

ARTICLE

Ethnography

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The economy of just-in-time television newscasting

Journalistic production and professional excellence at Euronews

■ Olivier Baisnée

Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Toulouse, France

■ Dominique Marchetti

Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris, France

Translated by Fredline Laryea

ABSTRACT ■ Since the 1990s, 24-hour national and especially transnational television news channels (BBC World, CNN International, CNBC, etc.) have imposed themselves as models for nonstop news production in Western Europe and have propagated a new model of professional excellence. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted at the pan-European channel Euronews, this article discusses the characteristics of the concrete organization of the new division of journalistic work such as its designs for processing and producing just-in-time news, and how it tailors its product for a transnational audience. The functioning of Euronews is a living laboratory for studying the constraints that bear on all-news networks, including the relentless reduction in production costs, the effects of temporal compression (spot assignments that are unpredictable, 'live' broadcasts, etc.), and the development of sedentary or 'sit-down journalism'. This article offers a rare ethnographic window into the workaday universe of 24-hour news broadcasting.

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KEY WORDS ■ 24-hours news, production of information, television, reporting, journalistic work, professional standards, transnational audience, time, France

Non-stop national and especially transnational television news channels (BBC World, CNN International, CNBC, Euronews, etc.) have, since the 1990s, established themselves as models for news production in Western Europe. If these media houses have aroused interest in many researchers (Flournoy, 1997; Kung-Shankleman, 2000; Semprini, 1997, 2000; Volkmer, 1999), their works, except for Brent MacGregor's (1997), do not, or rarely, dwell on the working conditions, the practices or the profession of journalists. Yet, these channels, especially when they are transnational, can be 'laboratories' for just-in-time production.

As they are more subject to economic and time constraints than the major non-specialized national channels, the non-stop television news networks are expected to produce 'news' with limited physical and human resources and thus provide the framework for studying the production of *hard news*, in other words, that which makes the 'headlines'. Beyond the relatively 'intense' working conditions of journalists, they expose far-reaching changes pointing to improved standards and forms of excellence in television news and the journalistic profession.

If it is hard to portray the impact of these non-stop news channels on the practices, the norms and the conceptions of news at other media houses.¹ It is, on the other hand, possible to describe the features of this new model of professional excellence and try to understand what it imparts about the present-day and perhaps future changes in television news production conditions since the 1980s. In the absence of a comparative study conducted over several sites whose heuristic values (Hannerz, 2004) are known, a study carried out in 2000 at the headquarters of Euronews, the multilingual pan European channel (Machill, 1998; Simon, 2003), will be used for our case study. At the time, it broadcast in six languages (English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese), but, since 2001, Russian has also been added.

After situating the origins of this channel within the media context of Western Europe, our article stresses first the features of the practical set-up of the division of journalistic work: Euronews's specific properties, its operations for coping with just-in-time news, and broadcasting to a transnational audience. Next, it shows how the channel is a laboratory for studying the well-entrenched constraints at all-news networks: reduction in production costs, the effects of temporality (unforeseen assignments, increased 'live' broadcasts, etc.), or the development of 'sedentary journalism'.²

This research combines both ethnographic observations and some 20

interviews with staff of the network (various categories of journalists, human resources, distribution, audience relations executives, artistic director, etc).³ The research was supplemented with several interviews with people working at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) headquarters in Geneva.⁴ We were indeed allowed to observe the work of the EBU news coordination unit for two days (Darras and Marchetti, 2004) where the Euro Vision News (EVN) is produced, with the exchange of images between many European channels constituting the raw materials for its international news stories.⁵ Finally, we rely on interviews conducted in 1998 and 2000 with French journalists working with non-stop French non-specialized or sports news channels or radio stations and on various documentary materials collected.⁶ For the purposes of this article, the research was updated in 2004/5.

A new professional and economic model

The creation of Euronews in 1992 must be viewed in a more general context marked by the development of non-stop radio and television channels in the last two decades, to which websites may be added. It is part of the changes in the national media fields of Western European states (Baisnée and Marchetti, 2000; Collins, 1992, 1994; Kelly-Holmes, 1999; Schlesinger, 1993, 1997; Tunstall and Machin, 1999). Just like cinema and sports, news in the larger sense of the word has become one of the major challenges of economic, professional and political rivalry (national and international) between a few major groups, and in Europe between the various states through public service channels.

The genesis of Euronews

Euronews, just like the other non-stop television news networks, has introduced (and continues to introduce) one of the 'loss leaders' of new satellite packages and cable networks or ADSL, which are on the increase all over Europe. The news sphere is turning out to be all the more strategic from an economic standpoint since it attracts subscriptions and viewers, but especially advertising earnings, as the channels often broadcast to audiences with strong cultural and economic resources.⁷ If the latter channels are operational, it is because they ensure the making of returns on public or private investments by their news production in the sense that the same human and physical resources are used to simultaneously supply news to several networks.

