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# **The Augmented Newsbeat: Spatial Structuring in a Twitterized News**

## **Ecosystem**

Matthias Revers

### **Abstract**

This article deals with the intertwining of digital and nondigital spaces of news reporting. It focuses specifically on how Twitter affects spatial and temporal orderings of news ecosystems. At the New York State Government, actors within the space permeate informational barriers through Twitter while enabling others to follow and engage in events from remote locations. The always-on mentality of tweeters not only blurs boundaries between work life and private life but also helps correspondents to get access to and pass on information instantly as well as to better anticipate events. The proliferation of digital spaces enhances awareness of nondigital spaces but requires coordination between the two. This paper is based on over two years of field research, involving observation, interviews, digital ethnography of the statehouse twitterverse and content analysis of journalists' tweets around the passage of same-sex-marriage law.

Keywords: news media, social media, news digitization, convergence

Kant defines space at one point as ‘the possibility of being together’—which it is sociologically; interaction turns the formerly empty and void into something *for us*; it fills it while it [space] makes it [interaction] possible. (Simmel, 1992: 689–690; my translation)

Scholarship on news digitization suggests a sense of despatialization of production practices, disembedding of interpersonal relationships and their replacement by technologically mediated relations. This is certainly one ancillary conclusion to be drawn from Boczkowski’s (2010) important ethnographic study on the intertwining of online news production and consumption patterns and the resulting homogenization of news. This diagnosis certainly holds true for a significant part of journalism, namely that which is produced in newsrooms. Looking beyond the newsroom, which is a priori spatially detached from the subjects it covers, to a news ecosystem (Anderson, 2013) sheds light on journalisms, which rely on and are characterized by continuous on-site reporting. In beat journalism of that sort, traditional and emergent worlds of news reporting intersect differently and the idea of replacement of one by the other seems absurd to begin with. Instead, what we find there is news hybridity and an augmentation of *news production space*, to use Robinson’s (2011a) terminology. This space is still bound by place in the physical sense of the term but Twitter and other technological infrastructures increasingly shape sociality and communication within it.

What this paper tackles more generally is how digital and non-digital spaces of news production interact. Using the example of a state government building, which is subjected to heightened mass-mediated observation, it looks at how Twitter affects this space. Rather than following the despatialization of reporting and declining importance of being

on site to report, this article deals with how existing news production spaces are shaped by digitality.

Currently, new media scholars focus on the influence of social media on established forms of communication and practices. This focus derives from a sense that political mobilization, public communication as well as professional practices in media work have significantly changed since the emergence of social media (Murthy, 2013). In regards to political mobilization and contrary to the popular notion of ‘social media revolutions,’ some authors stress social media’s demobilizing (Bailard, 2012), authoritarianism-enabling potentials (Pearce and Kendzior, 2012) as well as their ambiguity towards activating or appeasing activism (Hassid, 2012). Yet, other scholars demonstrate lower entry barriers to public spheres through social media in times of social change (Lim, 2012; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). In liberal democracies, we see slightly more permeable public spheres as social media enable more participation from the periphery while those at the center responded by also adopting social media.

Journalism has particularly embraced Twitter, which not only affects news production but also the professional ethos of journalism (Author, forthcoming; Hermida, 2012; Lasorsa et al., 2012). A common diagnosis in journalism studies literature is the normalization of technology, which perceives innovation to remain far below social media’s technological potentials (Chu, 2012; Cozma and Chen, 2013; Domingo, 2008a; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Singer, 2005). New media technologies are successful when they are perceived as advancing journalistic objectives (Robinson, 2011a) and when they resonate with traditional news values, for instance immediacy (Domingo, 2008b; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012).

Despite this emphasis on immutability of professional norms and practices, scholars also notice transformative implications of social media regarding more outspoken and opinionated forms of journalism (Chu, 2012; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Singer, 2005). Besides these normative changes, the constitution of news is clearly different on social media. Based on a large-scale analysis of tweets during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) speak of *affective news* and conclude that journalists are drawn to the *drama of instantaneity* that unfolds on Twitter. A side-effect is that fact-checking is left on the wayside. A more positive reading suggests that unilateral ways of verifying information are simply replaced by collaborative forms of networked expertise on Twitter (Hermida, 2012). For journalists, Twitter represents an ambient awareness system, whose impact lies in the constant flow of discourse rather than individual messages (Hermida, 2010).

