

# What is Multimedia Journalism<sup>1</sup>?

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**ABSTRACT** *Convergence, media cross-ownership and multimedia newsrooms are becoming increasingly part of the vocabulary of contemporary journalism—in practice, education, as well as research. The literature exploring multimedia is expanding rapidly but it is clear that it means many different things to different people. Research into what multimedia in news work means for journalism and journalists is proliferating. In this paper the social and cultural context of multimedia in journalism, its meaning for contemporary newsrooms and media organizations, and its current (emerging) practices in Europe and the United States are analyzed. The goal: to answer the question in what ways “multimedia” impacts upon the practice and self-perception of journalists, and how this process in turn shapes and influences the emergence of a professional identity of multimedia journalism. This paper offers an analysis of the professional and academic literature in Europe and the United States, using the concept of media logic as a theoretical framework.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Journalism, Internet, Online Journalism, Multimedia*

## Introduction

The discourse of convergence, media cross-ownership and multimedia newswork is increasingly becoming part of the vocabulary of contemporary journalism—in practice, education, as well as research. The literature on multimedia is expanding rapidly, and it is clear that it means many different things to different people. Research into what convergence and multimedia mean for journalism and the work of journalists is proliferating. In this paper I contextualize multimedia in journalism, explore its meaning for contemporary newsrooms and media organizations, and its current (emerging) practices in Europe and the United States. As the basis for these considerations I have used the professional and scholarly literature on convergence and multimedia in journalism in Europe and the United States in particular.<sup>2</sup> The goal: to answer the question in what ways the process of ongoing convergence impacts upon the practice and self-perception of journalists, and how this process in turn shapes and influences the emergence of a professional identity of multimedia journalism. As constituting elements of such a professional identity I

consider a “logic” of multimedia journalism as the institutional, organizational, technological, and cultural factors influencing how news work gets done in a convergent setting (see Dahlgren, 1996). These elements should be seen as *recombinant*, as journalists shape and are being shaped by the various contexts involved in multimedia news work (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002). Every aspect of the professional identity of multimedia journalism will therefore entail a critical discussion on the various meanings it can have for the journalists involved, indicating the bandwidth of issues involved in the convergence process which facilitate the journalists’ agency (van Zoonen, 1998). My aim is to provide a synthesis of the ongoing debates and experiences of media scholars and professionals using a theoretical framework to structure the manifold meanings and applications of intertwined processes such as computerization, digitalization, convergence, and multimedia in news organizations.

## Multimedia: a definition

In order to adequately understand what “multimedia” means for the field of pro-

essional journalism internationally, one has to look beyond the existence or examples of multimedia journalism to their social organization. Dahlgren (1996) proposes a framework for conceptualizing the reconfiguration of journalism and its publics in a new media environment in terms of a media logic, defined as the particular institutionally structured features of a medium, the ensemble of technical and organizational attributes, and the cultural competences of users—all of which impact on what gets represented in the medium and how this gets done (Dahlgren builds on the work of Altheide and Snow, most recently published in 1991). The concept of media logic can, for example, be used to analyze the characteristics of online media professionals in terms of how they describe and self-evaluate their competences, attributes and features (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002). I would like to extend these considerations to assess the characteristics of a *multimedia logic* in journalism. This means I will look at multimedia through the perspectives of the institutional, the technological, the organizational, and the cultural (in terms of producer/user competences). The advantage of applying media logic to the study of multimedia in news organizations over, for example, other relevant approaches used in new media studies such as diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995), gatekeeper studies (Singer, 1997a, 1997b), sociology of newswork (Schudson, 2003), or social systems theory (Quandt, 2003a) is that it at once allows the researcher to have a broad perspective on the dynamics of change and resistance in adapting to new environments, while at the same time locating the study within the boundaries of a particular media type.

Before moving to the elements of a logic of multimedia journalism let me offer a pragmatic contemporary definition of multimedia journalism. There are two ways of defining multimedia in journalism: first, as the presentation of a news story package on a website using two or more media formats, such as (but not limited to) spoken and written word, music, moving and still images, graphic animations, including interactive and hypertextual elements (online journalism; see Deuze, 2003a); secondly, as the integrated (although not necessarily simulta-