These new media houses in Western Europe were to a large extent modeled on American television channels, local radio stations or especially

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on CNN International (CNNI) launched in 1985. As specifically depicted by the story concerning the creation of Euronews network, CNNI's role in the media coverage of the 1991 Gulf War (many non-specialized national television networks took up the American network's images and followed the war 'as mere spectators') was a decisive factor in the re-launch of a European project for a news network. Hence the establishment during this period (to cite but two examples of all-news channels predominantly controlled by EBU members) of two international networks, BBC World (1991) and Euronews (1992), and of many national networks in major European countries. Among these are LCI (1994) and i<television> (1999) in France; Phoenix, ZDF: Infobox and Eins extra (1998) in Germany; Canal 24 Horas (1997) in Spain; BBC News 24 (1997) and BBC Parliament (1999) in Great Britain; SVT 24 (1999) in Sweden; and Rai News 24 (1999) in Italy (according to EBU 2000 Directory).

Birth and profile of Euronews

The origins of Euronews, created in 1992 and launched 1 January 1993, go back to the period when the main EBU members – in other words, the public European networks – were, for economic reasons, seeking to consolidate their news and sports links within the organization and faced with progress in commercial networks. Euronews was set up by 11 active members who were later joined by other partners.⁸ It was in fact the outcome of a political project formulated by some European leaders, particularly by the then French Socialist government, through community directives or financial support (some of the network's magazines are financially sponsored by the European Union). It was a matter, at least in speech, of combating American, indeed Anglo-Saxon domination (Machill, 1998), over news termed international. The creation of Euronews was also perceived as a means of strengthening national public television networks in Europe and especially of finding a new framework that would participate in the construction of a 'European identity'.⁹

After a difficult start marked by political struggles between the partner networks and by economic obstacles, Euronews had to open up its capital (49%) to French private operators from 1995, who sold off their shares two years later to the British group ITN. This consortium, formed mainly by major groups such as Reuters, Carlton Communication and Granada Group, which provides the news-stories for three English channels – ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5 – then tried to project itself on the international market by making Euronews

its 'showcase' vis-à-vis its rival BBC World. These new shareholders strove to restructure the network to improve a very difficult financial situation through increased advertising earnings. Similarly, they changed the programs and the format, gave prominence to news items to the detriment of news magazines and some sections (Sports, Economy), and gave priority to 'lives' and developed personal news. It is during this period (1999–2000) that our survey was conducted. Since the end of April 2003, Euronews, which has stabilized its financial situation, has once again become a public network held 100 percent by the 19 partner channels, which bought back the shares of ITN, in turn beset by financial difficulties.

In 2004, the network was received mainly in Europe (123,203 million homes), in Russia (27 million), in the Middle East and in Africa (3,046 million) and much less in the Americas (1,253 million in the United States, 49 million in Canada, 154 million in the West Indies and 41 million in Latin America). Comparatively, CNNI was broadcast much less than Euronews in Europe (89 million households), but was, on the other hand, more present in Asia (25 million), Latin America, be it in Spanish (13 million) or in English (9 million), in the Middle East (10 million) and in Africa (4 million).



Figure 1 Euronews' headquarters in Lyon.

104 Ethnography 7(1)**Distinctive features of non-stop news channels and Euronews**

These new non-stop news channels contributed immensely to the recognition of a new journalistic and economic model in Western Europe. Simple perception may lead to concluding that producing non-stop information requires considerable human and physical resources, much greater than those of most widely broadcast large Hertzian networks. However, one of the main features of the non-stop news network is precisely the difference between the volume of production of the network, the editing staff, the budgets or even the size of the building (see Figure 1). This is particularly true in the case of Euronews which, in its different aspects, has very modest means not only in relation to the editing staff of most national Hertzian networks but especially to those of its transnational competitors CNNI or BBC World.

'Cheap TV'

At Euronews, the number of permanent journalists at the end of 2000 came to 135 (including eight sub-editors, eight producers, three headline sub-editors, three deputy editors, one editor and one managing editor – according to data provided by the Euronews Human Resources Department). But this figure may be explained by the fact that the network broadcast in six languages at the time. Quite obviously this cannot match the staff strength of BBC World, which in early 2000 had 58 offices throughout the world (Euronews had none during our research period, although a correspondent's post in Brussels was created in the early 2000s) the 250 correspondents for BBC News and CNNI's 42 offices and associations with 900 television partner channels (Kert, 2003: 10). A comparative look at the turnovers further confirms the economic constraints that hang over the pan European network; in the early 2000s, its turnover was about 30 million euros compared to 1.2 billion for CNN International and 600 million for BBC World (Bélot, 2004: 90–1). In short, as an editing team member ironically summed it up, Euronews makes 'cheap TV'.

Another important feature of all-news networks is the need to constantly produce news even if some of it will be broadcast again. Such a constraint is probably never so keenly felt as during periods when 'current events' are deemed to be 'uninteresting' or 'hollow'. Journalists at these channels themselves admit that, during certain periods, they have to 'pad out their work'.

This situation is even more acute at Euronews since the network has virtually no reporters in the field. As an executive at Euronews put it:

There are highs and lows in a system like this. The highs are when important events of this nature break out [this journalist has just mentioned the Kosovo conflict at the end of the 1990s] thus enabling us to assert ourselves, to be free to enhance our credibility. Then, the lows. These are dreary days and obviously that is low for everyone . . . We've got to invent stuff . . . Sometimes, it's artistic (ironic). We have to pad out our work, irrespective of the 'current events' involved.