This body of research has brought us a long way in understanding how social media shape public discourse, how communication professionals as well as citizens engage with them and redefine their public roles through them. Their common interest lies in the practices social media afford and encourage and how they affect the status quo. One area, which has not been examined sufficiently in my view, is how spatial orders are influenced by mediation through social networks. Scholars have studied the relationship between mediation and space (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004), spatial interaction between newsroom and the city (Rodgers, 2013) and within newsrooms regarding representations of the outside world (Hemmingway, 2004). Robinson's (2011a) newsroom ethnography witnessed changing spatial arrangements in converging newsrooms. However, there has

been hardly attention to how social media as digital spaces affect existing spatial orders of news production.

Interpreting Hermida's (2010) notion of Twitter as an *ambient awareness system* not only in the discursive but also spatial sense leads in the right analytical direction, I would argue. It implies conceiving Twitter as projectional, allowing one actor to *become aware of* what other actors do in the augmented space, on the one hand. It also implies conceiving it as representational, as enabling one actor to *make others aware* of things that may be relevant to more fully grasp the augmented space. This article examines how the presence of Twitter shapes social interaction, information flows and deliberations within a defined news production space.

### **Digital/Nondigital Spaces**

Analytically accounting for how space structures action and is simultaneously structured by action is to pay attention to *spatial practices* (Lefebvre 1991). Space positions people, material and symbolic objects in a certain order but also requires to be perceived and imagined as a space in order to be actualized (Löw, 2008). News media themselves assume a dual role at places of temporary or constant media attention: Firstly, in fulfilling their relay function (Schulz, 2004), news media wrest events from their temporal and locational circumstances and bring them to life at different times and places through textual, auditory and visual representation. Secondly, news media are themselves spatially organized to anchor the news net (Tuchman, 1978: 39–41) and dispatching news correspondents to a government building is one expression of that. Besides reporting the

news, correspondents act as mediators and facilitators of discourse in the sphere they are embedded in, which helps organize and create a shared sense of space.

State house reporting will be considered as a *digital formation* in this paper. In such formations, digital technologies 1) help organize actors, practices and content they share with each other, 2) enable interaction between these actors and 3) provide a space where all of this gets staged (Latham and Sassen, 2005: 10). Mere advertisement of news stories on Twitter does not make for a digital formation; it does, however, when Twitter helps coordinate day-to-day reporting, facilitates interaction (mainly reporters among themselves but also with their sources and the public) and provides a space for news and performance of journalistic professionalism.

This article will be concerned with one aspect of digital formations discussed by Latham and Sassen, namely *imbrications* of digital and nondigital (2005: 19–21). This is to recognize that, in the first instance, digital formations are realized by nondigital arrangements. At the same time, nondigital, place-bound properties are themselves transformed through digital ones. The particular twitterverse discussed here is a product of government as a place, its rhythms, social relations and practices. Representation of government on Twitter means that part of its former exclusively place-bound properties have been dissociated from it. For instance, presence, access or conversation may occur digitally as well as nondigitally. However, the interplay and mutual constitution of digital and nondigital is not seamless but often times dialectic (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004). This paper will thus not only focus on coordination but also discordance through Twitter.

As Meyrowitz (1985) suggested, social situations become less contingent on locational settings and physical barriers of information become more permeable through

the proliferation of electronic media. Placeness remains important in government and news reporting, especially for actors on the inside, while digital spaces increasingly enhance it. One implication of this augmentation is a shift of the boundary between what is on and off public display. This transition is accompanied by a new situation, which is governed by its own logic (what Meyrowitz calls *middle region*). One way to circumscribe journalism is the continuous attempt to expand this region. The media-appropriating strategies of political actors can be seen as a means to prevent this region from advancing to the public, accordingly. The difference now is that journalists have more means with virtually infinite representational space at their disposal to bring what they learn to public attention. Because this space on blogs and Twitter is not 'just there' but demands to be filled, this tension is intensified.

A lost sense of spatial distance is also accompanied by a lost sense of temporal distance, as David Harvey (1989) suggests. Existing temporal routines of newspaper production in particular, as described in newsroom ethnographies (cf. Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978), are broken while not completely replaced (newspapers still exist). They were supplemented rather by continuous as-soon-as-possible deadlines to produce shrinking units of news online. This pull of immediacy led to an overall acceleration of the news cycle (cf. Boczkowski 2009; Klinenberg 2005; Robinson 2011b). The speedup of discursive flows is further promoted by the omnipresence of smartphones in combination with quick distributory media platforms like Twitter. Reporters therefore rely on Twitter not only as enhancement of spatial monitoring but also to better anticipate the immediate future in this news situation. Twitter is particularly relevant for journalists regarding *protention*, which is 'a future-oriented part of actors' present' (Tavory and



Eliasoph, 2013, p. 912) and concerns anticipating the immediate future. The twitterverse is but one of many layers of communication through which reporters anticipate.