neous) presentation of a news story package through different media, such as (but not limited to) a website, a Usenet newsgroup, e-mail, SMS, MMS, radio, television, teletext, print newspapers and magazines (a.k.a. horizontal integration of media). Both definitions are ideal-typical and should be understood as possible “end-points” on a continuum from no convergence to full convergence. Two studies have recently identified the various stops on this road. Researchers of the European *Mudial1*-project identified three steps towards the assumed end-point of a completely integrated multimedia newsroom as various “degrees” of convergence (Aquino et al., 2002), whereas a group of US scholars more or less similarly coined five phases towards full convergence (Daily et al., 2003). The thus defined “convergence continuum” assumes that sooner or later all media organizations move towards a stage where integration of different parts of the news-making process (including audio, video, text, images, graphics; but also marketing, cross-promotion, sales, redistribution and interactivity with publics) is achieved. Such models tend to ignore that convergence does not have to be a linear process, that it may fail, or that it leaves some parts of the organization untouched. The “continuum” metaphor also rests uneasy with its assumption of inevitability, and with its presumed consensus among stakeholders and media practitioners involved on what convergence means to them and their work or involvement in the company.

In this paper a rather pragmatic definition of convergence in news media companies is used. Convergence is generally seen in terms of (increasing) cooperation and collaboration between formerly distinct media newsrooms and other parts of the modern media company. Examples thereof are emerging all over the Web, even though issues like profitability (or lack thereof), bandwidth, media access, usability, and (international) copyrights are still problematic for an effective and innovative pursuit of this kind of multimedia journalism. Multimedia news operations often start out with joint websites, at some point branching out to other types of exchange (cross-promotion of projects, cross-media advertisement sales, news sharing,

partial integration of newsrooms; see, e.g., Boczkowski, 2003; Gentry, 2003; Singer, 2003, 2004; Stone and Bierhoff, 2002). Integrated multimedia projects are currently common practice for the entertainment industry in particular, where television shows like *Big Brother* or movies like *Star Wars* are meticulously developed, prepared for release, and cross-promoted through a wide variety of media platforms, channels, and markets. The following are some current examples of multimedia journalism from its earliest to more advanced stages:

- so-called “standups” print journalists do to present some aspect of the news on camera for their company’s television counterpart;
- galleries or slideshows of pictures photojournalists make for the website of their company’s newspaper (to include photographs for which there was no room in print);
- news briefs or summaries written by print, broadcast, or online reporters to be used for e-mail, I-mode, or SMS news alerts;
- joint projects among distinct media operations to gather, edit, and present news stories across formats;
- fully integrated multimedia newsroom where teams of news workers from print, broadcast, and online jointly gather information, mine databases, and plan story packages intended for distribution across all media.

Research in a number of countries shows that the contemporary use of multimedia projects and processes in news organizations tends to reproduce existing (or “old school”) journalistic practices and culture (Boczkowski, 2003; Quinn and Trench, 2002), as most websites or story packages hardly use interactive options (Jankowski and Van Selm, 2000; Massey and Levy, 1999; Quandt, 2003b; Schultz, 1999, 2000), multimedia options remain underused (Sundar, 2000; Zerba, 2003), and most examples of innovative uses of hypertext, multimedia, and interactivity are generally found outside mainstream news media online (Deuze, 2003a).

With the internationalization and global expansion of media industries and markets, media cross-ownerships enabled by increased deregulation in most countries around the

world, and the development of multinational media corporations, most authors expect the emergence of full-on convergent multimedia journalism at some point in the near future (see, e.g., Stone and Bierhoff, 2002 for Europe; Lásica, 2002 and Criado and Kraepelin, 2003 for the United States). It must be clear, however, that in the context of this paper I refer to a pragmatic definition when talking about multimedia journalism, as in a definition that takes its cue from current practices in newsrooms across Europe and the United States in particular. The key to this approach is to understand convergence as more or less reluctant collaboration and piecemeal integration of formerly distinct media operations, particularly observable in print or broadcast efforts with an online counterpart. This definition may seem more or less similar to online journalism: journalism (as in production of digital content, including audio, video and text) as it is produced more or less exclusively for presentation and distribution on the World Wide Web as the graphic interface of the Internet (Deuze, 1999). The difference lies in the intentions or goals of journalism: online journalism is not driven by the purpose of multimedia—in fact, digital storytelling using multiple media can be seen as a potential but not a necessary element of added value to an online journalistic presentation (Deuze, 2003a; Paul and Fiebich, 2002). In other words: online journalism is not synonymous with multimedia journalism, and for a thorough discussion of online journalism—also called cyberjournalism, e-journalism, or internet journalism—I would refer to theoretical and practical overviews of online journalism—such as more or less similarly offered by Heinonen (1999) in Finland; Altmeppen et al. (2000) and Meier (2002) in Germany, Hall (2001) and Ward (2002) in the UK; and Pavlik (2001) in the USA.