This not only demonstrates these general features of non-stop news networks, but also presents specific traits (Baisnée and Marchetti, 2000; Machill, 1998; Richardson and Meinhof, 1999) which make it a unique case, at least in Western Europe, regarding the organization and the broadcast of non-stop news. First, it is a more multilingual network than its counterparts (CNNI, BBC World etc.). Second, it has neither newscasters nor sets. In other words, if the commentaries are available in different languages, Euronews broadcasts the same images 24 hours a day and in relatively short formats. By its specific transnational character, it has been one of the pioneers of the broadcast of bulletins and news magazines entirely in images. Euronews is indeed a network without or almost without a camera, as it rarely produces its own images, for they are supplied by EBU member channels and the two main international audiovisual agencies (Reuters Television, Associated Press Television News) (Boyd-Barrett, 1998; Paterson, 1997, 1998).

The division of labor in just-in-time news production

It is for these reasons that the Euronews example makes it possible to describe very vividly and in detail a new type of professional and economic concept of news production that has been established in various forms in the European audiovisual media since the 1980s. The channel effectively embodies these new forms of organizing work, the outcome of other sectors which aim at reducing the unpredictability of current events, in other words, allowing journalists to cope with any new events deemed important. As stated by Peter Golding and Philip Elliot (1999: 113), 'if news is about the unpredictable, its production is about prediction'.

First, this need for just-in-time simultaneous production in several languages requires a very complex staff management. This explains why there must always be a full team of journalists in all the languages concerned. The operating system for the timetables, which was further complicated with the reduction of the legal working time to 35 hours per week, has been improved to contain the complexity linked to the rotation

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of the teams of journalists (three a day) and to their days off. To make up for possible absences, the network's supervising staff relies on a constantly renewed group of freelance journalists who can be called upon at any moment. Staff management is moreover complicated by the fact that the network resorts to professionals from other countries where remuneration conditions are at times, as in the case of the Germans and the English, much better than in France.

Second, this organizational structure implies a very clear division of journalistic labor between those working up and down stream. They operate around two key units within the internal establishment of the channel even if they are not very glamorous. They provide the raw materials to journalists through selection, analysis and by ensuring consistency: on the one hand, the coordination unit, responsible for sorting the array of images received by the network, images that will constitute the matter for the day's bulletin; on the other hand, the 'forward planning unit' responsible for vetting the news so that the network has a relatively clear agenda and can prepare live broadcasts during major foreseeable events.

The coordination unit

This occupies, for an outside observer, one of the most fascinating rooms because it is within its few square meters that the images of the entire world land. Since Euronews only has very few images of its own, those which are put together under the supervision of the coordination unit staff (four people in all, working in shifts of two) consequently constitute the raw material for the network. At fixed hours, the journalists receive the exchanges from the various image sources to which the network has subscribed (Reuters television, APTN, EVN) or from which it benefits (ITN and the Euronews partner channels).¹⁰ Depending not only on requests made during the morning editorial meeting, or news stories anticipated by the forward planning unit and endorsed by the editorial supervisors, but also on the current events, these journalists select the relevant images for the network from private agencies or from EBU current news exchange (Cohen et al., 1996; Hjarvard, 1998).

The coordination unit room has two workstations. Each journalist has a computer, a television set and a telephone. Slightly higher up opposite them are television sets broadcasting the exchanges of the audiovisual and EBU news agencies. The two journalists have their eyes permanently riveted to those sets, particularly at certain hours when series of text-images of a few minutes are being broadcast. On the arrival of the images, the journalists enter a short script of the item they are watching into the network's computer system. The mechanical aspect of the work is striking: our interview with the coordination unit journalist is not interrupted during the

exchange and the latter continues his recording and archiving undisturbed. The speed with which the items follow on gives the impression of a non-stop flow. At the same time that the two coordination unit journalists are viewing the items and noting the major elements on a database, they may seek to purchase EBU images via a distant procurement system. They can actually hear and talk to the other participants on the news market through a microphone and loudspeakers connecting them to the headquarters in Geneva. This hands-free equipment with a huge microphone allows them to speak without moving from their offices, in other words, while continuing to do other things. Another piece of equipment also allows them to communicate with the editorial staff. For instance, one of the coordination unit staff calls a journalist in the newsroom, 'are you watching APTN at the moment?', in order to alert him to a text-image which has just been shown.

In possession of the news-stories decided upon at the editorial meeting, the coordinating unit journalist also has various dispatches or scripts allowing him to find his way through the images that have been submitted to him. A coordination unit journalist sums up his work in the following way:

to give you a quick description, it is the control tower of a fast airport for the take-off and landing of planes. You know roughly when a particular aircraft is taking off that weather conditions come into play, as does what is happening in other airports, and the conditions in the surrounding areas. Here, it is almost the same thing, it is managing news but also combining news into images, knowing if it will happen, if it won't happen, at what time it won't happen while managing news on a daily basis just like every journalist does.

The 'forward planning'

This forward planning is the second strategic unit upstream of news production. It is responsible for anticipating and organizing the broadcasting of foreseeable news-stories but also for providing journalists with background documents for news-stories or live broadcasting. It is this feeble structure (it comprised only two people in 2002) that materially organizes the regular functioning of the network. In other words, it ensures that there is always a full team of journalists (bearing in mind that when broadcasting into six languages, the absence of a 'language' journalist would be disastrous). Furthermore, its function is to know the availability of images concerning an event that the network wishes to broadcast live, to enquire about possible translations and possibly to recruit from the network's roster of available translators.

