"CITIZEN JOURNALISM" AND THE MYTH OF REDEMPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT - The objective of this article is to present a debate on the so called "citizen" journalism or "participatory journalism" and to demonstrate, among other points, the mistaken view of simply presenting a confrontation between "us" (citizens anxious to exercise freedom of expression) versus "them" (journalists trying hard to preserve their "privileged" role of informants). In this manner, I hope to contribute by off ering a new approach to this acclaimed revolution in journalism. If all of us could take on the role of journalists, journalism itself would be "naturalized", or dissolved into daily errands. However, if we imagine a new scenario with the potential to change all of us into sources of news coverage, we might see that journalism has actually become more complex. Consequently, there is a demand for applying more rigorous criteria when selecting news stories. This concept, in turn, contradicts the current logic of "real time" journalism. However, that is a topic for an alto-gether diff erent discussion.
Key-words: Technology, blogosphere, participatory journalism.

O "JORNALISMO CIDADÃO" E O MITO DA TECNOLOGIA REDENTORA

RESUMO - O objetivo deste artigo é suscitar um debate sobre o assim chamado "jornalismo cidadão" ou "jornalismo participativo" e demonstrar, entre outras coisas, o equívoco na simplificação de se apresentar o confronto entre "nós" (cidadãos ávidos por exercitar sua liberdade de expressão) e "eles" (jornalistas que tentam preservar seu "privilegiado" papel de informantes). Pretendo, assim, oferecer uma nova perspectiva para a discussão sobre essa aclamada revolução no jornalismo. Se todos nós pudéssemos assumir o papel de jornalistas, o próprio jornalismo seria "naturalizado" ou dissolvido entre nossos afazeres diários. Entretanto, se imaginarmos que esse novo cenário permite transformar a todos nós, potencialmente, em fontes, poderemos verificar que o jornalismo se tornou, de fato, mais complexo. Consequentemente, passa a haver uma demanda por critérios mais rigorosos para a seleção de notícias. O que, em contrapartida, contradiz a lógica do jornalismo em "tempo real". Mas este já seria um tema para outra discussão.
Palavras-chave: Tecnologia. Blogosfera. Jornalismo cidadão.

EL "PERIODISMO CIUDADANO" Y EL MITO DE LA TECNOLOGÍA REDENTORA

RESUMO - El objetivo de este artículo es suscitar un debate sobre el así llamado "periodismo ciudadano" o "periodismo participativo" y demostrar, entre otras cosas, el equívoco existente en la simplificación de presentar la confrontación entre "nosotros" (ciudadanos ávidos por ejercitar su libertad de expresión) y "ellos" (periodistas que intentan preservar su "privilegiado" papel de informantes). Pretendo de este modo ofrecer una nueva perspectiva para la discusión sobre esa aclamada revolución en el periodismo. Si todos nosotros pudiésemos asumir el papel de periodistas, el propio periodismo sería "naturalizado" o disuelto entre nuestros quehaceres diarios. Sin embargo, si imaginamos que ese nuevo escenario nos permite a todos nosotros transformarnos, potencialmente, en fuentes, podremos comprobar que el periodismo, de hecho, se ha convertido en algo más complejo. Consecuentemente, existe ahora una demanda de criterios más rigurosos para la selección de noticias, lo cual, en contrapartida, contradice la lógica del periodismo en "tiempo real". Pero este sería ya tema para otra discusión.
Palavras-chave: Tecnología. Blogosfera. Periodismo ciudadano.

The innovations brought by new communication technologies have been causing, among many things, the prophetic end of journalism as we know it: supplied with a mobile phone with camera, operating a blog on the internet, anyone is turned into a reporter. Yet, a simple pause for reflection would allow for a significant demeanor of an enthusiasm of this supposedly democratizing perspective – or more precisely libertarian – which points out for the ideal of pulverizing power among "all" and hides or despises the mechanisms through which this same power is reorganized in the hands of the powerful, at the same time as it disregards a fundamental aspect to support the prophecy: the specific character of journalistic mediation is the social legitimation of this kind of information and imposes necessary procedures to demand its indispensable credibility.

In this article, I emphasize the discussion about the so called "citizen" journalism or "participatory" journalism, in pursuit of showing, among other things, the mistake made by appointing a confront between "us" (citizens eager to freely communicate) and "them" (journalists engaged in discretionarily preserving their "privileges" over the power of informing). I hope to contribute to a reorientation in the focus on this proclaimed revolution in journalism, which far from being diluted amidst several daily activities – as it would happen if we were "all" potentially journalists – becomes more complex facing this new scenario that turns "all" into sources and thus imposes a king of even greater rigor in the criteria of selecting

information. What is in itself contradictory regarding the "real time" logics in which journalism is produced nowadays – but then we would have to venture into a road that goes beyond the boundaries of the proposed theme.

1 THE MYTH OF REDEMPTION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The first question that is normally raised to confront the enthusiast about technology concerns access: according to the data from Internet World Stats updated on September 18, 2006, 16.7 used the network all over the world, with a predictable concentration (69.1% of this totality) in North America. But let us say these rates are not so relevant, taking into account the tendency of the number of users to increase (200.9% compared to the year 2000); we must concentrate on the always so recurring compliment of technique as a redemptive element for the audience.

