The Social Worlds of Journalism
Introduction

Joël Langonné

Ingénieur de recherche
GIS Marsouin, IMT Atlantique
France
joel.langonne@imt-atlantique.fr

Seth C. Lewis

Associate Professor
University of Oregon
USA
sclewis@uoregon.edu

Fábio Henrique Pereira

Professor Associado
Universidade de Brasília
Brasil
fabiop@gmail.com

Olivier Tredan

Maître de conférences
Arènes (UMR 6051)
Université de Rennes 1
France
olivier.tredan@univ-rennes1.fr

his special issue examines journalism through the multifaceted perspective of *social worlds*. Drawn from interactionist sociology, the social worlds concept is polysemic, assuming various meanings and interpretations—many overlapping and mutually reinforcing—depending on the contexts in which it is invoked and the corresponding case material through which such questions are examined. Originally, the social worlds approach was developed through the study of several distinct objects of concern to sociology, such as the composition and coordination that occur among social groups (Shibutani, 1955), institutions (Strauss, 1961), and artistic activities (Becker, 1982). As such, social worlds, if it can be regarded as a concept, is certainly not a monolithic one, nor one that requires an orthodox approach to articulation and analysis. It is, rather, a framework—a way of seeing and interpreting collective activities—that is based on a set of interrelated components and concerns, each varying slightly depending on the context under study: arenas, conventions, careers, negotiations, networks of cooperating people, segments, and so forth. The result is a heterogeneous perspective: dynamic, processual, plural, conflictual.

Journalism researchers often "discover" the social worlds perspective by traversing a variety of disciplinary and conceptual pathways. Some come from a sociological perspective, by way of the so-

ciology of work or professions, the sociology of the public, or the sociology of uses. Others arrive from science and technology studies, generally via the actor-network theory approach offered by Latour (2006). Still others realize the generative value of social worlds through anthropology and the study of culture or are uncomfortable with perspectives of Bourdieu's (1994) field or Elias' (1978) configuration. And some, of course, identify with social worlds in journalism studies, by virtue of their studies of newsrooms and newsmaking. They evaluate spaces, people, and processes that reveals elements of shared routines, norms, values and collective activities, or identifiy the construction of collective identities among professional groups.

However, when they arrive at the social worlds concept, many scholars come to appreciate its interdisciplinary dispersion and flexibility (Bastin, 2003; Dickinson, 2008; Lewis & Zamith, 2017; Pereira, 2011; Pereira, Tredan & Langonné, 2018; Travancas, 1992), not because the concept can be molded to fit pre-existing conditions and concerns, but rather because it opens to view social actors and dynamics among them that previously may have been overlooked through more narrowly oriented, field-specific accounts.

EXPLAINING THE SOCIAL WORLDS PERSPECTIVE

Before outlining what the social worlds perspective offers to and through papers presented in this special issue, it is useful to review the concept's development. While there have been many explanations and iterations on the broad notion of social worlds, a unifying idea throughout is that social actors engage in collective activities based on collaborative networks organized around "conventions" (Becker, 1982). "Routine collective activity creates relatively stable patterns of interaction that act as social referents guiding future collective activity" (Gilmore, 1990, p.151). In this case, "membership within all these social worlds involves various generalized commitments, beyond the more specific and easily discernible commitments, to agencies, institutions, organizations, cliques, and specialities associated with the social world" (Strauss, 1997, pp. 165-166). Furthermore, Strauss argues that "social worlds are characteristic of any substantive area" (Strauss, 1978, p. 122), which suggests that the social worlds perspective can thus be adapted to the study of theater, photography, music (see Gilmore, 1990)—and, yes, journalism (e.g., Lewis & Zamith, 2017; Pereira, Tredan & Langonné, 2018).

