

# Towards a journalistic method in the digital world

Erice, June 27, 2018

# Introductions



# Introductions

- Classic Humanities High School
- University degree in Contemporary History
- **MS** in Journalism
- 40-plus years professional journalist
  - ½ in newspapers, mostly in International Affairs
  - ½ practicing, exploring, experimenting, teaching Digital Journalism

# Digital Revolution

Two issues

1. Cultural and societal shifts of the digital revolution
2. Journalism after the digital revolution

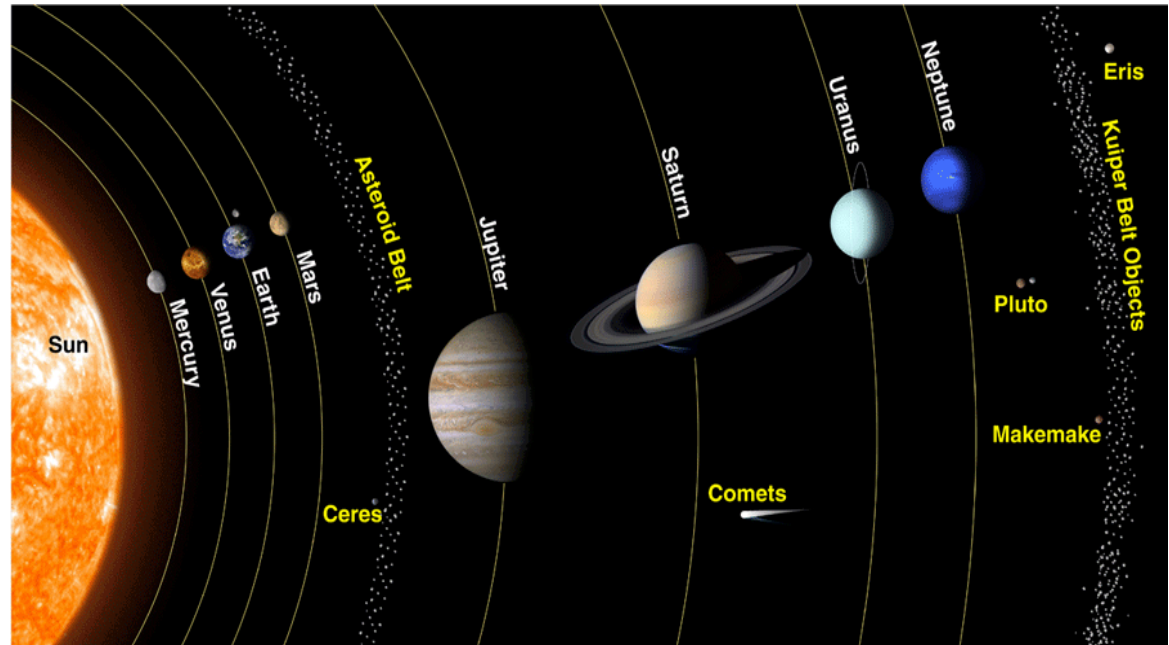


# A cultural revolution

- Digital journalism not just “another kind of journalism”
- Internet not part of Media linear development:
  - print > photo > cinema > radio > tv...
- The Internet is actually not (only) “media”. The Internet is:
  - an infrastructure (the infrastructure of our life)
  - a potent metaphor (of our relationships)
  - the visible part of a “digital universe”

# A cultural revolution

Not “just another planet” of the Media System...



# A cultural revolution

Not “just another planet” of the Media System... rather *a whole universe*

Not enough to adapt  
to a “new medium”  
what we always did



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***New (counter-intuitive) Laws***  
apply:

from Galileo/Newton  
to “modern” Physics





# A cultural revolution

Two basic shifts in the “laws of the Digital universe”  
as applied to Journalism and the Media

- Space and Time
- Indefinite, permeable boundaries

# A cultural revolution

## Space and Time

- SPACE: of the page, of the article, of the circulation...
- TIME: of a publication's period ("I work for a daily, I work for a weekly..."), of a deadline ("It's no news if it happens after..."), the half-life of a piece of news...

Digital world > ***first environment where normal people can directly and personally experience a multidimensional space***

# A cultural revolution

Main consequence: context not a given > **problems**

Main consequence: context not a given > **opportunities**

- .Ex.: *publishing “for the future”*

# A cultural revolution

In the digital world boundaries tend to collapse or become porous...

..physical, institutional, professional, conceptual boundaries

*What becomes of “journalism” when it can’t be defined  
by channel of communication nor by the person/s producing it?*

No place for journalism/journalists in this universe with no set distinctions?

# Journalism in the digital universe

*What is unique of journalism, not fungible?*

[not found in other kind of information gathering/distribution]

akin to asking

*What is unique of Science?*

[not found in other kind of knowledge gathering/distribution]

# Journalism in the digital universe

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akin to asking

*What is unique of Science?*

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**...its *method*, isn't it?**

# Journalism in the digital universe

- Science = what is produced following the scientific method
- Journalism = what is produced following the “journalistic method”  
Journalist = who follows the “journalistic method” (*when* he follows it...)
- The ethics of journalism is essentially its method
- Journalism ethics/method make good business... maybe *the only* possible  
Trust is the name of the game > should be earned, cannot be declared/imposed

# Journalism in the digital universe

Towards a definition of Journalistic Method

- Transparency is the “new objectivity”
- Show your sausage-making
- Declare your point of view (if you have one)
- Openly correct yourself



# Journalism in the digital universe

Any journalistic piece that is not pure regurgitation of information should

- Observe reality
- Identify sources - and, possibly, the context
- Collect data (even a politician's statement may be "data")
- Make them available
- Verify
- Show possible correlations or contradictions
- Explore alternative explanations consistent with data/observations
- Leave the "breadcrumbs" that show the path followed to do it

# Journalism in the digital universe

Journalists could borrow a key element of the scientific method: “Reproducibility”

*“Are the conclusions embedded in a work of journalism reproducible? Has the reporting been thorough, fair and accurate enough that another reporter digging into the same issue would reach a similar outcome? (...) Does the story describe its methods and inputs well enough that someone else could repeat them? “*

Journalism as a process

*“Journalists think in discrete stories. As in, ‘I’m finished with this story. Onto the next.’ We often aim to produce these polished gems of Aristotelian narrative, bearing arresting ledes, explosive kickers and genuine catharsis somewhere in the midst. In science, the continued journey toward greater knowledge is an unending quest.*

Matt Thomson on *Poynter*, 2001:

[“What journalists can learn from scientists and the scientific method”](#)

# Journalism in the digital universe

## Consequences for news organizations

- **Corrections.** Clear and public corrections policy/guidelines should become an integral part of the method itself. Such a policy should include a provision for the correction to be “open”, to be visible.
- **Workflow.** The journalistic method should not be left to single practitioners, it should be embedded in the workflow of the newsroom, be it large-, medium- or small-size. Special new roles and positions may become necessary, like “Standards Editor”, “Public Editor” and the like.

# Journalism in the digital universe

Some other sources

Philip Meyer, [\*Precision Journalism\*](#), 1973-2002

Robert Niles, [\*A journalist's guide to the scientific method – and why it's important\*](#), 2011

Nico Pitrelli, [\*Il metodo scientifico alla base del nuovo giornalismo \(interview\)\*](#), 2012

# Journalism in the digital universe

The “journalistic method”

- does not apply only to “investigative” or “quantitative” journalism
- it applies to journalism as a whole
- to “science journalists” as well -- especially when they are covering/reporting on their beat, not only explaining new research

**THANK  
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