# Journalists' work in digital and print media: flexibility , creativity, and control under changing technologies and markets

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## Abstract

The work of journalists is changing as media technology is becoming digitised and commercial market pressures are becoming stronger. These changes influence the labour process, work and management as well as the products, i.e. the publications.

This paper discusses the work of journalists on the basis of issues such as industrialisation, creativity, flexibility and control. Pressures for flexibility are strong in directions like: numerical flexibility (short-term jobs, freelancing, stringers, work when needed, at night e.g.) and functional flexibility ('multijournalists' working for various media channels: paper, web, radio, television, mobile phones..) but often with superficial training.

We also discuss journalists' control of the products on the basis of ideas of intellectual property rights (copyright) and the quality of the work in the light of flexible or "boundless" work. Differences between print journalists and web journalists are illustrated in these respects.

The results are mainly based on interviews with print and web journalists at two newspaper companies on two occasions. We largely limit ourselves to reporting the journalists' own view but we also make some preliminary interpretations as a stage in developing an empirical basis and questions for our continued studies.

## 1. General introduction

Journalism and media are sometimes grouped together with other sectors like art, music and design under the heading "creative industries". By implication it is often supposed that jobs in that type of industry are creative. In this paper we will not discuss the notion of creative industries, but the more or less creative character of the work of journalists.[1]

All work is in a way creative, in the sense that it is first conceived and then carried out, but the different aspects of work are generally divided in organisations between units and individuals: some conceive and create, others carry out. This is in contrast to the ideal model of art and crafts where one person does it all. But in practice in the crafts, there was usually a division of labour between the master and the journeyman. There is organisation – a division of labour, with some having more control and power – in creative industries as well. However, many of these jobs, more than is true of most factory work, contain elements of creativity in the sense of making something new every day.

In the case of journalists, this may be producing a new text or a new picture. The creation of a text or picture however often follows standard operating procedures and the result is often to a high degree standardised, within a certain genre. An article such as a report from a

[1] While revising this paper, one of us (Sandberg), had a research sojourn in Paris at the invitation of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. I am grateful to the FMSH, and to colleagues – most of them at the Centre de Sociologie Europeenne at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) – for providing this opportunity to study French research into media and the work of journalists. Special thanks to Patrick Champagne, Julien Duval and Dominique Marchetti. Thanks also to Eric Marquis who shared his insights as a 'reflective practitioner' at the l'Express magazine and as an official in the journalist union SNJ. The Centre Culturel Suédois provided an excellent basis for the stay. The Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (FAS) supported the stay. – An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 25th Annual International Labour Process Conference, 2-4 April 2007, University of Amsterdam

football match may be allotted a certain space, layout and place in the publication beforehand, and it will be expected to be written in a certain style. More fundamentally, there are pressures on the journalistic field from both politics (the editorial line of a periodical influences often more than only the opinion pages) and from economics, with owners and advertisers creating limits on the autonomy of the journalistic field and the work of journalists (Bourdieu 1996 and 2005, Champagne 2005 and 2007). Such limits to autonomy are clear not least in economic journalism as exemplified by a study of the French economic press (Duval 2004). At this stage of our project we have not brought in structural issues of the relationships between the journalistic sphere and economic and political fields.

The overall aim of our project is to examine new technical and financial conditions in the media industry and their impact on journalism and work as a journalist. Our project focuses on the relationship between the quality of work (health, control, qualifications, creativity etc) and quality of products in the journalistic field, both in print and on the web. A second focus of our project not discussed here is the relation between the quality of work and competitive media companies. The present paper is a result of the first stages of this project, and we primarily limit ourselves to reporting the journalists' own view.

### *Changing media markets, organisation and technology*

General societal change such as globalisation, new technology, the Internet and digitalisation as well as growing pressure from the media and financial markets and also the political sphere affect the work of journalists and the entire industry. In public debate, as well as in research, we talk about journalism turning into a type of goods among all other goods, standardised and intended for mass consumption; that professional knowledge is becoming something banal and journalism becoming just like any other job; a type of *industrialisation* of what used to be a creative craft (cf Pettersson et al. 2005, Tyrkkö & Karlqvist 2005, Ekström & Buskqvist 2001, Kielgast et al. 2005, Quinn 2005).

One aspect of the industrialisation of journalism is the *commercialisation* of the media (Bourdieu 1996). The focus is increasingly on cheap, simple and standardised news aimed at market-researched and segmented sections of the public, instead of "independent journalistic digging or seeking out of news" (Pettersson et al., 2005: 12, 14) [our translation]. The focus is on fast, efficient and, in the final outcome, routine work, something that is particularly clear in web journalism (Buskqvist 2002, Karlsson 2006, Norman 2006). Many journalists see the motives for multichannel publication and collaboration between media as a means of saving money –"doing more with less people" (according to Singer 2004, Deuze 2004). Media researchers (e.g. Devyatkin 2001) draw similar conclusions: the changes generate more work and more tasks for the journalists, without extra compensation.