Thus, like Becker's "art worlds" (1982), there are "journalism worlds" organized around journalistic activity—what Strauss (1978) calls "primary

activity" and Becker (1982) refers to as "core activity"—that would include "all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as [journalism]" (p. 34). This perspective is an open invitation to analyze the totality of actors who participate in the processes of production, circulation and consumption of news— however large or small their participation may be. This truly embodies the idea that journalism is a collective practice by shining a light on how things are done, the identities of those participating, the interchange between worlds, the cooperative relationships that develop, as well as the negotiations taking place (Lewis & Zamith, 2017; see also Lewis & Westlund, 2015).

Invoking the social worlds concept both generally and in the context of journalism gestures to at least three primary vantage points for consideration. The first poses the very Beckerian question, "Who does what?" (Becker & Pessin, 2006, p.178) in the worlds of journalism, or more precisely: "Who does what, according to what conventions?" For if we follow Beckerian hypotheses, all actors in the worlds of journalism are integrated into a network in which everyone cooperates according to "conventions" that "make collective activity simpler and less costly in time, energy, and other resources" (Becker, 1982, p. 35). These conventions informally structure cooperation between participants and form a kind of "catalog of social techniques" (Hennion, 2005, p. 14) that individuals and collectives implement to function optimally at any given moment. It may be a question here of describing what can be called the normal "presence to the world" (Hennion, 2005, p. 14) deployed by the "integrated professionals" (Becker, 1983) in a given world of journalism. Determining "who does what" is an attempt to describe precisely the worlds of journalism (past or present)—always dynamic, procedural, and collective.

The second approach is to recognize that conventions may be standardized, but they are neither rigid nor immutable. Things change. The social worlds perspective therefore emphasizes the dynamics of segmentation and the interlacing of different worlds. Strauss (1978) states that "within each social world, various issues are debated, negotiated, fought out, forced and manipulated by representatives of implicated subworlds" (p. 124). Actors, groups, and organizations make "differential claims, seek differential ends, engage in contests, and make or break alliances in order to do the things they wish to do" (p. 125). In the worlds of journalism, as in many fields, "no definition is definitive, [...] no border is a stable front, [...]

no principle resists an activity where everything 'depends' and everything gets worked out" (Hennion, 2004, pp. 169-170). Journalists make deals with amateurs (Ferron, Harvey, Trédan, 2015); have arrangements with hackers (Dagiral & Parasie, 2011) as well as writers, academics, and intellectuals (Pereira, 2011); collaborate with typographers (Langonné, 2014), the newspaper drivers (Moretzsohn, 2011) and other journalism's "invisibles" (Charron, Damian-Gaillard & Travancas, 2014); organize work according to social media, data, and algorithmic dynamics (Lewis & Zamith, 2017); and make sense of search engine optimization (Sire, 2014) or a particular labor market (Pilmis, 2013). In short, more or less "integrated" actors deal with other actors who may be described as "mavericks" (Becker, 1983) from other fields, and it is by describing these examples of cooperation that we are left without a doubt that the worlds of journalism are evolving. It may be a question, then, of describing the evolution of the worlds of journalism, past or present: worlds that innovate, evolve, grow, lie dormant or even disappear when they come in contact with other social worlds, other entities—or other "cosmoses," as Latour would say (2006). They transform themselves in response to the emergence of new ways of doing (new techniques, devices, and skills) and new ways of seeing (social norms and ideologies).

The third approach is to remember that, particularly within the application of social worlds to journalism, we must not forget to account for news users/consumers as actors in these relationships and modes of change. "The social world perspective reminds us that [readers or audiences] may bring active perception and judgment as well as a great deal of knowledge and even study to the events of their social words. (…) Readers will be highly selective and actively responsive in their reading" (Strauss, 1978, p. 126). Dominique Pasquier (2004) specifies that "this analytical framework offers genuine potential to work on how media content is received. … It encourages a micro-level analysis. (…) It obliges us to deal with the problematic dimensions of the coordination processes and the dimensions of conflict of cooperative activities" (p. 205). Thus, studying *who does what* and *how things change* requires remaining attuned to a broad definition of *who* and of *what* might occur *where*.

