

**PRINT HEGEMONY OR JUST A(NOTHER) PLATFORM?  
DIGITAL FIRST PRODUCTION AT DAILY NEWSPAPERS**

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Digital first production at daily newspapers

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Le doyen  
Valéry Bezençon



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a(nother) platform? Digital  
first production at daily  
newspapers*

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Académie du journalisme et des médias

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This thesis is dedicated to  
Alexander (Sandy) G. Higgins,  
for introducing me to the world of journalism.  
You were a model for every journalist, past, present, and future.  
You are sorely missed.



# Abstract

The present thesis is a study of *digital first* newspapers and their underlying production systems. *Digital first* represents a neglected research topic within (digital) journalism studies. This research broadly asks the question: How are digital and print versions of newspapers produced? Thanks to an in-depth ethnography at French-language Swiss legacy newspaper *Le Temps* in 2018 as well as interviews with newswriters from *La Côte*, *20 Minutes* and *Le Temps* in 2021, I provide descriptions of how web and print stories are produced at all three newsrooms (including at *Le Temps* at two different moments in time). I analyze the struggles between digital and analog, many of which play out on the battlefields of space and time. Successfully implementing idealized versions of digital stories (in terms of temporality, content and digital affordances) is subject to being able to untether digital from print, the former often being subjugated to the latter. Achieving this comes at a cost, since it requires what I call a *print capacity surplus*: having resources to produce and edit stories beyond those required to fill the pages of the print newspaper. I discuss the varying *print capacity surpluses* of the three newspapers studied and its impact on their *digital firstness*.

Finally, I offer a definition of *digital first*, which integrates five dimensions: workflow, temporality, mindset, text-level features, and strategy. For heuristic purposes, these are arranged into a *digital first matrix*, creating bridges for understanding digital and print news production at other newspapers. In terms of method, I mainly borrow from classic inductive ethnography, actor-network theory and newsmaking reconstruction.

Keywords: journalism, newsroom ethnography, newspaper, digital first, web-first, web-to-print, temporality, scheduling, production, affordances, flatplan, workflow, editorial strategy, actor-network theory.



# Résumé

La présente thèse est une étude de la production dite web-first des journaux papier et de leurs systèmes de production, un objet d'étude négligé jusqu'ici par la recherche en journalisme numérique. Cette thèse pose la question générale suivante : Comment les versions numérique et papier d'un même journal sont-elles produites ? Grâce à une étude ethnographique du journal suisse francophone Le Temps en 2018 ainsi que des entretiens avec des membres des rédactions de La Côte, 20 Minutes et Le Temps en 2021, je fournis des descriptions de la manière dont des articles numériques et papier sont produites par ces trois rédactions (y compris par Le Temps à deux moments distincts).

J'analyse les luttes entre numérique et analogique, dont plusieurs se jouent sur les champs de bataille de l'espace et du temps. L'implémentation réussie des versions idéales d'articles numériques (en termes de temporalités, de contenu et d'affordances numériques) est sujette à la possibilité de désatteler le numérique du print, le premier format étant généralement assujéti au deuxième. Cette émancipation est coûteuse et nécessite ce que j'appelle le surplus de capacité print : le fait d'avoir davantage de ressources à disposition pour produire et éditorialiser des articles que celles minimales requises pour remplir les pages du journal. Je discute des différents surplus de capacité print des trois journaux étudiés et de l'impact sur le degré de web-first.

Enfin, je propose une définition du web-first qui intègre cinq dimensions : le workflow (ou flux de production), la temporalité, l'état d'esprit, les propriétés textuelles et la stratégie. A des fins heuristiques, celles-ci sont ordonnées dans une matrice web-first, créant ainsi des bases pour mieux comprendre la production d'informations numérique et papier dans d'autres rédactions. Concernant la méthodologie, je m'inspire de l'ethnographie en rédaction classique, de la théorie de l'acteur-réseau et du newsmaking reconstruction.

Mots-clés: journalisme, ethnographie en rédaction, journal, web-first, digital first, web-to-print, temporalité, planification, production, affordances, chemin de fer, workflow, flux de production, stratégie éditoriale, théorie de l'acteur-réseau.



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## Preface

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. Back then, I was a 19-year-old high school graduate about to embark on studies in civil engineering. That day, I sat all afternoon trying to make sense of what was unfolding live, through the lenses of the cameras of cable news networks. During my first weeks of college, I recall my professor discussing the collapse of the Twin Towers in my structural dynamics course. I spent much of that class wondering what had made these two buildings fall. Was it just gravity weighing on a structurally weakened skyscrapers? Or the terrorists? Was it the airplanes or the pilots? Or the United States foreign policy?

I quickly realized that the latter questions interested me much more than the first, which in any case my professor had already resolved. *A journalist!*, I thought to myself, that is what I shall do with my life, as I dropped out only months later (having passed structural dynamics). Instead, I studied history, literature and political science and I spent one of my summers working as an intern for Associated Press at their United Nations building in Geneva, Switzerland (I must confess to not having been a very good reporter).

Aged thirty-one, I returned to university to study journalism and in the spring of 2015, still a student, I was almost hired by *Le Temps* – the newspaper at the heart of this study – in view of writing web-only technology stories. In the end I was unable to fit it into my schedule, and them unwilling to compromise.

But I returned to the newsroom in 2017, this time as a researcher interested in the strange relationships between newswriters, their tools, and their digital and print newspapers. As I became increasingly familiar with actor-network theory, I realized that engineering and journalism needn't belong to different realms. To the question of what had made the Twin Towers fall, the answer was: all of the above. Two decades later, and I am neither an engineer, nor a journalist. However, upon completing this manuscript did it occur to me that what I have been doing here is casting an engineer's gaze on the world of journalism.



# Introduction

“We have been working with the internet for 20 years and I still haven’t seen a project that successfully developed web and print conjointly. When this giant newsroom was created in 2015, we were told ‘we will be web-to-print, and so and so’, but if you look at the facts, it really isn’t web-to-print. I’m sorry, it just doesn’t quite work. Maybe because the two newspapers were not designed together, at the same time. But is it possible? I don’t know, maybe it just isn’t.”(Newsworker, *Le Temps*, 2018)

Print newspapers also produce digital news: this has been the case for two decades and is by no means a controversial statement. However, it might be one that has been taken for granted. Indeed, in the context of current newspaper production processes, not much is known about the relationship between the digital and print editions of newspapers, and their main components: those units of news read on screens and paper respectively.<sup>1</sup> In many newsrooms, gone are the days when the entire online content and the people producing it were entirely separated from that of the print edition, with its own team of legacy newsworkers. In many of today’s newsrooms, journalists now write their stories according to web-editing standards, directly into their media’s content management systems (CMS). From there, their work will be placed online, mostly prior to the mockup of the following day’s paper being completed. Newsrooms that work this way are often referred to as *digital first*. My research is about such newsrooms and what goes on inside them.

Swiss legacy daily newspaper *Le Temps* is one example of a *digital first* newspaper. It is where I spent several months collecting data, observing how people worked and how digital and print teams interacted (and when they did not). Stories also ‘interacted’: between each other, and among themselves through their (future) ‘ideal’ digital and print versions. Indeed, these ideal forms differ in terms of available affordances, as well as according to best practices and normative views of what constitutes good digital and print journalism respectively. Free daily *20 Minutes* and local daily *La Côte* – both located in French-speaking Switzerland – are two other examples of *digital first* newspapers where fieldwork was conducted.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is supported by the literature, which is discussed further in the three articles at the heart of this dissertation, and especially in article 3.

This dissertation is therefore a study of how newspapers, their content and those who produce them, collectively strive to accomplish two similar but nevertheless distinct missions with overlapping resources. Sometimes successfully, sometimes through compromise, and often with print overpowering digital.

### **Ambitions and General Results**

The following dissertation, and the three journal articles it comprises, are centered around the following goals:

- Documentary and descriptive: to provide a richly documented record of one example of (a) digital first newspaper(s) production system(s), a thick description of how a set of journalistic logics combine with a technological system to produce news for print and web.
- Analytical: to understand how web and print platforms generate a given set of constraints and logics, and how these lock horns when they are combined within a digital first production system.
- Discursive and definitional: to provide stability to the concept of digital first, and question how newswriters relate to the production system within which they work, and situate their practices.

The articulation between these levels will also allow us to pose the question of generalizability:

- To what extent may the phenomena described and analyzed here inform us about what is occurring in other newsrooms, and beyond the borders of French-speaking Switzerland?

#### Documentary and descriptive

At its most modest, thanks to the three articles that form its core as well as the large dataset, this dissertation seeks to offer original insights into how things were done, at certain moments in time at several *digital first* newspapers in French-speaking Switzerland: how their print and web versions were made and how each one (re)shaped the another.

A first preliminary newsroom observation (*phase 0*) allowed me to broadly define the subject of this study. *Phase 1* consisted of firsthand ethnographic accounts of work at legacy newspaper *Le Temps*, which amounted to more than 30 observation days over the course of

six months in late 2017 and early 2018<sup>2</sup>. The output spans beyond the text of this dissertation, since it includes countless detailed records gathered: traces, often digital, of how the news published online on one specific day, and the closely related print edition of the following day, came to be assembled. Thus, beyond this text, I have gathered a collection of rich production-related data, much of which is yet to be fully exploited, to get a more detailed account of how things were done (for a full list comprehensive list of data collected, see appendix H).

*Phase 2* uses 17 semi-structured interviews of how newspapers were made at three *digital first* newsrooms in 2021: *Le Temps* (again), *20 Minutes*, and *La Côte*.<sup>3</sup> This also allows me to question how things had changed at *Le Temps* over the course of more than three years.

My task of documenting newswork, analyzing its technologies and collecting data had made me aware of numerous problems and colliding logics that were either integrated into daily routines nor dealt with on a case base case basis. In other words, I recorded innumerable cases of print and web interfering with one another; mostly in small ways, but seldom in insignificant ones. This documentary work was one of patiently creating the conditions for identifying key data and assembling it. This was oftentimes guided by newswriters describing their work to me, and reflecting on their practices and those of others.

Documentary and descriptive results lend themselves badly to being summarized in an introduction such as this one. Instead, they lie in the form of structured data within the (thick) descriptions of production systems provided in the three articles. Nevertheless, the diagram of the production process for web and print articles at *Le Temps* in 2018 (appendix B) fits within this descriptive agenda.

### Analytical

By using the phrase ‘print and web interfering with one another’ I have already betrayed my theoretical and analytical stances: to consider these two artifacts not as innate objects magically appearing at the end of a production chain or workflow, but as actors who steer strategic decisions and influence newswriters’ courses of action. They speak and act through these human agents as well as the tools used to create them.

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<sup>2</sup> Research design will be discussed in depth in the section *An Account from Behind the Scenes*. A diagram of the research process is available in appendix D.

<sup>3</sup> For practical reasons, these newspapers are referred to by generic names in article 3, as submitted to *Journalism Practice*. All three newspapers had agreed to be named in the study. This logic of this decision, taken in the context its publication as a standalone journal article, does not extend to this manuscript, which among others deals with comparisons between the 2018 production system as described in *articles 1* and *2*, and how it operates in 2021.

This thesis is heavily inspired by material semiotics and newsmaking reconstruction. Both will be presented in greater detail below. Put briefly, newsmaking reconstruction identifies a set of features of news production that one wishes to explain. It then seeks to reconstruct the newsmaking process (or even to reverse engineer it) in order to identify the factors responsible for the given features. This provides the explanation. In many ways, it amounts to searching upstream for answers. Material semiotics, and more specifically actor-network theory, help us navigate upstream. A note of caution though: much like lake water, news comes from not just one but multiples streams.

