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Hunched Over Their Laptops: Phenomenological Perspectives on Citizen Journalism

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Abstract:

Donald Matheson (2003) writes of war correspondents 'scowling at their notebooks', and this is not meant as caricature but the corporeal expression of an epistemological orientation to the world in which facts have to be wrestled into submission. This article takes a phenomenological approach to ask whether there is a distinct orientation of citizen journalism and blogging, exploring the corporeal, temporal and spatial aspects of non-professional practices of media production. Hunching over a laptop suggests an epistemology in which facts and opinions are urgent and potentially subversive, though it is also tied to the romanticised individualism with which citizen journalism in particular is associated.

Keywords: citizen journalism, media phenomenology, epistemological orientation, subjectification, cultural authority, cultural competence.

Hunched Over Their Laptops: Phenomenological Perspectives on Citizen Journalism

Introduction

The concept of 'citizen journalism' has been applied to a wide variety of practices, underpinned by the idea that active participation in media production by non-professional actors is potentially a mode of political (Pickard, 2008), public (Allan, 2006) or civic (Gillmor, 2004) engagement.¹ The emergence of citizen journalism and blogging as normalised practices represents a partial transition in the field of cultural production from institutional to individual production² (the purported collectivism of wiki-journalism is addressed below). This is often seen in normative terms as evidence of the democratization of a field traditionally characterised by hierarchies of power and gatekeeping mechanisms. However, it can also be interpreted as the undermining of a space that uniquely provides the preconditions for specific, valuable forms of journalistic production. To be sure, such a claim amounts to a qualified defence of elitism; Pierre Bourdieu's (1994, 1998a) position is that, however iniquitous, some cultural forms depend on being insulated from market forces or open access. In journalism, this means that while the status associated with elite genres such as war reporting, foreign correspondence and political journalism is sustained by unjust cultures of practice (recruitment based on family connections, educational background or simply hiring 'people like us'), opening these subfields to all comers would lead to worse not better journalism. I return to the theme of elitism below, but, for now, in conducting this research its normative defensibility or otherwise was set aside in order to concentrate on the particular misrecognised symbolic economies underpinning the overt principles and standards of non-professional journalism. Previous work (Markham, 2011) argued that in the case of professional journalism this symbolic economy is based on two principal currencies: esotericization and ambivalence. The former is enacted through a variety of practices which establish journalistic skill as something ineffable, in line with existing theories of professionalization (e.g. Johnson, 1972). How one becomes a good reporter is not a matter of acquiring well-publicised skills, but instead *being* the right sort of person: if you have to ask what makes a good journalist, you'll certainly never understand.

Ambivalence serves to distinguish normal, 'human' responses to encountering journalistic objects from power and fame to danger and suffering, from those of the 'seasoned' journalist. This is interpreted not as a natural response to increasingly routine work, but instead as an active self-positioning, a strategic self-authorization made by recourse to an intangible quality. In each case these currencies are never simply displayed but strategically embodied (see below), so that their recognition in a particular journalist is associated not with 'journalism well done' but a matter of personal character. This character is perceived as pre-given, but is in fact contingent upon the 'practical mastery', in Bourdieu's term, of a set of practices. Key among these practices are those which project a disposition as opposed to specific skills – not evenly or homogeneously, but drawing on a shared culture of subjectifying practices. Among war reporters, for instance, misanthropy expressed through phrases such as 'does not play well with others' was a typical ascription made to well-regarded war reporters. Importantly, this disposition never just is: it is conditional on the successful performance, where success is judged according to how natural and authentic the performance is, of a set of specific linguistic practices. Staying with the war reporters, these included irony (commonly used in relation to danger, downplaying it in a way that

can be seen as establishing the speaker as a natural authority on the subject), humour (often irreverent and lightly offensive, in line with the traditional symbolic form of war correspondent as rugged individual) and taste (popular cultural references positioning the speaker in opposition to elite institutions, suggesting autonomy from the powers that be regardless of the relatively elite status of this genre).