The Special Issue and its Contributions

Altogether, the perspective of the social world offers something of a double interpretation: it can represent a space of shared representations around common activities, and simultaneously reveal a set of activities that unfold during the interactions among its participants. Put another way, scholars may take a Beckerian view of social worlds, one focused on the *observation of the practices*—that is, on the way people collaborate around a collective activity, or how they do things together, as Florian Tixier ("Competition and Cooperation in European News Production"), Vitaly Buduchev ("Journalists and Their Sources, a Self-Supporting Complementarity"), Nikos Smyrnaios, Sophie Chauvet Emmanuel Marty ("Journalistic collaboration as a response to disinformation online"), and Laura Rosenberg ("Rites of Passage in the Careers of Young Journalists") do in this special issue. Or, scholars may assume a Straussian approach, situating social worlds as an arena where different groups—or segments—negotiate their participation within an organization around *a representation* of identities and practices, as Sidonie Naulin ("The Rhetorical Construction of the Gourmet Journalist Profession") and Nils Solari ("*L'Âge de faire*: An Alternative Press Cooperative at the Crossroads of Social Worlds") do in this issue.

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive approaches. On the contrary, these two dimensions can be placed on a continuum that characterizes social worlds. Choosing one of them reveals more about the position of who is observing a social practice, the way he/she is approaching the research field: by collecting the discourse from the social actors or by observing in situ their activities. Indeed, there is no sense distinguishing between the representations and practices, between an established world and an emergent one, they are both part of the same social process. Trying to reconcile both elements of the social worlds approach means finding a break-even point between the constraints imposed by the collective organizations and the individual leeways. Following the researcher standpoint, this balance can be found in some key interactionists concepts, such as network of co-operating people (Becker, 1982), conventional system (Becker, 1982), careers (Becker, 1985), and negotiated order (Strauss, 1978). Together, these seemingly distinct yet related concepts reveal the collective, processual, and organized nature of an activity. As Strauss and colleagues (1964) remind us: "The realm of rules could then be usefully pictured as a tiny island of structured stability around which swirled and beat a vast ocean of negotiation. But we would push the metaphor further and assert what is already implicit in our discussion: that there is *only* vast ocean. The rules themselves are negotiable" (p. 311, emphasis original).

Bringing together these understandings and articulations and situating them in relation to the articles in this special issue, we can suggest four levels of analysis through which to articulate the social worlds concept and its applicability to the study of collectives, including those in journalism:

1. *Individual practices* focused on a shared activity and organized according to conventional ways of doing things together;

2. *Representations,* such as in the form of discursive universes or the cultural codes specific to a social world;

3. *Sites of activity,* including physical spaces, of course, but also the technical devices through which collective activity is framed and organized;

4. *Diversity of social actors* who collaborate within the social world, constituting potentially rather different segments of cooperation and negotiation.

Combined, these four levels reveal multiple ways of studying the worlds of journalism. First, while journalism counts as collective activity, it is not only accomplished by journalists; rather, it represents what seems to be an ever-expanding ensemble of social actors and technological actants, among other things (Lewis & Westlund, 2015). This revised understanding opens up ways of recognizing new configurations of information flows in contexts where journalism (and the journalists traditionally behind it) has lost its core position, a point illustrated by Vitaly Buduchev in this special issue. Secondly, journalism worlds can be seen as an intricate network of career trajectories and advancement opportunities, each of them cutting across the many dimensions of the people and processes that make up journalism work as a collective enterprise (as Rosenberg and Naulin illustrate in this issue). Applying the career concept means not only considering the diversity of these trajectories, the multiple ways of becoming a journalist and being attached to journalism worlds as an occupation, but also the diachronic dimension of social worlds more generally. Additionally, a more integrated study of social worlds opens the possibility of incorporating objects and their associated practices into the analytical scheme, taking seriously the materiality of any social activity (Barbier, Trépos, 2007; De Mayer & Le Cam, 2015; Langonné, 2014; Le Cam, 2013; Lewis, 2015). Journalism worlds are rich in examples in this sense: from the use of hidden cameras and drones for news coverage (Fernández Barrero, 2018) to the role of algorithms and metrics to organize and regulate media content consumption (Colson, De Maeyer & Le Cam, 2013). Moreover, with regard to the diversity of actors, the social worlds approach can reveal the coordinations and confrontations that arise as rivals attempt to come together around a flashpoint of concern—as in the case of a fact-checking initiative, illustrated by Nikos Smyrnaios, Sophie Chauvet, and Emmanuel Marty in this issue that required joint decisions among competing newsrooms about what to report and what to strategically ignore. In this same direction, Andrés Stefoni ("Politicization and Publicization in the World of Political Journalists in Buenos Aires") highlights the alliances between different segments of journalists and other members of its social world to protect themselves and defend their autonomy against the government persecution in Argentina.

