

The Objects of Journalism: Media, Materiality, and the News

London, June 17, 2013
Frontline Club

Lead sponsor: Journalism Studies Division
Co-sponsor: Communication History Division

Studying the “objects of journalism” involves looking at the role of *actual things* in the journalism production process. This pre-conference aims at moving away from perspectives focusing on overarching forces — be they of an economic, ideological or technical nature — as the main explanation of what happens in the making of the news. Without denying the existence of such forces, the approach advocated here tentatively explores the very material objects, sometimes seemingly innocuous or univocal, involved in journalistic production.

It is an effort, in other words, towards fully embodying a vast set of heterogeneous objects that were or are enrolled in the making of the news: from the carrier-pigeon to Google algorithms, from Remington typewriters to robot-journalism.

Taking objects seriously strikes us as being an approach towards which some very challenging research and researchers are currently tending, but also as lacking a larger, unified framework for discussing potential items of research. We also aim, finally, to help to facilitate discussion between those who scholars who might embrace this “material turn” and those who might see it as a return to a realist ontology perhaps best left behind.

Call For Papers

More specifically, this pre-conference seeks papers that:

- (1) Emphasize the socio-historical depth of journalistic objects, allowing us to think about up-to-the-minute aspects of modern newsmaking without being stuck in the contemplation of their alleged novelty. Examples would include papers tackling digital artifacts such as lines of code, hyperlinks, databases, APIs, CMS, algorithms, softwares, etc.
- (2) Analyze the very material aspects that once mattered — or still do — in the news production processes such as the rise of documents and quotes in the building of journalistic evidence, the evolution of newsroom infrastructure towards integrated open-spaces, or the birth and evolution of news wire services.
- (3) Approach, in a more historical fashion, the emergence, acceptance, normalization of various material objects in the news production and dissemination process.
- (4) Highlight, by reconstituting how objects that may not be originally journalistic in nature were enrolled in newsmaking, the intersections between journalism and other worlds, other *milieux*.
- (5) Provide critical reflection upon choosing this *modus operandi* over other classic journalism studies approaches.
- (6) Tackle more philosophical and theoretical questions, primarily those involving “new materialist” ontologies and epistemologies, and attempt to integrate practices in

journalism with already existing thinking on assemblage theory (DeLanda) actor-network theory (Latour) or object-oriented ontology.

- (7) Rethink methodologies — how do we understand what it means to do a materially-minded ethnography? Content analysis? Social network map? Have our methods always been material in this way? Or is there something new here?
- (8) Perspectives — whether theoretical, sociological, cultural, economic, or historical — that dispute the advisability or existence of a material turn. In other words, we encourage papers that dispute the thrust, premises, or underlying assumptions of the pre-conference. We are hoping for lively dispute and dialog!
- (9) Any other topics of relevance to the general theme of the pre-conference.

In a word, this pre-conference is concerned to reveal the very concrete materiality of journalism. Doing so requires us to think afresh about the ontology of journalism studies, the methods we chose, and the fields we decide to investigate.

Format

The pre-conference will consist of several roundtable discussions, composed of individuals presenting short papers based on abstracts submitted in advance of ICA 2012. The structure will be designed in order to facilitate discussion and dialog rather than individual presentations and a formal “question and answer” session. There will be a designated respondent for each panel, designed to facilitate dialog and interaction.

Paper Submission Process

Please submit abstracts of **no more than 300 words** to conference organizers C.W. Anderson at heychanders@gmail.com and Juliette De Maeyer at Juliette.De.Maeyer@ulb.ac.be, by November 20, 2012. Authors will be informed regarding acceptance / rejection for the preconference no later than December 20, 2012. It is the goal of the organizers hope to have the papers for this preconference posted online, and thus full papers will need to be submitted no later than May 15, 2013. The pre-conference takes place on June 17.

Location

The Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk Place, London W2 1QJ.

The Frontline Club is known as a champion of independent journalism in the United Kingdom, and is only a 7-minute walk from the main ICA conference venue. Interestingly, the Frontline Club is also well known for hosting one of Wikileaks’ first press conferences in July 2010. The relationship between the data-dumping Wikileaks and our pre-conference theme (“the objects of journalism”) makes the Frontline Club a particularly appropriate choice of venue.