Turning to the history of radio may be quite enlightening. At turn of the 20s to 30s in the last century, Brecht was very excited about the theme, glimpsing the transformative potential of the radio, which would have exactly this same relational ad interactive perspective of the internet. The audience would not be only the recipient, but also the issuer. The German playwright, however, formulated his theses thinking on overcoming the bourgeois society, but the events that followed right away – the Frankists' victory in the Spanish civil war, the World War II and the consolidation of the Soviet Union in the self-excluding context of the cold war drove away the horizons of this ideal that would be standing by with the defeat of the "real socialism" after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the absence of the concrete alternatives of the existing or just-defeated models.

The maximization of technology's transformative potential is no news: in 1909, Marinetti who would later become a fascist, made a flattering compliment to the machine and speed in his Manifesto of Futurism; in the 60's McLuhan became an icon of the admirable world of communication, going against the flow of leftist movements of that time. Today it is even easier to surrender to this discourse, facing the emergence of social movements with no define organization, fitting merely the outlines of the "network" that internet represents: it is as if they were born to one another.

The misconception is in not understanding that no

technology is capable of, out of its own, altering social relations; on the contrary, it is actually the social relations, the politic fight, the historically determined conflicts and contradictions that will conform to the use of this technology. The new technological environments reproduce the relations of force that are present in society. The example of the radio can illustrate it pretty well: apart from overcoming the bourgeois society, the revolutionary promises of the new means of communication were then confined peripheral contesting movement and the new technology was framed in the parameters of the arising big industry of communication. The same can be said about the promised of the internet, whose mobilizing potential depends on political projects that have so far shown any capacity of being anything but slogans like the "other possible world", of concretization, though far away, without perspectives of facing the power of the capital. And that is what foments the pulverization in its own benefit, in the era of "flexible accumulation" (HARVEY, 1993; CASTELLS, 1999), enthroning once again the ideology of *laissez-faire* in a radically different conjuncture comparing to the onset of industrial capitalism.

In the field of communication, the "wiki movement" is the most evident expression of this trend: a set of projects focused on the production and dissemination of information in several languages, from the voluntary collaboration of anyone. The agility natural to the internet marks the process of collective edition of hyper texted documents: content does not need to be revised before publication. The antidote against errors or frauds come from a kind of natural selection, resulting from the collaboration and comparison among several authors, who thus care for the quality of the documents.

The main trepidation regarding this product is not about the credibility of information, as it would be reasonable to suppose[1], but a deeper issue: the idea that both in the economics as in any other area, the market – that is, open competition – is what will allow us to get the best possible result. Malheriso (2005) points out the problem: the democratic idea of universal suffrage for all acts of daily life cannot be generalize, as no one in their right mind would decide the best medical treatment based on a neighborhood survey. There are specific requirements that must be acknowledged and preserved.

2 "PUBLISH THEN FILTER"?

This disclaimer, which reflects the criticism to post-modern fluidity is absent from the initiatives linked to the "wiki spirit" and predictably from the *We Media*, a The Media center in which Bowman and Willis (2003) try to show "how audiences are shaping the future of news and information[2]". The authors focus on the possibilities of breaking the "hegemony" of the "journalist's vulnerable position" as *gatekeeper* with the audiences being able to create and spread news and information. This would really be "altering the nature of journalism in this new century", as Dan Gillmor states in his foreword (*in* BOWMAN & WILLIS, 2003, p. vi), one of the greatest supporters of "popular journalism, by the people and for the people[3]" (GILLMOR, 2004).

The first example is the movement resulting from the attack at the World Trade Center: many of the largest news sites buckled under the huge demand, so users searched for alternate sources of information (e-mails, blogs and virtual forums), which, according to the authors, would stimulate the propagation of "do-it-yourself journalism", whose more structured expression would be precisely the blogs, supposedly responsible for a "phenomenon that shows the scars of a revolution – giving anyone with the right talent and energy the ability to be heard far and wide on the Web."[4] (BOWMAN & WILLIS, 2003: 8).

I have highlighted the last sentence in order to underscore a very relevant detail: the condition to become a reference in the virtual world or to influence the direction of the news would not come, as it should be obvious, "from the knowledge that its authors rejoice for reasons outside the blogosphere such as politicians, commentators, columnists etc." (MOREIRA, 2005), but from the individual's competence and dedication. The mysteries of communication are thus confounded with the mysteries of certain religions, such as miracles promised and performed by evangelical preachers in exchange of faith and donations: if the desired state of grace was not reached, it is the believer's fault for not believing truly enough or for not making the right sacrifice.

Bowman & Willis (2003, p. Bowman & Willis (2003: 9) define "participatory journalism" as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information[5], "in order to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant

information that a democracy requires[6]". Credibility, thus, would be an almost natural attribute of a citizen-journalist, since, according to one of our sources[7] "eyewitness reporting comes in large part from people's desire to share their stories and publish the truth[8]". And another paramount action to ensure credibility, that is, the verification of information, would also be a frequent activity, considering the great permanence effort of the community (the community involved in the blog) to uncover the truth.

