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Innovations in journalism and new information experiences

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In a context characterized by the ongoing transformation of the media landscape and the evolution of consumer behaviors, contemporary journalistic formats have fundamentally altered the production and consumption of information in France amid an information crisis. This phenomenon has garnered attention from scholars across various disciplines, leading to its description through several conceptual lenses: information overload, as articulated by Alvin Toffler; the chaotic consumption of successive pieces of information by citizens, a concept proposed by Neil Postman (Postman, 2010); the proliferation of misinformation, identified by Denis Muzet (Muzet, 2006); and the emergence of 'fast news', the 'data deluge', and persistent 'temporal pressure', terms coined by Alice Antheaume (Antheaume, 2016). Yves Citton further explores the mechanisms through which these phenomena capture individual attention, situating them within the broader context of attentional regimes that govern our communicative exchanges (Citton, 2014). In this contemporary era, alert messages have become prevalent, symbolizing a world in which mass media operate not just as tools of information dissemination, but as instruments of mass distraction.

In response to the evolving media landscape in France, a myriad of initiatives—both digital and traditional—have emerged, significantly influencing the culture of information. Noteworthy among these are the successes of 'mooks' (magazine-books) such as *La Revue XXI*¹, inaugurated in 2008, and *La Revue dessinée*², launched in 2011, both of which champion graphic reportage. Similarly, digital-first outlets like *Le Quatre Heures* (2013)³ and *Les Jours* (2016)⁴ strive to offer distinct and innovative approaches to journalism. Moreover, the realm of journalism has seen the advent of revisited and newly conceived formats (Pélessier and Eyriès, 2014) which include web documentaries, data journalism, and newsgames (Blanchard et al., 2011b), exploring the expansive possibilities afforded by the diversification of digital cultures. These developments have thrived within the context of what Fabien Granjon & Aurélien Le Foulgoc term as "the reconfiguration of the media and information ecosystem," where "new uses...tend to transform routines and informational experiences," highlighting a transformative shift in the consumption and dissemination of information" (Granjon and Le Foulgoc, 2010).

Numerous contemporary media productions are often epitomized as exemplars of slow journalism, particularly those employing narrative techniques. These formats are also perceived as hybrid forms of journalism that blur the boundaries between journalism and entertainment. Given the nebulous definition of journalism's essence, the diversity of journalistic formats emerges not as an anomaly, but as a normative feature of the media landscape. Currently, these innovative practices are recognized as strategies to challenge the prevailing norms of a conformist and standardized journalism, a perspective articulated by Christophe Dabitch (Dabitch, 2009), a noted author, graphic novel scriptwriter, and former journalist. Furthermore, it is imperative to examine these journalistic innovations under a new lens, one that underscores the dynamics

¹ <https://revue21.fr/>

² <https://larevuedessinee.fr/>

³ <https://www.lequatreheures.com/>

⁴ <https://lesjours.fr/>

of information creation, from its genesis to its dissemination, and interrogates the media's role within this framework.

This inquiry delves into the transformative impact of journalistic innovation on the information experience, questioning the extent to which these emergent formats engender a novel engagement with information through refreshed media encounters. Such interrogations could be pursued from multiple vantage points, including the professional practices within journalism and the economics underpinning media operations. This paper specifically concentrates on the construction of information and its reception by the audience, aiming to dissect the influence of these innovations. By employing a discourse analysis of the stakeholders involved, alongside a semio-pragmatic examination, the objective is to unravel the ways in which the media might leverage alternative methodologies to inform the public. This comparative analysis seeks not only to illuminate the dynamic interactions between media innovations and audience perceptions but also to contribute to the broader discourse on the evolution of information dissemination in the digital era.