If citizen journalism helps to disrupt and dismantle such unacknowledged symbolic economies, given that they tend to reproduce the unequal power relations underlying news production and obscure the means by which individuals come to inhabit positions of authority and status, then they may be instinctively regarded as a force for good. But instead of representing the liberation or de-structuring of journalism, this should instead be seen as a *re*-structuring – the substitution of one set of rules for another. Embracing citizen journalism does not simply mean ushering in a freer media in which the best ideas will naturally emerge to visibility, and in which media producers of all descriptions will simply be able to act in good faith rather than having to master a quasi-arbitrary collection of signifiers³ – which, significantly, come more naturally to some than others. The newly emerging economy of citizen journalism will inevitably be marked by its own currencies and dispositions which we have no reason to assume are truer to an idealised neutral conception of news values and the public interest. For Bourdieu, the criteria by which practices and objects are valued do not emerge naturally out of those practices and objects. Rather, their value is determined according to a symbolic system which has a logic of its own. This is not the same as saying that whatever symbolic economy accompanies a particular form of cultural production is arbitrary or meaningless. Drawing on Bachelard, Bourdieu (1998b: 2) characterises these different worlds as ‘particular instances of the possible’: distinct derivatives of a common set of generative structures, themselves the product of historical, political and economic forces. The particular emergences we observe today when studying contemporary journalistic culture were not pre-destined, but in retrospect they can be seen as reasonable, in JS Mill’s sense of ‘having reason’, not appearing out of nowhere.

We would expect that, as there are distinct symbolic economies underpinning different genres of professional journalism, new cultures of journalistic practice – blogging, citizen journalism, comment forums, social networking sites and so on – will also be characterised by distinct, generally unacknowledged economies by which value is ascribed. Recent exploratory research on political blogs and comment forums (Markham, 2011) suggests that the most significant of the consecrated values associated with these forms citizen journalism is a mastery of perceived amateurism. As with professional cultures of journalism, this is predicated on the naturalised performance of a disposition: it is about being the right sort of blogger rather than simply having the right opinions. Being the right sort of blogger is a matter of being unproblematically recognised as such. This is not a deontological state, but one dependent on the collective internalisation (and consciously forgetting) of criteria for instinctively assessing cultural practices and products. The importance phenomenology gives to the experience of authority as pre-given means that we are directed to look not so much at the content of citizen journalism but those markers of status which make taken-for-granted authority possible. In linguistic practices these include facility with specific modes of language, such as playfulness, irony, acronyms/abbreviations/epithets, and cultural references.

This article seeks to move beyond the linguistic, by setting out what other, non-linguistic categories of practice enact authority as perceived identity. Specifically, following Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, this means focussing on those corporeal practices which enact dispositions in ways which are experienced and recognised as non-intentive – that is, as dispositions that ‘just are’.

We said earlier that it is the body which understands in the acquisition of habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense datum under an idea, and if the body is as an object. But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of 'understand' and our notion of the body. To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance – and the body is our anchorage in a world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 167).

The body believes what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorise the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is. (Bourdieu, 1990: 73).

To say that dispositions are enacted corporeally is to train our gaze on the way in which individuals inhabit their physical bodies and navigate the world around them 'naturally', which we should more correctly understand as naturalised. As such, it makes sense to look to what corporeal embodiment can tell us about the naturalised orientation to the world in a particular arena of cultural production. This orientation is always to a degree collective, and it is also, in a specific sense of the term, strategic. This does not mean that individuals consciously wield dispositions competitively, but they do have an embodied interest in how it is enacted, as Bourdieu explains:

The language of strategy, which one is forced to use in order to designate the sequences of actions objectively oriented towards an end that are observed in all fields, must not mislead us: the most effective strategies are those which, being the product of dispositions shaped by the immanent necessity of the field, tend to adjust themselves spontaneously to that necessity, without express intention or calculation. In other words, the agent is never completely the subject of his practices (Bourdieu, 2000: 138).