The first two articles of the three that form the heart of this dissertation explain how print and web shaped one another at *Le Temps*, thanks to more than 30 observation days, as well as an in-depth study of the news produced and placed online on 14 February 2018, published for the most part in the following day's print issue. During my observation, most stories appeared both in print and web, and their text-level differences were mostly minor. Stories published in print or digital form only overwhelmingly comprised of newswire reports: in print to fill space (as classic *fillers*), in digital to offer a slightly broader and more complete overview of the news, but often also to fill time. In view of this very large overlap, it will become clear how the 20 pages in Berliner format bend and shape a digital newspaper whose affordances<sup>4</sup> extend way beyond those of the more "archaic" physical one. This struggle between the *potentials of the digital* and *the realities of the physical* is largely fought on the battlefields of time and space.

Over the course the first two articles, one discovers glimpses of these battles, with the lens constantly searching for where they might be occurring. In article 1, *Print hegemony? How a newspaper's print edition maintains its hegemony over digital*, I describe how three different types of stories – destined for both web and print – are configured by chains of forces weighing on them, many of which can be traced back to the print flatplan. This key artifact particularly extends its reach into desk-sections chiefs' content planning, weekly and daily budget meetings to impose itself on story length. In article 2, *What were you synching? An ethnographic study of news scheduling at a digital first legacy newspaper*, I consider the interrelatedness of production and publishing temporalities of digital and print versions of the same story. The question of time, already identified as crucial in the first, is studied in much greater

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of affordances will be defined and discussed in more detail later on. For now, they may be defined as "users' perception for the definition of technologies' qualities" (Nagy and Neff 2015, 5).

detail. This article reveals how heavily the 24-hour print news acts as a primary temporal structuring force, and how little margin for maneuver the web-production manager truly has in his pursuit of a constant output of stories throughout the day.

Often, the ‘agility’ of digital was no match for the rigidity of print: seldom was a story produced without previously planning a (likely) slot in a print edition. Much like myself – the researcher – desk-section chiefs worked upstream, anticipating and reverse-engineered their newspaper pages. They defined almost their entire output according to the blank spaces that needed filling every day. For breaking news, this of course meant searching for a slot in the next available issue. For the many stories planned further ahead, this involved a first round of scheduling. In a second round of scheduling, delivery and publication times would be determined for digital versions of stories. Here, we will see, the print newspaper would yet again have an important say. Although I will return to this in conclusion, I suggest that much of what I described is attributable to the socio-technical system within which newswriters operate, which implements its own strategy or agenda. Within this, newswriters do as best they can, developing ruses and tactics to reassert a degree of control over the content that they have a hand in producing.

Thus, the temporal and spatial subjugation of digital to print is the most significant takeaway from articles one and two.

### Discursive and definitional

My in-depth interviews during *phase 1* revealed discrepancies between an ideal version of how a *digital first* production system should operate and how things actually occurred at *Le Temps*. They identified frustrations related to the inability to produce a newspaper that was truly digital (see the opening quotation in introduction) and practices caught between digital and print production logics. It also confirmed what was apparent in the literature: the meaning of *digital first* was unstable, varying from one newswriter to the next. These issues, based on observations at *Le Temps* between 2017 and 2018, would be addressed in *phase 2*, which produced article 3.

*You said digital first!? A five-dimensional definition according to workers from three Swiss newspapers*, seeks to look beyond my case study of *Le Temps* to explore whether *digital first*, as used in other newsrooms, refers to a stable set of specific characteristics of the production system and/or resulting workflows, to what extent the results of my ethnographic research at

*Le Temps* might apply elsewhere, and what has (and has not) changed with regards to how the newspaper produced news three years later. This final part also seeks to confront discourse about web and print news production, and its possible multiple realities.

My colleague Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel and I interviewed 17 newswriters from three different French-language daily newspapers (*20 Minutes* and *La Côte*, while I returned to *Le Temps* after three years and a change of ownership). They described the overall production process, newswriters roles within it, as well as their perception of the relationship between web and print. We<sup>5</sup> sought to propose a stable operational definition of *digital first*; a term frequently used in academia and the industry despite having yet to be precisely defined. Together, we find definitions of *digital first* referring to properties of web and print newspaper publishing systems. These properties may be grouped into five dimensions: temporal, textual, workflow, logic & mindset, and strategic. These dimensions, which we argue reflect a dominant newsmaking paradigm, can be arranged into a *digital first matrix*, enabling scholars and practitioners to describe more precisely *digital first* newspaper production systems.

### Generalizability

Beyond the narrow question of the definition of *digital first*, the third article allows us to confirm several results from my ethnography, and confirm their relevance three years down the line: that the possibility of nearing an idealized version of *digital first* required emancipation from print, by untethering digital stories from the flatplan. This is something newswriters believed that only additional content and editing resources could achieve. In the final part of this thesis, the concept of *print capacity surplus* is introduced, which I believe crystallizes numerous less visible challenges to successfully implementing *digital first* production strategies. This *surplus* can be described as the production resources remaining once those required to produce the print newspaper have been subtracted from the total of those available.

In the remainder of the introduction, I briefly explain the unusual structure of this dissertation, and provide some key elements of context.

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<sup>5</sup> A note on the use of self-referring pronouns: the first-person singular is (logically) always used to refer to myself. Generally, the first-person plural is used to refer to Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel and myself during collaborative work. Article 2 is an exception to this rule: in this research conducted solely by myself and of which I am the sole author. Finally, when the first-person singular is used in reference to work during phase 2, it means that this was not the result of collaborative work.

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## **A note on how to read this dissertation**

The overall findings, summarized above, are the result of three research articles, submitted to three journals. Each one includes the minimum elements to understand how it may contribute to advancing scholarship within the field of (digital) journalism studies, as well as the basic elements of method used. As already stated, how they fit within the broader inductive process of this research project, which saw much toing and froing between theory, method, data, results and interpretations, will be presented after each of the three articles at the heart of this thesis. This should allow each piece of research to be discovered and judged upon its own merits, while at the same time providing many of the basic building blocks required for understanding how this research evolved and unfolded (thus also avoiding their tedious repetition).

Following these three articles, I invite the reader – by now familiar with the methods and results of each article – to discover an account from behind the scenes: the stories of how each one came to be, and its relation to how the research questions were framed, the data was collected and analyzed, and interpreted. This section will address questions of theory and method, this time through the lens of my analytical toolbox, which, as already stated, combines actor-network theory with a newsmaking reconstruction approach. The reader is thus brought backstage to discover the complex ways method, data-collection and data-analysis were in fact entangled. In a final discussion, I try to make sense of the results by posing the question of generalizability, and the relevance of understanding *digital first* as a dominant newsmaking paradigm. In some concluding remarks, I pose the question of what these results mean going forward.

## **Some Context**

### A note on studying a legacy newspaper at the turn of the 2020s

My choice to study a legacy newspaper in the late 2010s and early 2020s will seem as obvious to some as it will strange to others. In either case, it merits being situated. I shall briefly argue why I believe the study of print newspapers is justified at this moment in time, while refraining from fully embracing the narrow and normative view – held by some – of newspapers as undisputed central pillars of liberal democracies. Whether myth or reality, this widely held view does however make newspapers all the more pertinent objects of study, especially at a time when digital is considered to be the gateway to their salvation (a

constructivist perspective that holds that it is important because it is judged to be). But newspapers are also interesting in their own right: the news-media is one of the few human activities sitting precisely at the intersection of industrial and craft production. At this moment in time, this intersection is also the battleground of analog and digital. It is these two points that I believe make newspapers particularly worthy of study at the turn of the 2020s. I address these points here, before explaining why *Le Temps* was chosen among available newspapers as the starting point for my ethnographic work.

Few would contest that journalism and news media have undergone more than two decades of difficulties and profound reconfiguration (Alexander, Breese, and Luengo 2016), with factors ranging from societal change, economic downturns and, of course at the heart of much of this, the internet (Picard 2014). Printed daily newspapers have been shown to be those worst affected, with falls in readership and circulation numbers, declining advertising revenues and, consequently, important reductions in newsroom workforces, and the disappearance of many titles (Compton 2009). Dismissed by some as remnants of a bygone age, they nevertheless maintain a mythical status among many. Franklin (2008, 307) refers to “contested assessments” of the “future of newspapers”. Some believe they will reinvent themselves and continue to fulfil their important democratic functions; others expect them to become extinct, their function either being fulfilled by some replacement, or with cataclysmic consequences (Meyer 2009). To what extent the health of our liberal democracies is dependent on that of a healthy functional free press has been hotly debated (Joseph 2016); agreeing on how to measure the health of one and the other, and what constitutes the free press proves problematic from the outset.

Children of the Enlightenment, newspapers have long been viewed as the Fourth Estate (Carlyle 1841) and are generally believed to play a vital role in the democratic process (McNair 2009), while others have suggested that their importance may have been overstated (Zelizer 2013; Peters and Witschge 2015). Historians have linked the rapid rise of the newspaper to the redefining of social structures and power relations. There is a plethora of literature documenting and analyzing how they have also been (mis)used, placing financial gain before public interest, instrumentalized by the rich and powerful, served populist agenda and acted as key tools of propaganda. Accordingly, newspapers are emblematic of the normative view – that of a free press being a particularly worthy object of study – at least partly constitutive of the academic field within which this thesis is located (Blumler and Cushion 2014).

Newspapers' longstanding mythical status has certainly played a role in my curiosity to study them, although I do not share the teleological views of either side. I am less interested in the question of whether the newspaper is able to survive than the question of how, within a context of rapid technological change, it seeks to do so. I am interested in what it might become, and how the way it is made is changing behind the scenes. The newspaper's fragile position at the dawn of the 2020s provides the context for this study: because the narrative of newspaper's needing to reinvent themselves has travelled so widely and successfully. As such, this study does not seek to contribute to the grand narrative of the newspaper. At most, it considers newspapers' perceived importance (rather than their importance being taken as a given) as additional reasons to study them, because this perceived importance – real or not – produces an effect in and of itself. I will come to argue that this narrative has infiltrated newsrooms and frames much of newswriters relationship to digital: whether they survive depends on their ability to become digital, whatever this might come to mean.

There is in fact good evidence to suggest that entering the newsroom and shedding light on the work that occurs within (be it that of newspapers or other news media) helps deconstruct some of the more pervasive myths and provide nuance to generalizations made on the basis of existing (strong) theories. As Cottle (2007, 1) notes: "Major theories of media and society periodically need to be exposed to these more grounded findings because they encourage a more qualified stance to some of the circulating claims and generalizations made about the news media." But, as stated, this was not my primary motivation for studying a newspaper in the late 2010s. Here I must admit to more personal interests and ambitions: how humans come together and create artifacts and construct and use the underlying technologies that help them in doing so fascinates me. News is unique because it is both industrial and artisanal, and constantly torn between the former and the latter (Morin 1961). The production systems of newspapers both allow them to exist as industrial undertakings, while also hampering their ambitions as cultural productions. To the keen historian of technology that I am, the interference of an age-old analog production platform with a modern one constitutes an object worthy of being studied in its own right, not least for documentary purposes, as outlined above. For those more interested in the contemporary relevance of this work, it should be noted that the question of how this double digital/analog artisanal/industrial interaction plays out in all its forms, increasingly infiltrates the material world and its activities

As such, this research can be considered as belonging to a line of ethnographies about newspapers, which provide insights about how these artifacts are made in a context of tension between analog and digital. Examples which I found inspiring include Anderson's (2013) ethnography on how online news was transforming metropolitan news(papers), Usher's (2014) view from the inside of the *New York Times*, where digital was transforming workflows, creating culture clashes, while also witnessing the birth of new news formats, and the digital-only newsroom roles. Closer to home, Cabrolié's (2012) extensive work on national daily French newspapers and Langonné's (2016) study of newswork through the lens of copy-editors are good examples of how newspapers have been studied through the lens of newsroom technology. Although Czarniawska's (2012) study of news agencies is not strictly about newspapers, its original approach was also a source of inspiration.