Simple as that. "Let Truth and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?[9]", John Milton asked, three centuries before Goebbels and the marketing empire of (tele)politics.

Without considering this problem, the compliment of "participatory journalism" focuses on the confront between journalists (confined to strict procedures and proud of their "privilege" as holders of information) and the audience, not really interested, anxious for knowing the truth and now owner of means to get it and reveal it. Gillmor (2004) insists in this confront, taking the thesis – countless times contested – of passivity from the part of the audience in the tradition broadcast model (one-to-many), that would tend to be substituted by the "thinking network" (many-to-many) network, a feature of blogs and other expressions of the internet. This is where the concept of "pro-summers" comes from, a king of mix between producers and consumers, in Brown's statement's translation (in KOVACH e ROSENSTIEL, 2003, p. 41), also quoted by Bowman and Willis (2003, p. 9), a concept formulated by Alvin Toffler in 1980 in his best-seller *A terceira onda* at the climax of his excitement around oracle studies facing the impact of "technology revolution", but could only impress who have never been introduced to dialectics.

As criticism is necessarily directed to the "power" of journalists, not the capital's, there would be no problem in inverting the elementary procedures to publish information: "The order of things in traditional media is 'filter then publish'. The order in communities is 'publish, then filter[10]'". Because such procedure would be part of the self-corrected logics provided by the exchange of information among these active citizens: "writers subscribe their articles [to editors] to be published or rejected before the audience can see them. Members of a community, on the other hand, say what they have to say and what is worthy is separated from the mediocre *after the fact*"[11](SHIRKY *apud* BOWMAN & WILLIS, 2003, p. 12, my highlighting). Before the most

elementary deontological of journalism, this procedure would be at the very least an outrage, as it would mean being open to all kinds of rumors and "planted" information, with nefarious consequences to all we know. But the swiftness of the statement can be measured by the kind of comparison drawn of Shirky (*idem*): "If you go to a dinner, you don't ask the hosts to approve your impressions, so that they tell you what are fitting to be said, but that is exactly how *broadcast* works daily[12]".

"Publish then filter" is, properly saying, the conjecture of "open source journalism" in which the community involved participates in the elaboration of information completing it our correcting it, just according the "wiki method". As Deuze indicates (*apud* BOWMAN & WILLIS, 2003, p. 35), we are talking about a type of journalism that is more feasible for "specialized niche markets". It would certainly be the case of substituting one adverb for another by stating, instead, that this kind of journalism would be feasible *only* under these conditions. But, in this case, the participatory target audience's level of qualification and outreach would limit the performance of this modality.

Therefore, it does not make any sense whatsoever to generalize and say: "My readers know more than I do. This has become almost a mantra in my work. It is by definition the reality for every journalist, *no matter what is his or her beat*[13]." (GILLMOR *in* BOWMAN and WILLIS, 2003, p. vi, the italics are mine), although the base of the argument for such change of journalism is in this logics", *from a "lecture" into a "conversation"*). The supposed statement of humility would not be justified under any conditions: if readers know more than the journalist does, why would they need one? Either way, readers of a specialized column, such as Gillmor's column itself *San Jose Mercury News*, can be more than the columnist, due to the specialization of the theme. Sources are also readers and know more than the journalist knows, exactly because of that, they are called sources but the general columnist necessarily knows less and if they want to get information, they need to turn to some trustworthy means for that.

It should be more than evident: the journalist is the professional authorized to be where the audience cannot, and hence has the right of accessing sources through which they can assess information necessary to the society. This no less than the status given by the old concept of "forth power" which, though problematic –

as it masks the defense of particular interests in the name of common interest – , is what ensures the journalist their social renown and their role as mediator.

3 FILTER THEN PUBLISH, OBVIOUSLY...

The rules for the usage of "user generated content" established by two very distinct TV stations – the latest Current TV[14] strongly based on this kind of collaboration and traditional BBC – have shown that the theory of "publish then filter" is not nor could it be adopted by someone who is aware of the responsibilities of journalism.

Current TV was launched in august 2005 and since September 2006 has been associated to Yahoo Video and belonging to US ex-president Al Gore, it adopts the same discourse of "participatory journalism". "Current is a cable and satellite network which is transforming television into a conversation. It's about what is going on, stories from the real world told by real people[15]". Wouldn't "true journalists" tell "real world stories" or be "real people"? It is not like that: "Today the business of journalism is dominated by mega-corporations all following a common agenda. You change the channel but you get the same story[16]", says actor, director and producer Sean Penn[17] in the video of the "producer training" for citizen-journalists and he is introduced himself as such, as someone who "who has traveled to Iraq and Iran to see things firsthand and report back" to the audience. It is under this same simplifying view – as it would be worth asking "real journalists" what it really means to work covering a conflict such as the one in Iraq – that the defense of audience participation is made. to go against the "system", "do it yourself", all you need is a "smart pair of eyes with an honest point of view."

However, at least this so called "real journalism" is careful and thoughtful enough to alert that "it is not enough to tell a good story or capture beautiful pictures[18]", because what makes this journalism so different are the norms like "honesty, accuracy, fairness and integrity[19]", summarized in the Code of Ethics[20], which includes, among other requirements, rules for verifying the source of stories sent in by the audience. Contradicting the compliment on volunteering, Sean Penn tells us that, "as a Current Journalist, your work will be measured by a higher standard[21]." So it is really not for everyone.