*Organisational forms* in the new media and multichannel publishing is another way of saying industrialisation. The Newsplex project (managed by Ifra[2]) promotes a model for the organisation of multichannel publishing which involves more control and an important role for the news desk, where leaders of different channels cooperate on the planning of news production and decide what news suits publication in the different channels. In Scandinavia, "Nordjyske Medier" in Denmark, which sees itself as a media house, is a role model for many and can be said to be an example of organisation á la Newsplex. At the core of the activity is a *media conductor* who more than traditional news editors controls the work of the journalists and decides what jobs are to be done by whom using various tools (pen, tape recorder, computer, video cam etc). The media conductor also determines in which media channel(s) the outcome will be published: paper, web, radio, tv, mobile phones.

[2] Ifra is an international association for research and training in the newspaper and publishing industry, www.ifra.com

So we see here a combination of more overall and detailed control of work and product, that is what is to be published when, in which channel and in what form, and at the same time a need for journalists to be flexible and adapt to various often short term assignments working with various tools and for various media channels. This latter type of flexibility often means broader but not necessarily higher qualifications, but rather a pressure to try and do various things with just superficial knowledge, and under narrower time constraints. – A journalist submitting material must be prepared for it to turn up anywhere at all in all the media house channels and in various versions, after having been worked on by someone else (Sabelström-Möller 2005, Carlsson 2005, Bürén 2006). --------

*New technology* potentially boosts the opportunities for creativity, quality journalism and efficient production; ICT makes the work more efficient, digitalisation makes it easy to publish in different channels. The Internet opens up new opportunities for thorough research, continual publication and publication linked to different sources with original documentation and different perspectives on what has been reported. Studies show, however, that the work is in practice rather characterised by more control, less creativity and tighter deadlines demanding adaptation and flexibility on the part of journalists (Deuze 2004, Nygren 2006) and many commentators are of the view that this is causing a decline in journalistic quality. Productivity in a quantitative sense is tending to rise, with more "output" in different channels, but if the goal is quality journalism, this does not mean that fulfilment of objectives/efficiency necessarily rises.

According to a questionnaire sent to Swedish journalists, most think that digital technology and the multireporter role[3] are not making the work more creative. Nor do they think that journalism is getting better thanks to this. Nygren (2006) draws the conclusion that technology use and multichannel publishing are helping make journalistic production increasingly resemble a news factory. Keilgast et al. (2005) also hold the view that multichannel publishing, together with suboptimal utilisation of the strengths of the media, are leading to industrialisation of the work.

The trend in these technology-driven and organization-driven chances is reinforced by the fact that the media companies, as described, have become more market-driven and are applying management and organisational forms lifted from other sectors, without any history in a publishing business with other aims, or primary aims, than commercial ones (see e.g. from France contributions by Bourdieu and others in Benson & Neveu 2005 and Marquis 2006, and from the US by McManus 1994, Underwood 1995 and later Franklin 2005)

### *Print and web*

Studies show that web journalism tends to be more industrialised than print journalism, since web journalism often involves the production of short, rapid news items with tight deadlines. Industrialisation of the profession of journalism is also tending to take the edge off the idea of the journalist as creative individual and artist (see Norman 2006, Buskqvist 2002).

An extensive Norwegian questionnaire study of journalists' work environment (Sørensen 2005: 251) shows that web journalists are also more critical than average about what they see as future developments in media. They think that it is increasingly like a "sausage factory" where the aim is to produce to fill column inches and broadcasting time, that fewer people are producing more and that it is increasingly a desk job. The study shows that web journalists mostly work from the editorial office and that they are expected to deliver quickly and in several media at the same time. They have a higher production pressure, and over half are worried that things go too fast sometimes and that the errors that may be made can have serious consequences for others (Sørensen 2005: 246-247, 260).

[3] Multireporter is defined here as a reporter who performs several different tasks (e.g. both writes and takes pictures) and/or works for a number of different media channels.

*Boundless work and self-management*

In working life research, we talk about "the new workplace" and about a trend towards increasing numbers of flexible and "boundless" jobs. Management strategies that are based on clear hierarchies and detailed control are being abandoned in favour of "softer" management methods with management by objectives and results, decentralisation, and greater responsibility for the individual (Sandberg 2003). Boundless jobs means that there is less regulation and greater flexibility for organisations and individuals. The individual, to a greater extent, is free to decide *when* to work and *where*, and *how* to carry out the job, sometimes even *what* to do. Particularly in many creative professions, and with the aid of technology, tasks can be carried out at any time and anywhere, and what to do and how is sometimes very vaguely regulated, like in e.g. research and qualified journalism. This also means that the boundaries between work and the rest of life to a high extent are dissolved, and that it is up to each person to decide and to keep this boundary in place. But there is always some degree of regulation, in some of these dimensions; this is constitutive for a job, for work. Rules must however not necessarily be formulated by the employer, but may be built into the institutional framework, role models, forced through competition on markets etc.

These unregulated and flexible types of job thus mean that the individual determines to a greater extent how to do the work and with whom. Besides this, there is the responsibility of deciding where the boundaries of the work lie. We can talk about individualisation of work. Parallel to this type of flexible job, where the individual is given more freedom and responsibility over the work process, we are also seeing flexibilisation from the company's perspective through flexible types of employment that make individuals exchangeable, related to quantitative flexiblity (Allvin & Aronsson 2006, Hansson 2006).