Section I. Innovation in Information Narration

The advent of new media productions heralds a transformation in the temporal relationship with information, offering a respite in the incessant flow of news to allow for moments of engagement and depth. This shift primarily stems from the production timelines of media such as books, comic strips, and certain video games, fostering a distinct temporal engagement. The domain of graphic reportage serves as a compelling example. Cartoonists dedicate approximately 6 to 9 hours daily at their drawing desks, producing one to four panels weekly, embodying a retreat into a contemplative temporal space: "Drawing necessitates time—a stillness of immersion, a unique duration of presence/absence," notes journalist and comic scriptwriter Christophe Dabitch (Dabitch, 2009). These mediums aspire to liberate themselves from the "tyranny of real-time," as posited by François Jost (Jost, 2009), a French researcher and audiovisual media expert. Adherence to immediacy does not inherently equate to quality reporting. For instance, the independent news website *L'Imprévu* prides itself on its detachment from current news, opting instead to delve into the past to forge a deeper understanding of the present⁵. By revisiting overlooked events and rigorously exploring archives, *L'Imprévu* transcends the conventional media narrative and the predetermined agendas set by communicators, embodying what writer William Demuyter describes as "journalism that takes its time" diverging from the rapid pace of mainstream media⁶.

This innovation also cultivates an alternative relationship to reality, challenging the "tyranny of the visible" identified by François Jost (Jost, 2009), where appearances are not always synonymous with truth. It necessitates a deviation from media-highlighted reality scenes. In the realm of graphic reportage, "the reporter-cartoonist eschews the journalists' typical pathways," asserts Christophe Dabitch (Dabitch, 2009). Paradoxically, graphic reportage navigates closer to reality by distancing itself from the conventional imagery of television. For example, "Le juge Borel. Le suicide était presque parfait" by David Servenay and Thierry Martin, featured in *La Revue Dessinée*, utilizes the expressive potential of the comic format—through variations in letter size, panel dimensions, dark hues, and abstract illustration—to convey the trauma experienced upon the announcement of a husband's demise⁷. This method mirrors documentary filmmaking approaches where, as filmmaker Jean-Louis Comolli suggests, reality serves as a foundational element (Comolli, 2004). Like journalists, documentary creators harness reality but distinctly assert their narrative perspective, unmasking its inherent vulnerability.

This form of journalism often embraces a first-person perspective, manifesting through the narrator in narrative journalism or graphic reportage, or possibly through the receiver-player in newsgame formats. In *Primaires à gauche* (2012), a newsgame, the participant navigates the story of a political campaign, embodying a unique narrative perspective (Blanchard et al., 2011a). Graphic reportage, exemplified by Joe

⁵ <https://limprevu.fr/fil-rouge-2/limprevu-en-questions/quest-ce-que-limprevu>

⁶ <http://www.inaglobal.fr/presse/article/slow-journalism-quand-les-medias-changent-de-rythme-9214>

⁷ *La Revue dessinée*. N°10. Hiver 2015-2016, p. 42-103.

Sacco in his work *Palestine* introduces the concept of the "embedded artist," who marries the journalistic principle of objectivity with the passionate engagement of an artist (Sacco et al., 2024). This fusion of immersion, testimony, observation, and direct experience underscores the essence of narrative journalism. For instance, in *Le Quai de Ouistreham* (Aubenas, 2010), journalist Florence Aubenas narrates her six-month exploration of unemployment and low-wage labor in France, a narrative echoing Günter's 1985 investigative work *Tête de Turc* on the conditions of immigrants in Germany, where Wallraff disguised himself as a Turkish immigrant laborer (Wallraff, 1986).

Narrative journalism thereby emphasizes a subjective viewpoint and a narrated reality, with Sacco portraying a visual and intradiegetic representation of himself as a journalist-cartoonist within his work. This alternative journalism approach leverages unconventional media formats, necessitating a close examination of the chosen medium's characteristics, whether as a physical symbolization system or a social communication framework. The efficacy of this language, as a semiotic system, is paramount. For example, comic storytelling employs images to narrate, described by Thierry Groensteen as "a collection of separate and united icons," a "spatio-topical device" that demands the reader's active cooperation (Groensteen, 1999). Unlike television images, which craft a continuous illusion of reality, comic sequences construct an elliptical narrative, encouraging reader interaction and interpretation at their own pace and imagination, as noted by Federico Fellini (Groensteen, 1999).