### Multimedia Logic

As explained above, I assume in this paper that a broader understanding of the impact a changing media environment has for the social organization (including culture and praxis) in journalism involves a critical appreciation of its

logic. For the issues at hand this requires us to look at the mutually constituent (or recombinant) elements of multimedia logic: the institutionally structured features of a medium, the ensemble of technical and organizational attributes, and the cultural competences of users and producers of news.

### *Institutional Perspective*

A structure of convergent multimedia news organizations has been emerging since the mid-1990s, with companies all over the world opting for at least some form of cross-media cooperation or synergy between formerly separated staffers, newsrooms, and departments. According to a survey among 200 news executives worldwide in 2001, in almost three-quarters of these companies integration strategies were planned or implemented at that time (Innovation, 2001). Some examples of media companies physically integrating broadcast, print and online journalists include *FT.com* and *Financial Times* in the UK, *Recoletos* with *Marca* and *Expansion* in Spain, *Chicago Tribune*, *WGN-TV/Radio*, with *CLTV* (cable partner) in the United States (Boczkowski, 2003; Gentry, 2003; Stone and Bierhoff, 2002, p. 4). Perhaps the pioneering example is *Tampa Bay Online*, *Channel 8-TV* and *Tampa Tribune* in the United States, in which country arguably most of the examples of structural convergence at the institutional level can be found (Carr, 2002; Singer, 2004; Stevens, 2002). Beyond these "ultimate" forms of convergence, it is safe to say that growing majorities of news media in different parts of the world offer their core journalistic product through more than one channel. Studies in several countries show that journalists are slowly but surely getting accustomed to the fact that their "mother-medium" has an online presence too—which findings go hand in hand with an increased awareness of a distinctive character of online journalists (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Singer, 2003). Although several experts, academics and research firms suggested in the mid-1990s that the optimal model for a convergent (that is, the combination of an offline mother-medium with an online or Net-native counterpart) news media operation would be

an integrated newsroom, this situation still has not been achieved nor accepted widely by the industry (arguments in favor of print and online newsroom integration: Fulton, 1996, 2000; Lapham, 1995; somewhat "disappointed" conclusions for example for the United States: Pavlik, 2001; for Germany see: Neuberger, 2001).

The way convergent multimedia initiatives are structured varies from medium to medium, and organization to organization. These different approaches can be explained by several factors. In an overview of new media innovation efforts in five European countries (Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria) scholars noted a general lack of consensus or even vision regarding the nature of changes brought about by convergence (Bierhoff et al., 2000). Another overview of European multimedia initiatives cited issues like legislation, regulation and the role of unions, and the various histories and cultures the different elements in an synergistic company represent (see Stone and Bierhoff, 2002). Observers like Pablo Boczkowski (2003) and Jane Singer (2004) in the United States as well as in The Netherlands (Mark Deuze), Germany (Thorsten Quandt), Spain (David Domingo), and Argentina (Edgardo Garcia) also note differences in organizational structures and work practices and correlate these with perceptions of former competitors—now colleagues (print versus broadcast in particular, offline versus online in general), and cultural clashes between different newsrooms. The point remains that on an institutional perspective convergence comes in different shapes and sizes, strongly influenced by both internal (practices, rituals, routines, cultures) as well as external (regulation, competition, stakeholders, publics) factors.

As noted earlier, researchers in Europe as well as the United States have suggested a way to model this wide variety of approaches by subdividing the field in "stages" of convergence, evolving from no convergence through various degrees towards full convergence, which at the moment only exists in an experimental setting at the so-called *Newsplex* laboratory in South Carolina, built in 2002 (Aquino et al., 2002, pp. 19–21).<sup>3</sup> Following their work and the descriptions of participant observers like

Jane Singer and Pablo Boczkowski in the United States, and Jan Bierhoff and Martha Stone in Europe, institutional characteristics of these various degrees of convergence can be summarized as:

- partnerships with other (journalistic and non-journalistic) media organizations to provide, promote, repurpose, or exchange news;
- cross-media (integrated) marketing and management projects;
- establishment of a research and development strategy;
- contextual factors regarding local or industrial legislation and union rules.

It must be clear that the institutionally structured features of multimedia convergence in journalism mean different things in different situations. It is important to note that the multimedia adoption process is not uniquely “caused” by internet, or more specifically the World Wide Web. All these developments should be seen as accelerators and amplifiers of convergence, as journalists in for example public broadcasting organizations such as the BBC in the UK have always worked in a multiple media capacity, and there are plenty of examples of “combo-journalism” in the mid-20th century when newspaper journalists were also expected to wield a photo camera (for contextual work see, e.g., Winseck, 1998, showing how convergence existed in the UK and Canada in “pre-Web” times; Wise, 2000 who historicizes multimedia as a distinct technology; and Packer and Jordan, 2001 who include art, games, and cinema to their overview).