Velocities and synchronicities of digital and nondigital forms of communication diverge and these different temporalities require coordination and harmonization.

To sum up, this paper focuses on Twitter in news reporting as a case to explore how digital and place-bound properties of news reporting mutually constitute each other. It will show that Twitter affects the spatial structuring of journalism by helping to further transcend physical barriers of information and communication. Furthermore, this article assesses Twitter's virtues and deficiencies regarding future coordination.

## **Methods**

I conducted field research at the Legislative Correspondents Association (LCA) in Albany, New York. The association, as of January 2014, had 45 members. The hard core of about 30 journalists representing 15 news organizations (mostly newspapers) are permanently assigned to report on state government and the legislature. Reporters hold office spaces in the State Capitol building, on the third floor between Assembly and Senate chambers. Some news bureaus are staffed by one or up to four journalists. They are regional newspapers (*Albany Times Union*, *Buffalo News*, *Gannett News Service* providing coverage for several newspapers owned by the company), metropolitan newspapers (*New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *Newsday*), TV stations (NY1, YNN), radio stations (NYS Public Radio Network, WCNY/The Capitol Pressroom), one national newspaper (*New York Times*) and news agencies (AP, *Bloomberg News*) amongst others.

An average LCA reporter is 43 years old, white, male and has been working in journalism for 20 years. About half of the press corps had been on this beat for five or more years. The fact that there are several young journalists in their twenties, many in their forties or older and almost none in their thirties is indicative for the career structure of journalists, who hold positions of reporters, bureau chiefs and state editors. Unless the position is fixed-term by the organization, being the Albany correspondent is often a long-term or final position of a journalistic career, especially in regional newspapers. For younger journalists it is typically a springboard to move on to other ventures.

As one of the oldest state house press associations in the country (founded in 1900) it is permeated with tradition, even as it now constitutes a highly digitized newsbeat. When I left the field in June of 2011, there were only three reporters not on Twitter and the others' degree of engagement varied. About half of LCA journalists tweet intensively. They primarily shape the augmented situation, which I will describe in the following. Because passive monitoring of governmental affairs is essential for all of them, the augmented situation also affects the other half of reporters, even though they shape it less actively.

Focusing on a news ecosystem—circumscribing a political jurisdiction rather than a metropolitan area (Anderson, 2013)—is as much an analytical perspective as a sampling strategy: I conducted 42 semi-directed interviews with 31 journalists from 14 news organizations (seven of them were interviewed twice) and four spokespeople. With most reporters I had ongoing conversations during my research, which occurred between April 2009 and June 2011 and in two additional weeks in February 2012. The larger part of 300 hours of observation happened between November of 2010 and the end of June 2011.

During that time, Governor Andrew Cuomo came into office, the New York legislature passed its first on-time budget in years as well as a same-sex marriage (SSM) law.

Simultaneously, Twitter, which already gained traction during the gubernatorial campaign of 2010, won over the press corps and other political insiders (politicians, spokespeople, lobbyists, activists, etc.) involved in state governmental affairs.

The observation part of the research consisted of shadowing four specific reporters from three different news organizations as well as attending general formal and informal press events at the State Capitol Building. Shadowing consisted of observing reporters at work, in interaction with colleagues and sources in their offices and around the building. Field stays took between three and eight hours, sometimes even longer. Field notes consist of descriptive notes, hyperlinks to newspaper stories, blog items and tweets. I coded fieldnotes and interviews with the QDA software HyperResearch.

Although this project was not initially focused on Twitter, spending time with early adopters raised my interest in it before many LCA reporters got on it. I expanded my ethnography to the State Capitol twitterverse in December of 2010. I closely monitored a core group of 25 Twitter feeds of individual reporters and bureaus and also followed 45 other feeds of officials, spokespeople, lobbyists and reporters who left the beat but still engage in conversations in the State Capitol twitterverse. All in all, the core group generates between 100 and 200 tweets per day on average and on most eventful days 1621 tweets, as when SSM law was passed on 24 June 2011. Besides adding significant Twitter events to field notes, I conserved entire days and weeks of tweets in text documents and fed them into HyperResearch. The SSM Twitter debate between 16 June and 28 June 2011 includes 4492 tweets by the core group, which I coded for different

forms of Twitter engagement (which plays a subordinate role in this paper). For my informants, this period serves as a reference point for when they first fully exhausted potentialities of Twitter engagement.