The conclusion is quite elementary: with rare exceptions,

only professional journalists are really qualified to address these requirements". It is all about, therefore, an alternative for independent journalists, taking into consideration the payment scale per "pod" short videos up to 8 minutes long selected (U$ 500 for the first two, U$ 750 for the third and U$ 1,000 from the forth on), and also probably a great alternative for the audience, although clad in this mystification around the "citizen reporter".

BBC's perspectives are visibly very distinct: a well-known broadcast internationally recognized as a journalism model could not be based on "content produced by the audience" and only in rare cases does it accept to pay for the material received[22]. It is true that the venerable British public institution turns to a certain advertising appeal to allure its audience, inverting the ideal of "fourth power" – journalism as the "eyes and ears of society" by stimulating the subscription of pictures and videos: "News can happen anywhere at any time. We want you to be our eyes[23]" (BBC, 2006b). But it the concern in establishing clear and rigorous rules regarding the kind of collaboration to be used is quite notable. In its second newsletter about Editorial Policies, BBC (2006a) acknowledges that "audiences have provided invaluable material in the immediate aftermath of very important news events[24]" – as in the case of the attacks in July, 2005 in London –, but it highlights the need of parameters like those define in the same document, in order to guarantee that "ensure that all third party contributions are subject to appropriate editorial scrutiny, that requests for contributions are made responsibly and that where relevant we have obtained appropriate consents[25]". One of the first concerns is "not to encourage the audiences to risk their personal safety or that of others in order to gather material for submission to the BBC[26]". And this includes a sort of critique on the definition itself of the citizen reporter:

> There are those who classify that subscribe videos, audio or other kinds of collaborations are considered "citizen journalists". It is a definition that cannot be necessarily useful because these collaborators are not professional journalists. Most of them do not feel comfortable describing themselves as such. Especially, we must discourage people to refer to themselves as "BBC journalists" or as someone who "works for BBC News" or "gathering material for BBC News". *This could lead to confusion in the field and could expose them and our own crews to additional risks* (BBC, 2006a. The italics are mine)[27].

The company also states that they won't use any material obtained through illegal means, discourages the use of micro cameras

and micro recorders – despite the dissemination of such technology – for considering the need of privacy respect and emphasizes the caution by checking the material they receive.

> Our starting point is that we should aim to apply the same approach to pictures, audio and video supplied by members of the public, as we do to any other material we handle as journalists. We should not automatically assume that the material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification. As digital manipulation tools become more accessible, we also need to be on our guard against photo manipulation and hoaxing.
> *Special care must be taken if we suspect that material has been supplied by a member of a lobby group or organization with a vested interest in the story, rather than a disinterested bystander* (BBC, 2006a. The italics are in the original text.)[28].

4 "PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM": BUSINESS, AS USUAL

The analysis of one of the most celebrated examples of "participatory journalist" is the Korean newspapers *OhmyNews*[29], can also dismantle some myths related to the theme. Headed by Oh Yeon-ho (2004), a former reporter in alternative magazines in South Korea and then doctorate in journalism at the University of Seoul *OhmyNews* was launched in 2000 with the objective of "not just reforming the culture of the Korean media[30]" but "drawing a new line in the history of the world press[31]", by "changing the world press' basic understanding of how the news is made[32]". The military language of the manifesto starts from the title – "The revolt of 727 news guerillas – a revolution in news production and consumption[33]" and is used in the rest of the text. The main "weapon" of this "guerrilla" is the proposition that "every citizen is a reporter" which could be only a mistake, easily identifiable if we confront the ambition of the project concerning the fragility of the definition of what a reporter would be, according to Yeon-ho, "everyone who seeks to take new developments, put them into writing, and share them with others[34]". Thus, news can be actually anything and naturally everyone will be truly engaged in gathering and publishing accurate information, as the desire "of the people" is "to share their stories and to publish the truth"

However, it is not quite like that: the newspaper has a code of ethics and an "agreement with the citizen reporter", both very synthetic, which reproduce some deontological treaties of the traditional press and even condemn, though implicitly, a common practice and – never very well elaborated – of "investigative journalism" by affirming that the collaborator must "clearly identify themselves as a citizen

reporter while covering stories[35]" and "use legitimate methods to gather information and plainly inform the sources of their intention to cover a story[36]". However, seemingly, the identification must be carried out only verbally as the collaborator must be committed to not "produce name cards stating that he or she is a citizen reporter of OhmyNews[37]". The intention, more than to avoid the undue use of the newspaper name for its own benefit, seems to be not to create any formal bond with the company, as "legal responsibility for acts of plagiarism or unauthorized use of material [and] legal responsibility for defamation in articles lies entirely with the citizen reporter[38]". At the same time, there is no worry in the slightest about enlightening the collaborator about cases of legal infraction or about hindering him from trying to obtain information in case he or third parties are under any risk, as we have seen BBC doing (2006a).