Comics offer a unique temporality and reading freedom, allowing readers to pause, accelerate, reread, and absorb details and the whole piece at their leisure, fostering a sense of autonomy not dictated by a fixed sequence. Journalism utilizing comic strips harnesses the medium's capabilities and constraints to maximize its effectiveness. However, the integration of journalism with game design in creating newsgames can provoke debate, as selecting appropriate gameplay to convey information poses challenges. Adopting non-traditional formats introduces a departure from conventional information dissemination methods, fostering a distinct information consumption experience.

Section II. Alternative Journalism for a Novel Information Experience?

In the realm of narrative journalism, the reader's engagement extends beyond merely following a sequence of events; it involves synthesizing these events into a meaningful whole through reflective judgment. This narrative form aids in humanizing and emotionalizing the understanding of situations, as seen in Joe Sacco's *Palestine* or Florence Aubenas's *Le Quai de Ouistreham*. Aubenas, in particular, adopted an alternative journalistic approach driven by her dissatisfaction with conventional reporting on unemployment and precarity, which she found to be unenlightening. Instead, she sought to immerse herself in the reality behind job insecurity. The significance and impact of information vary with the medium employed, implying that the media format (and the experience it facilitates) influences the perceived value of information. A format predictable in its structure may offer limited new insights, as familiarity breeds anticipation. *Le Quai de Ouistreham* subverts traditional approaches, suggesting that these formats can foster unique forms of attention and even make information consumption enjoyable—a notion not entirely new, given the celebrated reportages of Albert Londres but which has seen new explorations since.

These media formats are designed to cultivate an aesthetic or pleasurable relationship with the audience, often rendering them inherently attractive—a prerequisite for engaging the reader or user's interest to delve deeper. David McCandless's attempts to render information both comprehensible and aesthetically pleasing (McCandless, 2011), and the testimonial delight of a reader of *La Revue Dessinée*, underscore the importance of aesthetic engagement beyond mere decoration. This aesthetic attention, as outlined by Jean-Marie Schaeffer (Schaeffer, 2015), is distinct from the pragmatic focus of ordinary tasks, being open to both the content and the form of media. It fosters a multifaceted engagement with the media object, emphasizing both narrative and visual elements, such as in graphic reportage. Without a specific task, this form of attention facilitates not the reinforcement of pre-existing beliefs but the construction of a unique world for the audience, integrating emotional and psychological responses to the media experience. Yves Citton suggests that this attention allows for an alternative perception of the world, fostering a sense of detachment from one's own perspective (Citton, 2014).

If we accept Gilles Gauthier's premise that journalistic output should offer a truthful representation of events (GAutHier, 2016), it's clear that events can be journalistically depicted through various representational systems, each with its own relation to journalistic truth. Florence Aubenas's narrative approach in *Le Quai de Ouistreham* seeks a truth not fully captured by statistics, emphasizing the subjective dimensions of social facts experienced by individuals. Thus, narrative journalism enriches the "truth" by considering the cognitive engagement of the audience with the representation of events, suggesting that informing on subjective social realities involves engaging the reader in a deeper experiential understanding of the world.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the distinctive characteristics of various contemporary journalistic formats that diverge from traditional media practices, investigating how this new journalism reshapes the information experience. It posits a transformed relationship to time and reality, inspired by a diversity of genres and cultural practices (literature, comics, video games). These formats propose a novel engagement with information through enriched media experiences, necessitating a closer examination of the medium's properties and its potential to elicit alternative forms of attention, particularly aesthetic enjoyment. By placing the quest for meaning at the core of the personal experience, these innovative formats offer profound insights into our interaction with information.

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