### **Twitter: Information Funnel and Space-Time Compressor**

Considering the temporal and spatial dimensions of Twitter-aided reporting is not just an analytical abstraction but based on reporters' own understanding of Twitter. Only in most general terms they think of Twitter as a 'tool.' Once they talk in more detail, they reflect on Twitter in spatial and temporal terms. The most obvious implication on everybody's mind is how Twitter has accelerated the news cycle. One referred to a 'brushfire' to circumscribe a particular instance where Twitter created an intense news breaking pressure among the LCA (Interview, 28 May 2011). During the SSM passage, 'every second was important' because of Twitter, said another (Interview, 28 February 2012). One correspondent defined Twitter's journalistic appeal as being able 'to see in real time who is picking it up' (Interview, 24 February 2012). Spatial conceptions not only reflect in the common verbiage of 'being on' rather than 'using' Twitter but also more elaborate allegories: One reporter calls Twitter 'a huge classroom where you are monitoring every note that is being passed from Suzie and Chuck and whoever' (Interview, 27 February 2012). Another journalist says Twitter helps him overcome spatial, acoustic as well as psychological impediments of place-bound sociality:

[Twitter is] like being at a cocktail party because there is all these different conversations going on, all different directions, different subjects, different people involved, there is different little groups of people that form around one topic and

then people drift over to another topic. But the advantage is: you can listen to *all* the conversations you want to, that you are physically capable of following, you can participate in all of them at the same time and you don't have to overcome any shyness. It's just: you're sitting in your home, type and you hit send and it's out there; you don't have to feel like you're interrupting somebody; you don't have to talk over the loud music. (Interview, 28 February 2012)

Yet another reporter combines Twitter's temporal and spatial appeals by suggesting: 'We live in a world where one tweet can be shot around the country in a minute' (Interview, 28 February 2012). Although individual tweets can have quite an impact, most dissolve in the ambience of ever-scrolling feeds and popup notifications, which are registered peripherally. The majority of tweets is significant for creating awareness of occurrences and debates within the news production space.

### **Awareness in News Production Spaces, Old and New**

The LCA in Albany is located at the heart of the bicameral legislature. Spokespeople, lobbyists, organizers and officials frequent reporters' offices to provide information, convince them to attend events, to write about certain issues and in ways that serve their interests, etc. On days when the legislature is in session, reporters are only at their desks to write and otherwise move around the building to attend hearings, press conferences, watch protest actions or just walk rounds. Their daily work is defined by a ubiquity of casual encounters and conversations with sources, which yield tips, background and off-the-record information about past, present and future events and developments.

The importance of off-the-record and background conversations for these journalists cannot be emphasized enough and deserves more attention than can be devoted to in this context. Except few who do it conditionally, reporters I talked to identified off-the-record and background conversations as *the* way to gather valuable information. The majority of face-to-face and phone conversations I witnessed between reporters and politicians during my research were not on-the-record. Many of these exchanges involved negotiations about which parts were off- and which on-the-record. Some spokespersons, especially in the executive branch of government, were so careful that they added ‘off-the-record’ as a prefix or suffix to almost every other sentence they said. One reporter told me he talks more to lobbyists than politicians, mind you that the former usually have a clause in their employment contracts that forbids them to ever talk on-the-record with journalists.

This is one main reason why reporters believe the internet cannot replace being on location, though they all benefit from the proliferation of information it brings. Dispatching permanent correspondents is one strategy of news organizations to deal with what Schudson (2007) termed the *anarchy of events*. They are on the spot to anticipate and report on expected and unexpected events. Being there not only means getting information faster but is also a precondition for developing interpersonal trust with sources, providing reporters with more background knowledge about political processes. An experienced reporter remarked on this issue:

When we had the Senate coup attempt two years ago, you really had to be here. If you were in an office somewhere else, you wouldn't even know that was going on because we were notified one minute before it happened. ... Sometimes you just