Criticality within an institutional perspective on convergent multimedia deals with questions of access, diversity, and labor (McChesney, 1999). The 20th century has seen a constant dwindling of the number of independent media (broadcast organizations and publishers), with a parallel development in a steady growth of the size of remaining “umbrella” companies. This has led in many if not all countries to a predominance of one-paper-towns, and other forms of local media market (near-) monopolies. This is why many countries or regions uphold laws and regulations stipulating a minimum competition level between media target-

ing the same audience. As most governments are moving towards deregulation of the media, media cross-ownership and a following decline of competition can be expected to diminish opportunities of access to local markets, and may pose threats to a certain level of between-media diversity of voices within such a convergent industry (Weare et al., 2001).

Distinct ethical and editorial autonomy concerns arise when mergers and acquisitions include media co-branding, joint ventures, and strategic alliances with non-news companies (Davis and Craft, 2000). The increasing corporate colonization of the media industry is indeed reproduced on the Web, and poses questions regarding the (desirability of) partnerships, cross-ownerships, and collaborations between former relatively distinct processes, products, and markets of news, entertainment, marketing, and so on (Garnham, 1996; Lessig, 2001). Such considerations put increasing pressures on the level of individual responsibility and ethical decision-making of reporters and editors, as these stress the importance of upholding safeguards towards the sustenance of independent voices and diverse opinions among them. Regarding labor it is important to note that some—including most of the journalists involved in converging media companies according to research by Singer (2004)—feel the industry’s primary motive for merging or co-operating across media is saving money. As Devyatkin (2001) for example notes: executives in the media industry tend to see new media as a way to make staff downsizing easier—doing more with less people—and generally not as a way to explore new genres, styles, angles, or voices for the news. This is a valid perspective, even though it must also be noted that convergence for companies in fact involves spending impressive sums on new equipment, hardware and software (requiring constant updating), in-house and external training and reschooling of staff, hiring new people (particularly those with IT skills or sensibilities), and so on. Case studies like the ones offered by the aforementioned *Mudria*-project do suggest, however, that many if not most journalists tend to complain that convergence means more work for them, even while they get the same salary as before.

### *Technological and Organizational Perspective*

The ensemble of technological and organizational attributes is a bit clearer to observe and define than the institutional structures of convergent news media. For one, media companies are increasingly relying on multiple media Content Management Systems (CMS)—either developed in-house, acquired through open source exchange, or bought on the commercial software market—and the application of software languages such as XML that automate the parallel use of databases containing audio, video, and text. As the different media formats become increasingly standardized regarding their translation to the digital, the exchange and repurposing or “windowing” of multimedia content becomes less problematic. Furthermore, the software used for multimedia presentation of content is becoming increasingly sophisticated and easier to use because of WYSIWYG (“What You See Is What You Get”) applications. Yet this lowering of the threshold for technological convergence is at the same time sometimes considered a problem for journalism, as its practitioners like to see themselves as creative workers, not as “slaves” to the relatively limited range of options offered by pre-programmed templates, shells, and formats offered by CMS and WYSIWYG-enabled systems. Technological convergence can therefore be problematized by questions of ethics and aesthetics (regarding “cut-and-paste journalism”, lack of creative uses, dependency on external partners in hardware and software, and so on), if only to counter the sometimes overtly utopian assumptions in the modernist discourse of computerization and digitalization of society—where authors tend to implicitly assume that technologies make things “easier”, “faster”, and “better” (Kling, 1996). One could add to this discussion of a journalists’ agency from a technological perspective the fact that studies among executives, publishers, and online journalists suggest technological skills are not considered to be a prerequisite in decisions to hire or retain new colleagues—it’s the ability to understand and think across media that seems to be asked for (Paul, 2001). As journalism education and training programs world-

wide adapt to the new media environment, most of them stick to techniques of production instead of conceptual skills of process in the curricula (Bierhoff et al., 2000; Bromley and Purdey, 1998, 2001; Deuze, 2001, 2003b).

From industry-driven studies like an *American Press Institute* online report (Gentry, 2003) and the *Mudita Report* (Aquino et al., 2002), one can deduct that key elements of organizational convergence are:

- convergence commitment level of management;
- appointed budget, strategy, and timetable;
- guaranteed opportunities for (re-) training and hiring (or firing);
- physical integration/embedding of different newsrooms/news peoples;
- synergy between different departments (including marketing, sales, beats, hierarchical levels of management, technical and administrative staff).