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Given the urgency under which news-stories and live broadcasts are produced, the rotation of journalists, who are often absent from the editorial offices for several days in a row, and the availability of news classified by subject and attached to various news-stories, enables them to have a documentary base and to acquaint themselves with the work program of the network when they return (this listing is made up of computer data to which journalists have access from their workstations).

The production of news items

This is the third critical step. Downstream from this gathering of news and images, the other news reporters¹¹ in charge of the news part (editors and sub-editors) use these raw materials to simultaneously prepare their montages and commentaries. They are gathered into a very long and narrow open space (see Figure 2). Only the editors, the managing editor (on the right in Figure 2), and the images coordination unit benefit from the glass-walled offices that open onto the editorial offices.

The journalists' offices face a wall of images obtained from the major transnational news networks (BBC World, CNNI, Sky News, etc.), audiovisual agencies and national European channels. Underneath these screens, there are also 'booths' where the journalists record their commentaries on images and the room reserved for live programs. The latter, whose area is



Figure 2 The newsroom.

relatively vast compared to the other spaces of the network, is occupied by transmission technicians seated in several rows (which makes it look like a space shuttle launching room) behind which are six studios occupied by the journalists responsible for commenting on the live images in each language.

The sub-editors (three in all), because they are responsible for the selection and preparation of the text-images, are pivotal to the production of the news bulletin. Their offices are located in the center of the room reserved for news journalists (Figure 2). It is on the basis of the images they have selected that the six so-called 'language' journalists each produce their respective commentaries. Each Euronews bulletin, broadcast every 30 minutes, is followed by four title items: Sports, Economy and Europe (which all deal, as their names indicate, with current topical sporting, economic and European events), and Analysis, which deals more analytically with a particular subject. The principle for arranging the headlines is similar: a headlines sub-editor has six language journalists under his supervision.

The production of multilingual news

If Euronews represents a model of an enterprise capable of just-in-time work thanks to its very routine schedule, it is also a unique example for analysing the production of just-in-time news owing to its transnational and multilingual character (Machill, 1988). Indeed, the major function of the network's editorial supervisors is ensuring the coherency in the production of similar text-images accompanied by different commentaries in several languages. The so-called 'language' journalists (English, Spanish, Italian, etc.) address neither a particular country nor the European territory as a whole, since Euronews broadcasts go beyond the geographical borders of Europe. The journalists' prospective viewers are therefore not defined solely in terms of any geographical zone but also and especially in terms of the language that is spoken or understood. For instance, a French-speaking journalist addresses not only viewers of his country of origin (often French) but also Quebecois, Swiss, Belgians, African, North African and, more extensively, individuals who understand French. The most emblematic case is undoubtedly that of the English-speaking journalists, often from England, in so far as Euronews is not, or is only in a limited way, broadcast in Great Britain. Their commentaries are therefore intended not only for their compatriots but also for English-speaking people throughout the world.

This is why Euronews journalists therefore have to learn not to use national references that are too explicit, nor to use very idiomatic expressions that would not necessarily be understood outside their countries of origin.¹² If they have any television experience with a national network,

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their work consists in ‘unlearning’ certain professional habits and routines, as indicated by this interview excerpt with a deputy editor in April 2000:

Each time that a French journalist begins here as a free-lancer or stringer or in any position, the first thing I tell him is ‘forget, forget that you are French; forget that you are in France; you are not working for a French television network. You happen to speak French, you happen to be working in French, but that is all. You will be dealing with a public that goes widely beyond France ... Therefore cast off your French skin; you are not producing a French TV program. Okay?’

The young journalists, who do not necessarily have any experience within a national television network, therefore have profiles specially tailored to suit Euronews’s needs. Considered more malleable, they are in more of a position to accept these specific constraints. This training is done over a very short space of time. Assisted by an older professional to produce their first news-stories, the new entrants are then supervised for a few weeks by the sub-editors so as to understand the Euronews format and ‘tone’. There is, moreover, constant re-reading among journalists of the same language and, depending upon the linguistic competence of each, this cross-control facilitates the correction of any possible errors. In other words, Euronews has had to ensure that no matter which journalist is commenting on the story, the news broadcast is roughly the same.¹³ One does not find as many editorials as languages broadcast within the editorial unit. There are not as many languages within the network’s editorial staff as there are languages broadcast but a common structure and language that journalists attach to each headline and editing unit.

Once the decisions concerning the news-stories have been taken at the editorial meeting, the news and headline sub-editors who see to the joint mounting of the images must keep in mind that the six languages must be able to adapt their commentaries. On the arrival of the ‘language’ journalist team every day, they explain the story and the montage they have chosen. A discussion on the story-image, its relevance, and its accompanying commentary can then take place. Depending upon nationalities and professional traditions,¹⁴ the sensitivities regarding an item may be different, with some arguing that it is of interest to ‘their’ audience, that the montage is adaptable to the language’s structure or to the television habits of their country.