The new organisation and management forms make high demands on individuals to decide for themselves what their tasks are, plan and structure the work and thereby also take responsibility for the result of the work. The individuals sometimes feel that the freedom and lack of clarity can be difficult to manage, and there are health risks associated with this. These primarily involve people being "encouraged to make an effort beyond their abilities, since the work lacks a clear framework" and "people feel uncertain when they encounter unreasonable or unformulated demands" (Allvin et al. 2006: 18) [our translation]. It is up to the individual to regulate the demands and assess whether they are being met, which is particularly difficult in this type of creative work where the results of work are often linked to self-esteem – "performance-based self-esteem" – which in turn leads to a risk of burnout (Hallsten 2005).

These boundless jobs require the individual to have self-organising ability and that he or she has "self-management skills" (Hansson 2006). This can be described as an ability both to take responsibility for the efficiency of the work and quality of results *and* be responsible for his or her own self and skills. The latter concerns personal development, being employable in a long-term perspective and ensuring that one does not get overloaded.

> "If modern flexible and results-oriented types of organisations are to be regarded as long-term sustainable, great individual responsibility and latitude are thus not enough – there must also be reasonable conditions and an ability to cope with the flexible conditions" (Hansson 2006: 180) [our translation].

A conclusion from an employee point of view is that one aspect of an employment dialogue and of agreements might be to see to it that there are reasonable conditions as to time, manning, respect (and even active support) for vacation and decent working hours (not least for parents with small children) competence development, individual and collective self-management

## 2. Methods

Empirically, several case studies, using mainly qualitative interviews, have been carried out in our project in the newsrooms of a couple of Swedish regional newspapers, covering both their print and digitised activities.[4] A minor study has been made of the gradual transformation of articles published on the websites of two journals, and of the transformation of articles when transferred from one media channel to another. We have also carried out a general literature survey and one focused on journalists' control of their products, in the light of intellectual property rights. Our results so far mainly provide us with background information and research questions for our planned main studies.[5]

We have however already sufficient interview material to enable us to present and discuss the way *journalists themselves* tend to see phenomena such as changes in the quality of their work and products as well as creativity, control and intellectual property. We also highlight differences between print and web journalists in those respects. We also initiate a preliminary discussion on creativity, industrialisation, and boundlessness in relation to control (own and that of others) of the work.

## 3. Key concepts

In labour process studies, there is an emphasis on a historical narrative from *craftsmanship* in the pre-modern era, *industrial/mechanised labour* during the early modern era, and *automation* in the later phase of the modern era. To this, we can perhaps stress the *aspect boundless work*, which becomes topical for parts of the labour market in the late-modern and post-modern era. Braverman brought up the *polarisation* thesis, a division of labour that at the same time creates qualified jobs and controlled, simple routine jobs.

Previous research indicates that journalistic work is characterised by both industrialized and creative handiwork, as well as of boundlessness (Djerf-Pierre 2001a, Djerf-Pierre 2001b, Ekström & Buskqvist 2001, Tyrkkö & Karlqvist 2005, Norman 2006, Kielgast et al. 2005, Sørensen 2005, Hansson 2004).

In a historical approach, characterisation of this type can be regarded as idealised types of different jobs. A *creative* job is characterised by its giving great scope to personal creativity, a free and autonomous work process where there is clear individual control of tasks, structure and design. People with creative jobs often have a strong identification and personal connection to their products. They also often have a high degree of self-motivation, which means, among other things, that detailed control and guidance on the part of superiors is not as important in ensuring efficiency and quality as in other jobs.

*Industrialised* work is characterised as a work process that is routine, micromanaged and controlled with limited freedom, autonomy and individual control. The work is oriented towards efficient mass production, and offers little scope for creativity and personal creation. The personal connection, identification, with the products made is not particularly strong

[4] A total of 22 interviews (one hour per interview approx.) were carried out with web journalists, print journalists and managing editors at two newspaper companies. The first round of interviews in June 2005 focused on journalists' view of their work and the results of their work. The second, in June 2006, dealt in particular with issues of journalistic quality and the conditions for it, changes in the profession of journalism and copyright in multichannel publishing organisations.

[5] Our main studies are intended to include nationwide surveys involving journalists and managements, as well as reflection groups among journalists. We are also considering further case studies of the relationship between the production and working conditions on the one hand and the resulting products on the other, as well as the quality/productivity relationship. We plan to carry out studies in a few newsrooms as well as studies of certain "media events" and how they are produced and presented in various media; conversations with Patrick Champagne demonstrated the fruitfulness of this latter type of case study. An example of a major such study is Marchetti's (1997) on the "contaminated blood scandal".

Different types of journalists (reporters, editors, web editors, subeditors, features writers, columnists, pundits, item/fact box writers etc.) locate themselves in different places on the scale between creative and industrial work, but each individual journalist can in his or her work have creative and industrialised aspects. The view of journalists (and others) on the role of journalists also varies according to where they are on this scale, where different types of journalist tend to see the professional role in different ways.