As I embarked on a quest to research these phenomena within the walls of a newspaper, there remained the question of which one to study. There are multiple reasons for having chosen *Le Temps* as the site for my initial ethnographic research (many elements justified this choice of newspaper subsequently, without having been involved in the decision to begin my fieldwork there). First, the above-mentioned mythical status of newspapers was, among those possible for conducting this research, strongest at *Le Temps*. Second, *Le Temps* has oftentimes been a pioneer when it comes to digital journalism, whether as one of the early (Swiss) newspapers to provide much of its news online, to introduce a paywall, or to switch to a *digital first* production process. What happens at *Le Temps* has often tended to happen later elsewhere in the Swiss media landscape. Crucially, the creation of its *digital factory* – a unit within the newsroom tasked with producing multimedia and video content – made *Le Temps* an ideal candidate for what I had set out to study: digital only news production at a newspaper (I discuss how I adjusted my research focus from digital only stories to *digital first* production in *An Account from Behind the Scenes*). Finally, but most importantly, my decision for beginning my research at *Le Temps* was a practical one: access. Editorial management agreed to open their doors to me, let me sit in on key meetings (not limited to the usual budget meetings) and provided me with countless internal documents and data.

### Le Temps newspaper: a brief history of a digital pioneer

In view of the centrality of my newsroom ethnography of *Le Temps*, the following brief history of the newspaper is provided. It describes a pioneer of Swiss online journalism, which nevertheless also incurred many of the tribulations of the wider newspaper industry.

The history of *Le Temps*, and those of *Le Journal de Genève* and *Le Nouveau Quotidien* – the two struggling newspapers that merged to create it in 1998 – embody both the ambitions of producing a high-quality legacy French-language newspaper, and the difficulties of doing so for a linguistic region of 2 million inhabitants, sub-divided into cantons (administrative regions with strong identities and a high level of political independence from Switzerland's federal government). The strong media concentration, and the competition between the two main publishers in western Switzerland adds further complexity to this history.

The 1990s had been a time of intense reconfiguration of the Swiss media landscape (Clavien 2017). The independent *Le Journal de Genève*, had itself swallowed up *La Gazette de Lausanne* in 1991, these newspapers having been founded in 1826 and 1798 respectively. *Le Journal de Genève* was steeped in tradition, austere in its news selection as well as its tone, and entertained almost self-righteous ideals of the democratic role of the press (Clavien 2017, 161). *Le Nouveau Quotidien*, co-owned by Lausanne-based family-owned publishers Edipresse and Zurich-based publisher Ringier, had lived only a short but eventful existence, having been founded in 1991. *Le Nouveau Quotidien* was a strange hybrid of impertinent investigative and political journalism with a simpler and more popular tone. It placed a strong emphasis on photography and illustration and sought to appeal to an audience having lived through the social and cultural movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The first issue of *Le Temps* was published on 18 March 1998, two weeks or so after its predecessors were sent to press for the very last time. From the outset *Le Temps* had believed in the future of an online press: its website was even up and running some weeks prior to its first issue, publishing a small number of stories during the two weeks of print void, between the end of *Le Journal de Genève* and *Le Nouveau Quotidien* (Willemin 2018, 75). When it launched, *letemps.ch* published the entire contents of its print newspaper online and for free, believing that its presence on the world wide web would help grow a readership base, and with the belief that online advertising would be sufficient to finance digital news. As the internet bubble burst, *Le Temps* launched a new website in 2002, becoming one of only a few

newspapers to have introduced a paywall in the early 2000s: print subscribers received unlimited access to digital versions of print stories as well as some mostly newswire online-only articles, while a digital-only subscription was available for 10 Swiss francs (approx. 12 US dollars adjusted for inflation). A small selection of stories was also made available for free. Despite this, traffic and digital subscribership remained low, and the newspaper began shrinking initially ambitious digital-only content. Over the course of the 2000s, *Le Temps* decreased the proportion of stories hidden behind the paywall to less than 20% (Willemin 2018, 83), aligning itself with the rest of the industry, and becoming a co-conspirator of what became known as *print's Original Sin* (Mutter 2009); a strategic miscalculation that became all the more obvious following the sharp drop in advertising revenues in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. In 2009, print advertising revenue in the Swiss daily press fell by 23% compared to the previous year (Amez-Droz 2015, 38).

*Le Temps* launched a new website in 2009, which came with the promise of digital playing a more central role in production and offered content in line with the emerging doxa of *cross-media* and *convergence*. In reality, this had limited impact on work within the newsroom.

Two years later, *Le Temps* became one of the earlier adopters of a metered paywall (both within the Swiss media landscape and internationally). It used its status as a so-called “quality paper” to justify making readers to pay for digital content. Free content, limited to 10 stories per month nevertheless required readers to register.

Although during its first decade or so of existence its digital activities underwent multiple mutations and strategic changes, *Le Temps* ownership structure remained stable; something that cannot be said about more recent years. During its era of stability, it was co-owned by Edipresse and Ringier, with 47% of shares each, the remaining 6% being held by multiple minor shareholders (Clavien 2017). However, when Edipresse completed the sale of its press titles to Zurich-based Tamedia in 2013, its ownership became more problematic, since it was torn between Switzerland’s two largest news publishers. It was almost immediately put up for sale, eventually being acquired by Ringier in 2014. At a time when *newsroom reorganization* and *convergence* were the focal points for the strategies of news media, it was announced that the newsroom of *Le Temps* would merge with that of weekly news magazine *L’Hebdo*; a project that placed the growth of digital content at the center (Garelli 2014; Amez-Droz 2015, 70; Clavien 2017, 192). Editorial management was renewed, with an emphasis on digital: the former editor-in-chief was replaced by one editor-in-chief responsible for print,

and another for digital. However, behind these renewed digital ambitions also lay a cost-cutting exercise: shortly after its purchase of *Le Temps* Ringier announced a restructuration, which included around 20 redundancies, including eight reporters (Placade 2015).

A third major relaunch of the website occurred on 1 October 2015, when *Le Temps* unveiled a new responsive website, accompanied by a redesigned print template. Henceforth, stories would be produced for the web first and adapted its layout to the specificities of the reader's screen (smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer), while adapting online publishing temporalities to the following daily patterns defined by audience preferences and metrics ("Le Temps - Découvrez Le Nouveau Site" 2015):

- Mornings: hot news and the follow-up of the day's print newspaper's biggest stories
- Lunchtimes: softer news and feature stories
- Afternoons: hotter and harder news as well as opinion pieces
- Evenings: key news topics, investigative reporting and data-journalism

This would be achieved thanks to a large integrated cross-media newsroom, producing not only a daily print newspaper and a weekly magazine, but also a variety of interactive online news formats. Only a few months later, in January 2016, ownership of the paper changed again, becoming part of a joint venture between Ringier and German publisher Axel-Springer that included several other Swiss newspapers and magazines ("Ringier and Axel Springer Sign Contract to Create Jointly Owned Company in Switzerland" 2015). Enthusiasm was short-lived: a year later the publishers killed off *L'Hebdo* and implemented yet another restructuring: from a staff of 112 newswriters, 30 would be cut (Dufour 2017), severely dampening ambitions of becoming the embodiment of a 21<sup>st</sup> century digital newspaper.

My observation at *Le Temps*<sup>6</sup> began six months after the 2017 restructuring, which was described to me as very traumatic by many of the newswriters I spent time with in late 2017 and early 2018 (appendix A displays a floorplan of the newsroom at *Le Temps* in early 2018).

Although stripped of significant resources, many of which were destined for digital, the newspaper was still producing some digital-only content. A so-called *digital factory* had been created a couple of months previously to produce video and multimedia content, in standalone form and in support of regular reporters and other newswriters. This team of

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<sup>6</sup> The central elements of the production system will be described below, especially in article 1.

four, which rapidly grew to eight, also sought partnerships for sponsored content and native advertising. In May 2018, *Le Temps* launched its first podcast, which focused on topics often considered taboo, through the lens of individual life stories in a genre best described as intimate journalism. Despite the relatively small size of the digital team, this was a period during which *Le Temps* won multiple prizes for its digital work (*Le Bac à Sable du Temps* 2017; “Les récompenses reçues” n.d.).

Other than this small digital team, viewed both from the inside and from the perspective of a reader carefully observing the stories and other content being placed online, *Le Temps* had the look and feel of a classic print newspaper. For example, its budget meetings, its organization according to typical thematic desk-sections, the looming print deadline, and the evening hustle to get the pages ready in time: at first glance, many of the aspects of making the daily newspaper would have been familiar to those having written the early ethnographic accounts of newsmaking from the 1950s onwards: similar enough to have been overlooked by research, but—on closer examination—different enough to warrant investigating.

Following the end of my observation period, both the ownership structure and the composition of the newsroom remained stable for a while. Outgoing journalists were replaced like for like by incoming ones. Ongoing rumors of financial losses and Ringier Axel Springer’s subsequent desire to find a buyer circulated regularly within the newsroom and beyond, several of which I became aware of, since I still spoke frequently with several newsroom workers. In parallel, a small group of prominent journalists, entrepreneurs and publishers were preparing for the launch of a new Geneva-based digital-only independent news website named *Heidi.news*. It was to be subscription based and free of advertising. Editorially, it would specialize in key topics known or *feeds* as well as long form journalism, with the ambitions to add new *feeds* as it grew. One of *Le Temps*’ deputy editors-in-chief left to join them. *Heidi.news* came online in May 2019, with a sole topic: science. In early November 2020, it was announced that Fondation Aventinus<sup>7</sup>, a not-for-profit created a year earlier with the objective of “supporting a quality press in French speaking Switzerland”, would purchase *Le Temps* from Ringier Axel Springer (Ringier Axel Springer 2020) with the intention of also acquiring *Heidi.news*. In the spring of 2021, thanks to funds from Fondation Aventinus, *Le Temps* purchased *Heidi.news* with both newsrooms moving into the same building over the course of the

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://aventinusfondation.ch/>

summer (von Holzen 2021). At the time of writing, the exact cooperation or collaboration between the two media is still unclear.

This describes the situation as Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel and I began our interviews of what *digital first* means and how it is being performed in 2021 at *La Côte*, *20 Minutes* and *Le Temps*.

Compared to how things worked during my 2017-2018 observation, *Le Temps* has undergone numerous changes, mostly related to its new ownership. The two editors-in-chief have been replaced, while several new reporters as well as additional web and print editors have been hired. As a result, print and web production has been separated further, with journalists and desk-section chiefs no longer being involved in any stages of print production. For the latter, a slightly larger team now selects stories from the bulk of content produced over the course of the day, to fill the pages of the print paper (Ackermann 2021). This process is described in article 3.

Today, much like in 2018 when this research project began, *Le Temps* remains the only so-called legacy daily newspaper in French-speaking Switzerland. It nevertheless competes for national news with a small number of other major national French-language newspapers. Three of these are owned by Switzerland's largest news publisher TX Group (formerly Tamedia): daily free Metro-style newspaper *20 Minutes* (included in *phase 2* of this study), has the largest print circulation and traffic to its website of these; free web-only tabloid-style *Le Matin*, which ceased its print edition in July 2018; and Sunday paper *Le Matin Dimanche*, whose content is published on the websites of the publishing group's regional newspapers. Two new French-language digital-only versions of news media already established in German-speaking Switzerland were launched in 2021: *Watson* and *Blick*. Alongside these, each of the cantons where French is spoken has its own daily newspaper, while only a small number of more local newspapers remain. *La Côte*, which is studied in *phase 2*, is one such local newspaper.