... run into a lot of people, have conversations with people, and find out a lot about what's going on that way. ... If you're not here, you're really left out. Particularly this new Governor: he doesn't give any warning of his press conferences. You can't even be three buildings away. They'll just say: 'he's gonna have a press conference in ten minutes.' So you got to be here. (Interview, 11 February 2011)

Why, I asked, does Cuomo's office do that? Her response: 'Because they can.' When I asked another reporter whether short-noticing and Twitter were related, he said: 'I don't think they're doing that because of Twitter but that's just how they operate' (Interview, 27 February 2012). However, even the Governor's office is interested in attendance of its press conferences. Twitter does not enable such a mode of operation single-handedly, of course. It is promoted by the digital formation as whole, of which the smartphone is another important component. Together with the always-on tweeting mentality, a situation arose where immediate awareness of messages is collectively expected. As a consequence, politicians are more flexible whether and when to make announcements and hold news conferences, depending on the general news flow and state of the media attention economy. A minor event during my fieldwork was revelatory for me regarding this flexibility and the significance of Twitter for structuring the news production space. It occurred during the final negotiations about the 2011 state budget:

As I'm sitting in the office with Dash, @NYGovCuomo—Cuomo's press office—tweets that there is a 'three-way Legislative Leaders Meeting' in the Governor's office, that is, Governor, Senate Majority Leader and Speaker of the Assembly. The notification pops up and fades from his screen as Dash takes a

minute to finish writing a paragraph for his newspaper story of the day. ‘Lets go downstairs,’ he says and we head to the executive floor. When we arrive there is already a group of about 20 reporters and spokespeople assembled to stake out the three leaders; all of them prompted by the same tweet, which was released only minutes earlier in its deceptively ephemeral fashion. (Fieldnotes, 24 March 2011)

After waiting for 20 minutes, the two legislators (not the Governor) appeared one at a time without saying much. To me, however, this episode was striking for two reasons: 1) the attention to a tweet, which influential tweeters can rightly assume, 2) how effectively a powerful agent can utilize this attention to steer journalistic attention in a certain direction. In this particular case, the Governor’s press office wanted to make sure the press talks to the legislative leaders once they leave their bosses’ office or rather: they wanted to make sure the leaders have to answer to the press. A cynic may also assume they intended to occupy reporters with waiting instead of doing journalistic work.

### **Locational Freedom/Digital Fixation**

Specific events during the first half of 2011, namely the state budget negotiations and especially the passage of same-sex marriage (SSM) legislation, prompted many reporters to pay attention to Twitter. Although half of the press corps was on Twitter before, the LCA’s sense of news production space sustainably extended to the twitterverse only during that period. Even though it is a useful supplement rather than substitute for bearing witness to occurrences (Ahmad, 2010), covering the State Capitol unaware of its twitterverse became untenable to most reporters from that point on. One reporter who monitors but does not tweet actively says: ‘A lot of times Twitter is my eyes and ears of



stuff I'm just unable to see first-hand' (Interview, 23 February 2012). He would prefer but says it was impossible to witness all events in his purview first-hand. Another reporter, who is an active j-tweeter, says that Twitter is 'like having a telescope on the whole world' (Interview, 24 February, 2012).

The Capitol twitterverse encompasses statements and announcements by political actors, links to news items on blogs and webpages, eyewitness accounts, including multimedia material, instant commentary and analysis, discussions and more. Consequently—merits of being on location notwithstanding—Twitter enables journalists to better cover the beat from a distance (blogs certainly also play an important role). The *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, decided in 2010 to cover state politics for their newly introduced metro section by a beat reporter who is not on-site permanently. The instantaneous coverage provided by on-location reporters grants more spatial freedom to others.

Reporters on- and off-site share, however, what I would like to refer to as *digital fixation*. One does not have to watch LCA reporters for very long to detect a coercive element to Twitter. This fixation on digital space is in a way more coercive than the requirement of locational presence because not only does it transcend physical but also social boundaries between public and private. Reporters find it increasingly difficult to tune out because of the proliferation of new spaces. One reporter described to me in some detail how easy reporting out on assignment has become through technology before he added: 'but it's also made us more like a wire service ... where you are always kind of writing.' He tells me he can now stay home if one of his children is sick and still write as many stories as he would have if he had been at the Capitol. Asked about his news

reading habits, he responds: 'I'm insane,' before describing a comprehensive routine that starts at 5:30am to beat his children awake and sometimes does not stop before 11pm, including weekends (Interview, 10 February 2011).