*Boundless jobs* are loosely regulated jobs, often found in flexible organizations. Objectives and demands are imprecise or unspoken in their definition, and the individual's tasks instead contain definitions of objectives, concrete or vague, and demands. Flexible organisations with loose regulatory frameworks entail greater demands on the individual to plan, organise and be responsible for the performance of the work, and thereby also for the results. Delimiting the work and determining when the demands and objectives have been met is also the responsibility of the individual (Allvin & Aronsson 2006, Hansson 2006).

In work in journalism, boundlessness can be said to have a qualitative as well as a quantitative meaning. Qualitative boundlessness can mean there are no boundaries for the quality of the research or the text; the character and quality of the product can always be improved upon. Within the framework of rules, demands and norms at the workplace and in its milieu, it is in the end the individual journalist who decides how much, and how well, he or she is striving to perform. An example of quantitative boundlessness is that there is no limit to how many articles the individual (in his or her own view) must produce each day.

## 4. Results and discussion

*Journalism – craftsmanship or factory work?*

The print reporters interviewed in this study all describe their jobs in a way that can be likened to a creative craft. One of them sees parallels between journalism and carpentry, and points out that he likes to make good products and invests his soul in the work on them.

> I don't believe that a carpenter wants to sell a badly made table, he wants to make a good one. And it's the same with us. Even if you might think it's an unimportant item you're working on, you still put your soul into it, and try to do justice to the person you've interviewed or write as well as possible.

Some print journalists who share this view of journalism as a creative craft distance themselves from two other views: journalism as an art form or as impersonal, mechanical production. Among print journalists, the biggest worry is that the job will become ever less creative, with tighter deadlines and more routine.

Web journalists tend, to a lesser extent than print journalists, to describe their work in terms of a creative craft. As a rule, they have a more impersonal attitude to the work and the products. Some of the web journalists also demonstrate some resistance to the view of journalism as a craft or artistic profession and try to take the edge off what they see as a romanticised notion of the journalist as artist. One of the web journalists says that he is tired of how journalists are extolled, and the cult of personality that he says can occur.

> This cult that has happened in recent years, the cult of personality that surrounds journalists, it's just not interesting. This thing about how journalists do an extra special job. Are part of some sort of exclusive guild and do something that is much better than what anyone else does. I don't accept that at all. And all these columnists all over the place, I really loathe that. All that pontificating!

Alongside the criticism of what they see as an idealisation of the profession and of personalisation trends, there is also criticism of encroaching industrialisation. A number of the web journalists we interviewed, like those included in Sørensen's study (2005) of Norwegian

journalists, are critical of the trend in the profession of more sitting indoors in front of the computer, focused on "production rather than journalism". You don't get out and meet people, you don't produce as much journalism of your own; what you do is work on what is already available via your computer and phone. One web journalist says that time has got tighter and that there is more machine work compared to five years ago, and says that they experimented more than and did a more fun type of web material; now, the website is to be developed and new tasks are to be added without more resources being allocated. One web journalist says that there is concern in the editorial office that they are to be flexible "multimachines" and the company a "writing factory" – "that you don't get a chance to enjoy your work because you are supposed to just produce all the time, which can kill creativity."

The tasks and labour processes of web journalists, compared to those of print journalists, are more industrial in character and leave less scope for creativity. They work with short news items (crimes, accidents etc.) which are to be published as fast as possible ("constant deadline"); immediacy is the key and the news can be updated as events unfold. In this, a large part of personal creativity is lost which is traditionally associated with journalism. Compared with web journalists, print journalists have more time for each assignment. They also work against a predetermined, allocated deadline, and with texts that as a rule are more extensive and based on their own research.

Multichannel publishing, that is a flexibility when it comes to form of product/publishing without more resources is however also affecting print journalists. They also feel that their work has become less creative, more stressful and more industrialised. Several of those interviewed hint that multichannel publishing is being introduced with the primary motive of saving money and "doing more with less people". Our study here confirms results reported by other researchers (Singer 2004, Deuze 2004 and Devyatkin 2001). Many journalists are experiencing an increased workload and more tasks, and some feel that they cannot live up to their own ideals and quality criteria. One print journalist says that the combination of cuts and multichannel publishing has led to a much higher tempo and more stress. The combination of greater intensity in the work and productivity increases through new technology can lead to reduced quality of journalistic work as well as the products that are the outcome of the work. The pressure, and the inability to live up to one's own demands and ideals constitute a risk to health and of burnout.

What the interviewed journalists are saying indicates trends towards both industrialization and personalisation. These can, at first glance, appear to be two development trends that stand in opposition to each other, but can on the contrary underpin and reinforce each other (see e.g. Kovach & Rosentiel 2003, Marquis 2006). Technology developments and market conditions affect journalism in the direction of fast news which can be produced quickly. Parallel with this we are seeing the growth of a free "opinion" journalism. This means that there is *polarisation* of journalism, in which some are doing hard routine writing (reporting of simple facts) while others "have views" and are "analysts", columnists and so on. What many regard as the essence of good journalism risks being lost through this polarisation. This applies not least to the good reportage which is based on thorough field work, has a clear perspective, and is well-written. Routine work is more clear in web journalism, while the personalisation trend tends to be more common in print journalism (if not among the journalists we have interviewed so far**).**

### *Control of the work, freedom and flexibility*

Work as a journalist appears, in many ways, to be free and independent without detailed regulation from superiors. It is as a rule regarded as a creative profession, by journalists as well as others. Most of the journalists interviewed think that the best aspects of their job are things that can be associated with words like *freedom, autonomy* and *ability to influence*. This

can mean different things to different journalists. For a print journalist, it can mean writing about what you want and structuring it as you want, and for an web journalist it can mean evaluating the news yourself, when you are choosing among news items received from external sources and from the material of the same companies printed newspapers. A number of other studies reinforce the view that freedom is something that is valued by journalists. The opportunity to work freely is one reason for journalists' choice of profession, and also why some of them choose to become free-lancers (Allvin & Aronsson 2000, Hansson 2004, Norman 2006, Djerf-Pierre 2001a).