As of 2021, all of these newspapers now work according to a production process they describe as *digital first*. With this and the above-mentioned descriptive, analytical and definitional objectives in mind, we can now take a close look at how this work occurred at *Le Temps* in 2017-2018 (article 1 and article 2), and at *20 Minutes*, *La Côte* and *Le Temps* in 2021 (article 3).



## **Three Articles about Digital First Newsmaking**



## Article 1

# *Print Hegemony? How the print version of a newspaper maintains a hold on digital (in French)*

Andrew Robotham

Status: submitted to *SComS*

### Abstract

So-called *digital first* strategies adopted by newspapers tend to switch which publication platform is prioritized, from print to digital. Despite being widespread, research has said almost nothing about how it is implemented daily, and in practice. This article answers this research gap by conducting an ethnography of the creation of digital and print editions of the daily Swiss newspaper *Le Temps*, which had been completed by 11 semi-structured interviews. Thanks to the analysis of the trajectories of three news stories, this study shows how, despite the desire to think and produce first and foremost with online in mind, the print edition maintains a hold on digital. The use of digital features to harness the affordances of digital remains underexploited because it is time-consuming and impossible to translate into print form. Furthermore, by configuring what is created for digital, the print flatplan imposes the rigidity of a material publication platform: digital stories are calibrated in terms of story number, length and topic. Thanks to an in-depth case study, this article shows how an object designed to be souple and fluid remains conditioned by the rigid object that is the print edition of a legacy newspaper.

Keywords: digital first, web-first, newspaper, production, newsroom, ethnography, flatplan, affordances



## Article 1

# *Hégémonie print ? Comment la version papier d'un journal maintient son emprise sur le numérique*

Andrew Robotham

Statut: soumis à *SComS*

### Abstract

La stratégie Web-first récemment adoptée par de nombreux journaux traditionnels tend à inverser le support de publication jusqu'alors privilégié, en basculant du papier vers le numérique. Malgré l'adoption de ce principe à large échelle, la recherche ne sait presque rien de son implémentation pratique au quotidien. Cet article répond à cette lacune en proposant une ethnographie du processus de création des éditions numérique et papier du quotidien suisse *Le Temps*, complétée par 11 interviews semi-directifs. A travers une analyse de la trajectoire de trois actualités, l'étude montre comment, malgré la volonté affichée de penser et produire prioritairement pour le web, le papier maintient son emprise sur le numérique. L'exploitation des potentialités du web demeure rare puisqu'elle s'avère chronophage et impossible à valoriser dans le print. Par ailleurs, en configurant l'offre numérique, le chemin de fer y projette la rigidité d'un support physique : les contenus numériques sont calibrés chaque jour en fonction des impératifs du papier, que ce soit en termes de nombre de sujets, de longueur ou d'organisation thématique. Par l'analyse en profondeur d'un cas unique, cet article montre ainsi comment un objet conçu pour être souple et fluide est encore conditionné à l'objet rigide que constitue l'édition papier d'un quotidien traditionnel.

Mots clés: digital first, web-first, journal, ethnographie, journalisme, production, chemin de fer, affordances

## Introduction

« On a beaucoup travaillé à réfléchir d'abord le web et ensuite le print, mais mon réflexe reste quand même aujourd'hui qu'il me faut trois têtes de pages. Donc deux têtes éco et une page finance, parce que c'est quand même un peu le but avant d'arriver à la séance de rédaction de se dire : 'Ok, les papiers clés de mes pages sont en place' »

Ce journaliste trentenaire et responsable d'une des rubriques du journal suisse francophone *Le Temps*, paraissait embarrassé d'avouer que son site internet pouvait encore subir le diktat d'un assemblage de feuilles de papier mesurant 315 par 470 millimètres. Une telle emprise du papier dans un média récompensé à de multiples reprises pour ses innovations numériques peut surprendre. Parmi les premiers en Suisse à avoir basculé, en 2015, vers une production *web-first*<sup>8</sup>, *Le Temps* peine à émanciper sa réalité numérique de son objet papier, qui pèse sur chaque étape de la chaîne de production.

Tout en offrant l'un des rares comptes-rendus ethnographiques de la production d'un journal bi-média, complétée par 11 entretiens semi-directifs, cette recherche vise donc à répondre à la question suivante :

- A travers quelles forces de production les supports papier et numériques se configurent-ils mutuellement ?

La présente enquête aborde cette question à travers l'étude du processus de production. C'est lui qui définit les propriétés du journal papier et de son homologue numérique, et respectivement celles des articles qui les composent. Ce processus de production implique des assemblages régis par des forces de nature diverses : des logiques de production, des routines collectives héritées, et des pratiques individuelles idiosyncratiques certes, mais toujours situées dans les limites de ce que permet (voire impose) le système sociotechnique sous-jacent. Dans ce cadre, les logiques du print et celles du web s'affrontent sur de nombreuses propriétés *intratextuelles* (titrairie, liens hypertextes, autres éléments multimédia) et *extratextuelles* (sélection des sujets, organisation spatiale de la page, temporalité de production et de publication).

Empiriquement, je décris la création d'une édition du journal, à travers l'étude de trois articles en particulier, qui négocient avec des forces de production du numérique et du journal papier, dont plusieurs s'avèrent antagoniques. Dans ce contexte, il s'agit d'interroger ces forces à partir des traces (tant discursives que numériques et matérielles) qu'elles laissent, dont certaines sont visibles jusque dans la production finie. Ce travail revient donc à identifier et retracer des assemblages de liens hétérogènes par l'ethnographie d'une chaîne de production, et les discours des acteurs sur celle-ci. Une décision prise en séance de rédaction configure un article au

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<sup>8</sup> Dans la littérature et dans le langage utilisé en rédaction, le terme *web-first* est davantage répandu dans la francophonie, tandis que *digital first* est privilégié en anglais.

même titre que les (limites des) fonctionnalités des outils de production numériques. Inspiré par la théorie de l'acteur-réseau (ANT) pour ce qu'elle apporte sur un plan méthodologique, cette perspective permet d'accorder une attention toute particulière aux manières dont la matérialité du produit fini pèse rétroactivement sur les articles tout au long du processus de production.

Bien que chaque article soit le résultat d'une configuration unique, les mêmes forces produisent des effets similaires sur des articles similaires. Les trois articles étudiés – sélectionnés pour offrir un panorama des forces en jeu – renseignent donc également sur l'ensemble des articles de même type autour desquels se construisent au quotidien les versions numériques et papier d'un journal comme *Le Temps*.

Au-delà d'un aperçu inédit de la fabrication d'un journal bi-média, cette ethnographie permet d'identifier des réseaux de configuration à travers lesquels un journal numérique se retrouve enchaîné à son homologue analogique.

## **Théorie et méthode**

### **Etat des lieux : quelle ethnographie de la production en mode web-first ?**

Le concept des *affordances*<sup>9</sup> semble un point d'entrée incontournable pour comprendre la relation complexe qu'entretient la presse avec le numérique, et les propriétés intratextuelles et extratextuelles auxquelles je m'intéresse ici. Appliquée aux technologies de communication, la valeur heuristique de ce concept tient de sa capacité à lier le technologique au social, sans déterminisme de part ou d'autre. Les *affordances* se définissent comme la gamme des possibilités et contraintes qu'offrent un média et le dispositif technique sur lequel il repose (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2018). La recherche a identifié de nombreuses *affordances* de l'information numérique (Steensen 2011) que l'on peut ranger dans les catégories suivantes : l'hypertextualité, l'interactivité, le multimédia et l'instantanéité.

Parmi les questions que pose la production de l'actualité bi-média, se trouve le décalage entre les *affordances* du papier et du numérique, ce dernier étant affranchi de nombreuses contraintes spécifiques au print et profitant de potentialités nouvelles (Pavlik 2001). Une première réponse des titres de presse à ce décalage a été, durant une décennie, de séparer à l'échelle organisationnelle les activités de production de l'information destinée au web de celle destinée au papier, en particulier dans une perspective d'immédiateté – c'est-à-dire dans l'optique de proposer une information en deçà du cycle de 24 heures qui sépare les éditions d'un journal quotidien (Paterson and Domingo 2008). Le fonctionnement de ces unités organisationnelles

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<sup>9</sup> Parfois traduit comme *potentialité* en français, *affordance* est un néologisme proposé par Gibson (1979, 127) pour désigner ce qu'un environnement spécifique offre à l'animal ou à l'humain.

distinctes, ainsi que leurs logiques professionnelles, ont été décrites dans le détail, notamment par Boczkowski (2004) et Cabrolié (2010).

En parallèle, de nombreux médias d'information ont cherché à créer des synergies entre ces différentes unités. De manière presque téléologique, les médias sont peu à peu devenus multimédia, alternant entre texte, vidéo et son, et privilégiant le médium le plus à même de traiter une information (Erdal 2011). L'émergence de ces rédactions dites *intégrées*, qui produisent une information multi-support grâce à des journalistes formés pour cela, a donné lieu aux *convergence studies* (García-Avilés et al. 2009), un champ d'étude au carrefour de l'industrie et de la recherche académique. Parmi les grandes questions qui se dégagent figure celle de savoir si le contenu numérique se distingue dans son fond ou dans sa forme, au niveau du texte, ou au niveau de l'édition (Pilmis 2017a).

Dans la réalité, malgré une présence en ligne de la majorité des titres de presse, certaines *affordances* demeurent peu exploitées (Domingo 2008; Ghersetti 2014). La mise en place de *rédactions intégrées* est souvent freinée par les ressources limitées d'une industrie en grande difficulté financière, par des questions d'opérationnalisation ainsi que par une culture professionnelle résistante au changement (Tameling and Broersma 2013; Doudaki and Spyridou 2015).

Malgré ces difficultés, les années 2010 ont connu un mouvement vers une intégration plus forte des rédactions et de leurs contenus à travers l'adoption de stratégies dites *web-* ou *digital-first*, de concert avec l'implémentation de *paywalls* (Robotham 2021). En plus de l'offre réservée au numérique, il s'agissait de penser et concevoir les articles destinés à la fois au web et au print en intégrant dès le départ les *affordances* du numérique. Dans un premier temps, l'emphase a porté sur l'ordre de diffusion des produits finis, pour profiter du potentiel d'immédiateté (English 2011a; Robotham 2021). D'autres ajustements ont suivi, tels que l'intégration d'hyperliens et d'éléments multimédia dans les papiers web, ou l'affranchissement des lignages imposés par le journal papier. Le print devient alors un élément parmi d'autres de l'offre du média, qui intègre d'ailleurs les contenus web les plus forts et les plus adaptés au papier, notamment ceux dont la pertinence informationnelle demeure jusqu'à 24 heures après les faits (Robotham 2021). Paradoxalement, la *convergence* et les stratégies *digital-first* ont amené l'espoir d'une sortie de crise à une industrie médiatique en grande difficulté, bien que cette extension de l'offre éditoriale nécessite des ressources supplémentaires.

Comment ces mutations se traduisent-elles aujourd'hui, dix ans plus tard, dans les pratiques quotidiennes des rédactions qui se définissent comme *digital-first*? La question reste largement inexplorée, malgré la normalisation de ce mode de production en Suisse et ailleurs. Le *web first* (ou *digital first*) a été étudié en termes d'enjeux managériaux (Hendrickx and Picone

2020a), de stratégies éditoriales (Schlesinger and Doyle 2015) ou encore de temporalités (auteur 2021, Wheatley and O'Sullivan 2017), mais pas en termes de pratiques. Vermeulen (2020) offre l'une des rares descriptions d'un flux de production *web-first*. Se basant sur des entretiens et des analyses de contenu, l'étude confirme de nombreuses tendances repérées ailleurs à propos de la numérisation du secteur de l'information : réduction des effectifs, précarisation de certains postes, accélération des temporalités. Mais l'absence d'une composante ethnographique, qui semble incontournable au vu des écarts entre discours et pratiques en la matière, limite la portée des résultats (Cottle 2007). Le rôle des outils et des technologies dans le processus de production, et la question des *affordances* passent sous le radar.