Most research related to organizational issues in multimedia convergence has looked at the ways in which reporters and editors have dealt with, responded to, and accommodated desktop computers, the Internet and particularly the World Wide Web into their work. Interestingly, the quantitative studies—generally consisting of statistical analyses of survey data—are generally upbeat and sometimes even utopian in their conclusions: almost all journalists use the Internet in their work, and using e-mail or a search engine is an accepted part of newsroom life in different parts of the world (Australia and New Zealand: Quinn, 1998; United States: Garrison, 2000 and Middleberg and Ross, 2002; The Netherlands: Pleijter et al., 2002; France in an international comparison: Hopscotch, 2002). On the other hand, qualitative scholars find that opinions regarding all of this are mixed at best, that technologies and organizational changes following the introduction of the Internet in news work cause stress and frustration, and that cooperation across formerly distinct media operations is far from smooth—often best characterized by “turf wars”, all kinds of clashes and misunderstandings between journalists (from different beats, genres, or departments), mutual prejudices, a perception of

multimedia journalism as being less prestigious than working exclusively for one's own medium, and resistance of reporters and editors whose social roles are thoroughly embedded in well-established newsroom cultures (Singer, 1997a, 1997b addresses newspapers and the Internet; Martin and Hansen, 1998 discuss the same issue in the larger context of newspaper innovations; Cottle and Ashton, 1999 profile the innovations at the BBC in the UK; while Neuberger, 2001 gives an assessment of the German new media landscape). The management of a converged company finds itself facing not only a combination of pre-existing patterns of behavior and expectations, but also with the often subtle but pervasive extension of the boundaries that traditionally have determined the way things got done in the formerly distinct organizations (Gristock, 2002; Killebrew, 2001). Studies among online and print staffers, for example, show how relationships are filtered through feelings of anxiety, distrust, disrespect, and negative evaluations of each other or the commercial goals of their converged organization (Fee, 2002; Filak, 2003; Silcock and Keith, 2002; Singer et al., 1999). The critical issue here seems to be whether the organization of a multimedia operation assumes its different media operations and cultures to remain distinct or to accomplish some kind of synergy. Nerone and Barnhurst (2001), for example, suggest that the printed newspaper and the Internet can coexist when one surrenders some tasks to the other—and vice versa. This seems to be healthy advice, but largely ignores the entrenched ways of doing things that precede cooperation or partnership in a multimedia enterprise. Some enthusiastic case study examples of multimedia operations in the United States—*LJWorld.com*, *Topeka Capital-Journal*, and *Florida Today*—suggest that crucial factors are: between-media communication, finding the “right” partner to team up with, and the routinization of newly converged operations facilitating a faster “buy-in” among the professionals involved (Gentry, 2003). Filak (2003) additionally shows that when a group of reporters and editors perceives the innovation or convergence process to be initiated or at least supported by themselves or their peers, they are much more likely to rate

the changes it brings positively than when it is forced upon them by some outside agent (like management or another group of journalists). The cliché that journalists don't like change therefore is not applicable to this logic of multimedia; journalists want to have a feeling that changes are somehow beneficial to them—in other words: they appreciate a sense of agency in the adoption and innovation process.

#### *Producer/User Perspective*

The aforementioned Innovation (2001) survey among news executives worldwide cites as the biggest obstacle to media convergence “the individualistic nature of journalists” (mentioned by 31 percent of all news executives in the study). The importance of acknowledging the existence of firmly entrenched and well-established social roles or rituals within newsrooms and media organizations has been signaled earlier when considering the organizational perspectives on multimedia journalism. The “nature” of journalists, however, also has a competence dimension—as shown when discussing the relevance of acquiring technological and conceptual skills for working in a new media environment. Kennedy (2002) writes in an overview of European education programs in multimedia that convergence particularly poses a challenge to departmentalized education systems. One could argue this conclusion equally holds true for the functionally differentiated newsrooms in today's media organizations. As shown above regarding the organizational attributes of multimedia logic, one of the main issues in convergence of news media companies is the way in which distinctly different parts—print/online/broadcast newsrooms, specialized sections or “beats”, marketing and editorial, offline and online professionals—perceive each other, establish a mode of communication with each other, and develop cross-disciplinary skills to work with each other (Aquino et al., 2002; Huang et al., 2003a, 2003b). From an overview of contemporary journalism education innovations in different parts of the world it indeed followed that most schools, departments, and training institutes signal an increasing need to develop jour-

nalists" social and communication skills, as well as flexibility and team-working across media to effectively answer demands of the industry (Deuze, 2003b).