When the journalists are asked what the worst aspect of the job is, many say that it is about the *indoor* nature of the work, something that is particularly emphasised by web journalists. Someone points out that the work may be independent, but that it is still limited and unfree, and that they are *producing* rather than *doing journalism*. Another web journalist similarly points out that you do not produce so much journalism of your own, but work with what is already available via the computer and telephone.

One web journalist points out the negative aspects of the freedom and influence – that you are so free that it feels like nobody cares what you do, you have to trust your own judgement. *Lack of feedback* and *discussion* are one of the things that most of our interviewees describe as negative about their work. They want more feedback on their texts, that someone cares about what they write and values their work. They want more specific feedback on their texts, and constructive discussions about work methods, the content of the paper and what is good journalism, and that this should take place during the work and not afterwards. One of the web journalists says that you need feedback to continue to be creative. That journalists receive too little feedback is something that is supported by previous research into journalists' working conditions (Tyrkkö & Karlqvist 2005, Allvin & Aronsson 2000, Djerf-Pierre 2001a).

There are, as indicated, differences between print and web journalists in our study. The boundless aspects of print journalists' work are associated with their own high (boundless) demands that can be difficult to live up to due to lack of time and resources. Cuts alongside pushes into other media than the print newspaper are, in their view, what creates this situation.

The experience of boundlessness is however clearest among web journalists. They see themselves as free to structure their daily work as they like, something that they sometimes feel is *too* free; that they have too few directives. On the whole, they think that they have great freedom as journalists, e.g. in evaluating news and what subjects are dealt with and in what way. Their creativity and freedom are not limited by rules, directives, detailed regulation and control, but by the fact that the realisation of this freedom is impeded by the practical conditions of the work, by a lack of time and resources.

The *potential* freedom and boundlessness thereby often becomes, in *practice*, routine and unfree work limited by sitting at a computer and a choice between the news that the Internet provides and telephone contacts can lead to. In the worst cases, web journalists are given a wide range of opportunities, autonomy and freedom, but inadequate resources and incentives to realise them. Freedom becomes non-freedom.

Other *limits* to freedom that are not dealt with in our present study could be more fundamental, like rules and norms, often unexpressed and taken for granted. e.g. about what you write about, what perspectives are acceptable, how you write, what time you are allowed to devote to a certain type of task, etc.

If we compare print and web journalists with freelancers, the work of the latter appears as more boundlessness. Apart form boundlessness in quantitative and qualitative demands and personal responsibility for how the work is structured and carried out, freelancers have much more freedom – a double-edged sword – with respect to the time and space in which the work is done. Both print and web journalists have fixed working hours and a fixed workplace, even if web journalists are even more tied to the specific workplace in front of the computer.

One explanation as to why the journalists interviewed describe freedom as a defining characteristic of the job, despite the many trends in the opposite direction, above all for web journalists, may be the *dominant discourse* of journalism as a creative job and creative industry. The resilience of this may mean that journalists interpret certain conditions as freedom, despite their rather being an expression of something else, of lack of organisation and resources. A related explanation can be selection and training, which means that young journalists are socialised into a professional role in a field that has defined political and economic limits.

Another explanation as to why journalists describe their job as free, despite many indications to the contrary, is the *many dimensions of the term freedom.* Examples of dimensions of freedom are goals-methods and potential-realisation, as we have seen above. The web journalists have varying degrees of defined goals. Goals such as "bring more visitors to the website" are rather unclear. Relatively clear goals may be a focus on fast publication, and highly precise goals to write e.g. twenty articles a day. Having goals set by management of course limits freedom, but at the same time provides opportunities to openly discuss what resources are needed to reach the goal, and to be able to say: I'm finished for today, I have done my job and can go home satisfied. With respect to methods, or ways of reaching the goals, the choice seems very free. Apart from some journalistic methods and ethical approaches, our interviewees have no expressed directives from management about how the work is to be done. But as has been described – the resources are limited.

The issue of the management of boundless jobs is a complex one. It necessarily has to do with a relation between (more or less) creative workers and management. One possible concept would be management laying out stable processes and preconditions in terms of resources and norms that enable a high degree of self-management. The web journalists' testimony can be interpreted as a wish for better opportunities for individual and organised self-management within clearly defined frameworks and goals.