Another reporter has just read *All the President's Men* when I interviewed him. He pointed out something Woodward and Bernstein mentioned in passing, which is that research on the Watergate scandal essentially came to a halt when either of them went on vacation. 'Oh my god, these guys went on *vacation*?' he said with disbelief, besides realizing this could never stop him from working because he carries the newsroom with him wherever he goes, as he remarked. To quote danah boyd (2010): 'It used to take effort to be public. Today, it often takes effort to be private.'

### **Future-coordination and Twitter**

One of the most prevalent Twitter practices in the State Capitol twitterverse is live tweeting. It is defined by instantaneous, often situational accounts of unfolding situations and events. In the analysis of SSM tweets, half were in that category. 19% of those provided situational information (e.g. protest action), which often involved pictures. 32% were more or less substantial live news updates (e.g. votes, statements by officials). Especially for newspaper journalists, live blogging (Thurman and Walters, 2013) and live tweeting (Hermida et al., forthcoming) have become recent commonplace forms of news coverage.

For LCA reporters, instantaneity and live coverage capabilities are the main reasons why they stayed with Twitter: 1) They experience direct, almost synchronic effects on public debate and 2) receive instant gratification for their work, whether by recognition

through retweets or conversations. Reporters describe this direct conversion of on-location expertise to discursive power as ‘exciting’ and ‘fun.’

The general proliferation of news channels, however, made the anarchy of events and associated competitive pressures more powerful as bits of news and increments of time by which exclusivity is assessed became infinitesimal. Fueled by the drama of instantaneity on Twitter (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012) and relating to what Grusin termed *premediation* (2010), the LCA enters what I call a *spiral of anticipation* whenever important political decisions are impending. There is a heightened sense of excitement and anxiety about anticipating the immediate future among the press during these periods, which can last for days or weeks. This anxiety, rooted in competition with other news operations, is paralleled by collective paralysis. A constant stream of updates about the inexistence of news (in 2% of SSM tweets) and minor news bits are typical forms of coverage reporters generate on Twitter when they are in the spiral of anticipation. During these periods, they are primarily occupied with hovering in front of offices for hours, staking out politicians for comments.

Once the anticipated event occurs, the spiral of anticipation ends abruptly and reporters go either back to their regular routine or on vacation. ‘Once these things finally happen we are all too exhausted to really appreciate them,’ one senior reporter told me on the day before the same-sex-marriage vote (Fieldnotes, 23 June 2011). The press was in a constant state of alert in the days and weeks before that event. In view of protest action of hundreds of SSM supporters and opponents right next to each other and intensive negotiations among Senate Republicans, reporters were tied to the hallway in front of the Senate GOP offices for long stretches of time. There they staked out officials entering or

exiting the premises. Protesters, who also positioned themselves there, not only turned the corridor into a hothouse but also acted as ‘voices of the people’ for reporters. All of this was broadcasted live on Twitter where LCA journalists picked up thousands of new followers in the light of national interest about SSM law in New York—an alleged precursor for federal legislation.

The scope of anticipation on and through Twitter is typically immediate, what I have discussed as *protention* above. However, to journalists this immediate anticipation is always connected to forms of sense-making of present and future events in terms of preexistent cultural forms, such as narratives (Jacobs, 1996a, 1996b; Schudson, 2007). Tavory and Eliasoph distinguish different modes of future-coordination and besides anticipating the immediate future, actors anchor themselves and others within larger *trajectories* (one of which is narrative). Coordination between different modes of anticipation is particularly difficult in journalism, I would argue, which is concerned with immediacy and for which alignment with preexistent cultural templates not only guides decision-making but is at the heart of news work and taming the anarchy of events: ‘[Journalists] assimilate the new, apparently novel, unique, unprecedented event to the familiar old ways of understanding the world,’ argues Schudson and continues: ‘they “naturally,” without much thought, [respond] with the narrative frame that they [believe] fit the circumstances of the event before them.’ (2007: 254, 256)

Future-coordination in contemporary journalism not only occurs in different modes but also in several digital and nondigital spaces simultaneously, each involving its own communicative logic. It takes effort to establish consistency between these different layers and dimensions of future-coordination. Although Twitter comes close to the direct

turn-taking in face-to-face communication, it does allow some delay between turns, which is more typical for asynchronous forms of communication, such as email. This ambiguousness of synchronicity and asynchronicity of Twitter amplifies inconsistencies between narrative emplotment and immediate protention. As a consequence, interpretations of occurrences on and off Twitter contradict or overtake one another.