Professional experience and the literature clearly suggest that new media technologies challenge one of the most fundamental "truths" in journalism, namely the professional journalists is the one who determines what we—the public—see, hear, and read about the world around us (Fulton, 1996; Singer, 1998). In a case study of the converged news operations of the Lawrence-Journal World in Kansas, Gentry (2003, p. 2) for example writes: "Editors and reporters must learn to put readers/viewers ahead of their own egos." The combination of mastering newsgathering and storytelling techniques in all media formats (so-called "multi-skilling"), the integration of digital network technologies coupled with a rethinking and re-configuration of the news producer-consumer relationship certainly tends to be seen as one of the biggest challenges facing journalism in the 21st century (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001). Several authors note that a fully converged reporter can be expected to make decisions on what kinds of platform to utilize when practicing his or her craft, and in the case of multimedia productions ideal-typically has to be able to oversee story "packages" rather than repurposing single stories in multiple formats. Applied research suggests the necessity for multimedia operations to organize people in teams, to manage these working groups on a project basis, and to arrange these working units in collaborative and cross-departmentalized ways (Abraham, 2001; Bulla, 2002; Gentry, 2003; Huang et al., 2003a). Indeed, the optimistic discourse of multimedia journalists' competences centers around concepts like flexibility, collaborative skills, the value of communication, and understanding of the goals, needs and demands of "other" media (Paul, 2001). As Stevens (2002) writes: "...the twin forces of convergence and multimedia will force journalists to provide more context and continuity, which requires more planning, teamwork, and providing the type of depth impossible in television and print." On the basis of these studies and considerations one may argue that the shift from individualistic single-

media journalism to team-based, collaborative multimedia journalism creates particular tensions in the industry and among journalists, and challenges the "nature" of journalistic culture in general, and individual journalists in particular. Challenge or no challenge, it is particularly interesting to note the conclusion almost all scholars (such as the ones cited in this paper) make who have interviewed journalists involved in innovating news media companies: the majority of reporters and editors who however cautiously embrace a "new media way" of doing things say they feel it has increased the quality of their work, improved their career opportunities, and enhanced their sense of doing a good job as a journalist. On the other hand, almost all studies involving interviews with newswriters who are embracing new media technologies in their work—such as online journalists or reporters in newly converged newsrooms—also show that because of the high learning curve, most of them report spending less time "out on the streets" than inside at the computer (see, e.g., Heinonen, 1999 in Finland; Pleijter et al., 2002 in The Netherlands; Neuberger, 2001 in Germany; Singer, 2004 in the United States).

On a final note on multimedia logic we have to take a closer look at the cultural competences of users—and not of audiences. Today's news consumer is multitasking, and particularly when going online must be characterized by definition as an "active" user: *surfing* the Web, *searching* databases, *responding* to e-mail, *visiting* chat rooms (BIGresearch, 2002; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002, p. 10). Lev Manovich (2001, pp. 13–4) places the changing ways people interact with media in the context of what he calls an emergent information culture, assuming that the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication has profound consequences for the way in which we understand and visualize each other and the world around us (see also Bucy and Newhagen, 2003). Important for news organizations are a couple of related trends in the news habits of people:

- reading: people read less print, but apparently do read online—especially when they



are interested in the topic on offer (Stanford Poynter Project, 2000); earlier studies certainly suggest writing for computer screens and the Web requires a specific understanding of people's changing habits and expectations when reading online (Nielsen and Morkes, 1997);<sup>4</sup>

- watching: media historian Mitchell Stephens (1998) has suggested what we are witnessing in the contemporary media sphere is a "rise of the image, and fall of the word"; this does not necessarily mean that people only watch television and do not read books anymore—it means that our understanding of events and the way we perceive the world around us are increasingly contextualized by the manipulation and high-speed editing of images and video;
- listening: people still listen to radio, but increasingly do so online through Internet radio stations while performing other tasks, which coincides with trends in watching television: a 2002 survey of over 7800 US adults found that more than half of all people use multiple media at the same time (BIGresearch, 2002), which finding leads to the most important trend in the changing rituals of media usage:
- multitasking: what typifies contemporary media users best seems to be the title of "multitasker", as people increasingly engage in the consumption and production of information in different media simultaneously: we watch TV (with the sound muted in order to be able to have a phone conversation), browse through a newspaper or magazine, and type in queries in search engines on topics we feel are relevant to us—all at the same time.