It is clear that I will be presenting him [the ‘language’ journalist] nevertheless with a structure. I tell him, ‘There, I am going to begin with that as I think it is the strongest image.’ In that respect, I do not think there are differences between countries, it is ... you feel it ... a little. You are expecting many pictures to choose from; let us begin with this ... Mozambique: do

we begin again with the rescue, a helicopter going to save people on trees? No, we start with people burying the dead ... (interview with a sub-editor, March 2000)

However, sub-editors very often make decisions relatively fast and there is not really any room for discussion – at times, these journalists have only 15 minutes to produce their joint work: writing their commentaries from available agency dispatches or documents provided by the forward planning unit and entering the mixing studio to produce the ‘sound’ of the news-story.

In other words, the montages are relatively routine. Thus, during our observation period, a sub-editor of the network had to produce 45 seconds of a meeting partly broadcast live at midday between Thomas Klestil, the Austrian president, and Romano Prodi, then president of the European Commission. Before the joint meeting even began, he had already planned to start with (15 seconds of) Thomas Klestil around a table (‘with his 14 friends’ he joked), then the arrival of the two personalities in the corridors and in the hall. Between the 15th and the 34th second, one or two extracts from the speeches, to conclude (from the 34th to 45th second) with the handshake in a small room close to the press conference room. According to the sub-editor, this routine method of making a montage was necessary because of a wide variety of professional habits and specific linguistic constraints. A German needs more time (given the length of words used) than an Italian to comment on an identical event. A sub-editor at Euronews provides an illustration:

Sub-editor: Well for the montage, you look at a German editing; German editing uses very long sequences [he takes on a Swiss accent]: Ah that ... calm. Our montage is done ‘calmly’. So, you look at the Italian or Spanish and French editing, it’s MTV. Then in such a case, there are no long sequences ... it’s clips, no sequences for more than two seconds. Then you are bombarded. Well in Germany, that would never work. It is true that in private television networks in Germany, it is now shorter but in general no, it is ... we want to see this sequence; one often begins with a building before starting, before going inside where the meeting is being held.

Interviewer: The building, the meeting.

Sub-editor: With the Germans, it is meeting, then building ...

Interviewer: What are the others like?

Sub-editor: The others, the meeting comes straight away. Ah for the Italians, it is the head at once and someone who speaks and speaks and there is a journalist who is talking over ‘Here is the man he said this and that.’ It is ... and then ‘and the other one said that’ and without cuts in the editing,

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they go back and forth, they make a chain of heads. Here, I would not say that there are problems; I think that most people, chief editors and film editors have understood that a German for instance needs a ... at least a 15 second introduction ... You do not say things as easily as in English or Italian ... At least in French, things can be said much more succinctly; therefore you need less introductory images. This is not the case for the German. He would like to have a little more to explain.

Interviewer: Therefore here you are compelled to do a montage that is a little more ...

Sub-editor: We try to do a montage which can work ... a montage which can work in as many situations as possible.

A news 'factor'

In addition to staff management and a well-organized division of work to cope with non-stop current events and multilingual news broadcasting, it is mainly the work tempo of journalists that reflects the conditions for producing news at Euronews and, in some respects, the functioning of the all-news networks' model. The long newsroom with its rows of computer and television screens where journalists are seated side-by-side shows a sort of assembly-line work in that it is very much controlled in terms of space and time.¹⁵ It is significant that, to describe the set-up of an editorial office where journalists now clock in and out,¹⁶ some journalists use the thought-provoking metaphor of the 'factory':

Here when seated behind the sewing machine, you sew the whole day and then that's it ... except if it's serious, you don't rack your brains too much to ask yourself existential questions. It must be done, it must be done and then we do it. (Interview with a chief editor of Euronews)

It involves producing news-stories in a chain. It is a little like in a factory but that's news networks. (Interview with a Euronews sub-editor)

The rate of production is indeed much greater than that of an audiovisual editing unit at a major national West European network. This intensity of work is primarily related to economic constraints and explains the small number of journalists, apart from the news and headlines sub-editors, who prepare the news: seven journalists (if one divides the total number by the number of languages broadcast: three news journalists and four for the programs that follow the news) are responsible for producing the news in one language. 'This amounts to seven people spending half an hour', sums up a deputy editor. Whereas a journalist of a French Hertzian network, for instance, may very well spend several days without producing any

news-story or may prepare one or two of them daily at the most, the Euronews journalists will produce 10, even at times 12 a day for the sports section, within a very tight deadline.

A 'laboratory' for transformations in journalistic activity

This pattern of work, specific to Euronews, which is new in the journalistic sphere, is revelatory, on the one hand, of the imposition of a dominant definition of news based on a very short-lived nature and, on the other hand, of general changes in professional practices: the development of 'sedentary journalism' and the reward given to young, more 'adjusted', journalists.

A dominant definition of news and the profession

Non-stop audio-visual news media have first of all helped to impose a new dominant definition of news characterized by the obsession for the fast broadcasting of news, whether in interviews, images or commentaries. The all-news networks were moreover based on the model according to which news must be broadcast as soon as possible and becomes stale increasingly fast. This short-lived nature, which is only a logical effect of novelty, is of greater importance today as professional and economic rivalry between national and international networks is exacerbated in the various national areas. Indeed, competition to be the first with the news (Bourdieu, 1998) is very important in the reciprocal appreciation of professionals. To be the first to show images or to broadcast news on such and such an event helps in establishing professional reputations: 'well, it is the first who said it, who is the most credible ... to be credible, one is commercially led to go fast' as summed up by a 50-year-old Euronews executive.

