double role: at times giving those voices a momentum that helps condition the deliberative process of policy making; and at the same time, giving the journalist a potential power to claim a place in the public attention space. The journalist operated by letting others speak – but only in accordance with certain narratives. The critical work of the journalist was important because it gave voice to certain agents, and eclipsed the interviewees *own* voice. This aporetic setting was due to a technologically basis of journalism: Due to the unidirectional structure of mass-media, dialogues between the audience and the newsmakers was not possible on the same information platform in real time, and it was therefore important that the voice of the newsmakers was challenged by the journalists – by critical questioning or by being situated within narratives that was not necessarily the ones preferred by the newsmakers themselves.

In the mass-mediated setting the journalist thus lets the interviewee speak *to* the public. Drawing on the hermeneutical insight that the answer as a linguistic given only makes sense against the background of a common understanding of questions (Gadamer 1990, 368-84), one could say that the voice of the interviewee, in the mass-mediated setting, was endowed with its significance by the journalist's mastery of the question. The questioning of the journalist challenges, and *thereby* gives voice to the interviewee.

IV.

This journalistic setting was fundamentally changed by the emergence of Internet-based media. We are not claiming that traditional journalism (as described in the previous section) has vanished; not even that it will inevitably vanish. The history of technology shows that new technologies rarely *replace* traditional practices. Most often they lead to altered or supplemented practices in which

both old and new technologies are applied (Finnemann 2001, pp. 15-21). This will probably also apply to the relation of the Internet to mainstream journalist practices. On the one hand, the Internet certainly serves as a powerful tool for journalists in their everyday practice, creating a vast data space for huge amounts of information with almost instant reference, for instance. But for the first time, both sides of the communicative channel – the newsmakers and the audience – share this same space, and can potentially compete in disseminating stories to others. Newsmakers increasingly communicate through Internet-based media that are available for everyone. If, for example, someone is interested in the views of the prime minister, she can visit the prime minister's blog, facebook- or twitter profile, and see for herself. Or perhaps even ask the prime minister directly. The new media potentially facilitates the newsmakers and the public talking with each other without intermediators. The distances separating newsmakers from the public therefore change (Gillmor 2004).

The Internet also allows news to be customized –satisfying the interests of various audiences among the mass audience. Less actively engaged agents can subscribe to news-bots that search the Internet for news, and publish it according to the criteria of relevance that the agent has specified. As the end-user has defined the criteria of relevance herself, she no longer has to rely on or confront the full array of voices that the journalist would present.

Thus, if we look at the traditional aporia of journalism (journalism within the mass-mediated structure) – the tension between the huge amount of information and the necessary sorting of narratives based on criteria of relevance – we note that the urgency of both aspects of the aporia have changed. On the one hand, we no longer depend on receiving the information through traditional mass media because the information is already available to us via the amalgamation of news sources on the Internet. Secondly, search-bots on the Internet facilitate user-defined sorting according to self-defined criteria of relevance.

In this situation, one might argue that the aporia of journalism vanishes, and along with it, the urgency of journalism. But does it really vanish, or does the aporia merely change? In our view, the answer is the latter. The journalist's job is no longer to navigate in the aporias of giving voice (from the potential news subject to the public), because this channel is now replaced by the direct link provided by the Internet. Instead, the journalist becomes a moderator. Note that the conceptualization of the journalist as moderator is not new. We will, however, revise it somewhat. To understand it in the context of the Internet news world, we must however turn, first, to what we mean by dialogue.