The issue of self-management takes on new character and importance in these types of jobs when the sustainability of work, and thus of production and its quality, tends to be dependent upon employees' ability to regulate their ambitions in relation to the resources and capabilities they have and to the norms and expectations of the organisation and profession. These basic, material and normative preconditions cannot to any important extent be influenced by individual employees. So the issue of managing your own work turns out to be related to self-management in the sense of participation, socio-technical forms of organisation, and workplace democracy, and industrial democracy as discussed in the 1970s and earlier on in the 1930's. (cf Ramsay 1990). It concerns participation and agreements relating goals and levels of ambition to resources (personnel, competence, time etc.) in semiautonomous organisational units (cf Sandberg 1992, 2003), a kind of "responsible autonomy" (Friedman 1977).

In boundless types of work and organisation, such agreements and limits are important for the quality work (qualifications, control as well as the health of employees) and by extension, to the quality of the product and ecologically sustainable production. But, such agreements are related to organizational democracy issues, and, as we learn from history, we have seen periods of progress and periods of backlash (e.g. again Ramsay 1990) but if employee influence was important before it is even more so in today's more or less boundless worklife.

### *Control of the products*

As we have seen, there are to a varying degree aspects of creativity and uniqueness in the work of journalists. Many journalists, especially print journalists, tend to see themselves as creators of unique products: texts, photos, videos etc. Like the artist or the craftsman they are proud of what they produce and they want to control its use and distribution. In the

continental European tradition of intellectual property rights, the creator has the right to his or her product and its use, and this is true also for journalists.

New digital technologies and an intensified commercial pressure on media companies are contributing to changing the preconditions for the journalists' control over their products. For example, an article written for a paper edition of a journal may easily be published on the Internet too, perhaps in a modified version, with or without the cooperation of the original author. It may also be used as a manuscript for a radio or television news programme together with photos taken by the journalist. In this way, the original interviews, texts and pictures may serve as raw material processed in various ways by editors for publication in various media and with various contents, perspective and style. Media firms are developing into media houses, perhaps a form of media or news factories, that publish in multiple media channels directed towards various market segments. Journalists' control of their products is thus being challenged. Digitalisation facilitates such developments.

Using more or less the same basic elements to create products with various appearances and for different market segments is of course nothing new. A well-known example is the Sweden-based company Ikea designing furniture, and producing, mainly through sub-contractors in low-cost countries, and with outlets all over the world. Using the same raw material, producing the same cupboard frame, kitchens are adapted to customer groups and price niches by putting doors of differing prices and quality on the front. The products can flexibly be adapted to demand, and that necessitates a certain flexibility in production and distribution.

In a similar way, a journalist's raw material may be packaged as articles adapted to a subscribed morning newspaper, an evening tabloid, a paper distributed free on the underground and on buses, radio news in a music channel, web TV, etc. Such market-oriented thinking is reinforced by the fact that many media houses are now part of even broader conglomerates producing not only media products and journals, but anything. Companies with a strong professional publisher at their head, and with quality journalism as a main or sole product, are becoming rare. This tends to have consequences for the organisation and management of media work and for the view of media as something that produces any type of product, or something special.

And yet among the general, informed public, in the political sphere, in the deontology of journalists, and among many (but not all) journalists, their work and products are regarded as qualitatively different from factory production of any consumer good.

Intellectual property rights are an important issue among journalists today, and an important aspect of the control issue. The right not to have material used in a way that insults the integrity of the creator or used in an insulting context will reasonably be harder to defend if the material is used in numerous different ways and in numerous different variations/versions, which will be the result of multichannel publication and republication by other media companies. The difficulties are made worse by the time pressure and speed of republication.

Do journalists feel that they are in control of their products today? And do they think that it is important that they are? Are there differences between print and web journalists? About half of those we interviewed think that there has been some loss of control of the material and all are of the view that the reason is technological development with more publication channels, the advent of the Internet and the fact that the material is available at the website. Others can easily take material without permission and spread and use it outside the control of the creator. Even if Internet search functions partly facilitate control of the use of the material (Pavlik 2006, Norman 2007: 14-16), the interviewees primarily stressed the overall loss of control.

Most of the journalists we interviewed however say that they have good control of how the material is used in the company's own publication channels and over editors' and other colleagues' treatment of their own material. The web journalists publish their own material on the Internet and the print journalists trust the web journalists and editors to do a good job, and are also pleased with their work. External control, such as onward sale to other companies, also currently takes place in ways that most of them think functions well and they have control over. Both the print and web journalists state the same conditions under which they think that onward sale is acceptable: financial compensation and right of veto, i.e. that they are asked about and approve new publication.[6]

The issue of onward sale and exchanges of material between media companies is however an issue under debate. It should be emphasised that freelancers are not represented among the journalists in our case study. Their situation has deteriorated in that their material is put onto the Internet, meaning that their market for onward sale disappears. In a negotiation, this might mean that they do not get an assignment if they demand extra payment for e.g. Internet publication, and do not sign "all rights contracts". The exposed situation of freelancers is underlined by the situation in which media companies are bought up or merged and this means that their material can be spread even further without having to be sold on.

Even if the interviewed journalists feel that they have reasonable control of their products at present, they are worried about the future. Print journalists in particular are on the whole doubtful about how control is to be able to be retained in future, and are more critical to onward sale of material to other media companies than web journalists are. They raise the negative consequences of growing onward sale to other companies, negative for journalism on the whole as well as for them personally and for those whom they interview – less diversity, poorer democracy, and reduced confidence in them on the part of their interviewees.