This means that the demand for working fast is quite often experienced in terms of both technical performance because it is made possible by new technologies, and human performance because journalists partly evaluate themselves according to this criterion: 'we need journalists capable of producing more or less personalized scripts very fast on receiving dispatches; in some ways, they are not required to verify or investigate', explained a Euronews senior executive.

As demonstrated by other writers concerning other networks (Richardson and Meinhof, 1999: Chapter 1), the 'live' broadcast precisely represents this conception of immediate news which corresponds to a professional ideal of making action, utterances and broadcasting coincide (Arcquembourg, 1996: 39). 'At every moment, you have journalists, they are thrown into the studios, it takes two minutes. Everybody is there, we can go ... any event that takes place, we do not need an infrastructure, or

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a studio, or cameras, the tap is beamed live and here, all hinges on the talent of the journalists in the six languages to comment on what they “see”, explained a Euronews executive. Some live broadcasts are actually not planned long in advance and the journalists sometimes have only a few minutes to get ready to comment on images and events about which they know little. Seated in the studio, they only have the documents they have been given for the broadcast, the unfolding of which they have no control over.¹⁷ In other words, they are compelled to take increasing risks as regards the accuracy of the facts and interpretations.

The development of sedentary journalism

The functioning of Euronews very strongly represents another major change in the work of the journalist. The organization of work and the haste of production often means processing news or images partly produced by others without going, and even in some cases, never going, to the ‘scene’. As in other young networks such as cable or satellite thematic networks or news websites, Euronews journalists do ‘office work’ where technical tools play a dominant role. Almost the entire staff only physically leave the editorial offices situated in the outskirts of a major French city (Lyon) to have something to eat or to drink coffee or smoke.

As we saw, the news-stories are almost exclusively produced in the studios from images that are not produced by the network. This is illustrated by this statement from a managing editor of a French thematic network: ‘we are probably [increasingly] going to process events arriving through the images of others’ (interview, 2000). In addition to the images, it is mostly news produced outside which is re-processed, with the editors obtaining their raw materials from documents, the written press, dispatches of written press agencies¹⁸ and ‘dope-sheets’ (i.e. written commentaries accompanying the images) from audio-visual agencies. This is what makes Euronews a different sort of news agency or a ‘news supermarket’: broadcasting images and news produced by ‘wholesalers’.

If the case of Euronews cannot be entirely generalized, it reflects the general trend of reinforcing ‘sedentary journalism’ in relation to ‘up and running journalism’ (a tendency which affects news production more generally, according to Joinet, 2000). Quite obviously, this type of journalism is different from that practiced by the national and international non-stop news networks (Sky News, CNN International, BBC World) which have ample materials for filming. Nevertheless, given the staff strength and the geographical areas to be covered, some of the reporters of these networks produce news-stories from images they did not shoot, drawing from images supplied by partner networks, agencies or the archives, and

adding computer graphics where necessary (Taylor, 1997: 66–9). For instance, most of the French non-stop news networks dealing with international current affairs carry out this type of work. As for those sent out to cover events, the time allotted for producing images and sounds is limited because they rapidly have to prepare their groundwork upstream, mainly by making phone calls, reading articles or listening to fellow journalists, then editing the material as fast as possible downstream without even considering that they could be called to do ‘live’ broadcasts’.¹⁹ Time for gathering news at the actual site of an event is therefore relatively limited.

To be fully understood, such a change must be related to a double series of changes; on the one hand economic, with a tendency for reducing production and broadcasting costs inasmuch as the non-stop news networks seek to cover increasingly large segments of the social and geographical sphere; and on the other hand technological, due to the massive arrival of new techniques in the 1980s and 1990s which totally changed production conditions for journalists. There is also a need to consider other phenomena such as the upsurge of communications, surveys and the increasingly frequent recourse in all sectors of activity to ‘eyewitnesses’, ‘spokespersons’ and ‘experts’, which favor sedentary work.

A young media and a media for the young

Consequently, one better understands why these young media houses are those where the average age of the journalists is around 30, which is different from the Hertzian networks, whose age pyramid is just the opposite. This may particularly be found within the many new cable and satellite television or still websites. In the organizational chart, the senior posts are often occupied by older journalists supervising staff who have recently come out of training. The youthfulness of the staff owes much to the production conditions described earlier. The senior staff’s expectations here converge with the skills of the younger journalists who have just entered the labor market. Employers want professionals who can immediately adapt to severe production constraints and relatively low salaries, as explained by an all-news channel executive:

The work pace at a non-stop news network is very, very important ... I distrust youthfulness but it is nevertheless quite obviously a factor, the editorial staff is relatively young. But especially if you have spent 45 years with television where there is one news bulletin a day or two a day and ... I am not saying it spitefully, I am saying it from practical experience because we tried, the graft rarely takes well. If it comes to the worst, I am more interested in someone who has, for instance, worked with non-stop radio service

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than in someone with audiovisual experience, but at a different pace because it really is gymnastics ... There are casting errors ... e.g. You take on someone unfamiliar with non-stop production, who cannot manage on his own and who just cannot get down to it, who cannot be as reactive as is necessary.