Citizen Journalism's Epistemological Orientation to the World

Matheson draws largely on war reporters' memoirs to develop a picture not only of their professional disposition or culture, but a specific epistemological orientation to the world. This orientation conceives of information as something which needs to be hunted and wrestled into submission: war correspondence is a kind of battle in itself, and research and writing are fundamentally attritional. This article draws in part on a discourse analysis of self-presentation in online comment forums. The discourse analysis was carried out on the basis of codings of comments left in response to blog pieces written mostly by professional journalists about the riots in Tibet in 2008. The codings were multi-layered, and included statements of facts and opinions, ascription of value to self and others, contestations and decontestations, style and syntax. But it is also based, more speculatively, on what we know to be distinctive about cultures of practice of blogging and citizen journalism: that it often uses different devices to traditional, professional journalism; that it is frequently done in alternate physical spaces, whether that be domestic or a 'third' place (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1992; Oldenburg, 1999; Soukup, 2006); and that it has its own distinct temporal rhythms – while there is much variation, a cursory scan of comment forum timestamps shows how both of these forms of media production tend to be done in shorter bursts and at greater frequency than mainstream journalism. This consideration of spatial, temporal and corporeal aspects of new media production was developed both abstractly and through pilot observations of laptop and handheld devices in two locations in London.

Combining these two perspectives does not allow us to infer that there is a single, homogenous epistemology that applies to all citizen journalism and blogging. However, observations of linguistic and non-linguistic practices does suggest that a distinct epistemology pervades a substantial proportion of it. Specifically, this is one in which facts or truths are seen as urgent, precious and potentially subversive; in which practices of citizen journalism are conceived as adaptive, dynamic and ingenious; and in which the authoritative citizen journalist is individualised and anti-establishment. It was further hypothesised that the dominant conception of citizen journalism is also specifically urban; however, the pilot observation does not include a non-urban control, and there was little evidence to support this in the comment forums. In phenomenological terms, although this epistemology may be experienced as a natural or given orientation to the world, it should be understood as a particular prioritisation contingent upon certain conditions, the details of which are addressed below. If there is such a naturalised prioritisation of one epistemology over others, its collective pre-given recognition depends on the performance of collectively consecrated symbolic forms. That form may be described as newsworthiness, but it is a newsworthiness in opposition to the mainstream news agenda and news cycle.

There are two key aspects to this subversive newsworthiness. First, it consists not only in the information itself but in the self-presentation of the citizen journalist or blogger as underdog. Previous research (Conboy, 2006) demonstrated that this is not something confined to new forms of media production: professional, institutional journalists also tend to present themselves as anti-establishment, potentially as a means of establishing their autonomy and credibility. The discourse analysis reveals that casting oneself as an individual (or member of a small collective) up against the heft of the state and corporate world is an established means of projecting authenticity. This leads to the second aspect, which is that the citizen journalist has access to information that is potentially dangerous. Both aspects speak to the journalistic ideal of speaking truth to power, but with a particular conception of power. This is essentially Foucaultian in nature: power is all-pervasive, intractable, and constitutive rather than restrictive – that is, it produces will rather than thwarting it. Further, and perhaps obviously, it is a power which inevitably serves the interests of the established centres of power in society, in the form of economic and political elites – and this corrupting, oppressive force characterises mainstream journalism as much as other branches of the establishment. It is questionable whether such a conception of power bears scrutiny, for while concentration of ownership continues to grow in the UK and elsewhere it is broadly recognised that the last fifteen years have seen a partial decentring of journalism, with new sites of journalistic production emerging far from the traditional centres of power. Either way, authority and authenticity (the relation between the two is considered below) in citizen journalism consists in part on maintaining outsider status, which means that there is a strategic interest in sustaining the idea that official power is pervasive, authoritarian and malign. Next, outsider status suggests a universal acceptance of what constitutes the interior of power, but it is in fact a specific conception of that to which the outsiders stand opposed, namely the corporate and the institutional. This is not to undermine such a self-positioning, but rather to point out that in such a context there is an interest in being anti-elite and anti-professional: it confers authenticity in an arena where authenticity is privileged above expertise, and thus also confers status.