Pourtant, une observation même sommaire du travail en rédaction permet de constater combien les pratiques sont indissociables des outils et des technologies au cœur du système de production. Plusieurs chercheurs ont appelé à une sensibilité matérielle et technologique (Primo and Zago 2015; De Maeyer 2016). Selon Neff (2015), celles et ceux qui étudient le processus organisationnel de la production journalistique ont tout intérêt à inclure l'analyse d'objets. Comme le note Domingo (2015, 70) : « La technologie est donc configurée de manières fragile ou forte ; elle transporte avec elle des bagages qui vont déterminer combien les journalistes pourront la façonner, ou seront façonnés par elle ».

Au moment où de nombreux titres de presse sont dans leurs premières années de production en mode *web-first*, il semble donc opportun d'observer de près : (1) comment une même information s'articule sur deux supports ; (2) comment la question des *affordances* du numérique se traduit dans des logiques de production numériques ; et (3) si et comment elles aboutissent en sachant qu'en parallèle, une version analogique doit être produite, exempte de ces mêmes potentialités.

### **Cadre théorique : une « newsmaking approach » en mode matérielle-sémiotique**

Le fait de chercher à savoir *comment* les productions des journaux papier et numérique pèsent l'une sur l'autre me prédispose à une approche inspirée de la *théorie de l'acteur-réseau*. D'une part, les forces en présence sont hétérogènes : les journalistes et l'équipe d'édition agissent sur le contenu du journal en devenir au même titre que la *maquette* qui en définit les contours, ou encore que le système de gestion des contenus (CMS), dispositif que tout article est amené à traverser pour être publié en ligne ou sur papier. En ceci, notre approche applique le principe de la symétrie, qui consiste à ne pas restreindre aux seuls humains la capacité d'agir (Latour 1991). D'autre part, dans la distinction entre le *pourquoi* et le *comment*, notre démarche tend à dissoudre le premier dans le deuxième : l'explication est alors ancrée dans l'assemblage des propriétés et relations qui génèrent l'objet que je vais décrire (Latour 2006). Les multiples

étapes de la production d'un journal, produit fini constitué d'assemblages d'articles et impliquant de nombreux métiers et outils – autrefois matériels et analogiques, aujourd'hui toujours plus numériques – génèrent de multiples *acteurs-réseaux* tels que définis par Latour (2006, 317). Identifier et décrire comment des forces du numérique et du papier accompagnent les articles dans l'espace et dans le temps, et repérer, lorsqu'ils s'opposent, lesquels l'emportent aux dépens d'autres qui échouent : voici comment je procède. C'est donc dans la méthode de récolte, d'analyse et de restitution des données – résumée grossièrement par le mantra « suivre les acteurs eux-mêmes » (Latour 2006, 22) – que l'approche ANT se distingue.

Au-delà d'une sensibilité analytique, répondre à cette question requiert de définir les critères de mesure de l'influence mutuelle des forces en présence avant d'en identifier les origines. Cette approche, que Reich et Barnoy (2020) qualifient de « newsmaking reconstruction », opère donc en deux temps. Premièrement, il s'agit d'identifier au sein des productions journalistiques des éléments d'intérêt qu'il convient d'expliquer. Deuxièmement, il s'agit d'interroger les forces de production ayant été déterminantes dans la configuration de ces propriétés afin d'en dégager l'explication. Je distingue à des fins pratiques *facteurs* et *logiques*, l'un et l'autre étant des *forces* ou *vecteurs* par lesquels l'action se traduit.<sup>10</sup> Les facteurs sont davantage rigides, définitifs et directs, tandis que les *logiques* émanent de l'action humaine, selon des règles explicites ou bonnes pratiques de la rédaction (ou selon des principes issus de l'évaluation de la meilleure façon de procéder en fonction d'un objectif visé).<sup>11</sup>

Comment définir et identifier ces éléments d'intérêt qui traduisent les jeux de forces entre le papier et le numérique ? Parmi ces forces, il est attendu que certaines seront inscrites dans le système de production, et donc indissociables de celui-ci, permettant ainsi de faire un premier pas vers la généralisation. Pour ce faire, il s'agira de :

1. Présenter le système de production ainsi que les logiques qui s'appliquent ;
2. Décrire les trajectoires de création de trois sujets, en accordant une attention particulière aux facteurs et logiques du papier et du web, en particulier lorsqu'ils ne s'alignent pas ;
3. À partir des comptes rendus spécifiques, décrire et analyser comment des forces inhérentes au système rédactionnel configurent de manière systématique les articles qui le parcourent selon deux réseaux distincts.

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<sup>10</sup> S'il ne convient pas ici de proposer un cadre théorique mettant en relation les pratiques individuelles et les logiques institutionnelles, je recommande aux lecteurs curieux la théorie proposée par Lindberg (2014), au croisement de l'*action theory* et des théories matérielles-sémiotiques.

<sup>11</sup> *Logique*, telle que je l'utilise, serait un type particulier de *plug-in*, tel que défini par Latour (2006, 303) : « des autres véhicules transportant l'individualité, la subjectivité, la personnalité et l'intériorité ».

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### **Approche et données empiriques : description fine de trois parcours de production**

Cette recherche est issue d'une observation au sein du journal suisse *Le Temps* d'une trentaine de jours, sur une période de six mois entre septembre 2018 et février 2019. A cela s'ajoute un accès presque total aux outils de travail et aux documents utilisés en rédaction.

Rapidement, je me suis aperçu que les facteurs de production des supports qui configuraient les articles variaient selon le type d'article, mais aussi que les facteurs des uns en influençaient d'autres. Ceci explique notre choix de mener une étude de cas sur les articles placés en ligne au cours d'une seule journée (14 février 2018), et publiés dans le journal papier du lendemain (15 février 2018). Les principales séances ont été suivies, enregistrées, retranscrites et analysées. Le travail en rédaction a été observé en opérant des va-et-vient entre les bureaux de la rédaction en chef, de l'équipe d'édition numérique, et de l'équipe d'édition papier, points de passage obligé de tout article dans le processus de production (annexe 1). Enfin, les traces numériques de la production des articles ont été recueillies, notamment grâce aux registres des modifications. Des sauvegardes régulières du document *Planning Editorial* et des onglets qui le composent (voir ci-dessous), mais aussi de certaines pages du site (*la page de Une* et la page *Info en continu*) permettent également de documenter l'évolution des articles, de même que des extractions des historiques de modifications des articles.

Les éléments et principes généraux du système de production, ainsi que les actions et logiques spécifiques opérées sur les articles durant la journée du 14 février ont été par la suite documentés à travers onze entretiens semi-directifs avec des membres de la rédaction occupant différentes fonctions (3 journalistes, deux membres de l'équipe d'édition numérique, deux membres de l'équipe de production papier, deux rédacteurs en chef adjoints et les deux rédacteurs en chef). Selon l'approche du « newsmaking reconstruction » (Reich and Barnoy 2020), les entretiens se sont concentrés sur les liens entre les propriétés des articles publiés, et les logiques et pratiques qui les sous-tendent, en distinguant ceux-ci – lorsque cela a été le cas – de la manière habituelle de procéder.

En retraçant l'ensemble de la production d'une édition en général et des trois articles sélectionnés en particulier, des récits de trajectoires prennent forme ; des trajectoires qui révèlent d'innombrables facteurs et logiques de production du papier et du numérique. Ces trois sujets ont été sélectionnés parce qu'ils offraient une diversité des trajectoires empruntées et des facteurs de production impliqués ; en d'autres termes un large spectre des phénomènes à l'œuvre (Becker 1998, 71). Comme déjà signalé, l'identification des facteurs inscrits dans le dispositif de production (et indissociable de celui-ci) permettra d'effectuer un premier pas vers la généralisation.

*Achat d'avions*, *Finances publiques (Finances impossibles et Interview Kurth)* et *Rasta Rockett* : voici donc les sujets sélectionnés parmi la cinquantaine ayant paru dans l'édition web du *Temps* du 14 février 2018, et dans son homologue papier du lendemain. *Achat d'avions*, est un article classique de politique nationale institutionnelle. D'une longueur moyenne (3'804 et 3'643 signes espaces compris [= s.e.c.] pour la version web et papier respectivement). Il est issu d'une conférence de presse, et réalisé en une demi-journée pour parvenir aux équipes d'édition tard dans la journée. Le deuxième est un sujet composé de deux articles, que je nommerai *Finances publiques (Finances impossibles et Interview Kurth)*. Il occupe la page *Temps Fort* et fait figure de sujet vitrine de l'édition papier du 15 février. Long dans sa forme (7'299 & 3'378 | 7'501 & 3'552 s.e.c. pour chacun des deux sujets, respectivement papier et web) et coûteux en temps de production (trois jours de travail à temps plein selon le journaliste), il est planifié à l'avance et relève de la responsabilité de la rubrique *Suisse*. Le troisième, que je nommerai *Rasta Rockett*, est un article de la rubrique sport d'une longueur rare (10'216 et 10'001 s.e.c.) à propos de la participation de l'équipe jamaïcaine de bobsleigh aux Jeux olympiques d'hiver en Corée du Sud. Il est programmé de manière rétroactive et se distingue par un travail d'enrichissement numérique, dont l'intégration d'une vidéo produite spécifiquement pour accompagner l'article. *Rasta Rockett* remplira à lui seul la page *Sport* du journal papier. Trois sujets, trois rubriques et trois temporalités de production. Chacun subit des facteurs de production et opère selon des logiques qui impactent et subissent mutuellement la production des journaux en ligne et papier.

## **Analyse d'un système de production à travers des récits de trajectoires**

Cette partie présente brièvement le système rédactionnel du journal *Le Temps*, tel qu'il opérait en 2018. Je décrirai ensuite les trajectoires de production des trois sujets susmentionnés. Le récit met l'accent sur la manière dont les sujets héritent des propriétés *intratextuelles* et *extratextuelles* spécifiques à des affordances numériques ou papier, et la différenciation (ou non) des versions respectivement publiées sur chaque support.

### **Le système rédactionnel web-first du journal Le Temps**

Les articles qui paraissent dans le journal *Le Temps* sont publiés selon un système rédactionnel décrit comme *web-first* depuis 2015. La principale caractéristique de ce système, en comparaison avec le précédent, est la rédaction d'articles dans un format apprêté selon les besoins de la publication sur internet (titre web, liens hypertextes, etc.), avant leur ajustement pour inclusion dans l'édition papier. Logiquement, les articles tendent à être publiés sur le web la veille de leur parution sur papier.

Durant la phase d'observation, l'équipe d'édition web était composée de trois secrétaires de rédaction web (dont le chef d'édition web). Grâce à des horaires de travail légèrement décalés (7h00 à 16h00 et 9h00 à 18h00), une présence élargie était assurée par rapport à des horaires de rédaction classiques, tandis qu'au moins deux personnes étaient toujours présentes durant la majeure partie de la journée. L'équipe d'édition papier était, quant à elle, environ trois fois plus grande, travaillant à partir de la mi-journée jusqu'au bouclage. L'équipe de rédaction était composée d'environ 70 journalistes au total.

De manière générale, les articles et autres contenus publiés par *Le Temps* parcourent les étapes classiques communes à la production de nombreux médias d'information. Ce processus est reproduit schématiquement à partir de notes de terrain (Robotham 2021, voir annexe 1) et régi par des règles et manières de faire que j'ai documentées (annexe 2). Cependant, comme nous le verrons, les trajectoires qu'empruntent les articles sont soumises à des logiques et facteurs de production parfois très différentes.