In the late 20th. century Gadamer proposed a model for dialogue in which he claimed that dialogues happen through a fusion of horizons, meaning that all participants in a successful dialogue would gradually come to share a common ground, to which the very event of dialogue would refer, that would be more comprehensive and balanced than the starting point of each participant (Gadamer 1990). In Gadamerian terms one could thus say that the informational notation form that lies behind digital technology like computers and the Internet constitute a "language" that makes it possible for seemingly incompatible phenomena (like sound, the visual, text) to be represented in one language (code), making mutual exchanges possible.[5] The informational notation form thus constitutes a horizon that makes it possible to understand these phenomena (although degrees of understanding will vary).[6]

While we will not seek to refute this account of dialogue as based upon the extension of horizons, we will point out its inadequacy – it needs to accommodate the Derridean twist that was articulated in section II. Even though it is true that dialogues lead to fusions of horizons, it is important to notice that the fusion itself must be based upon a (often implicit and inarticulate) common agreement that there are some things we do not discuss. Signification can only happen on the background of spaces, silence, blanks, in-betweens (Derrida 1969; xxxanonymizedxxx 2009).

5   These features are, however without the Gadamerian interpretation, described in (Finnemann 1999; Galloway 2004; Galloway and Thacker 2007, vol. 21).
6   To take an example: Through some text (assemblercode) sound can be transformed into visual representations. An example of this can be seen in the various *visualizations* in Microsoft's "Media player" (http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/player/visualizations.aspx).

Dialogue can only happen in the tension between the urge for systematicity and adequacy; and systematicity necessitates certain reductions. In order for dialogues not to deteriorate into chaotic chatter, issues of personality and fragmented exchanges, it is important that they are framed in certain ways – it is decisive that there is a certain *narrative* that connects the various contributions. A dialogue can only happen against the background of a general agreement that certain contributions and subjects are *not* accepted. Aporetically stated, the existence of a dialogue implies the prevention of other dialogues from occurring in that space and time. Dialogues only generate real political and cultural advancement if the participants on the one hand *listen to* and *recognize* the contributions of the others, while at the same time not letting themselves be passively *determined* by the agenda of the others.[7]

In mass-mediated dialogue (newspapers and broadcast), the journalist intermediator chooses the participants and limits their number. Journalism is in this setting both the ground for the possibility of the success of the dialogue and the limit of its development. The intermediary journalist usually has a sense of who the potential participants are and how they will respond to certain statements, and it is thus possible to take these aspects into account when designing the dialogue.

This limited but powerful pre-determination is, however, decisively different with dialogues on the Internet. On Internet-based sites with open access, everyone can often potentially participate in the dialogue. This makes it somewhat unpredictable how trustworthy statements are, how they will be received, and whether the dialogue will stay on topic or not. This is one of the strengths of the Internet (if the diversity is handled with an eye to moderating personal statements and continuing on topic); it is, however, also one of the weaknesses (if the diversity is handled unconstructively).[8]

Dialogues are thus situated in an aporetically based tension. On the one hand, dialogues are dependent on contributions that to some extent challenge the prevailing horizons, while at the same time, an exaggerated or obsessional challenge will destroy the spirit of the dialogue, causing it to fall apart (fragmentation), and lose focus and direction.

This aporia is also found on the Internet. One of the ways in which it is handled is through the creation of communities. Communities should be understood outside of the old model of face-to-face meetings, or even the model of a number of dispersed members sharing the symbols and narratives of the collective imagination. Instead, community becomes first and foremost a collection of end users who find each other. The finding is mediated by the Web, which makes possible a less physically exhausting, more extended and more temporarily succinct search in order to find other people with, if not the same opinions, at least the same interests. Thus, instead of a top down dissemination of symbols, what one has is a search that links people together to create and participate in the activity on a certain site or sites. Thus, these voluntaristic communities are in various ways framed by the kind of participants and contributions that find their way to the dialogue. On a technical level it is possible to design a site to provide limited access to the community. In many communities you need to be invited, or at least to create a userprofile, and if you do not act according to the prevailing codes of conduct, you may risk being excluded from the community. Another selective mechanism is the focus of the community. Communities that discuss poodles are not attractive for agents that are not interested in poodles. This is not to say that there will only be dialogues about poodles, but the chances for a qualified feedback will be higher, if the subject has some affinity with the subject of the community.