Finally, this special issue also reveals the adamantly empirical and inductive character of the social worlds perspective. The selected papers highlight how journalism worlds may be used as a useful heuristic to describe this domain of research. They are grounded in qualitative research: ethnographic observation, interviews, and, up-close evaluation of group dynamics and interactions. In this process, the scholars here bring the social worlds approach closer to other sociological concepts such as field (Bourdieu, 1994) and devices (Foucault, 1975) as well as theories from the major universe of the interactionist and pragmatic sociology (e.g., Boltanski, 1983; Hughes, 1958; Latour, 2006). Some might argue, however, that this friendly, generous use of the social worlds approach in combination with other sociological traditions might drain the explanatory value from the social worlds concept. If people can reach similar findings by turning to other concepts, what is the interest in applying, appealing to, and ultimately defending the social worlds perspective? Perhaps the answer rests on the concept's versatility, in its ability to go beyond a few theoretical orthodoxies to reveal the richness of journalism practice in all its various actors and activities.

REFERENCES

Barbier, R., Trepos, J.-Y., 2007, « Humains et non-humains : un bilan d'étape de la sociologie des collectifs », *Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances*, n° 1, pp. 35-58.

Bastin, G., 2003, *Les professionnels de l'information européenne à Bruxelles : Sociologie d'un monde de l'information (territoires, carrières, dispositifs)*, Thèse de doctorat en sociologie, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan.

Becker, H. S., 1982, *Arts Worlds*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Becker, H. S., 1985, *Outsiders. Études de sociologie de la déviance*, Paris, Métailié.

Becker, H. S., Pessin, A., 2006, « Dialogue sur les notions de monde et de champ », *Sociologie de l'art*, vol. 1, no 8, pp. 163-180.

Becker, H. S., 1983, « Mondes de l'art et types sociaux », *Sociologie du travail*, n°4, pp. 404-417.

Boltanski, L., 1982, *Les cadres : la formation d'un groupe social*, Paris: Minuit

Bourdieu, P., 1994, « Espace social et espace symbolique », *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, Paris, Seuil, pp. 13-35.

Charron, J., Damian-Gaillard, B., & Travancas, I. ,2014, « Journalism's "Invisibles". Introduction », *Sur le Journalisme - About Journalism - Sobre Jornalismo*, vol 3, n°1, 10-13.

Colson, V., De Maeyer J., Le Cam F., 2013, *Du pigeon voyageur à Twitter. Histoires matérielles du journalisme*, Bruxelles, Espace de Libertés, Coll. Liberté j'écris ton nom.

Dagiral, E. et Parasie, S., 2011, « Portrait du journaliste en programmeur. L'émergence d'une figure du journaliste hacker », *Cahiers du Journalisme*, no 22-23, pp. 144-154.

De Maeyer J., Le Cam F., 2015, « The Material Traces of Journalism », *Digital Journalism*, vol. 3, n° 1, pp. 85–100.

Dickinson, R., 2008, « Studying the Sociology of Journalists: The Journalistic Field and the News World », *Sociology Compass*, vol. 2, n° 5, pp. 1383-1399.

Elias, N., 1978, *What is sociology ?*, London: Hutchinson.