The upshot is this: if the mastery of amateurism is to be pre-reflexively perceived as authentic, one must be an unthinking, instinctive expert in the lived world of citizen journalism and blogging. In phenomenological terms this means inhabiting the mediated lifeworld of citizen journalism as given: navigating the web, researching, posting, interacting and so on as essentially bodily twitches not requiring focussed conscious

direction. And because the approach taken here is *political* phenomenological, it means internalising as unproblematic the field structures of citizen journalism: criteria for ascribing symbolic value, rules governing association and embodiment of symbolic capital, principles for converting one form of symbolic capital into another, and the power to consecrate new forms of symbolic capital. This is not to suggest that all citizen journalism and blogging is competitive, but there is always a naturalised interest. This is what Bourdieu terms *illusio*, or the collective, tacit agreement that the game is worth playing. It means that when one observes individuals using their laptops in the British Library or Caffè Nero, their posture and movements should not be interpreted as simply either doing what is required mechanically to do what they are consciously focussing on. Nor is it just the way people sit and move when not in a formal work environment, and nor is it reducible to cultural determinism, with individuals merely acting out the received signifiers of hipster, emo and the like. Primarily, it should be seen as active – a performance according to collectively agreed though unspoken rules governing position-taking, where positions are associated with authority and authenticity.

Is the subjectifying aspect of blogging collective, individual, or both?

In analyzing the self, then, we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time (Goffman, 1959: 245).

Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his class or group, each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all other group or class habitus, expressing the difference between the trajectories and positions inside or outside the class. 'Personal' style, the particular stamp marking all products of the same habitus, whether practices or works, is never more than a deviation in relation to the style of a period or class (Bourdieu, 1977: 86).

Recent research (Markham, 2011) has emphasised the subjectifying aspect of practices of new media production, seeing blogging and citizen journalism as much as enactments of identity as communication of information. In pursuing such a perspective, it is important to avoid both voluntarism and determinism. This means that individuals do not instrumentally, consciously *use* citizen journalism to construct and project their identity, but nor are there homogenous collective subjectivities which individuals are directly incited or compelled to enact. This raises the question of what balance should be struck between the individual and collective as subjects or agents of new media practices. What champions of citizen journalism celebrate is precisely its collectivist, horizontal approach, not its atomization (Gillmor, 2004; Platon & Deuze, 2003). As with all themes addressed here, one could take a normative approach to collective media production such as wiki-based news and open online discussion forums. Allan (2006) has questioned the underlying philosophy of wiki news: that no individual's perspective on events is uniquely accurate, and the highest 'truth' is produced through the synthesis of a maximum number of authors. This leads to well-rehearsed arguments about the 'highest' actually translating to the lowest common denominator and by extension the rule of the mob (Keen, 2007). Further, while wiki journalism has warmly embraced Barthes' proclamation of the death of the author, in practical terms this means that no single journalist can be asked to take responsibility for the veracity of a news item. Perhaps more compelling, however, is the durability of the individual in collective media production. For Allan this takes the form of a subject-centred mantra in sites such as IndyMedia and WikiNews: everyone has something to contribute to our collective

understanding of the world around us. This appears to be compatible with the therapy culture thesis (Furedi, 2003), specifically that the ethos of collective media production is predicated on a prioritization of the formal act of giving voice over the content that is voiced.

This normative argument only stands, however, if it can be demonstrated that emerging cultures of practice around news production are more individualistic than collectivist. Bourdieu has been broadly criticised (see, for example, Eckstein, 1988) for reducing all behaviour to strategy, apparently ruling out the possibility of altruism or selflessness, though Fowler recently gave a reminder that Bourdieu gives ample consideration to non-calculating behaviour in his studies of family life in Kabilye and Béarn (Bourdieu, 1961; Bourdieu, 2008). It would be wrong to suggest that there are no cultures of journalism in which individual interest is subsumed to genuine collaboration and in which the focus of journalism is outward rather than inward (in Buber's sense of full awareness of the subjectivity of others); while the competitive egotism on display on blogging sites such as the *Guardian's* Comment is Free (Singer & Ashman, 2009) provide a potent counter-example. The logical conclusion to draw from this is that new types of journalistic and other media production are themselves neither inherently collectivist nor individualist: the logistical possibility of collaboration and interaction does not negate the individual as a primary unit of new cultures of practice; nor does it guarantee a viable context for an ideal speech situation. After Habermas, the structures in which collective media practices are located are necessary but insufficient towards instituting horizontal communication and collective decision-making: the quality of communicative content remains important.

