

Summary

Miriam Meckel: The Internet: Evolution or Revolution of the Media?

The internet will change the structure of our society in forming a network, decentralising existing social structures and in providing continuous access to the most recent facts in an unlimited number of combinations. Due to this networking the search for information is no longer confined to a surface dimension but makes use of the in-depth structure of the virtual environment. Providers and users of information therefore have to do some rethinking: under the conditions of networking, information processing is no longer linear but functions reflexively. Furthermore it is no longer based on stratificational hierarchic patterns but rather on associative cybernetic models.

Growing memory capacities and extensive information possibilities cause a competition for the attention of the users. Attention as a resource will increasingly determine the development of markets defining themselves through information as a good or information about goods. The established forms of media will continue to exist but they will also have to develop further. The individual interfaces in the networked communicative process will not grow together but will rather further differentiate on the basis of mutual technological platform.

The internet and network communication are embedded in an evolutionary process of media culture. As in previous processes of change, similar indicators and factors can be recognised. A revolution of communication does therefore not lie ahead. In contrast, we are facing a continuous and long-term adaptation to partly new conditions of network communication.

Joan Hemels: Media and the Church: A Discourse

In the Netherlands, the church and religion are still areas reflected critically by the media. In view of a general interest amongst the audience of print media, radio and television, topics with a religious dimension unrelated to the church receive attention regardless of the audience's view of life or political orientations. The institution of the church along with its office holders, however, is received critically by journalists.

Especially bishops are directly and very severely questioned in the news. Most dignitaries and their spokespersons, however, lack the communicative competence to react quick-wittedly when dealing with profes-

sional journalists in order to overcome the gap between a secularised media culture and an ever decreasing number of believers. All this happens in a time in which the 'civil society' offers perspectives for a fundamental debate on values and norms.

A better understanding of how the media function and a deeper knowledge about the role of journalists and producers may prove a way to stop the devastating development the denominations/churches are facing. Members of the bishops' conference and media representatives therefore met to discuss the promotion of a shared discourse. An elaboration of the ideas expressed at this meeting could have a positive outcome for an adequate relationship between the church and the media for the future.

Thomas A. Bauer: Interreligious dialogue. Weak-points and chances of communication between religions

The interest of the following analysis meets the question, whether in general – and if, when, where, and under which conditions then – the medial and public discourse, reflecting the meaning of society, is open to give space to the religious dimensions of transcendent topics. Confessions and churches obviously do not reach relevant aims of religious communication (such as intermediation). They are too much involved in self-presentation and highly interested in gaining self-definition by excluding others. They do not search for contradiction, which would be an important factor for dialogue. They avoid the communicative principle of expository discourse („Streitkultur“), they are – because of autistic inclinations – not capable to learn creative communication. In the meanwhile new theoretical models of thinking of communication and intermediation, and new models of practising new spirituality (media-religion) get established. This process surpasses the traditional religious institutions. The media-society gets increasingly independent – even by religious thematising of life.

Sonja Fink: „Public Journalism“ – A New Journalistic Concept and Implementation in Local Editorial Departments in the USA

Locality is the future of newspapers. „Public Journalism“ is the motto with which individual journalists in the late 80's and early 90's attempted to find new approaches to reporting and coverage. Their main goal was to re-establish the relationship between journalism, the reader and their community – a relationship considered essential for a functioning democracy. The guiding principle is to engage people in forming opinions and critical reflection. With this, the precursors of this movement emphasise

the significance of journalism situated in the local community for an overall societal level.

„Doing public journalism“ means to move away from the tradition of the solely „objective“ uninvolved reporter. The aim is not only to report on deplorable state of affairs but to start a discussion of possible solutions by co-operating with officials in charge as well as competent boards and authorities. Community meetings, telephone campaigns, monthly readers' panels and editorials are parts of this concept that summon the reader to become actively involved in his community, thus creating a democratic society. The role of the media is henceforth not that of a cynical spectator but must understand its role as a responsible member of society.

„Public Journalism“ has become a form of provocative and project oriented activism in the USA. Pricey ventures such as the organisation of debates on TV or the sponsoring of youth centres have been abandoned and replaced by daily local reporting focusing on the expressed needs of the reader.

It would be wrong to interpret „public journalism“ as a categorical revolution of the entire sector of journalism. However, as a complementary model that is not detached from other vocational norms it is groundbreaking for responsible reporting and the future of newspapers. It calls for action in a time of disenchantment with politics and lacking involvement of citizens in order to maintain a form of government grounded in the principle of freedom.

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