An example of this occurred during the SSM passage, which was part of a proverbial ‘big ugly’—a situation when several substantially unrelated issues get linked together in political deals. One of those issues was rent regulations. After Democrats refused to vote on an extension of the measure and many Republicans joined them, the law temporarily expired. On Friday, 17 June 2011, Governor Cuomo threatened to call a special session, which would have kept legislators in Albany over the weekend to pass a temporary extension of the law. While the Senate Democrats agreed on voting for the extension on Friday, Liz Benjamin, blogger and TV anchor for YNN, tweeted a comment from Democratic Senator Kevin Parker under @CapitalTonight, suggesting otherwise: ‘Andrew can drag us here, we’ll be here...I have no deal w the gov. If GOP wants rent extension they shld deliver 32 votes.’

Evidently, Benjamin met Parker before Senate Democrats reached an agreement but tweeted his comment with some delay. Although a spokesperson of the Senate Democrats went on-the-record shortly afterwards, confirming the agreement, Parker’s statement spread widely through other reporters and emails among the GOP Senate staff.

Apparently it set off alarm bells amongst Senate Republicans: when the Senate was back in session, Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos abruptly adjourned without voting on the extension bill, expecting Democrats would oppose it and leaving it to the Governor to

enforce a special session. Confusion erupted in the Senate chamber and after the misunderstanding was cleared up the Senate went back into regular session and voted unanimously on the extender bill. Republican Senators later blamed Parker's tweeted comment for the confusion (Vielkind 2011, Reisman 2011).

In this case, the expectation and appearance of synchronicity obscured the leeway of asynchronicity and led the Senate GOP draw conclusions based on an outdated level of information and to follow the wrong narrative trajectory (we might call it 'the story of the stubborn and unreasonable political opponent'). This episode also demonstrates an intensification of the political messenger role taken on by journalists on Twitter and their immediate influence on political processes as a consequence.

### **Informational Permeation of Space**

Another instance where the influence of tweeting journalists on political processes became unambiguously clear was one day in January of 2012, when *Daily News* columnist Bill Hammond live tweeted a budget hearing with education chairwoman, Assembly Member Catherine Nolan. He commented on her interview of New York City Education Commissioner, Dennis Walcott, and remarked that Nolan refrains from asking him about the controversial issue of teacher evaluation. This comment was retweeted by several journalists and half an hour later Nolan says to Walcott: 'the twitterverse wants me to ask you about teacher evaluation.' (Hammond, 2012) Although she expressed it in a sarcastic manner, her intention was to avert criticism in Hammond's impending column, which loomed in his tweet. This was to no avail, however.

Hammond, through his journalistic influence and Twitter, was able to interfere in a debate that prohibits comments from the audience. He discursively penetrated a delimited political space, creating instantaneous publicity to a procedure he deemed unsatisfactory. Twitter helps journalists to advance government affairs to a public that was previously unaware of them. Apart from the question whether the public-at-large follows these communications (most of them do not), the opportunity and the fact that an interested public *does* is noteworthy in itself and apparently to those who are held accountable.

Although generally expected, the reciprocal attentiveness of political actors and journalists on Twitter has rarely manifested itself so clearly to me as in this example. However, one reporter remarked when I talked to him about this episode a month afterwards: 'that's not the first time I've seen that happen and it's probably gonna happen more often' (Interview, 21 February 2012). The fact that the LCA discussed this episode on Twitter and that Hammond himself reviewed it in his following column indicates, though, that reporters were taken aback by the potential impact of a 140-character tweet and by the directness with which they can create accountability, if only in a minor way. Journalists may not learn more but have an outlet and incentive to bring what they learned immediately to public attention through Twitter (unless it interferes with other objectives).

In this case, live tweeting promoted concrete permeation and promulgation of the political backstage. However, Twitter is also used as a means of symbolic production in performances of journalistic professionalism (Alexander, 2004; Author, 2014), drawing from representations of watchdog journalism. Simply put, through Twitter a reporter can make claims of being *there at this moment* as a critical observer, raising the authority of

her journalistic account by conveying a sense of on-site immediacy. Live coverage imparts this immediacy to unfolding events, which black-boxes the journalistic mediation (Couldry, 2008) and narrative construction that is actually taking place (Jacobs, 1996b). In this sense, Twitter confers discursive authority of live news coverage to newspaper journalists, which is something they were previously excluded from.