Still, should it happen that a participant joined the community and contributed unfruitfully one will often see that the other participants try to educate the user, pointing out how he breaks with the norms of the community. At other times the intruder will be bullied in various ways, in order to make him exit. Communities of a certain size will often institutionalize this process by introducing moderators who have the power to rebuke, edit/delete contributions and even exclude offending users.

The task of moderators is, however, a difficult one. Their primary goal is to facilitate dialogue – through elimination of dialogue. Moderators only have to intervene if the ongoing dialogues are

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7 On the importance of fruitful differences between communicating agents, see (xxxanonymizedxxx 2009)
8 Attempts to personalize or intentionally divert the topic of comment threads is often referred to as *trolling*.

threatened. Due to the aporetic foundation of dialogues, there are, however, no clear-cut criteria that define *when* a dialogue is threatened. Dialogues *need* challenges (in order to keep on moving), they need surprising (and thus potentially problematic) input to remain interesting. It is often the surprising contributions that further the development of the dialogue. On the other hand, dialogues fall apart if *every* contribution is surprising, if it is not possible to work out some common horizon within which the various contributions can be understood.

Moderation is thus a practice that draws on qualities that are already developed in the education and practice of journalists. The moderator needs to assess each voice in the dialogues and determine whether or not they contribute fruitfully – that is, advancing the dialogue toward some insights – in a suitably surprising way against the conventions of prevailing narratives. The moderator needs to be selective and reductive, in order for dialogues and narratives to flourish.

In order for this to happen successfully, the moderator should have a comprehensive and broad overview of the topics concerned. They need insight into the relevant data space from which the participants will draw their references. They need skills in assessing the value of contributions – whether they are novel, whether they are on topic, whether they respect the contributions of others – as to their worth in substantiating a narrative. They need to have the hermeneutic sense to recognize *potential* narratives inside conventional ones that are worth developing, or that may need to be overtly challenged. In short, they need to be journalists.

The fact that the qualities of journalists are a close fit with those of moderators should come as no surprise. As shown above, mostly, journalists in the old mass-mediated structure specialize in sorting and organizing information, which often means finding ways to include different views, non-judgmentally, in a narrative. This is what moderating is about. The turn from an understanding of journalists-as-giving-voices to journalists-as-moderating-dialogues should thus not be thought of as a complete break with previous practices, but a reconfiguration of journalist practice in the post-gatekeeper era. The traditional aporia of journalism has therefore translocated from the problem of giving space to the most relevant information to finding a way to both give space to varying positions and attitudes in ongoing dialogues and preserve that space from violent rupture between these positions and attitudes. This requires tact, a sense of fairness, and a very lively sense of what is not being said.

Our suggestion will thus be to rethink the practice of journalists; rather than being situated in the aporias of giving and denying voice, journalists should situate themselves in the aporias of facilitating and reducing dialogues – i.e. the aporias of giving and denying space for dialogue, according to the levels of disagreement. This is not to say that the role of the journalist should be merely *re*-active, in the sense that she merely systematizes and elaborates what others have created. In moderating and facilitating dialogues it is also important to contribute by inviting new participants that can reflect the ongoing dialogues in new perspectives; furthermore, the moderator often achieves her position by writing the contribution that generates the community comment threads, or responses from other communities or sites on the Internet. In this respect the new setting of journalism is not radically different from journalism within the traditional mass media. The contributions from the journalists are, however, no longer the end product – but rather a means to facilitate a subsequent process of dialogue.

V.

As we said above, the claim that journalism should now mainly be thought of as the moderation of dialogue is not new (Stuart 2006, pp. 156-7; Bardoel 1999, pp. 386-8; Karp 2009; McAdams 2008). Our detour through the notion of dialogues should, however, make it clear that this claim needs a Derridean twist. We need to know how journalists should relate to the "outside" of dialogues – i.e. the worldly affairs that are *not* considered within the prevailing dialogue horizons. In this section we will discuss how, from this task, we evolve a *critical* aspect of journalism: its treatment of the blank spots of dialogues.

