

Iwona Hofman

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (Poland)

The New Journalism: an Attempt at the Model Reconstruction

Abstract: An attempt at reconstruction of the New Journalism model results from the observation of the crisis symptoms of journalism as a profession and mission (social responsibility). On the grounds of journalists' and theoreticians' statements, it is possible to establish a hierarchy of values of the serious journalism, which a social demand is growing for. The New Journalism is most frequently described as the conscious journalism, which provides *spectrum* of needs and views of recipients. This type of journalism is committed, independent, functioning in the public sphere, credible, realizing educational role. These attributes pertain to journalism. The paper includes standpoints, for example, of S. Michalczyk, B. Hennessy, P. Mancini, S. Russ-Mohl, S. Bratkowski, R. Kapuściński.

Keywords: *serious journalism; professionalism; crisis of media; values*

The New Journalism is understood in the context of: journalism of the new media, journalism of linguistic and imaging genres, serious journalism values. Regarding the first case – it seems obvious: new media and new-new media have revolutionized the form, communication channel and the role of a sender and recipient. A journalistic statement referring to visual communication, and more broadly - visual culture can be viewed through the prism of literary genesis of most journalistic and extended informative genres. Literary determinants, for example. fictionalization, style originality, language accuracy, narrative subjectivity can be a remedy for modern nonchalant way of practising journalism.

This paper addresses the issue of New Journalism as a scientific essay in which I – being a media observer and a social communication participant – introduce my point of view on the issue. These reflections refer to professional discussions about the

quality of journalism and consider the claim of a serious journalism. I use analytical methods.

The proposed interpretation of the term leads to the genre of the New Journalism which developed in the USA in the 1960s under the influence of the experience of writers and war correspondents, including Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe. These experiences can be described as an experience of inadequacy of journalistic language to the nuances of the reality (conventional vocabulary and style). As Ryszard Kapuściński stated: “New Journalism was born from a combination of two so far different spheres: real events and people that traditional journalism dealt with, and instruments and techniques borrowed from fiction to enrich the description of the facts” (Kapuściński, 2012, p.7). The rise of this phenomena is connected with the popularization of television as a medium conveying information by images, which was so popular that it was feared (not for the first and not for the last time) that newspapers would decay. The value of the New press Journalism consisted in explaining and commenting on the information already known to the public from the screen. In this perspective, the New Journalism was also a response to genres obscurity, the formation of genres hybrid, combining means of expression typical for different styles, types, etc. (Kapuściński, 2012, p.10).

Combining the expression “New Journalism” with serious journalism means taking a challenge of restoring public confidence in journalism by renewing the classic paradigm of journalism as a profession and as a mission.

In the context of the term New Journalism, some of the mentioned characteristics should be stressed: “tight reflection and consideration” as the reason for picking the subject, the contents of “sententious judgments” stimulating reflection as a result of a journalist’s work affecting the educational values, dialogism as a summary of the arguments or attitudes enabling the reader to form his own opinion, completeness and complementarity of assumptions, implementation and achievement of objectives, which I understand as a proof of a journalist’s credibility.

Thus, dialogism becomes the first value of the New Journalism. Dialogism understood as openness to arguments and various views, curiosity about the world and people, willingness to listen to others and the art of conversation. It can be said - contemplation of a problem, which is a determinant of the humanities. The New Journalism is or should be humanizing, focused on the needs and expectations of the public, but not in the sense of a *human story*. Unobtrusively explaining the world, it relates to the reality. It criticizes creativity as part of a special game testing the patience of the public for deforming (obscuring) of the image of the world, up to a burning question of who, which journalists and what media bear responsibility for flattening and simplification of problems.

The New Journalism is a serious journalism, treating readers and topics seriously, practised by serious journalists who are aware of goals and techniques of their work. The counterparts of this kind of journalism might be categories of quality, commitment, opinion-shaping, neutrality, locality, citizenship. It should be added that Stephen Russ-Mohl has made an interesting distinction between opinion-shaping journalism, focused on the presentation of one view or opinion, and interpretative journalism which offers a reader a wide range of attitudes allowing him to take his own point of view (Chyliński & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 33).

It is worth starting to construct a model of the New Journalism with the observation: journalists, or at least part of them – present and experienced in the independent (second-hand) media before 1989 – notice, define, propose to create a standard of reliable journalism, identifying “new” with “professional journalism” (Gawroński & Polak, 2010; Szot, 2013; Hofman, 2010; Hofman, 2010a; Hofman, 2011) while the British media researcher, Philip Elliot calls professionalism “a way to mystify certain professional roles in media, since the adjective »professional« increases cultural and social credibility of media, and in his opinion, contemporarily journalistic routine tasks, such as, maintaining compliance with facts, style of the presentation, sense of the value of the news and timeliness started to be defined as »professional«” (Taylor & Willis, 2005, p. 131). Features can be found in the automatic reflections: too much of information and the lack of information hierarchy, sensational character, flattening the image of the world by splitting information into unimportant and context-free components, taking over the style and culture of journalistic work from new and newer media, the loss of the ability to create space for the crucial public debate, the lack of environmental leaders (Świat *według Naczelnych*, 2005; Boniecki, 2006).