Facing that, perhaps, the most correct to do is saying that this revolution in world media history" is more properly a good slogan for the private initiative as many others, that only takes advantage of the agility provided by new technologies and encourages the audience you feed the project in exchange for a small payment and the furtive status of "reporter", even if it is not really a "professional" one. After all journalists is one of the activities that most cause wonder in the common citizen's imaginary – as for that, Superman won't let us lie regarding what BBC says. The hypotheses that this "revolution" is no more than a marketing stroke can be evaluated through two details: one, the invitation displayed by the "international" version of the newspaper, which greets the future collaborator with a warm : "welcome to the revolution in the culture of news production, distribution and consumption[39]" and stimulates them to say "goodbye to the backward newspaper culture of the 20th century[40]", but at the right corner of the screen a link for a link to articles of an advocate of that old-fashioned, outdated type of press, *International Herald Tribune*. Another detail is the evidently false argument in the text launching text of the project, suggesting that the news would take the contrary direction of the established mainstream media: "In the 20th century, a presidential press conference was news, and tears shed by one's lover the night before were not. We will now be restoring that lost half of the news[41]". Yeon Ho certainly does not ignore the fact that since it has become an activity focused on the "mass", around the 19th century, journalism, or the dominant entrepreneurial journalism, not only heavily invests in the dramatization of petty banal stories of daily life, interweaving

it into its own universe without inserting them in a broader political context, but also tries to deal with political matters likewise.

As a business project, there is no doubt of its success: in the six years in activity, the initial "727 news guerrillas" skyrocketed to over 40 thousands and the newsroom, though in its initial phase, could then rely on 35 professionals. The international version in English has been published since 2004 with over 1,300 "citizen reporters" in nearly 100 countries. In August 2006, Oh Yeon-ho launched the *OhmyNews Japan*, using half of the US$ 10 mi received from Softbank for his project. Initially, he has got over 1,000 "citizen reporters" available in this new enterprise, and plans to reach 40,000 within two years[42].

Business, as usual – or maybe it would be more appropriate to say "*it is business, stupid*", paraphrasing the expression that became famous after Clinton's victorious campaign in 1992. Hence, there cannot be illusions about this libertarian perspective that levels all citizens (at least in this matter related to the task of informing), but at the same time it keeps and broadens a professional newsroom: it is hard to acknowledge that this abominable task division in which some gather and write and others edit. Although maybe the contradiction it not so stark: as Yeon-ho says we are all reporters, no editors.

5 "NATURALIZING" JOURNALISM: COMMON SENSE AS SOURCE OF "TRUTH"

Turning every citizen into a journalist is no new aspiration, despite the freshness of the concept: the origin of the confusion between the exertion of journalism and the defense of freedom of expression is lost to memory; furthermore, in the 70s Tuchman (1993, p. 88) used to say that "as journalists are not surrounded by a 'technical myth', we are left with the impression that anyone can do their job. After all, "almost everyone is a snoop." In the age of social networks, the decentralization and the pulverized power, it is more difficult to adhere to the motto "*do it yourself*" for an "*as you like it*" type of journalism. As result of that, Gillmor (2004) can confront two epigraphs in his book, contradict A.L. Liebling's famous argument ("freedom of press is limited to those who own one")[43] the apparently libertarian invitation of the "alternative" writer, journalist and radiobroadcaster Wes "Scoop" Nisker ("If you don't like the news... go out and make some of your own")[44].

It is needless to remind ourselves that news is not a matter of preference, but is indeed a question of necessity. But it is worth remembering that, among other things, the misunderstanding of automatically attributing a positive evaluation to the action of common citizens by gathering and disclosing information above all due to the increasing appeal and the easier access due to digital technology, to trading images on the web: if "almost everyone is sneaky", the proliferation of "paparazzi-citizens" who are interested and immersed in the not a wee bit civic pursuit of celebrities to make "*money, money, money now!*[45]" is more than predictable.

Therefore it is important to underscore the reasons for what I once called "surprisingly obvious" (MORETZSOHN, 2003), from the discussion of the context of formulating these ideas and what they represent as naturalization of journalism, blended amongst the citizens' many day-to-day activities.

Firstly, this stimulus of going out and producing your own [news]" ignores the evidence that "people" – like Gillmor usually refers to the audience – need to earn their living in their respective professions – or in the hard flowing times, they may face the greater difficulty of trying to get a common way of survival – and have to deal with their prosaic activities; hardly ever would they have time left enough for this supplementary task of producing news[46].

It is something elementary that may help to undo the old recurring confusion between the journalistic work – the practice of a profession that implies responsibility in editing and disclosing news and demands a good qualification so the professional is able to move in this conflicting field where so many interests compete for the same media space – and the constitutional right of freedom of expression and communication, which belongs to all, must be encouraged and surely is significantly expanded with the access to new technologies. Reaffirming journalism's professional character – and hence denying the naturalization of this trivial activity – has nothing to do with corporative defense or "market reserve", as the swiftest criticism usually points out; means on the insistence of the role of journalism as mediator, which implies in critically recovering the referential of the "fourth power", demystifying it so that the necessarily political role of this mediation can be nailed. Forsaking this referential of credibility is to open the doors to the dissemination of every kind of rumor in a field where the identity of the informer is neither demanded nor guaranteed.