Bourdieu is perhaps best placed to resolve this with defensible ambiguity: it makes little sense to speak of the opposition between the individual and the collective when our practices of individuation are themselves collective. Performances of individual identity permeate not only those cultures of journalism in which personal opinion is valued currency, but also in citizen journalism practiced on wiki news sites such as Indymedia. As Hammond (2007) recently suggested in relation to war reporting, addressing oneself to a humanitarian crisis as a media producer or consumer is never only about the crisis itself: it is also, in part, a performance of identity, a public projection whose recognition contributes to one's becoming a subject. The extent to which such projections are *competitive* is unclear: is such an expression of empathy through engaging in practices of news media production a distinction, a positioning against other actors? It is plausible, though so is the alternative: that the projection of identity through these journalistic practices proceeds narcissistically, without expectation of public recognition. Either way, the scope for individuation remains bounded by a finite, collective set of practices on which agents have to draw in performing 'themselves'. It should not be assumed that this set of practices allows for a more unconstrained subjectification than what went before, though nor need it be as stunted as Christine Rosen (2007: 24) has written of social networking sites: 'an overwhelmingly dull sea of monotonous uniqueness, of conventional individuality, of distinctive sameness'.

In truth both the rugged individual and collaborative solidarity models of citizen journalism have been mythologised to an extent, and it is important not to conceive of either as a radical rupture from historically dominant modes of journalistic production. 'New' cultures of practice are not discrete developments but are marked by what Bourdieu termed structural memory, determined to a greater degree than is generally acknowledged by the durable structures of the journalistic field and broader field of cultural production. To an extent this concerns cultural memories of what a journalist is, with citizen journalists instinctively oriented to act according to the same structured anticipations (as to what counts as news, for example) as professional journalists, or,

despite the infinite possibility of expression online, to retain an 'instinctive' (though in fact contingently embodied) sense of who can speak with an authoritative voice in journalistic discourse (Dent, 2008). Perhaps more prosaically, it is crucial to avoid seeing new, non-professional journalistic practices as insulated from economic structures, despite the dismantling of many former barriers to media production. Allan (2006) notes how public contributions to mass news media can be seen not as an opening up of corporate media but simple co-option by them. And the adoption of media forms such as vlogs (see especially lonelygirl15) and viral videos as marketing tools demonstrate that where new cultures of practice emerge, enactment of them is not limited to non-professionals. Corporate engagement in these cultures means adapting to the unspoken rules set out here, adopting the same practices which perform authenticity and authority, though the ability of institutions to embody such practices in such a way as to be perceived as natural or instinctive will be limited by audience media and marketing literacy.

Discussion

In one sense it could be argued that the structured misrecognition of authority in citizen journalism is no different than that which characterises other journalistic genres. I noted above the tendency in professional journalism for authority to be conflated with perceived personal character, predicated on the enactment of certain subjectifying practices. The standard Bourdieusian (rather than Bourdieu's) take on this is that it functions as a gatekeeping mechanism, and that we should seek to expose and overturn any rarefied arena where only the right 'sort' of person may gain admission (more specifically, where only certain 'sorts' of people would see entering the field to be a logical, intuitive choice). But Bourdieu also defends a qualified form of elitism: it is only with insulation against popular criteria of consecration that certain types of cultural production are possible. Put another way, standards of war reporting would not necessarily be improved by encouraging the idea that everyone can be a war reporter. The same may apply to citizen journalism. It seems likely that all forms of new media production, including blogging and tweeting, appear as unproblematic, normal things to do to certain 'sorts' of people. Facility in these contexts – meaning not just formal access and literacy but an instinctive feel for the way it is done – comes easier to some than to others. And it has been pointed out that those who are at home in the blogosphere, experiencing it not only as meaningful but also playfully or viscerally, are not representative of society at large. But perhaps it is only under such conditions, exclusive and hierarchical as they are, that 'good' citizen journalism can take place. Of course, what constitutes quality in these spheres is hotly contested. By way of illustration, it could be argued that while sites like Comment is Free and the blogosphere generally are often marked by vitriol, personal attacks and cynicism, and that the discouragement this poses may apply disproportionately according to gender, ethnicity and class, a sense of ease in this world may well correlate with an ability to produce significant citizen journalism – a sustained, audacious campaign to root out political corruption, for instance. Following this logic through, the upshot is that democratising citizen journalism by removing the invisible as well as visible barriers to participation would not necessarily result in better citizen journalism.