These features are emphasized in the analysis of the role of media in political communication and political journalism. So what should the New Journalism be like, since “the old” (presently practised) journalism evokes negative associations in most people? The attempts to describe the desired change have already been made. A broad approach was presented by the writers of the Report Laboratory in the program work *Media Dogme*, containing 14 points developing the characteristics of journalism. For instance: “Journalism is a search for truth (...) analyzing, interpreting and building the world through the media (...), it is a cognitive tool”, “Journalism is a character, a personality rather than a profession entered in a personal survey”, “it is art of media, a great opportunity to carry out research and experiments”, “Creativity and development are significant in journalism. I compete with myself. I seek for understanding and cooperation with others”, “The most important thing for a journalist is his name. His name is his business name and a journalist works for it for all his life (...). Working to earn his name he works to earn his professional ethos”, “A journalist is an intellectual

(...) responsible for popularizing desired attitudes and social patterns”, “the duty of an intellectual-journalist is to popularize higher cultural values and reach lower social classes with significant issues and problems. It is not an instruction or teaching, it is still necessary grassroots work”, “We shouldn’t work with rating, we should accept it making welfare an attractive, sensational, aggressive value” (“Tygodnik Powszechny”, 2001; I quote Miller, 2005, p. 37–43).

Dogme is set against a collection of negative observations of journalism, called TCCT – Totalitarianism of Commercialism, Consumption, Transgression. This collection basically captures the atmosphere of these circles discussions. As an example I quote the most radical statements: “Information is a product. We are going to deliver and sell such goods that there is a demand for”, “As a matter of fact, journalism constitutes an attractive supplement to the advertising it is governed by”, “Leave your personality at home”, “The most important thing for a journalist is the company: consortium, station, party, newspaper – the system he owes the most to”, “Rating is our god. Easy, pleasant and carefree, (...) people enjoy it, people do it” (Miller, 2005, p. 37–43; Chyliński & Russ-Mohl, 2008).

Thus, it can be alleged that the postulate of the New Journalism was formulated in the opposition to the symptoms of the crisis of journalism caused by a global evolution of the attitude to the profession (no longer a mission) in the competitive environment and freedom of the flow (generation) of information. Thus, the triggering factors include: the primacy of the economy and preferences of viewers, the practice of global corporate media operations, media tabloidisation, mediatisation of the public sphere, reversed roles of a sender and recipient of information, the Internet model (time of availability and format).

The model of the New Journalism is derived from attitudes contesting “exhaustion” of journalism (Budzyński, 2007, p. 20–21; Warchoń, 2007, p. 25–33). In the light of some journalists’ statements, the components of the model are high standards of journalists’ work, defined, among others, by the following statements: “humanism of our writing lies in the effort to convey the real image of the world and a collection of stereotypes” (Kapuściński, 2003, p. 63; Bereś & Burnetko, 2007, p. 145–146), “we are professional agents for information. We are supposed to pick up from this ocean of available information what we consider important, distinctive, worth conveying and we have to endow it with such a form that will make it possible to reach and be accepted by readers” (*Świat według Naczelnych*, 2005), “a journalist must look for an authority in himself (...) he must talk to himself, criticize and rebuke himself” (Milewicz, 2006, p. 8–9), “the basic obligation of journalism is to keep distance from politicians (looking at what they are doing from a certain distance (...) making them account for the words they flood us with” (Torańska, 2006, p. 25).

A special attention should be paid to an ethical aspect of the definition, and also to an emerging educational and controlling function of media (which remains in connection with the priorities of media education) and reevaluation of the concept “media – the fourth authority” (Braun, 2005; Nentwig, 1995; Goban-Klas, 2005; Goban-Klas 2005a). An interesting point of view was expressed by Leopold Unger: journalism “is not any fourth authority but ant-authority, that is wise scepticism, not to say lack of confidence in any authority, especially the one that wants to be right and suggests or perhaps even forces very simple suggestions how to save humanity” (*Leopold Unger. Doktor Honoris Causa Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej*, 2009, p. 22–25). Wawrzyniec Smoczyński stated: “Infotainment would remain a harmless entertainment, were it not for its tremendous influence on politics” (Smoczyński, 2009, p. 38).

On the other hand, a distinction between a media worker and medial product should be confronted with journalism ethos and work ethic. The concept of a media worker evolves dynamically: from rendering services (Kapuściński, 2003, p. 122) to “synthetic and uniting journalism”, which – in Bernard Poulet’s opinion – consists in animation and compilation of the content (a journalist – “compiler” of information) (Poulet, 2011, p. 247, 256).