This listing of trends in the ways in which people access information has two main problems. Firstly, people in general experience quite a few difficulties when accessing, using, and interacting with multimedia information online (Zerba, 2003). Sure, most users like interactive and multimedia news sites, but they also get confused or sometimes even do not click on interactive, video, or audio fragments at all (Bucy and Newhagen, 2003; Sundar, 2000). In other words, using and understanding digitized visual information is difficult. Secondly, a listing of media usage habits ignores something quite

a few authors suggest: people increasingly seem to want to have some agency too, in terms of taking part in the construction of meaning, information, and experience. Journalism has only just begun to acknowledge this shift towards "voluntary engagement" among their publics, as some organizations and scholars argue for or experiment with various forms of public/civic/communitarian (Black, 1997), conversational (Anderson et al., 1994; Kunelius, 2001), people's (Merrill et al., 2001), open source (Moon, 1999; Preece, 2000), user-directed (Pryor et al., 2003), participatory (Bowman and Willis, 2002), and dialogical (Martikainen, 2000) journalisms. The key to understanding today's cultural competences of media users is the recombinant realization of: (1) their ritualized preference to be perfectly happy to lean back and consume anything that is offered to them by mass media through existing channels—in a multitasking way; and (2) their willingness and ability to at times actively engage in the news, demand context and multiple perspectives on topics of interest, and participate in all kinds of collaborative storytelling (ranging from participation in polls, mailing lists, discussion forums, and chat sessions to publishing their own website, contributing their news or views on the news on individual or group weblogs, disintermediating journalists by going directly to sources of the news, and so on). Schudson (1999) notes in his treatise on the different stages of American citizenship that the mass media have as yet to prove that they are capable of meeting the demands of this new kind of citizen—what he calls the "monitorial" citizen. In other words, the professional identity of a multimedia journalist must negotiate a user who is at once switched and switched off, engaged and complacent, informed and ignorant, increasingly reliant on journalism and inclined to bypass journalism altogether. No small task, indeed.

### **Discussion: multimedia journalism and education**

In this paper I have aimed to synthesize the literature and experiences of multimedia journalism and journalists in terms of how a professional identity is emerging. Using the

concept of a distinct *multimedia logic*, I have addressed this issue by analyzing the field from an institutional, technological, organizational, and a producer/user perspective. Within each perspective I looked for a certain criticality, as the professional identity of multimedia journalists can be considered to be the ongoing negotiation and evaluation of recombinant factors of influence on the daily decision-making and technology adoption processes of reporters and editors.

An institutional perspective allows us to look at multimedia journalism as an ongoing contest between the seemingly inevitable road towards some kind of convergence between formerly distinct (parts of) companies, including newsrooms, marketing, and technical departments—and legal or ethical questions of access, diversity, and labor. This situation can be typified as a highly dynamic and complex one as each company is converging differently, often pushing forward without establishing some kind of research and development strategy or detailing a coherent mission or vision regarding this process, nor fully taking into account perceptions of competition, culture, and legitimacy that journalists within different elements of news media organizations have of themselves and their (new) colleagues—what Filak (2003) describes as intergroup bias.

The technological perspective turns out to be a discussion between the pros and cons of increasingly standardized yet custom-made software applications to be used to digitally produce, edit, translate, and integrate distinct media products: easy-to-use but limited in independent creative options. Even though multimedia is commonly understood by scholars, educators, and professionals alike as predominantly a technological issue, pundits like Paul (2001), Stone and Bierhoff (2002), and Gentry (2003) suggest otherwise as they observe a converged breed of journalists to be able to *think* across media first—and be savvy with the hardware or software later.

From an organizational point of view, a synergy between different companies, newsrooms, or departments particularly impacts upon how to deal with the embedded roles and rituals of doing things within the distinct cultures of for-

merly different media or parts of the modern media company. The literature suggests that management and editors of a converging new media company face an ongoing dilemma of how to balance between an expectation of a newly converged newsroom culture to emerge like a phoenix from the ashes of distinctly different media, or to somehow amalgamate existing cultures, rituals, routines, and practices into some kind of hybrid where “old” and “new” ways of doing things evolve more or less side by side. Early studies suggest that while management tends to promote the first, the latter prevails. This discussion also ignores studies that show how journalists respond to the omnipresence of disruptive technologies like the Internet in their daily work: they stress out, not in the least because many of them do not see any prestige or professional accomplishment in producing a story for multiple media formats. On the other hand, journalists that are actively involved in a convergence process do report to interviewers they think this kind of innovation ultimately benefits both them and their company. The key here is journalists’ sense of having agency: the newswriters involved do not oppose change, unless they perceive change as being forced unto them.