However, there are other grounds for shedding light on the misunderstood constitution of authority in the blogosphere. Specifically, the functional myth of the citizen journalist as rugged individual, urban warrior or tireless everyman frames the interpretation of their work as less structured or determined than mainstream professional journalism. The misrecognition of immediacy or unfilteredness hides the insuperable fact that amateur new media production is itself determined by its context: it represents a

restructuring rather than a destructuring of journalistic practice. The physical and temporal fluidity of citizen journalism and blogging is broadly praised for enabling media production which is both more responsive than traditional professional journalism, and less encumbered by its industrial structures and professional cultures. There is also a degree of reverse technological determinism at play here, with the fact that portable devices are worn, carried and *wielded*, rather than physically addressed as immovable monoliths, coming to symbolise individual empowerment. Two correctives need to be made to this view, however. First, what appears as spontaneous – and thus as unpremeditated or unstrategic – is instead the structured instinct of habitus. If rapid-fire microblogging is experienced as being unfiltered and led by gut instinct (Schutz, 2007), this is because the transposable, durable and collective dispositions of habitus are oriented to the ‘rules’ associated with a certain position in the field of cultural production. It is, again, alternately structured rather than less structured. Second, being unencumbered is not just about physical mobility: it suggests freedom from all of the constraints of office work, its routines, banality and sterile physical environment smothering any individual creativity. But this seemingly liberated individualism cannot be divorced from the broader economic context, namely the casualisation and job insecurity that increasingly characterises media work. It also, of course, forms part of an anti-conformist counter culture which has its own rules of engagement and demands of conformity. Further, a phenomenological approach to citizen journalism and blogging should be sensitive not only to these broad trends, but to the commercial and political aspects of everyday practice: the monthly cost of a PDA, business models for generating income out of blogging, and the routine navigation of commercial contexts (even where the wireless is free). If a café is a ‘comfortable’ place to do citizen journalism, then we should look to the design, architectural and branding strategies that made it so, as well as the wider rise of the third place (and its critics). After Goffman, we can discern what new interaction rituals need to be learned for work meetings that take place outside the office.

To walk, to cross a road, to utter a complete sentence, to wear long pants, to tie one’s shoes, to add a column of figures – all these routines that allow the individual unthinking, competent performance were attained through an acquisition process whose early stages were negotiated in cold sweat (Goffman, 1972: 293).

But further, merely sitting in a café is itself an interaction – not only online or mobile communication, but nonverbal interaction with the built and social environment, taking cues and giving signals as we would in face-to-face conversation. This not to suggest a culture of performance or narcissism, but rather to point out that there is a shared framework which renders inhabiting such a space largely pre-reflexive, and there is no reason to assume that this framework is politically neutral. The same inevitably applies to domestic contexts of non-professional journalistic practice, with the inhabiting of space, shared use of resources and assumption of responsibilities enmeshed within shifting cultures of partnership, the family, flat-sharing and, increasingly, living alone.

The decline of discrete spaces of media producers’ professional and personal lives has a corresponding temporal shift in how media and other practices are organised. The embedding of practices of media production and consumption in everyday life provides the basis for more, not less, pervasive embodiment of anticipatory structures through routinization and naturalization: continual ‘grazing’ or ‘ambient’ consumption of news and piecemeal production through tweeting and blogging signals greater, more intimate structuring of individual subjectivity than when consumption and production are more strictly separated. However, for this to be a genuinely new development we would need to presume an historically dominant and durable distinction between our public and

private selves. While there may be more intertwining of public and private practices in contemporary news production, and the real possibility that greater use of personal experience in citizen journalism represents an interpellated (in the Foucauldian sense of a produced desire) publicization of the private, the decline of the public/private distinction was identified by Habermas, Sennett, and others well before the advent of the internet. Increased regulation and rationalization of the private sphere, for professional journalists through the dispersion of work practices and for producers of UGC through 'incited' self-expression, should thus be seen as part of a broader historical trend rather than the effect of new media technologies as such.