The voice-giving of the journalist within the traditional aporia is, as mentioned above, not only a *mediation* of the desired voices of the newsmakers. Relevant voices are not always the voices

desired by the interviewees; often the journalist seeks out a voice that the interviewee would like to keep hidden. Sometimes merely critical questioning can do this. At other times in-depth research is necessary. Can this function persist in the new setting? I will argue that it is still an open question as to whether the kind of critique that emerges through in-depth research can persist. The new structures may, however, open for new kinds of critical interference.

News-bots are, by design, uncritical – they are simply extensions of algorithms that pick up stories generated elsewhere according to certain rules. Critical investigations are often driven by an intuition that there is "more to it" than what is immediately visible; and since news-bots can only trawl through the visible information it would be impossible to create mechanical rules for any kind of critical investigation. The news-sorting maintained by news bots can thus not continue the task of critique that has often been brought out as one of the most important aspects of journalism. You cannot program a news bot to find the news that isn't being reported, or the opinion that isn't being expressed. News bots are accumulators, not creators.

The question is thus whether the critical mediating function can be maintained in a communicational setting based upon self-consciously limited communities with direct interaction. If we lose the unifying aspect of the mass media, politics may devolve into a conflict of special interests that cannot even agree on a common framework for issues, much less on a structure ranking issues according to some relevance criteria. With the loss of mass media, will it not be tempting to orient politics (or at least the discussions of politics) towards the particular, private interests that are prevalent in communities?

In order to answer this question it will turn out to be helpful to contemplate the very distinction between the private and the public. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have suggested that we reconsider the very distinction between the public and private (Hardt and Negri 2009). Rather than focussing on what is happening in the private and public spheres, we should contemplate the signification of *the common*.

The notion of the common has in recent years become a focal point for attempt to articulate layers in social interaction falling between the private and public spheres that have traditionally been overlooked (e.g. in Hardt and Negri 2004; Hardt and Negri 2009; Benkler 2006; Lessig 2001). The common is that which has no clear proprietor or which is, as it were, owned by everybody. Hardt and Negri define the common thus:

> By "the common" we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty – which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together. We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth (Hardt and Negri 2009, viii).

A shared feature of the listed phenomena is that they are normally not subject of exclusive appropriation. The results of social production furthermore share the feature that they would actually lose some of their value if they were wholly appropriated. In the following we will focus upon this kind of commonality.

Hardt and Negri introduce the analytics of the common in order to re-articulate our notions of property. Property has been categorized, since the Enlightenment, in terms of the private or public, with the public being represented solely by the state. Against this approach Hardt and Negri point out that some resources are not adequately conceived in this matrix. The value of knowledge, language and information is not adequately conceived in private or public terms, because these categories do not reflect their actual instantiation in social life, where they form the common basis for rational and emotional interaction. Knowledge, language and information are, rather, to be assessed in relation to how they form a commonality between agents.

Hardt and Negri's notion of the common is more radical than what is found in Benkler and Lessig's approaches. This is so because their socio-psychological approach (unlike Benkler and

Lessig) is based upon a Marxist emphasis on production (Marx and Engels 1845, 21; Hardt and Negri 2000, 3.4; Hardt and Negri 2009, 56-9, 174-5, 267). They refute the liberal supposition about the self-relying, autonomous social agent. In Hardt and Negri's account there is a reciprocal relationship between agents and products (a similar idea can be found in Derrida 1994, 86-87). In traditional capitalist approaches that focus upon the appropriative relations between agents and products it is natural to conceive the agents as being coherent, clearly defined units. However, a focus upon resources that are not clearly appropriated (the common) makes it evident that the identity of agents is much more decisively negotiable. Interactions that are oriented towards common resources are thus open to the continual negotiations of social positioning, because none of the agents can legitimately claim the exclusive right of defining the relations.