Tout système rédactionnel est un réseau hybride de personnes, d'outils et de processus. Bien que cet article porte seulement sur certains de ces éléments, je m'arrête brièvement sur les éléments centraux du système rédactionnel : les *séances de rédaction*, les documents de *planification des contenus*, et les *outils de publication*.

Deux types de séances de rédaction concernent la rédaction *du Temps* dans son ensemble. Lors de la séance hebdomadaire, qui a lieu tous les lundis matin à 9h15, les journalistes discutent des idées d'articles et des opérations les plus importants de la semaine. Ils sont en général plusieurs dizaines de journalistes présents, tandis que les correspondants se joignent par visioconférence depuis leurs bureaux respectifs. S'ajoute à cela une séance de rédaction quotidienne, lors de laquelle sont discutées les propositions d'articles en vue d'une mise en ligne au cours de la journée, et d'une intégration dans le journal papier du lendemain. Les responsables des rubriques sont présents, ainsi que des membres de l'équipe de production du journal papier et en ligne. Pour les deux types de séances, l'ordre du jour est structuré selon la séquence des pages-rubriques du journal papier.

A une échelle globale, la planification des contenus est assurée par le document *Planning éditorial*, tandis que, pour chaque édition papier, la planification des contenus passe par *le chemin de fer* (le chemin de fer de l'édition du 14 février 2018 est reproduit dans l'annexe 2). Le *Planning éditorial (PE)* est une feuille de calcul en ligne accessible et modifiable par toute la rédaction. Elle est composée de 30 onglets. L'onglet *PE\_Programme du jour*<sup>12</sup> liste les sujets du journal du jour. Chaque ligne y correspond à un sujet, pour lequel est indiqué un descriptif ou titre de travail, un

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<sup>12</sup> Par souci de simplicité et de concision, je me réfère aux onglets de *Planning éditorial* en indiquant leur intitulé tel qu'il figure dans le document, précédés d'un *PE\_*.

format (une colonne obsolète puisque toujours laissée vide), une heure prévue de publication web (parfois indiquée), la rubrique affiliée, le nom du journaliste et le statut de publication (options: corriger, corrigé, publié, corrigé et publié ; presque toujours vide). L'onglet suivant, *PE\_Idees de sujets*, répertorie les idées de sujets parmi lesquelles peut puiser la rédaction en chef pour les pages hors rubriques, ou autres opérations spéciales. Vient ensuite l'onglet *PE\_Temps Fort*, dans lequel sont inscrits les sujets candidats à cette page-rubrique. Puis il y a un onglet consacré à chaque rubrique (par ex : *PE\_International*, *PE\_Suisse*, *PE\_Culture*), selon la même logique.

En parallèle, un *chemin de fer* est produit pour chaque édition du journal papier, et représente de manière schématisée les pages du journal. Pour chaque page, les informations suivantes y sont fournies : le numéro de page, la page-rubrique (contenu thématique), l'ultime délai de transmission du fichier graphique à l'imprimeur, et les emplacements réservés pour les annonces publicitaires. Chaque *chemin de fer* est différent de tous les autres. La configuration des annonces publicitaires qui y est renseignée n'est jamais exactement la même. Pourtant, certaines rubriques sont invariables (les jours de semaine, le journal compte en général 20 pages). D'autres pages sont spécifiques à un jour de semaine (le journal du lundi est le seul à inclure une section *Finance*, mais ne comprend qu'une seule page *International*, etc.). Pour une édition donnée, le *chemin de fer* définitif est envoyé aux responsables de rubrique et aux équipes d'édition en amont de la séance de rédaction, leur permettant d'évaluer le contenu qu'ils devront fournir dans la parution du lendemain.

La publication de tous les articles numériques et, à de rares exceptions près, celle des articles paraissant dans le journal papier, passe enfin par le système de gestion des contenus (CMS). Cet outil permet de formater les contenus pour leur mise en ligne, tout en servant de point de collecte pour les articles papier. La version papier est obtenue en dupliquant l'article numérique, en le « nettoyant » de ses spécificités numériques et en créant un pont vers les outils de mise en page.

### **Trois sujets, trois trajectoires : des logiques et contraintes différentes**

Au-delà du système rédactionnel du journal *Le Temps* présenté ci-dessus, les comptes rendus des trajectoires des trois sujets<sup>13</sup> analysés dans cette étude permettent à la fois de donner un aperçu du système de rédaction dans son ensemble, et des différentes manières dont les articles spécifiques issus de ces sujets se fraient un chemin à travers celui-ci. Pour cette raison, le premier compte-rendu est plus détaillé que les autres, un certain nombre de processus se répétant à l'identique pour les deux autres.

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<sup>13</sup> La distinction entre sujet et article est introduite ici, puisque *Finances publiques* (un sujet général) donne lieu à deux textes/articles séparés : *Neuchâtel : ITW Kurt* et *Neuchâtel : Finances impossibles*. Pour les autres sujets, cette distinction n'est pas nécessaire.

### Sujet 1 : Achat d'avions

Le soir du 13 février 2018, lorsque le responsable de la rubrique *Suisse* sonde par email son équipe sur des propositions d'articles, le bureau de Berne (où se joue la politique fédérale en Suisse) met au programme les annonces prévues par le gouvernement suisse, dont les détails leur sont à ce stade encore inconnus. *Achat d'avions* émergera de cette conférence de presse.

Dans le *chemin de fer* prévu pour le journal du surlendemain, deux pages sont prévues pour l'actualité suisse, sans publicité réduisant la quantité de texte requise. Le responsable de rubrique connaît donc le nombre de signes approximatif dont il aura besoin pour remplir ses pages. Chacune contiendra deux à trois articles, pour un total d'environ 11'000 signes espaces compris.

Ainsi, lors de la séance qui suit, le responsable de la rubrique en informe ses collègues. Le chef d'édition web inscrit deux sujets à l'ordre du jour dans *PE\_Programme du jour*. A ce stade, il est déjà peu probable que les sujets puissent paraître avant la fin de journée sur le web, les annonces en question étant prévues en début d'après-midi.

En début d'après-midi a lieu le « point édition ». Il s'agit d'un passage de témoin entre la cheffe info et le chef d'édition du journal papier – après cette réunion, la cheffe info n'intervient plus que sporadiquement dans la fabrication du journal. Participe également à cette réunion, la responsable du service iconographique. Il s'agit, lors du « point édition » de répondre aux questions suivantes :

- Quels articles sont prévus dans quelles pages ?
- Quelles parties du journal sont incertaines ou sujettes à d'éventuels changements au cours de l'après-midi ?
- Quels articles et images s'agira-t-il de proposer en Une ?

Rubrique par rubrique, la cheffe info décrit les différentes propositions au chef d'édition papier. Ici le web n'est tout simplement pas mentionné. Chaque sujet est présenté en quelques phrases, à l'appui d'une version imprimée du *chemin de fer*. A l'instar des autres rubriques, le chef d'édition délimite dans les espaces dévolus à l'actualité suisse des rectangles dans lesquels viendront s'insérer les articles du sujet 1 dans un équilibre négocié avec le reste de l'actualité nationale. Le jeu des longueurs et de l'équilibre visuel créé un puzzle dans lequel chaque pièce compte.

En début d'après-midi, *Achat d'avions* est annoncé pour la fin de journée par la journaliste. A ce moment-là, l'équipe du web sait donc que le sujet ne pourra pas être mis en ligne plus tôt.

Lorsque se tient la séance de mise en page à 16h00, l'équipe de production papier a été informée des angles et de la longueur anticipée du sujet. Les pages du journal sont imprimées en l'état et affichées sur des panneaux d'affichage. Ces pages sont déjà structurées selon le contenu

qu'elles devront accueillir et dont environ la moitié du contenu a été insérée. Le secrétaire de rédaction responsable de chaque page fait l'état de la situation, tandis que le chef d'édition demande quelques ajustements ou changements de structures de pages. Dans la page supposée l'accueillir, un rectangle vide. La secrétaire de rédaction avait préparé la page selon les longueurs convenues, dont le total doit compter environ 11'000 s.e.c.

Ce n'est qu'à 17 heures, que la journaliste démarre l'écriture, qu'elle termine une heure et demie plus tard après avoir trouvé rapidement une photo dans une banque d'images. Dans le texte livré ne figure aucun hyperlien, aucune suggestion de lecture, et pas d'élément multimédia. Il est mis « à disposition », indiquant qu'il peut être relu et validé. Lorsque les correcteurs auront fini leur travail, il suffira au secrétaire de rédaction responsable de la page d'extraire une copie de l'article depuis le système et d'opérer les quelques ajustements requis pour une publication papier. Le titre est légèrement raccourci, le chapeau reformulé, et deux intertitres sont supprimés. *Achat d'avions* est mis en ligne vers 20h30 par une auxiliaire responsable de de publier l'ensemble des articles encore en attente lorsque l'équipe web finit sa journée : un article en texte brut, sans lien hypertextes ou recommandations de lecture est donc publié en ligne, faute de temps.

Cet article est typique de l'accélération vécue en fin de journée. La journaliste a dû s'empresser de terminer avant l'heure de bouclage, et l'article parvient à l'équipe web trop tard pour bénéficier d'une édition numérique soignée. Il aura fallu plus de deux heures entre le moment où la journaliste termine le sujet, et le moment où il paraît en ligne.

*Achat d'avions* présente une trajectoire classique, qui navigue dans le processus rédactionnel sans grande surprise ou de difficulté. Il traverse une série d'étapes prévisibles et prévues : des boîtes noires qui forment le noyau du système de production. Il sera fortement impacté par le goulot d'étranglement en fin de journée (sur la question de la gestion des temporalités, voir Robotham 2021). La conséquence ? *Achat d'avions* ne fait l'objet d'aucune *affordance*, que l'équipe du web se donne pourtant comme mission de proposer.

### Sujet 2 : Finances publiques

Ce deuxième sujet deviendra le *Temps Fort* du journal papier du 15 février. Hors rubrique thématique, le *Temps Fort* propose de se plonger dans un thème, souvent à deux points d'entrée distincts pour mettre en relation un événement particulier et une tendance plus générale. Le *Temps Fort* occupe la page 3. Les principales règles qui régissent le format sont implicites pour l'ensemble de la rédaction, même si elles ne sont pas formalisées au-delà des différents gabarits disponibles. Un *Temps Fort* est composé d'au moins deux textes, agrémentés de photographies

et parfois d'éléments graphiques. Sa gestion globale est assurée par le/la chef-fe info. Il est souvent produit par un-e journaliste affilié-e à l'une ou l'autre des rubriques, plus rarement par un-e pigiste.

La naissance de *Finances publiques* émane de l'initiative d'un journaliste et de la responsabilité de sa rubrique de fournir régulièrement des *Temps Forts*. Ce dernier l'avait fait valider auprès de la rédaction en chef par l'intermédiaire de son responsable (rubrique *Suisse*), une dizaine de jours avant sa parution. Lorsque la séance hebdomadaire a lieu, il est déjà inscrit depuis plusieurs jours dans le *PE*, dans l'onglet *Temps Fort*. Le sujet est plusieurs fois reporté. A cours de la semaine précédente, le journaliste avait recueilli la quasi-totalité des informations requises, dont de multiples entretiens.