What this implies is that as well as unpacking the spatial and temporal specificities which underpin the experience of media consumption and production as given, it is important to look also at the naturalised interest in engaging in such practices – that is, the collective experience amongst bloggers as given that one has a stake in what happens in the field. This points to themes beyond the remit of this research, but speculatively I would suggest that such an interest 'makes sense' only in a context in which 'giving voice' has become a dominant norm in the discourse of public engagement. Perhaps more rhetorically, this culture could also be described as one which prioritises the fact of expression over its content in thinking about the centrality of recognition to citizenship (Taylor, 1994; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; McNay, 2008; Fowler, 2009). More prosaically, on the other hand, while it seems compelling that more informal modes of communication are tied to a distinct symbolic economy of authority, it is also likely linked to rising time poverty. The playfulness that marks a lot of blogging is in part a performance of facility with its unspoken rules, but it may also indicate that it is experienced less as a means of publicly engaging, and more as simply a leisure pursuit. In this case the sociology of taste might be a more relevant lens, focussing on what underpins the choice to adopt this particular hobby over others, instead of the content of what is expressed. More broadly, however, I would suggest that the urgency and preciousness that characterises the epistemology of citizen journalism represents an uneasy relationship with knowledge. That is, instead of presuming that these new forms of cultural production are normatively benign, we should also consider the possibility that the experienced need constantly and immediately to *do* something with knowledge might represent not empowerment but twitchiness. The need always to be doing something – and to be seen as such – suggests a combination of pleasure and unease in the experience of liquid modernity, a mixture which finds expression as much in the corporeal and temporal inscription of its demands as in the expressive output of the citizen journalist or blogger.

Conclusion

This article has made two principal contentions about citizen journalism. The first is that it is characterised in large part by an epistemological orientation to the world in which information is conceived as precious, elusive, urgent and potentially subversive. The second is that the experience of citizen journalism as a naturally appropriate culture of practice to engage in is conditional upon the mastery of specific linguistic and non-linguistic practices. These practices include a facility with a particular style of language – in short, a mastery of informality – as well as an ease with the corporeal, spatial and temporal aspects of citizen journalism, including facility with portable media production devices, a sense of ease or givenness in navigating physical contexts such as 'third places', and a normalised interweaving of bite-sized media consumption and production. These two claims allow us to understand the emerging cultural identities of citizen journalism: as individual (even if engaged in collective journalistic production), anti-establishment, anti-corporate, adaptable and creative. But there are two important

correctives to this cultural identity which warrant emphasis. The first is that there is a collective interest in such a disposition achieving common sense or taken-for-granted status: it contributes to the romanticization of citizen journalism, which is a stake in its struggle for authority in the field of cultural production. The second is that, on the flipside, a collective, instinctive buying in to this world also necessitates a degree of complicity – that is, the reproduction of power structures which will invariably contribute to the determination of individual subjects. This is not to suggest that citizen journalism is bound in a Foucauldian sense to be counter-productive, with all attempts to resist and challenge dominant discourse unwittingly doing its bidding. But it does mean that where new media practices appear less constrained – by cumbersome devices, the architecture, time pressures and norms of interaction of offices, professional codes of conduct – we should be alert to what alternate structurations are operating and how they are implicated politically.

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Notes

¹ Singer’s article focuses on the engagement of bloggers in the electoral political arena; Allan writes that citizen journalism is predicated on the ethos that everyone can contribute to the collective understanding of the public world; Gillmor compares citizen journalism’s self-corrective mechanisms to the ‘broken window’ policy of US civic policy.

² Lüders (2008) argues that the shift is not simply from mass to personal, but proceeds along two axes: interactional and professional or institutional.

³ That is, neither entirely random nor with any natural relation to the doing of journalistic work.