Most of the informants think that control of the products is important; they want to know what is happening to their material when they have handed it over. Some bring up the importance of having control of the material for the sake of those they interview. The journalist should be able to say the context in which the interview will be published, and guarantee that it will stay in that newspaper if the interviewee so wishes. The consequences can otherwise be negative for the journalists and the newspaper company too, in the shape of reduced public confidence.

Print journalists put more emphasis than web journalists on the importance of control of their material. All print journalists, but only a third of web journalists, think that it is important to know what happens to the material once they have handed it over.

These differences between print and web journalists can be understood in the light of their differing work, products and professional identities. Print journalists can be said to regard the profession as a personal and creative craft and the journalistic products as more unique and personally coloured. The web journalists, on the other hand, express a view of their profession as being more industrial, and of the products as goods like any other than anyone could produce. The web journalists as a rule write short, rapid, changeable news items. Both print and web journalists point out that it is for example more important to have a byline on extensive and personal material.

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[6] In the *continental French tradition*, which prevails in Sweden, copyright is divided into economic and moral rights. The first involves the right to control the material, sell and disseminate it. Moral rights mean the right to be named in connection with one's work and that the work is not used in a way that is insulting to the creator or in an insulting context. In the *Anglo-American tradition*, on the other hand, the focus is on publicists' opportunities to reproduce and spread the work, and the copyright to works created in a job automatically fall to the party who commissioned the work, the originator. Arguments are currently being presented in the Swedish debate for a more Anglo-American application of copyright.

Intellectual property rights seem, then, to be regarded as having differing degrees of importance depending on what type of journalistic products are being created. The more personal and extensive the material is, the more important these issues become. We see here how polarisation of the work of journalists finds its expression in polarisation of professional identities.

## 5. Conclusions

As we mentioned in the introduction, journalism as a branch and profession is generally described as creative and with a sometimes rather boundless character. There are companies and jobs like this, but in our interviews with journalists we also see signs of industrialisation. This applies to print journalists as well as web journalists, although we see clearer tendencies towards industrialisation in the latter, and the boundlessness in their jobs is often meeting practical obstacles. Time pressure combined with unclear goals and demands create this contradictory situation. When journalists are not given sufficient time and resources to produce results that they are happy with, frustration can result; the products could always be better. Boundlessness, for print and web journalists, is primarily about the structure and demands of the work. With respect to time and place, they are less boundless, compared to e.g. freelancers.

The journalists often bring up freedom as something that is a defining characteristic of the job. Despite this, clear signs of lack of freedom appear, particularly among web journalists, in the shape of a spatially fixed position in front of the computer, a tight time schedule and restrictions in allocated freedom through insufficient manning and resources. More time, resources and feedback are needed if the journalists themselves are to feel that they are working creatively and freely.

There is a clear tendency of a division of labour, vertically with the development of new managerial strategies with e.g. the "media conductor" (even if this is not practised at "our" companies, more than as a role model) as well as horizontally between different groups of journalists, some being more of craftsmen and even artists/authors and others producing routine texts and pictures, not seldom transforming, e.g. rewriting, what others have already created. In part, this corresponds to polarisation between print and web journalism.

### *Polarisation: industrial-handicraft-art*

Our interviews in many ways confirm our preliminary hypothesis concerning a clear trend towards polarisation of work in the media sector. Many talk of a trend towards routinisation and industrialisation, at the same time as they see the development of "journalistic stars" and personalities. We find that these developments are multifaceted and multidimensional.

In one dimension – looking at the way the journalists we interviewed regard themselves and journalists in general – we might talk of a continuum from media creator/artist via media craftsman to media wage labourer; from workshops for artists or craftsmen to a news factories. The creator/artist is typically "le grand rapporteur" who spends long time researching and investigating in archives and in the field, and then writes a major article/reportage of undisputed journalistic and literary quality.

Another person-centred type of journalism involved columnists and "analysts". Their articles may be the result of extensive research, and well-written, but are not seldom quickly produced personal comments, quite predictable as an expression of the journalist's "brand".

Some journalists look upon their job as nothing special, they are wage labourers in a news factory, who deliver their texts and pictures, work regular hours, and do not worry too much about what they are producing, as long as it is accepted by the media company they work for. They follow the standard operating procedures and norms in their firm. This type of identity seems to be most common among journalists mainly publishing on the web. These journalists

are also the ones who are critical of personalisation and idealisation of the profession of journalist as a particularly fine heritage.

Additionally, there is the difference between print and web journalists with respect to how they see their own products and the importance of having control over them. Print journalists place much greater emphasis on the importance of such control, and express a more personal connection with their own products.

### *Management and self-management*

The management of journalists' work may take, and must take, various forms depending on the type of work. More routine work may be managed with rather detailed, direct control whereas more qualified, creative work has to be managed by giving more autonomy to the individual journalist. This is possible because for those journalists, the quality of what they produce is a main preoccupation, as is clear from our interviews. Journalists themselves assure the quality – as well as they can, given constraints on time and resources. Those who regard themselves as autonomous, free and in control are probably those who find that they are able to live up to the quality standards they set themselves, under the influence of professional standards, contact with people they interview, as well as hierarchical control and market pressures.