Other things are rather obvious: for example, the despising feeling towards journalism professionals (this arrogant, privileged elitist people) means the rejection of the press itself as an institution and as a reference of credibility in the discursive mediation work. And the illusion regarding the possibility of eliminating this mediation exerted by the journalist indicates two underlying matters: the first and most evident, related to forgetting that every discourse implies a mediation; the other is the false supposition that, once the "people" speak, they will speak with their "own" voice. The thorough unawareness of mechanisms through which common sense is shaped and consolidated is made explicit, tending, in this case, to repeat the formulas learnt in daily life with TV programs so that the incentive to the "do it yourself" concept ends up resulting in "do it like Globo[47]".

So what lies beneath the compliment to the direct action is the naive belief of a return to common sense as the source of "truth". And this way the dialectical perspective of interaction elevating common sense to critical sense is broken, in what is known as Gramsci's formulation: any "external" interference is seen as an unbearable attempt of domination and suffocation of a "naturally" authentic expression.

6 THE CITIZEN "TYPES L": STILL A SOURCE

Now we can get back to the essential question, which as usual is all about power.

The first issue refers to the admirable participatory world of the blogs and their influence over the supposed change of nature in journalism, "from a lecture to a conversation". It would be possible, mayhap, to imagine this dialogue in relation to our common daily activities. But what would this "conversation" with *decision makers* be like? What would a conversation with Bush be like?

An equivalent episode that occurred on the other side of the Atlantic provides with some elements for discussion: on December 22, 2005, Loïc le Meur (2005) one of the best known French bloggers, interview the homeland minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, not long after the disturbances caused by young Arab immigrants' descendants in the suburbs of Paris. Upon being criticized in his blog due to his excessively friendly posture during their encounter – in which he boasts to be the first blogger to be received by a State minister –

and for having offered an ipod and a book written by himself to his interviewed guest, what would be an ethical failure, le Meur responds: "I am not and I have never introduced myself as a journalist", so that interview would never have to be subject to "any pseudo-deontological journalistic code". And he goes on: "This is my blog and as such I say what I wish and discuss what I want, I am no one else, but myself. I am a blogger, but also a businessman and my company has leftist and rightist clients, what can probably explain the complaints of who waited for embarrassing questions (...). I asked question according to my expectance and (...) I do not see why I would be aggressive with a minister who accorded me the honor of welcoming me, once I'm neither a politician nor a journalist". Concerning his given presents, le Meur says this is a business of his own and argues that he was transparent "unlike many other, even certain journalists, who offer every kind of present without stating as much".

A good example of the intricate contradiction to the expression of "citizen journalism" is exactly this: le Meur simply argues that he is not a journalist. How then can the concept be applied to bloggers? Or are they "journalists" only when it is interesting, that is, only when it comes to rights and not when duties are required?

This issue leads us to another one with equally political content: even if we could take it as something good – and devoid of demagogical appeals, above all in voting times – the hypotheses of a State minister receiving a common citizen in his office and even not considering the importance of such particular insisted, in the context of social conflicts though which French had just gone, we would be either way forced to question about which criteria would lead to the choice of this or that "common" citizen for such a privileged meeting.

Another fundamental issue arises when we reconsider A. J. Liebling's statement: "freedom of press is limited to who owns one". "Now, millions own one", Bowman and Willis say (2003, p. 47). To be limited to only one example we can talk about million, save for the journalists themselves by judging reports gathered by Borjesson (2002), that revealed the "myth of a free press"[48] and as a result of an effort through which the book collaborators overcame the "risk of losing their jobs and being included in the companies' black list"[49].

On the other hand, these "millions" (maybe billions) who own a newspaper will not be always welcome. It suffices to see how some political forces against the mainstream established power use the internet: for example, Muslim fundamentalist groups who shoot their

victims being beheaded and post the images on the web or publish their threatening manifestos. No one remembers "participatory journalism" in light of Beslan's massacre, which led some of the main tv broadcasts to reconsider the property of live transmissions, not only to spare the audience of the shocking scenes, but also to protect against the possibility of terrorists to use the power of live images to impose their demands in front of a perplexed audience[50].

The providences of these networks show the attempt of keeping the reigns of the process of information, in spite of not achieving it – Monica Lewinski's case; blown up by Matt Drudge, a first time *blogger* not at all innocent in his intentions could very well reveal that. What doesn't mean to say that each and every piece of information that goes on the web will produce effects: everything depends on whether political forces are interested in publishing or hiding them. In addition, here the process Ramonett (1999) called "media mimicry" takes place, in another environment, but with the same rules.

Thus, the messages broadcasting corporations send to the "citizen reporter" inevitably have this mystifying sense of suggesting that the "people" speak, but do not edit. Moreover, they represent an alternative economy to obtain raw-material from an informal working force, that at the same is overwhelmed with this sudden valorization and reattributes as a faithful audience.