Intense Twitter engagement not only levels the medium playing field but also makes informational boundaries between journalists more porous. With news digitization, all news organizations represented at the Capitol became competitors, irrespective of their legacy news medium and coverage area. However, those traditional lines of competition still matter and reflect in how office spaces on the LCA floor are distributed, namely in such a way that direct competitors are not in earshot of each other. The *New York Post* is separate from the *New York Daily News* and *Newsday*; *Bloomberg News* is in a different room than the *Associated Press* and the same goes for *Buffalo News* and the *Albany Times Union*. Twitter-aided journalism does not completely subvert but somewhat permeate this spatial arrangement. One reporter who himself maintains these boundaries on Twitter says he benefits from others crossing them:

It's become a very good tip-sheet for me to know what my competitors are covering, almost to the point it's odd: I know this one guy, when he is out on assignment [he] will sometimes mention that he is out of town on assignment, which I would never do (chuckles) because it's sort of a tip-off [that] you are working on something bigger, you know. (Interview, 21 February 2012)

What reporters learned from staking out officials was previously limited to those who were physically present, at least until it was publicized in ensuing newspaper editions.



Instant tweeting from stakeouts has eliminated this spatial-informational separation and I have witnessed disputes between reporters over this issue. At a follow-up visit in Albany in early April of 2013, an older reporter told me delightedly about a recent instance where reporters agreed on a temporary non-tweeting policy at a stakeout.

Besides such idiosyncratic rebuilding efforts of traditional informational barriers, journalists receive more hints on Twitter about what their competition is working on and also what they think about a given issue than before. A snarky or ironic comment tells something about where a journalist stands on a given issue. Mentioning certain facts and not mentioning others may indicate emphases of upcoming news stories. A further consequence of this enhanced flow of discourse among the press is that it is not self-contained. As one LCA reporter pointed out, Twitter 'is letting the public in on the kind of banter that journalists engage in ... [which is] probably a little locker room-ish sometimes' (Interview, 28 February 2012). As the informational separation between journalists becomes more porous, news production processes become more transparent to the outside.

To some extent, this is hardly new for a rather tightly-knit press corps whose members talk about issues they cover all the time, at least those who get along. Twitter has enhanced this preexistent group practice, however, and partly uncoupled it from physical and social constraints as journalists become more aware of those they do not have face-to-face conversations with. However, one of the three traditionalists told me this was one main reason he does *not* follow Twitter. He believes that not participating in this conversation means avoiding the pack journalism involved, even though it means he misses some things.

## Conclusion

Twitter not only substitutes but also enhances on-site news reporting, which becomes itself unsustainable without awareness of the augmented space. Considering how it permeates the Capitol, it is not surprising that journalists in this study understand Twitter in spatial terms. Twitter, furthermore, does not only have spatial characteristics but, like other electronic media (Meyrowitz, 1985), space-transcending implications. This transcendence enables information flows and dialogue among journalists as well as with the public and politics. It also means that these journalists can't leave their work behind them when they go home.

A defining feature and purpose of on-site reporting is to witness events when they occur and, connected to that, anticipating these occurrences. The immediacy of Twitter enhances their awareness and anticipation capabilities. Twitter is, furthermore, significant in this context because journalists utilize it to directly convert on-site capital into discursive authority in the public sphere. However, this quality of Twitter comes with costs: the paralysis, which seizes the press corps in times when important decisions are impending, gets intensified through Twitter. Furthermore, coordinating the multitude of layers of communication and modes of anticipation can cause inconsistencies and misperceptions.

Reducing Twitter to a 'journalistic tool' disregards the ways in which it affects the world journalists cover. In twitterized news ecosystems, the domains of journalistic observation constitute augmented spaces, constituted by physical and digital sociality. Place-bound properties shape the twitterverse and digital representations on Twitter influence spatial orders in turn. This configuration may be suggestive for the relation

between nondigital and digital in other news ecosystems and, more generally, spaces subjected to heightened media attention.

Within the walls of government, a digital formation arose whose physical properties may still be more encompassing but in which digital components have continuous relevance and can temporarily dominate social relations. This formation has its own logic but needs to be held together by coordinative social efforts. One challenge of Twitter in this regard is its ambiguousness as a synchronous communication medium, which allows a degree of asynchronicity. The aforementioned drama of instantaneity of Twitter creates an expectation of and willingness to constantly be aware of it, which evokes contradictory feedback loops and responses between nondigital and digital spaces.

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