Young journalists recently graduated from journalism schools fully meet the expectations of this type of employer. They are immediately 'operational', available in no time, and they only require a few days of internal training on the equipment to complete their mastery of the techniques. 'The more the chap is trained upstream, the less I lose money training him, money and time because time is very essential. At a non-stop news network, there is no time to say: well, in six months I think that I will need a desk. Usually the need for the desk is when the chap has left ... I must find everything immediately', explains a network supervisor interviewed in 2000. As demonstrated elsewhere (Marchetti and Ruellan, 2001), for employers, these are trial periods and tests for beginner journalists (on attachment, freelancing or on fixed-term contract) by making them compete against each other.

Far from being perceived negatively, these entry conditions to the labor market by young journalists are apparently regarded in many cases as unavoidable 'experiences' (Accardo et al., 1999: 8–41) that allow them to prove themselves and acquire practical knowledge. To use *mutatis mutandis*, an analogy with the young French temps studied by the sociologist Michel Pialoux (1979: 35) at the end of the 1970s, these 'new' journalists appear ready, hankering for a change and willing to try every part of professional values, contrary to state-employed journalists.

If the non-stop news networks are made up of young journalists, it is also because they offer few career prospects, especially in small establishments like Euronews, so that the exit rate is quite high. Passing through a non-stop news network is therefore often perceived as a 'springboard', to borrow one journalist's expression, to other media establishments. In the words of a Euronews producer:

There is a very high turn-over: there are many people who arrive here and have not necessarily worked very much before, and for them I think it is an excellent springboard. But the problem is that too often it remains a springboard. You have ... let's say ... a moving machine that is a bit like a news factory but after a while, you stagnate in terms of career prospects, i.e. you go through the various stages: sub-editor, section head, producer etc. But there aren't 36 positions ...

This set of changes therefore goes to show in an exacerbated way the growing gap between the most prestigious public symbols of the profession (grand reportage, intellectual work, 'free' selection of news, etc.) and some

of the working conditions that are increasingly uncertain for some journalists,²⁰ even if this situation is at times not experienced as such.

The media coverage of the September 11 attacks on New York and their immediate sequels constituted a sort of compendium of several changes described in this article. It showed, firstly, the characteristic dominant news traits in the non-stop networks and even outside them, since some Hertzian networks interrupted their programs to follow their counterparts. In addition to the confirmation of the interest attached to this type of very sensational '*hard news*' on television, these events illustrated the competition for priority in broadcasting images and news. To be the first to broadcast the images or a piece of information has become the major yardstick for main journalistic excellence at the risk of that information sometimes being retracted or refuted a few hours or days later. Such an exceptional event demonstrates how much non-stop news is leading to risky practices. The media handling of the attacks also demonstrates the importance of sedentary journalism in news production. Unable to be present on the site, on the one hand, and to challenge the American television networks for economic reasons, on the other, the main French and foreign non-stop news networks were compelled to carry over the information and images produced by others. This was also the case for on-the-spot ordinary and special correspondents.

The coverage of recent major events, such as the Asian tsunami, the flooding of New Orleans or the November 2005 rioting in the French urban periphery, also confirm the ascent of the category of 'breaking news' in the hierarchy of journalistic priorities and further document the effect of 'sit-down' journalism. Indeed, in the absence of video feed available from the major audiovisual agencies or of any picture whatsoever, other significant events (such as the earthquake in Afghanistan for which few pictures were available and few correspondents present on the ground) simply cannot be covered. For lack of an autonomous means of production of images, the journalists of a channel such as Euronews, but also those of the major newscast for the French national networks (who have massively reduced the number of their overseas correspondents and eliminated their 'foreign' bureaus), find themselves unable to cover these events besides a cursory mention. 'Sit-down' journalism and 'breaking news' thus reinforce each other and further narrow the scope of the journalistic compass.

Notes

- 1 For some hypotheses on these effects, see Baisnée and Marchetti (2002).
- 2 The use of the notion of 'sedentary journalism' enables us to underline a new trend in contemporary journalism: the fact that more and more journalists work from their desk and rarely get out of the newsroom. Most of

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their time is spent at (re)processing information and images produced by others (i.e. news agencies and, in this case, audiovisual news agencies). 'Sedentary journalism' or 'sit-down journalism' opposes itself to 'up and running journalism' where journalists produce their own material.

- 3 The examples of other non-stop French news channels (LCI or i>television) and sports channels (Infosport and L'Equipe TV) broadcasting round the clock have only been used as a supplement.
- 4 This transnational organization grouped 116 TV channels in 52 countries in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East together in 2002 – most of them are public service channels to which are added private TV channels with a national network, for instance TF1 in France or Channel 4 in Great Britain – and in 22 countries in other regions of the world. A list of acronyms used is included at the end of this article.
- 5 Unless otherwise stated, most of the interviews conducted at Euronews were done in 2000. Our survey is part of a more general research pertaining to the media treatment of European issues, which has been financed by the 'European Identity' program of the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS in French). We would like to thank all the journalists and more generally the network staff, especially Dominique Gicquel, director of Human Resources, who helped in convincing her superiors of the interest of such a study and Bill Dunlop, the then managing editor, for allowing us to do such a job. The research on EBU was conducted in collaboration with Jean Chalaby (City University, London) and Eric Darras (CURAPP, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Toulouse). Furthermore, our thanks go to the various EBU staff who granted us a bit of their time, especially Adina Fulga who contributed immensely to facilitating our access to the news co-ordination unit.
- 6 As part of this article, we have chosen to be concerned mainly with the production of *news* broadcast in news bulletins and not that of magazines or debate broadcasts which can be found on these networks. In other words, only the more generalized portion of the production of these networks is being dealt with here.
- 7 It is not accidental that the most detailed audience studies of these networks relate to very high revenues and that these results are the ones put forward by the advertising services.
- 8 Although German (ZDF and ARD) and English (BBC) television channels feature among the main active members of EBU, they did not participate in the establishment of Euronews, unlike the French (France 2, France 3), Italian (RAI), Cypriot (CyBC), Greek (ERT), Egyptian (ERTU), Belgian (RTBF), Portuguese (RTO), Spanish (TVE), Monegasque (TMC) and Finnish (YLE) networks.
- 9 Chris Shore (2000: 258) thus recalls that from 1985, the Adonnino report ordered in 1984 by the European Council, following the low turnout in