Fernández Barrero, A., 2018, *El periodismo que vuela: Drones, 3D, Smartphones y robots, tecnologías emergentes para la profesión periodística*, Sevilla, Fénix.

Ferron, B., Harvey, N. et Trédan, O. (dir.), *Des amateurs dans les médias : Légitimités, autonomie, attachements*, Paris, Presses des Mines, 2015.

Foucault, M., 1975, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris, Gallimard.

Gilmore, S., 1990, « Art worlds: developing the interactionsist approach to social organization », in: H. S Becker, & M. M. McCall (Eds.), *Symbolic interaction and cultural studies*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 148-178.

Hennion, A., 2004, « Une sociologie des attachements. D'une sociologie de la culture à une pragmatique de l'amateur », *Sociétés*, no 85, p. 9-24.

Hennion, A., 2005, « Pour une pragmatique du goût », *Papiers de recherche du CSI*, no1, pp. 1-15.

Hughes, E. C., 1958, *Men and their work*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Langonné, J., 2014, « L'impossible "dernier mot". La maquette du journal : un outil partagé », *Sur le journalisme - About journalism - Sobre jornalismo*, vol 3, n°1, pp. 18-29.

Latour, B., *Changer de société, refaire de la sociologie*, Paris, La Découverte, collection Armillaire, 2006

Le Cam, F., 2013, « Le 'journal' dans le discours des journalistes du Québec (1880-2005) », in A. Levrier et A. Wrona., *Matière et esprit du journal. Du Mercure Galant à Twitter*, Paris, Presses universitaires Paris-Sorbonne, Coll. Histoire de l'imprimé, pp. 233-251.

Lewis, S. C., 2015, « Epilogue: Studying the Boundaries of Journalism: Where do we go from here? », in Carlson, M., and Lewis, S. C. (Eds.), *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation*, London: Routledge, pp. 218-228.

Lewis, S. C., Westlund, O., 2015, « Actors, Actants, Audiences, and Activities in Cross-Media News Work », *Digital Journalism*, vol. 3, n° 1, pp. 19-37.

Lewis, S. C., Zamith, R., 2017, « On the Worlds of Journalism », *in* Boczkowski, P. et Anderson, C. W. (dir.), *Remaking the News*, Cambridge, MIT Press, pp. 111-128.

Moretzsohn, S., 2011, *Repórter no Volante - O Papel dos Motoristas de Jornal na Produção da Notícia*. São Paulo: Publifolha.

Pasquier, D., 2004, « La télévision comme expérience collective : retour sur les Mondes de l'Art », *in* Blanc, A. , Pessin, A., (dir.), *L'art du terrain, mélanges offerts à Howard S. Becker*, Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. La librairie des humanités, p. 193-218.

Pereira, F. H., 2011, *Jornalistas-intelectuais no Brasil*, São Paulo, Summus.

Pereira, F. H., Tredan, O., Langonné, J., 2018, « Penser les mondes du journalisme », *Hermès*, vol. 82, n°3, pp. 99-106.

Pilmis, O., 2013, *L'intermittence au travail. Une sociologie des marchés de la pige et de l'art dramatique*, Paris, Economica, coll. Etudes sociologiques.

Shibutani, T., 1955, « Reference Groups as Perspectives », *American Journal of Sociology*, n° 60, pp. 522-529.

Sire, G., 2014, « Référenceur et référencement. Cachez ces pratiques que je ne saurais voir », *Sur Le Journalisme - About Journalism - Sobre Jornalismo*, vol. 3, n°1, pp. 70-83.

Strauss, A. *et al.*, 1964, *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions*, New York, Free Press of Glencoe.

Strauss, A., 1978, « A Social World Perspective », *in* Denzin N., *Studies in Symbolic* Interaction, vol. 1, Greenwich, CT, JAI Press, pp. 119-128.

Strauss, A., 1997, *Mirrors and masks: the search for identity*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers.

Travancas, I. S., 1992, *O mundo dos jornalistas*, São Paulo, Summus.