And this brings us to two conclusions: firstly, the fact that the citizen's witness capable of dealing with digital technology earns more relevance, but as a source to be appropriately checked – a process that is even more complicated when facing the profusing offer; secondly the fact that "as you like it" journalism – that is, the naturalization of journalism tends to the category thought up by Soler (*apud* PINTO, 2005):

> (...) let us go back to the fascinating persona of the citizen-reporter. Let us assume that he is quite popular and that very soon he will be the main information-holder. This means anyone who encounters a possible newsworthy incident can decide to spontaneously take a photo, or write down his impressions and post it on his blog. Now, let us take it a step further with the enthusiasm of a novel writer (...). Let us imagine that every citizen decides to practice his right to become a *citizen reporter* and thus leaves home every day armed with his mobile camera, ready to hunt down the news of the day. Let us continue to imagine that this journalistic craze extends to the entire population of a city. What happens to the dissemination of information when everyone gathers information but no one is on the receiving end? And once this fad spreads, citizen-

> reporters will go out and take photos of every single piece of information, anything, because anything can be newsworthy… an open drain hole, a man that limps, a limp flower, every single detail of the day can be assigned real time, until the plot reaches a point in which step by step, 24 hours a day are recorded in real time, at the same time as things happen during the day.

By the way, Pinto (2005) comments: "what Soler in fact proposes to us is the reflection not about the problem of instantaneous information, but the issue of useless information". And concludes paraphrasing one of Borges's celebrated tales: "what would be a map for if it were printed in such a scale that it was the same size as the territory?"

NOTES

1   According to a *Nature* magazine article from December 15, 2005, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia and main theme of the project, presents an error margin similar to the traditional Encyclopaedia Britannica.

2   In the original version: "how audiences are shaping the future of news and information". The translations of this article were made by the author.

3   In the original version: "grassroots journalism by the people, for the people".

4   In the original version: "a phenomenon that shows the markings of a revolution — giving anyone with the right talent and energy the ability to be heard far and wide on the Web".

5   In the original version: "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information".

6   In the original version: "provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires".

7   The source cited is John Hiler, co-founder of WebCrimson, a consulting Software Company based in Manhattan, and Xanga.com, one of the largest sites that host blog communities (BOWMAN & WILLIS, 2003:

33-34.)

8   In the original version: "eyewitness reporting comes in large part from people's desire to share their stories and publish the truth".

9   In the original version: "Let Truth and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?".

10 In the original version: "The order of things in broadcast is 'filter, then publish'. The order in communities is 'publish, then filter'".

11 In the original version: "Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact."

12 In the original version: "If you go to a dinner party, you don't submit your potential comments to the hosts, so that they can tell you which ones are good enough to air before the group, but this is how broadcast works every day".

13 In the original version: "My readers know more than I do. This has become almost a mantra in my work. It is by definition the reality for every journalist, no matter what his or her beat."

14 Editors' notes: Current TV was launched in 2005 in the USA as an independent television broadcast. The initial proposal was the elaboration of programs based on content generated by the audience. In 2013, after continuous changes in TV listings and production models, Current TV was sold to Al Jazeera broadcast, becoming Al Jazeera America.

15 In the original version: "Current is a cable and satellite network which is transforming television into a conversation. It's about what's going on, stories from the real world told by real people".

16 In the original version: "Today the business of journalism is dominated by mega corporations all following a common agenda. You change the channel but you get the same story".

17 http://www.current.tv/make/training?section=journalism.

18 In the original version: "it's not enough that you tell a good story or capture beautiful images".

19 In the original version: "the standards, like honesty, accuracy, fairness and integrity".

20 http://www.current.tv/make/resources/cj/ethics

21 In the original version: "as a Current journalist, your work will be measured by a higher standard".

22 http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/advice/video-audioandstills/paymentformater.shtml

23 In the original version: "News can happen anywhere at any time. We want you to be our eyes".

24 In the original version: "audiences have provided invaluable material in the immediate aftermath of very important news events".

25 In the original version: "that all third party contributions are subject to appropriate editorial scrutiny, that requests for contributions are made responsibly and that where relevant we have obtained appropriate consents".

26 In the original version: "not to encourage the audiences to risk their personal safety or that of others, in order to gather material for submission to the BBC".

27 In the original version: "Some commentators describe members of the public who send in video, audio or still contributions as 'citizen journalists'. This may not necessarily be helpful because these contributors are not professional journalists. Most do not feel comfortable describing themselves as such. In particular, we should discourage people from referring to themselves as 'BBC journalists' or as 'working for BBC News' or 'gathering material for BBC News'. This could lead to confusion in the field and could expose them and our own crews to additional risks".

28 In the original version: "Our starting point is that we should aim to apply the same approach to pictures, audio and video supplied by members of the public, as we do to any other material we handle as journalists. We should not automatically assume that the material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification. As digital manipulation tools become more accessible, we also need to be on our guard against photo manipulation and hoaxing. Special care must be taken if we suspect that material has

been supplied by a member of a lobby group or organization with a vested interest in the story, rather than a disinterested bystander."

29 Editors' notes: The newspaper "OhMyNews" as launched in 2000 and is considered one of the pioneers in the publication of articles produced by the so called "citizen journalists". The website stimulated the activities of amateur reporters and even paid some of their collaborators for their work. It kept at work until 2010, when the participation of readers was completely deactivated. Currently, "OhMyNews" keeps in its structure an archive with all collective productions published until 2010 and sporadic updates about citizen-journalism. Such updates are carried out by a small group of collaborators, acting as curators of content.