Temps forts & Eclairages		
y compris les grosses opérations		
Sujet	journaliste	deadline
mardi 13 février		
Transparence: l'attaque de l'Europe contre les partis suisses. ITW inédite		
ECL ou en pages ou TF: le Kosovo, 27e canton suisse		A passer vite car les sujets de ce genre se multiplient.
mercredi 14 février		
Finances publiques: pourquoi Neuchâtel ne s'en sort pas (repoussable)		Piste Edito
OU Cinéma: le phénomène Black Panther		
jeudi 15 février		
vendredi 16 février		

Copie de l'onglet 'Temps Fort & Eclairages' du document *Planning éditorial*. Etat au 12.02.2018 à 8h45

Mais *Finances publiques* n'a pas encore été rédigé : le journaliste ne se risquera pas à le rédiger avant d'en connaître le format définitif, lui-même dépendant du jour de parution. A l'instar d'*Achat d'avions*, les longueurs de ces deux articles se calculent à partir de l'espace disponible dans la page qui les contiendra.

L'essentiel du sujet sera rédigé entre le feu vert en séance hebdomadaire et la veille du jour de parution convenu. Le *Temps Fort* se composera de deux articles : un principal analysant les origines de la crise budgétaire que traverse le canton de Neuchâtel (*Neuchâtel : Finances impossibles*), et un secondaire, sous forme d'une interview question-réponse avec le ministre du gouvernement en charge des finances, Laurent Kurth (*Neuchâtel : ITW Kurth*).

Lors de la séance de rédaction du 14 février, le chef de la rubrique *Suisse* annonce à nouveau le sujet, avec quelques précisions concernant les deux articles qui le composeront. Le responsable du site web les inscrit dans l'onglet *Planning du jour* sans spécifier d'heure de mise en ligne. La question de savoir si les deux articles doivent apparaître dans une même page n'est pas réglée, en l'absence d'une approche systématique ou d'une politique claire. Il revient donc au responsable du site web d'évaluer au cas par cas. Interviennent, dans la décision, une pesée complexe de logiques :

- S'agit-il d'un seul et même sujet ou plutôt deux articles « pleins », mais ayant un thème commun ? Dans le premier cas, la compréhension de l'un peut nécessiter la lecture de l'autre, ou encore l'ajout d'éléments contextuels y figurant.
- Quel impact sur le trafic et par conséquent sur le revenu publicitaire ? La lecture d'une page-article regroupée sera-t-il autant que s'ils avaient été séparés.
- Les articles ont-ils été rédigés dans une même page-article ? La tâche de créer une nouvelle page-article accroît la charge de travail de l'équipe web.
- Les deux articles sont-ils du même auteur ? Si l'auteur n'est pas le même, la signature du deuxième n'apparaît pas, heurtant potentiellement l'égo du second.

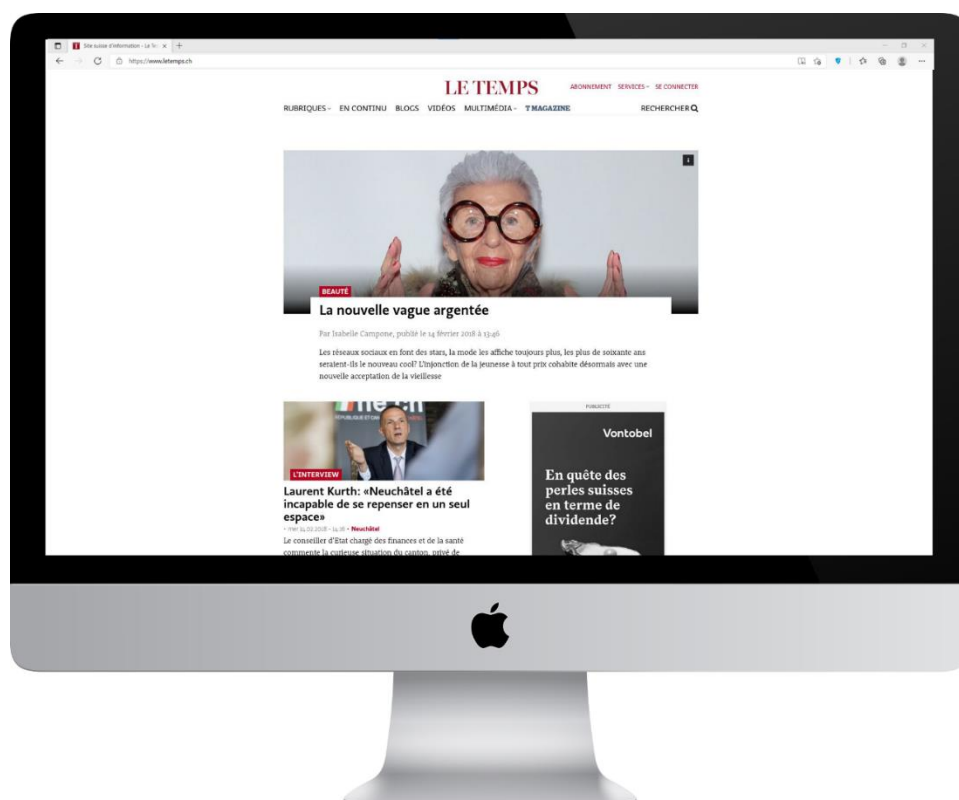
Le responsable de rubrique suggère au membre du desk web de vérifier directement avec le journaliste.

En fin de matinée, le journaliste ajoute quelques touches finales (notamment quelques liens hypertexte et citations en exergue) et signale que les deux articles sont disponibles pour relecture dans deux pages-articles séparées. Ils abordent une même thématique sans pour autant se référer directement l'un à l'autre dans le texte ; ils sont suffisamment longs et donc « tiennent seuls », et en tant que tels leur publication séparée n'entraîne pas un travail supplémentaire pour l'équipe web.

En parallèle, la page *Temps Fort* se discute durant le « point édition print » de 12h50. La mise en page relève de l'évidence : dans une mise en page classique, *Finances impossibles* occupera la pleine largeur de la tête de page (la proposition d'illustrer avec une photo d'une manifestation anti-austérité est approuvée sur le champ) et *ITW Kurt* le pied (il manque une photo-médaille du ministre).

De son côté, *ITW Kurth* ne requiert presque plus de travail avant sa mise en ligne par l'équipe d'édition web. Quelques petits ajouts contextuels (les éléments contextuels importants fournis par l'autre article dans le print doivent être explicités) ainsi que l'assignation des catégories et mots-clés pertinentes suffiront. *Interview Kurth* paraît en ligne vers 14h. Lors du prochain rafraîchissement de la Une du site, il sera placé en deuxième position.

Pour l'article principal, *Finances impossibles*, le responsable web opère quelques ajustements supplémentaires et ajoute les catégories et mots-clés requis avant sa parution numérique vers 15h. La dernière relecture – celle des correcteurs – a lieu après la parution sur internet.



Page d'accueil du journal Le Temps, le 14.02.2018 à 16h00

L'importance de proposer sans cesse du contenu nouveau sur le site est jugé plus grande qu'une ou deux coquilles qui pourraient être repérées par les lecteurs. Une correctrice gomme toute imperfection une vingtaine de minutes plus tard.

À 16 heures, lorsque débute la grande séance de mise en page du journal, les deux articles du *sujet 2* sont déjà en ligne et dans la maquette. En version numérique, *ITW Kurth* sera illustré d'une photo d'archive du ministre et du petit médaillon pour la version papier. La photo de la manifestation, proposée par la responsable iconographique, accompagne *Finances impossibles* sur les deux supports. Sinon un dernier ajustement de l'un des deux titres et quelques micro-ajustements, les lecteurs les retrouveront sous une forme identique sur papier et écran.

A travers les deux articles du *sujet Temps Forts* se manifestent de multiples logiques et *affordances* du journal papier. Leur relation, telle qu'elle s'opère au sein de la page du journal, n'a pas d'équivalent numérique et s'avère impossible à traduire pleinement d'un support à l'autre. Malgré leur rédaction dans le CMS, leur articulation dans le journal papier est omniprésente dans la tête du journaliste lorsqu'il les conçoit. L'attente d'une date de parution dans le journal papier, décision qui confirmera le statut de *Temps Fort*. Avec elle, le paramétrage du format et des lignages est déterminant.

Sujet 3 : Rasta Rockett

Rasta Rockett, dont la principale source est une conférence de presse à Pyeongchang ayant eu lieu le samedi précédent, n'est pas évoqué durant la séance hebdomadaire. L'article est pourtant dans le CMS trois jours avant sa parution, presque prêt à être publié. Il est, à l'instar de la plupart des articles de la rubrique Sport, plutôt long la ligne éditoriale pour la rubrique sport privilégiant un traitement « magazine » (les résultats et comptes rendus sont plutôt rares).

La première version de Rasta Rockett compte un peu plus de 7'500 signes, laissant de la place pour un article court en pied de page du print. Rasta Rockett pourrait être rallongé ou raccourci en fonction d'autres actualités, ou encore en fonction des retours du responsable de

J.A. 1002 Lausanne / www.letemps.ch

# LE TEMPS

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JEUDI 15 FÉVRIER 2018 / N° 6039

**Portrait**  
Eric Dupond-Moretti  
L'âge de Cahuzac en quête d'acquiescement ●●● PAGE 20

**Débats**  
L'islam hante le débat politique et intellectuel français ●●● PAGE 8

**Musique**  
The Young Gods, trois décennies d'expériences sonores. Rencontre ●●● PAGE 17

**Sortir**  
Théâtre, cinéma, spectacles, musique, expos: les choix de nos critiques ●●● PAGES 18, 19

## Les bénéficiaires récurrents des finances fédérales attisent les convoitises

**POLITIQUE BUDGÉTAIRE** Ueli Maurer annonce un solde positif de près de 2,8 milliards pour 2017. Un excédent qui donne des idées.

Le Confédération a fait, des budgets passés, un jeu de cache-cache. On a vu des dépenses dépasser les recettes, mais on ne parlait pas de déficit. On a vu des dépenses dépasser les recettes, mais on ne parlait pas de déficit. On a vu des dépenses dépasser les recettes, mais on ne parlait pas de déficit.

### EDITORIAL

#### Le moment est venu de desserrer le frein

Après onze années, et cela depuis plus de dix ans à l'exception de l'année 2014, les comptes de la Confédération ont affiché un résultat positif. Le budget, en soi, n'est pas positif, mais il n'a pas permis de faire passer des dépenses au-delà des recettes. Véritable success-story, le frein à l'endettement en vigueur depuis onze ans, après avoir eu un effet d'atténuation des excédents budgétaires, a permis de réduire le déficit de la dette à un niveau historique, puisque celui-ci a été amoindri de plus de 20 milliards en quinze ans.

### ENQUÊTE

#### Pourquoi Neuchâtel déprime

Le canton de Neuchâtel sombre dans une dépression collective. Privé de budget, fragilisé par des déficits publics chroniques, tiraillé par les rivalités régionales, le canton affronte une crise sans précédent. Decryptage d'une sinistrose

### INTERVIEW

#### Affaire Maëlys: le suspect avoue

Après six mois de détention préventive, le suspect Maëlys a avoué son rôle dans l'affaire. Il est parti de son domicile à La Chaux-de-Fonds, a pris le train pour Neuchâtel, puis s'est rendu à la gare de Yverdon-les-Bains, où il a été arrêté.

### TECHNOLOGIE

#### Kudelski toujours plus américain

Kudelski, le géant suisse de la sécurité, continue de renforcer sa présence américaine. L'entreprise a annoncé l'acquisition d'une société américaine spécialisée dans la cybersécurité.

### EXPLORATION SPATIALE

#### Mars comme si on y était

Depuis dix-sept ans, deux bases de la Mars Society, dont l'une est située dans le désert de l'Utah, accueillent des scientifiques qui veulent se confronter à un environnement qui rappelle la planète rouge.