This idea of the common sphere is not new, but it tends to be excluded from traditional economic and political theories, because it is difficult to articulate within the classical notions of property.[9] Even though the common is not a new phenomenon, Hardt and Negri claims, drawing on Foucault's notion of biopolitics (as a dissolution of Enlightenment individuality) and fusing it with an informational account of production (its immateriality), that the common has been *accentuated* in the informational age. With this shifted accentuation in the political and economic agenda, the focus of critique also changes. Critical projects should no longer mainly be thought of in *emancipatory* terms; critical projects should rather be thought of in terms of *liberation*:

> The terminological distinction between emancipation and liberation is crucial here: whereas emancipation strives for the freedom of identity, the freedom to be who you really are, liberation aims at the freedom of self-determination and self-transformation, the freedom to determine what you can become. (Hardt and Negri 2009, 331)

Two points are crucial in this transformation. Firstly, the main battles no longer concern the distribution of wealth, but are rather over the possibilities inherent in the content of the relevant individuals, classes, interests and goods that should be distributed according to some notion of justice. Classes are not given once and for all. Second, the essential struggles are struggles for the power of definitions; what differences deserve to be articulated? What differences are relevant in the articulation of states of affairs? What interpretations prove fruitful in our common engagements?[10]

The struggles for the power of definitions are played out in the common of communication. The explosion of common spheres in the informational production[11] entail that the struggles for the power of definition gains added power of penetration. The common-based informational products are not easily appropriated in the private or public spheres – they lose some of their value as soon as they are appropriated, because the value is based upon the degree of their access. Informational products are mainly valuable insofar as they have existence in the relations between agents. It is true that informational products can be (and often are) appropriated – through copyrights and patents. Information can be privatised, and sometimes this entails added value for the appropriator (because the information gives the appropriator a monopoly on access). Products, however, increasingly gain their value in the role they play in communicative relations, and in this sense they need to be brought into the common. And in this sense the products are dependent on the ways in which we communicate about the products.

There is nothing new in this. Brand-marketing demonstrates that the corporate world is aware of this. Brands are highly appropriated informational products. However, even though they are

9 This point is also demonstrated in Benkler 2006.

10 The importance of language over materiality can also be seen in the increasing focus on brands in the valuation of products and companies. See Klein 1999 and Lindemann 2010.

11 I will not in this paper substantiate that the common-based approach has gained impetus in today's political setting. Further substantiation of the claim can be found in Hardt and Negri 2000; Hardt and Negri 2004. Notice, furthermore, that it is not my claim that political struggle cannot be played out in the traditional private and public spheres in today's political setting. My point is mainly that the common-based approach gain impetus – not that traditional approaches vanish.

protected by multiple copyrights, the brands would lose their value if they were completely removed from the common sphere. Brands have value according to how other agents relate to them. This meeting between the brand and the others is always to some extent out of control; strong brands are strong because we become habituated to being attracted to them, or incorporating them into our background of assumptions about the world; but even strong brands are potentially challenged by changes in attitude and practices. The value of the brand is tied to the attitudes and practices of others, and therefore vulnerable to the same attitudes and practices of others.

The power of definition is essentially played out in dialogue. As we saw in section IV, dialogues are structurally open-ended. We do not know where we will end, when we participate in dialogues, because the contributions of the others are unpredictable. Dialogues are thus, on the one hand, open; on the other hand they are, however, carried out by participants who may be interested in differing approaches to the point of threatening the topic order of the dialogue, or who may be focused, inversely, solely upon a narrow reading of the telos of the dialogue, and thereby stifling the creativity of the dialogic enterprise.

The aim of critical approaches to dialogues is to reflect the horizon of the dialogues in terms of its openness. The critic's task is to demonstrate or articulate the limits of the prevailing horizons. One way of doing this can be by showing how apparently disruptive or uninteresting contributions may contribute fruitfully in surprising ways.