30 In the original version: "not just reforming the culture of the Korean media".

31 In the original version: "drawing a new line in the history of the world press".

32 In the original version: "changing the world press' basic understanding of how the news is done".

33 In the original version: "The revolt of 727 news guerillas – a revolution in news production and consumption".

34 In the original version: "everyone who seeks to take new developments, put them into writing, and share them with others".

35 In the original version: "plainly identify himself as a 'citizen reporter' while covering stories".

36 In the original version: "uses legitimate methods to gather information, and clearly informs his sources of the intention to cover a story".

37 In the original version: "not to produce name cards stating that [he or she is] a citizen reporter of OhmyNews".

38 In the original version: "legal responsibility for acts of plagiarism or unauthorized use of material [and] legal responsibility for defamation in articles lies entirely with the citizen reporter".

39 In the original version: "welcome to the revolution in the culture of news production, distribution, and consumption".

40 In the original version: "say goodbye to the backwards newspaper culture of the 20th century".

41 In the original version: "In the 20th century, a presidential press conference was news, and tears shed by one's lover the night before were not. We will now be restoring that lost half of the news".

42 "OhmyNewsJapanDebuts"(Aug. 28 2006), in http://english.ohmynews. com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=A11100&no=313808&rel_no=1&back_url=.

43 In the original version: "freedom of press is limited to those who own one".

44 In the original version: "If you don't like the news... go out and make some of your own".

45 Such is Mr. Paparazzi's invitation (www.mrpaparazzi.com), that encourages the audience to send photos and videos containing from celebrities, artists and football players to Big Brother participants caught red-handed in the act of committing an offense. The appeals pulsate on screen: "get rich quickly", "become a millionaire", "earn a huge fortune", "earn a lot of money with celebrities' offenses" and so on). It is not a journalist website, clearly, but the practice is close to the so called gossip press. As we have seen companies that care for quality journalist have adopted a completely an strictly opposite posture.

46 In an e-mail conversation with the author, on December 12, 2005, journalist and professor Manuel Pinto from the University of Minho, – who is far from being a "common citizen" in term of qualification for the media discussion – gives his statement about the blog ("Jornalismo e Comunicação - Journalism and Communication - , www.webjornal. blogspot.com) for which he is the main responsible in charge. "It is hard to withstand such a job, considering that the array of sources I regularly track would give me a much more encompassing and systematic work if... if... my life were all about this and I had nothing else to do. When I look to this work – which I know is carefully followed namely by journalists from several vehicles – I realize that what distinguishes this activity from professional journalism resides in the fact precisely that I don't have time to do the work I should've done. Not only in the research and edition of information, but also in the analysis and comments. Besides the time, there is the not small issue of resources, given the fact that under the viewpoint

of journalist work, it is necessary to not only gather or comment on an information produced by others, but also to search for it, check it and evaluate the sources, etc. As it's evident, I've been a professional journalist and editor for ten years now and I base myself on the requirements of what I understand as being a professional of journalism".

47 Reference to the largest Brazilian TV broadcast, well known for its slogans that aim for establishing a close relation to the audience such as "Globo, we see you here" (Globo, a gente se vê por aqui').

48 In the original version: "the myth of a free press".

49 In the original version: "risk [of] losing their jobs and being blacklisted in the business".

50 On September 1st, 2004, school holiday when the "Day of Knowledge" is traditionally celebrated in Russia, an armed group of Chechen Separatists besieged and kidnaped a school in Beslan, where they had already previously installed explosives, keeping around 1,300 people as hostages, among children, parents and teachers. The kidnapping lasted for over three days and resulted in hundreds of dead people and most of them were children. The intense competition among tv stations during the coverage with a furious struggle for exclusive and spectacular images led the editors of these networks to their self-criticism that was translated into decisions contrary to the promise of "real time" information. in its new editorial guide, published on June, 2005, BBC, among other guidelines (as "to never make a live interview with a kidnapper" nor "disclose live material, videos or audio produced by kidnappers") determines ""install a delay when broadcasting live material of sensitive stories, for example a siege of a school or a plane hijacking." This is particularly important when the outcome is unpredictable and we may record distressing material that is unsuitable for broadcast without carefull editing" (to "install a delay when broadcasting live material of sensitive stories, for example a school siege or plane hijack. This is particularly important when the outcome is unpredictable and we may record distressing material that is unsuitable for broadcast without careful editing"). (cf. BBC, Editorial Guidelines, section 11, "War, Terror and Emergencies", item "Hijacking, kidnapping, hostage taking & sieges, in www. bbc.co.uk/guide-lines/editorialguidelines/edguide/war/hijackingkidnap.shtml). They do not state, however, what the delay time should be. One month after the massacre, though,

an article published in the Jornal de Notícias (Portugal) stated that Sky TV proposed a 20-second delay, without investigating whether 20 seconds is enough time for "excellent journalists (...) to make the necessary decisions on what to let through or not." ("Sky News studies the delay in images in their transmission", JN, October 24, 2004)

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