In the context of these statements, some new arguments were provided by the participants of a recent discussion on the basis of a book by Ryszard Kapuściński *To nie jest zawód dla cyników [It is not a profession for cynics]* (Warsaw 2013). The key issues in this discussion seem to be the references to new synonyms, such as: “the world explainer” (journalist), “clicker” (media recipient). “The world explainers” are vanishing of course, because a contemporary reader “takes a minute to learn about everything. He has less time and more information to digest”, “a journalist becomes a guide for a customer’s map”. In Katarzyna Kolenda-Zaleska’s opinion, a “clicker’s” choice constitutes a proof of confidence in a journalist’s competence, allows to maintain a sense of work involving passion, reliability, commitment: “We have work to do: check the source of information, talk to people, be at the place where something is going on, and not only read on the Internet about what has happened (...). Standards do not change. We have to stick to them strictly and hand them over to our younger colleagues” (Kolenda-Zaleska, 2013, p. 34; Bratkowski, 2013; Smoleński, 2013).

In the light of these opinions, it has to be definitely emphasized that the model of the New Journalism is an attempt to reconstruct the way of conveying and interpreting reality which is known to the readers of the newspapers issued in the 1970s and 1980s in the times of the primacy of quality press journalism. The quality criteria of media were defined by Florian Fleck (1980), and only a decade later they were modified by Stephan Russ-Mohl (1992) as: comprehensiveness, actuality/relevance, objectivity,

interactivity, originality (understood as your own *research* or exclusive character of a text), transparency/feedback nature (understood as an assessment of the sources and circumstances in which the material was prepared) (Chyliński & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 366). It is also worth mentioning earlier attempts, already made in the 70s to define informative journalism, i.e. by Winfried Schulz who said that “events become information only because they were selected from the whole and complexity of what is going on in the world” (Chyliński & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 121), thus anticipating – traditional journalism does not constitute a complete coverage but only a selection based on topicality, continuity, relevance, status and dynamism of events. As Joseph Pulitzer used to say “Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.” (Hennessy, 2009; Skworz & Niziołek, 2010, p. 685; Chyliński & Russ-Mohl, 2008, p. 25).

The plan of journalism quality must take into account: education of journalists, media ethic, economic factors. This triad reflects the real expectations of media recipients as it describes competences and journalistic “decency” (see: Survey conducted by “Tygodnik Powszechny”) in the circumstances of a generic diversity of media.

The name of new Journalism includes local journalism, taking direction of citizen journalism. A German researcher of this problem, Dieter Golombek claims that these media perform the controlling, educational and entertaining function most fully. They fit the trends of journalism development based on the interaction with recipients and delivering useful information (*news you can use*) (Hennessy, 2009, p. 59–68; Poulet, 2011, p. 222). To some extent, local journalism restores faith in the possibility of social understanding. It is useful due to a potential of journalists’ reliable coverage, public sphere and recipients.

Another feature worth attention in the reconstruction of the New Journalism is also a correlation of content with the public needs. It was expressed precisely by Paolo Mancini: “journalism purposefully addressed to readers possessing precise views or likings, defending these views, representing people who share them and who are involved by reading” (Żakowski, 2011, p. 21). This statement remains in a kind of opposition to the criteria of objectivity and neutrality which are frequently mentioned in typologies of information or media merits. Therefore, the New Journalism takes into account the spectrum of needs and opinions of the public, hides nothing but clearly indicates world views and cultural representation.

The simplest but most complete definition of the New Journalism was suggested by Rev. Adam Boniecki: “Media is a means of social communication, thanks to the media people have an opportunity to participate in the life of society, we are supposed to inform and help people to understand reality” (Świat *według Naczelnych*, 2005) as

long as we deem appropriate to identify the function of media with the functionality of the New Journalism in the public sphere. The value of the New Journalism consists in independence from and in this sphere, and also a superior status towards public and commercial media.

Trying to find a model conception of the New Journalism, we can risk the following allocations: at the micro level – awareness of professional and ethical standards, meso level – economic stability, presence of authorities and/or individuality, restoration of the status of a profession enjoying public trust, macro level – educational role of media, synergy with citizens’ initiatives (Michalczyk, 2008).

The model of serious journalism is possible to achieve when several conditions are compiled: dominant media system, high level of media and political culture, journalism professionalization. Currently, we are at the stage of making projects of “serious” media that have strong criteria of evaluating journalist work and are firmly tied to market. It seems that at least a few media devoted to values of ethical and contentwise journalism could begin a campaign for changing audiences’ preferences. Otherwise, we are struck in the stage of discussions over the attitude-crafting role of the internet and feeling disoriented when facing media coverage of reality.

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Author

Professor Dr Hab. Iwona Hofman

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Department of Journalism. Contact details: pl. Litewski 3, 20–080 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: iwonahofman@gmail.com.