Finally, looking at the perspective of the cultural competences of users and producers of news, one may observe the polarization of media usage rituals, on the one hand (engaged and disconnected simultaneously, multitasking and paying no attention at the same time), and a reconfiguration of the news producer–consumer relationship within journalism, on the other hand. This leads some media to adopt classical mass media top-down approaches, while others opt for increasingly participatory forms of doing news work (see also my argument in Deuze, 2003a). An important facet of the competences of multimedia journalists is the noted shift from individualistic to collective and cross-departmental team-based newswork. Although journalists have worked in teams in the past—one could think of certain special projects, specialized news beats, short-term groups producing broadcast documentaries or subsections of newspapers—the multimedia environment suggests structural collaboration

with others, and in particular notes the social convergence of journalists with tech staff, newsworkers with marketers and other non-news stakeholders, reporters with publics.

The issues relating to the changing competences of makers and followers of news particularly challenges an essential myth in journalism: people read, watch, and listen to what journalists produce, which always consists of some kind of storytelling. Participation, collaboration, sharing of knowledge and resources, collective production of stories including elements of multiple media formats and interactivity—these are not only institutional, organizational, and technological challenges. I would like to suggest that these are all issues fundamentally impacting upon a professional journalists' sense of self (-worth). The multimedia journalist thus can be seen as a professional at once competent and confident working as an individual within the context of a converging news industry—demanding flexibility in thinking about and having agency in the process of change and adaptation—and at the same time as part of a collective where several if not most colleagues feel stressed, distrustful and maybe even threatened by the ongoing processes of computerization and convergence. If we only look at technology, or newsroom culture, or management, or users, we will not be able to acknowledge this legitimate and seemingly unavoidable tension in today's or tomorrow's work floor in the news media industry.

I want to end this essay with some personal observations regarding the practice of multimedia journalism education. It must be clear from this admittedly incomplete and rather "immediate" study of the theories and practices of multimedia journalism that it carries many different meanings for different people and organizations. Any "new" converged news operation also takes on the well-established roles, rituals, and cultures of doing things, as well as the entrenched ways in which many publics

consume their news. The convergence process is felt throughout the field of journalism education worldwide. Following the observations in this paper it seems that schools, colleges, programs, and courses in multimedia journalism are best off to:

1. think twice about technologies and techniques as the foundational principles for their converged curricula;
2. focus explicitly on understanding the logic of multimedia (recombining insights from all levels of the media organization, including its publics);
3. allow for convergence to be contested by students, educators, industry partners, and other stakeholders within their school, program, or course—because it will be in practice, and this will give people a sense of agency in the process;
4. instill a criticality into all aspects of teaching/thinking multimedia; and
5. perhaps focus more on the quality of interaction between journalists, educators, and journalism students from (formerly) distinct sequences (radio, television, newspaper, magazine, newswire, online, but also public relations, marketing, and strategic communication), as somewhere down the line in their careers they might be expected not to view each other as competitors anymore, but as colleagues.

At the moment departments and schools of journalism train students and study journalists in a challenging, and changing context. Most of what is happening in this context is not necessarily "new"—but it is also not exactly old: it is many things at the same time. For me, that is the most valuable lesson of this essay exercise into multimedia journalism: it really shows effectively how a "one way" approach of doing things can never work in today's converging media world.

## Notes

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Los Angeles, May 6; Editor & Publisher Interactive Conference at San Diego, May 8. Thanks specifically to the following colleagues for comments and thoughts on earlier drafts: Jane Singer, Larry Pryor, Jan Bierhoff, and Martha Stone.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is also based on my stay (from January 6 to June 13, 2003) as a visiting Fulbright scholar at USC Annenberg School for Journalism, Los Angeles, which fully converged its curriculum in 2002. During this stay, I attended several meetings and conferences regarding multimedia news and journalism in California; this process has shaped my thinking about the topic and has spurred me to write this conceptual paper. The data gathered during my stay in the United States are intended for another project on global journalism education (see Deuze, 2003b), therefore I will not formally refer to it at this time.

<sup>3</sup> More information on the Newsplex multimedia newsroom is available at <http://www.newsplex.org>.

<sup>4</sup> For an exemplary graph visualizing the projected decline in everyday readership among 20–29-year-olds in the United States (from roughly 50 percent in 1972 to 10 percent in 2004), see <http://www.naa.org/Presstime/PTArtPage.cfm?AID=2527>. It is important to note that this decline goes for younger people in wired societies in particular; for older segments of the market and for Asian countries like China, Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia, according to figures released by the World Association of Newspapers (see <http://www.wan-press.org/ce/previous/2000/congress.forum.2000/news/wpt.html>) readership figures and the number of newspapers are in fact rising.

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