the European elections, suggested, among other measures aimed at 'strengthening and promoting the identity of the Community and its image at the same time for its citizens and for the rest of the world', that a European 'audiovisual space' be created notably through the setup of a 'truly European' pluri-lingual channel.

- 10 The rate of such exchanges has increased considerably since one of our interlocutors described a shift from five or seven exchanges a day to 23 at the time of the survey.
- 11 This section of the editorial offices is distinct from the magazine part both from the geographical viewpoint (it is situated in another area within the editorial offices) and editorial viewpoint (the deadlines and the production constraints being less restrictive).
- 12 In his book on the European Parliament, the French anthropologist Marc Abélès (1992: 364) emphasizes the difficulties inherent in political communication towards a multinational audience. The traditional forms of political speech (humor, historic reminders) must under such conditions be banned, as viewers will find them hard to understand.
- 13 Journalists at the network, particularly in the early years, explained that it was often easy to tell the nationality of the chief editor through his montage of news-stories and his selection.
- 14 During the interviews, there were repeated ironical remarks about the lyricism and the disorganized aspects of 'Mediterranean' images as opposed to those of the Germans, described as a guarantee for seriousness and consistency.
- 15 This room was renovated recently and during our last visit, in early 2005, the proximity of the journalists to each other was even more pronounced because a new Russian language team, the seventh one, had also moved into the very small space. Since then the news editing room has been equipped with flat-screen computers.
- 16 Due to the introduction of the 35-hour week, the network has had to install time clocks, to the utter amazement of the Scottish managing editor.
- 17 On 11 September 2001, a French journalist commented live (obviously in the absence of accurate information) on the images of the World Trade Center in flames following the two attacks: 'You can see these impressive images live on Euronews [the image shows the aircraft crashing into the second tower without the journalist visibly seeing it] with the huge explosion that occurred today in upper floors of the World Trade Center'. Some seconds later, on the air, one can hear a journalist enter the studio and whisper, 'You saw the aircraft. You saw the second aircraft. It's crazy!' Her breathing indicates that she seems to be deeply moved by those images. This anecdote indicates the conditions under which 'live' broadcasts take place: journalists without information are compelled to comment (at times for relatively long periods) on images about which they know nothing or almost nothing.

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- 18 Euronews has subscribed to three major international agencies (Agence France Presse, Associated Press and Reuters) but also to a large number of national agencies, especially in Europe.
- 19 Situations of war or catastrophes show how the special correspondents of the broadcasting media at times have to do live 'external' broadcasts with minimum information. In other words, a portion of the 'on the spot' work may at times also be very sedentary.
- 20 For France, see the data and analysis presented in Accardo et al. (1999); Balbastre (2000); Champagne (1996); Marchetti and Ruellan (2001). The case of the United Kingdom is also revealing in this regard (Hazelkorn, 2001; Paterson, 2001).

Acronyms used

APTN: Associated Press Television News
 BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation
 CNNI: Cable News Network International
 EVN: Eurovision News
 EBU: European Broadcasting Union
 ITN: International Television News

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■ **OLIVIER BAISNÉE** is Lecturer in political science at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Toulouse, where he is also a member of the Laboratoire des sciences sociales du politique (LaSSP). His research interests are the political sociology of the European Union and the transformation of journalism (especially in its international and European dimensions), with a focus on the comparison between France and Great-Britain. His recent articles have appeared in *Politix*, *Pôle Sud*, *Réseaux*, and in *The Politics of the European Commission* (Andy Smith (ed.), 2004) and *France and the European Union* (Helen Drake (ed.), 2005). Address: LaSSP, IEP de Toulouse, 2, ter rue des Puits Creusés, 31000 Toulouse, France. [email: obaisnee@club-internet.fr] ■

■ **DOMINIQUE MARCHETTI** is Researcher at the Centre de sociologie européenne (a unit within the National Center for Scientific Research, CNRS, and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales). His work deals with contemporary changes in the journalistic field in its relations with the arenas of action such as the political and the economic fields. He is the author of *Devenir journalistes. Sociologie de l'entrée sur le marché du travail journalistique* (with Denis Ruellan, 2001) and editor of *En quête d'Europe. Médias européens et médiatisation de l'Europe* (2004). He has also contributed to Rod Benson and Erik Neveu (eds), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (2005). Address: CSE-MSH 54, boulevard Raspail 75006 Paris, France. [email: marchett@msh-paris.fr] ■