If journalists are thought of as moderators, it should thus be clear that journalistic practice still relies on the tools of critique to moderate successfully, and to fulfil the role of the fourth estate in the public sphere. As mentioned in the previous sections moderation is an aporetically shaped assignment. We can only have satisfying open dialogues to the extent that we are ready to adhere to some rules of implicature regarding relevance and perspicacity. This certainly also goes for the work of the journalist. The critical function of the journalist can thus not be to *avoid* narrowing the horizons of dialogues – but to make the narrowing strategies *visible*. As the informational field becomes a battlefield between powerful brand possessors on the one hand (seeking to appropriate the informational horizon), and common-based interests on the other (seeking, with a certain group narcissism, to keep certain informational horizons open), the task of contemplating prevailing horizons become increasingly important

This is certainly not the *same* critical role as has been carried in journalism in the mass media. The dialogically oriented journalists will help making narrowing strategies visible. Journalists that are primarily dialogically oriented will not easily be able to serve as maintainers of general, holistic publicity in the same sense as was possible (at least ideally) in the mass-mediated journalism (cf. Habermas 1962; Habermas 1992, VIII). Journalists in the dialogical setting will thus not reveal non-limited dialogical horizons. The disclosure of limitations will not necessarily lead to an annulment of them. To think so would be to forget the aporetic constitution of dialogues. But the disclosure of limitation will serve as a continuously ongoing reminder that the limitations are only contingently valid – hereby checking hegemonic structures as they attempt to monopolize the public attention space.

VI.

During the last ten years new journalist approaches like citizen- and participatory journalism (Gillmor 2004; Bowman and Willis 2003; Lasica 2003) and collaborative journalism (Glaser 2004) have come about – approaches that in various ways take serious the new dialogical structure that is carried by the Internet. In these approaches it is generally acknowledged that what I am calling dialogically oriented journalism will facilitate more diverse and plural approaches. It helps the journalist gain access to multiple perspectives. At the same time it is, however, also acknowledged that the main challenge for dialogical journalism is the quality of the products and producers – that is, their credibility and trustworthiness.[12]

12 Different kinds of peer- or quantitative based rating systems are suggested to neutralize these challenges (Gillmor 2004, ch. 9; Benkler 2006, pp. 75-80). Recently, Facebook.com has introduced plugins that facilitate cross-page references based on our facebook-accounts, hereby making it possible to terminate a user's account, severing all their friend connections. The idea is that most users will be scared of ruining their social reputation if their friends

This difficulty exemplifies the aporia of dialogical exchanges. On the one hand dialogue, in order to maximize its potential to inform and enlighten, needs to be open towards the plurality of worldly interpretations. Critically shaped moderation can facilitate this plurality. This can be done through framing- or discourse analyses, which make us aware of the horizons of dialogues. The framing and discourse analyses makes us aware of the borders of the prevailing dialogues. But the point we have been pressing in this paper (in the analysis of journalism) should help us see that an awareness of the limitations of dialogues can also happen through a focus upon the aporetic constitution of the very fundamentals of prevailing practices. The aporetic analysis emphasizes the insolubility of the analysed practices. Every opening of the boundaries of dialogue happens through a shift in focus to the aporetic constitution of the very fundamentals of prevailing practices – but the aporias are not dissolved as such. The paradoxes or tensions of the dialogues that structure practical reason and its political extensions cannot be solved but only reframed. Thus, in stating that journalistic practice is constituted by an aporia, we are stating three things: (a) Journalistic quests are important; (b) There are no perfect solutions to the tasks at hand; (c) But only by continually trying to solve it, journalism maintains its relevance in society.

The struggle for open horizons of dialogue is one of the driving forces in practising good journalism. In struggling for open horizons, the journalist has to continually approach his subjects and objects in new ways, in order to dig out new aspects of the ongoing issues. The struggle for open horizons is thus one important source (among others) for journalist creativity.

The moderating function of the journalist should, however, not only be conceived of in re-active terms. The journalist-moderator is not only the one who systematizes what has already been written by others. The journalist-moderator needs to be actively engaged as well – i.e. by inviting new voices in the discussion or by writing contributions herself that may stimulate new discussion. Journalists are certainly also participants in the common, and it would thus be illusory to think of the journalist's role in dialogues as merely re-active. The task of the professional journalist in the dialogue is, however, mainly to make the invisible visible. Hereby she can maintain her critical voice in Internet based public spheres.

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