Others may be frustrated because they find that they cannot live up to standards and they may either "adapt to reality" and tend to become somewhat cynical "workers doing their job in a news factory" or try and work even harder. The latter are probably often journalists with high internal standards and self-esteem based on their own performance. For them there are no limits to what could and should be done; you can always make it better. They run the risk of serious burnout (Hallsten et al. 2005; for comparison with workers in the Internet sector, se Sandberg et al. 2005). It is against a background like this that we may understand the perception among some of our interviewees that their work is at the same time free and not free.

To counteract the negative effect of boundlessness on the journalists as a group, one way may be individual feedback and, above all, the creation of open, joint discussions about what is *good* and what is *good enough*. A dialogue about goals and quality, and thereto adapted resources, is one part of this; a part of the development of self-management skills.

Clear limits and goals, and resources linked to them, can be in principle laid down and/or negotiated between management and employees and between the social partners. This has been the historical pattern in industry.[7]

Responsibility for ensuring that flexible and goal-oriented organisations are long-term sustainable and not to affect the health of individuals lies with the individual, but also with the organisation's management and with the social partners. Reasonable conditions at work can be the result of individual or collective negotiations on goals, resources and qualification development which enables work that is of quality and sustainable. (cf Sandberg 1992, 2003)

In media and other "creative industries", there are traditions of individual commitment to the activity and the products/publications. This means that "negotiated management by objectives (MBO)" of the type indicated may encounter resistance. Problems of stress and health, and the quality of the content, however indicate that attempts in that direction might be a good idea, and is also discussed among journalists and unions.

[7] The Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard talks of the "insatiable demands of the technical-economic system", which in industry are controlled by setting limits, either informally or in negotiations. Individualisation and new management strategies weaken the "worker's collective" and the insatiability/boundlessness is becoming more apparent in traditional industry too (Lysgaard 1967, Skorstad 2003).

*Journalism and research*

The pressure on journalists and journalism today makes debate on autonomy and control of, and within, the journalistic field, and on creativity and the quality of journalists' work and products, is necessary for all those who care about quality journalism and about the role of journalism in democratic processes. Perhaps one way forward is stronger cooperation and dialogue between practicing journalists and researchers studying the practice and products of journalists (cf e.g. Neveu 2007). There has to some extent been a cleavage between "critical research" and "practical journalism" with little fruitful interaction between the two. Critical networks and seminars seldom attract many practicing journalists, and some of the professional meetings seem to engage researchers to a limited extent– this seems to be true in many countries.

We think this cleavage may be overcome by journalism research that focuses not only on the products and their reception, but also on work and organisation in media, and on the relation between the quality of work and production preconditions and the quality of products. In such a way the risk that the quality and creativity discourse *either* just legitimises today's problematic journalistic practice and products *or* condemns them as just not good enough, may be overcome and replaced by a more constructive approach.

*Future research questions*

The profession of journalism is faced with a number of challenges. The first of these is from those who work with the new media in organisations, such as web journalists, who are critical of idealised notions of journalism as a creative, artistic craft. How are the new media affecting the formation of ideals and self-esteem among journalists?

Secondly, journalism is being challenged from the outside – increasing participation by readers, user-generated content and blogs. Developments in the profession merit further study against the background of new technology and new media.

The results with respect to web journalists' somewhat different ideals and professional identity when compared with print journalists invites further study.

The media companies that we studied do not practise the developed model for control in multichannel publishing that Newsplex promotes. It would be interesting to compare journalists' jobs and professional identities at newsrooms with varying types of organisation of multichannel publishing.

In our future work, we hope to examine the results of the work, i.e. the products and content and put these in relation to different types of work and work organisation. Important questions will then be: does a certain type of work and organisation contribute to a certain type of products, with a certain form and certain content? Are there visible differences in journalistic quality? These issues are important from a working life perspective – doing a good job is a key aspect of the work environment for those with this type of job – but additionally, and not least from a democratic perspective, given the privileged position of the media due to their postulated role as informers of the public and in democratic processes.

Negative aspects of boundlessness are a problem in the work environment of journalists and a potential threat to health. Opportunities for discussions on goals, methods, quality and resources at editorial offices are one way of not just creating healthier jobs, but better products as well. Dialogue groups of journalists, may be one way of testing forms for learning at the editorial offices. In the long run, this raises issues of the conditions and development of forms for self-organisation and self-management in journalistic work, taking responsibility for the working conditions and health and for the products' journalistic quality.

A more general need is that of a more detailed study of journalists' views of different dimensions of freedom at work and contrasting this with studies of the position of the sphere of journalism and media firms in the political and economic fields. Such a study could be

given an international aspect and build on questionnaires, case studies and dialogue groups, illuminating not only the “freedom” and boundless aspect but other aspects of product and work, like new forms of managerial control, pressures from the markets and politics, and a flexibility at work which has rather the character of coercion to adapt to what Lysgaard (1967) called the insatiable and “flexible” demands of the technical-economic systems on the human work sphere.

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