**COMPENSER LES MANQUAISES DES REFORMES FISCALES À VENIR**

**REPERSEUR LE TOURISME À GENÈVE**

**INTERVIEW** Ueli Maurer annonce un solde positif de près de 2,8 milliards pour 2017. Un excédent qui donne des idées.

**EXPLORATION SPATIALE** Mars comme si on y était. Depuis dix-sept ans, deux bases de la Mars Society, dont l'une est située dans le désert de l'Utah, accueillent des scientifiques qui veulent se confronter à un environnement qui rappelle la planète rouge.

LE TEMPS

www.letemps.ch

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rubrique. Le journaliste a également tourné quelques séquences filmées de la conférence de presse, qu'il a transmises à la cellule vidéo, en vue d'un éventuel enrichissement multimédia se saisissant des affordances du numérique.

L'article est inscrit dans l'onglet *PE\_Sport* pour une parution suggérée dans l'édition papier du 15 février. S'agissant d'un avant-papier, le journaliste souhaite qu'il paraisse avant le début de la compétition, prévu le 15 février.

Durant la séance de rédaction quotidienne, il n'y a aucun représentant de l'équipe *Sport* pour annoncer *Rasta Rockett*. Le responsable de la rubrique est à l'étranger pour couvrir un tournoi de tennis et l'auteur est toujours en Corée du Sud. Cependant, ce dernier a transmis à la rédaction en chef par courriel un descriptif de son article que la cheffe info synthétise lors de la séance du jour. Ce message, partagé avec la rédaction en chef et les équipes d'édition, mentionne qu'il y a « pas mal d'images dedans pour la version web » et demande pour le papier une colonne étroite « pour parler actu olympique (slalom dames au programme notamment) ». La cellule vidéo propose de créer une vidéo à l'aide des séquences fournies par le journaliste, pour accompagner l'article web. Le chef d'édition web et la cheffe info donnent un avis favorable, même si cela retardera l'heure de mise en ligne de la version web, habituellement en milieu de journée pour ce type d'article.

Pendant ce temps, le responsable de la rubrique *Sport* est connecté au CMS depuis sa chambre d'hôtel à Rotterdam pour relire *Rasta Rockett*. L'article convient, estime-t-il, mais suggère l'ajout d'une mise en scène narrative, ce que fera le journaliste depuis Pyeongchang. L'article dépasse alors légèrement les 10'000 signes requis. Le journaliste indique que l'article est à disposition et le chef d'édition web, peu occupé en fin de matinée, commence à le préparer pour sa mise en ligne, en attendant la vidéo. Lui et ses collègues intégreront, au cours de la journée, trois photos supplémentaires, ainsi que plusieurs liens vers des articles connexes, en plus de ceux déjà proposés par le journaliste. La photo est discutée durant le « point édition ». La même illustrera les versions print et web.

Le journaliste échange brièvement avec le secrétaire de rédaction, responsable de mettre en page. Vu sa longueur, la page intégrera difficilement la colonne « actu olympique ». Mais cet espace est moins indispensable : le slalom dames a été reporté à un autre jour, en raison de la mauvaise météo.

Vers 15 heures, l'article est exporté vers la page du journal papier. Dorénavant chaque modification ne concernera plus que l'une des deux versions. Pour la version papier, le lieu est supprimé pour raccourcir le titre ; trois intertitres et une phrase sont coupés pour permettre au texte de tenir dans la maquette de la page. La vidéo est livrée vers 17h et intégrée par l'équipe web dans la page-article. Après quelques ajustements, *Rasta Rockett* est publié vers 18 heures.

*Rasta Rockett* se saisit davantage des affordances offertes par le numérique que les sujets 1 et 2. Certes, on a pris soin de penser et proposer des éléments spécifiques pour le numérique, mais plusieurs autres éléments le rendent moins sujet à la domination du print : en tant qu'avant-papier, les temporalités de publication s'alignent naturellement et l'équipe d'édition du web peut travailler sa mise en forme lors de moments creux. Enfin, nul besoin de subir un lignage imposé par d'autres éléments de la page : seul dans la page, il peut bénéficier d'options graphiques permettant d'accommoder un large spectre de longueurs de texte ; une impossibilité pour un article tel qu'*Achat d'avions*.

## **Discussion : configuration des contenus à travers les réseaux intratextuel et extratextuel**

En analysant les trajectoires de trois sujets bimédias durant la phase de production, j'ai décrit comment différents facteurs et logiques s'assemblent pour constituer deux réseaux de configuration en grande partie indépendants l'un de l'autre que je nommerai *réseau intratextuel* (propriétés se situant au sein même du texte), et *réseau extratextuel* (propriétés extérieures au texte).

### **Le réseau intratextuel**

La gestion de la production des différents éléments qui composent le texte sont soumis à une sorte de double contrainte : publier sur chaque support une version de l'article fournissant la même information, tout en optimisant chaque version en fonction des affordances du numérique et du papier respectivement. Il s'agit de faire la même chose, mais autrement.

Dans la pratique, si le système *web-first* privilégie des articles apprêtés pour une publication numérique, elle requiert également une écriture et une structure permettant une adaptation au papier faisant l'économie d'une réécriture conséquente ; en somme, des textes conçus pour le papier, auxquels des éléments numériques sont ajoutés, pour être ensuite supprimés lors de l'intégration dans la maquette (le langage en rédaction utilise en effet le terme « enrichissements » pour les éléments tout-numériques tels que les liens hypertextes, les intégrations de contenus des réseaux sociaux, les vidéos et autres éléments interactifs). Chronophages, non-essentiels à l'information véhiculée par les articles, ces éléments sont souvent ajoutés en fin de production (par les journalistes ou l'équipe web) si le temps le permet.

Pour des articles tels qu'*Achat d'avions*, réalisés en moins d'une journée, les spécificités numériques demeurent rares à la livraison. Les deux articles de *Finances publiques*, conçus comme vitrine du journal papier, s'adaptent quant à eux maladroitement au numérique. La question récurrente de la publication des *Temps Forts* dans un ou plusieurs pages-articles du site est

emblématique. De nos trois articles, seul *Rasta Rockett* offre une édition numérique qui se démarque réellement de la version papier. Les articles se saisissant pleinement des potentialités du numérique et impliquant d'importants réajustements pour le papier demeurent l'exception. Il aura fallu la combinaison de plusieurs éléments (un sujet prédisposé à un traitement numérique plus ambitieux, une temporalité de production et de publication permettant la réalisation des éléments en question, et un journaliste qui s'engage à proposer un travail allant au-delà du contenu textuel minimum requis) pour que les affordances soient effectivement exploitées.

En pratique donc, le processus se rapproche davantage d'une écriture pour le papier, après laquelle d'éventuels éléments numériques sont ajoutés, pour ensuite être facilement supprimés lors de l'exportation vers le papier.

### **Le réseau extratextuel**

Au-delà du texte même, plusieurs propriétés d'ordre différents sont liées entre elles dans un réseau qu'on pourrait qualifier d'extratextuel (aucun n'étant situé à l'échelle du texte). De nombreuses forces et logiques de production du papier et du web s'y confrontent. Au sein de ce réseau, le support papier maintient une emprise forte sur le numérique à travers la rigidité des propriétés du support de publication. C'est notamment via l'intermédiaire de *chemin de fer*, que le journal papier contraint chaque responsable de rubrique à remplir ses pages, en conditionnant des assemblages dont la somme des longueurs correspond à environ 11'000 signes. Ce processus de sélection et d'attribution opère selon des logiques multiples et complexes, décrites dans les récits ci-dessus. Le document *PE\_Planning éditorial* exhibe, de manière éphémère, les traces de ce processus, même s'il ne rend pas compte des logiques qui le sous-tendent. Pour des sujets moins urgents tels que la paire *Finances publiques* ou *Rasta Rockett*, ce processus tend non seulement à déterminer la longueur, mais également à imposer le jour de parution à l'article web. La planification des heures de publication s'insère donc dans une fourchette de 24 heures imposée par le journal papier.

Le tableau ci-dessous reproduit, de manière schématisée, les étapes de configuration temporelles et spatiales des articles en fonction des forces de production du papier et du web. Les options à chaque étape de la production sont dépendantes des étapes qui précèdent. Or, malgré un système rédactionnel dont le flux de production est *web-first*, les facteurs et logiques de production du web, n'impactant pas le journal papier, se situant en fin de chaînes. À l'inverse, les configurations temporelles (jour de publication) et spatiales déterminantes (longueur du texte) se situent en amont des facteurs de production web et sont hérités du *chemin de fer* et des *gabarits* disponibles. En d'autres termes, si chaque article n'est apprêté qu'en fin de parcours pour le journal papier, ce support davantage rigide configure les articles – certes de manière indirecte – dès l'idée-même d'un sujet à travers des acolytes : le *chemin de fer* et la maquette.

Les configurations numériques s'opèrent donc dans les limites de ce que permet le journal papier.

Schéma de configuration des facteurs extratextuels (temps et espace)	Chaîne des supports à l'origine des facteurs	Dimension configurée
N Identification de la temporalité inhérente à l'article	N	Temps
↳ N Définition d'une plage de parution	N→N	Espace
↳ P Evaluation des besoins de contenus selon le chemin de fer	N→N→P	Espace
↳ P <b>Confirmation du jour de parution sur papier</b>	N→N→P→P	Temps
↳ N Estimation des contraintes temporelles de prod. (< 24h)	N→N→P→P→N	Temps
↳ W Définition d'une plage-horaire de parution web	N→N→P→P→N→W	Temps
↳ W <b>Planification d'une heure de parution web</b> †	N→N→P→P→N→W→W †	Temps
↳ P Négociation de l'emplacement dans le chemin de fer et du nombre d'articles de la page	N→N→P→P→P	Espace
↳ P Sélection du gabarit approprié	N→N→P→P→P→P	Espace
↳ P <b>Détermination de la longueur (papier et web)</b> †	N→N→P→P→P→P→P †	Espace

**Légende:**  
P= processus issu d'un facteur de production papier  
W= processus issu d'un facteur de production web  
N= processus issu de facteurs production neutres en termes de support  
† = fin d'une chaîne de configuration (aucune conséquence sur d'autres processus ou propriétés)

### Le chemin de fer : vecteur de la rigidité de l'objet print

Le *chemin de fer* – dont le nom-même suggère une rigidité matérielle réduisant le nombre de 'destinations possibles' – se traduit par une checklist gérée par les responsables de rubriques et supervisée par le rédacteur en chef adjoint ainsi que par son chef d'édition. Bien que conçu comme un document de planification pour l'équipe web, *PE\_Programme* du jour devient le lieu où se traduit cette checklist imposée par le chemin de fer. Le journal en ligne est donc, structurellement, subordonné à cette checklist. Émanciper le numérique des contraintes du journal papier pourrait passer par l'assouplissement du *chemin de fer*. L'attribution d'un nombre de pages entières à des rubriques, le fait de contraindre chaque article à une seule (double) page : ces facteurs de production entièrement hérités du journal papier configurent l'offre numérique à un niveau extratextuel, en termes de nombre de sujets comme de thématiques et de longueurs. Cette rigidité avait été constatée par l'équipe de rédacteurs en chef (avant leur départ en 2020), qui avait pour projet d'adapter la maquette et le *chemin de fer* du journal pour réduire les contraintes imposées par le journal papier à l'édition web. Ils prévoyaient notamment de dissocier les pages des rubriques, en affectant chaque jour les espaces en fonction de l'offre d'actualité. Ce projet a pourtant été abandonné à la faveur d'un remaniement de la rédaction fin 2021, suite au rachat du journal et à l'arrivée d'une nouvelle rédaction en chef.

Au niveau des *affordances* textuelles, proposer des contenus bi-médias qui exploitent davantage les potentialités du web semble difficile au journal *Le Temps* en l'absence ressources supplémentaires. Pour les actualités plus chaudes en particulier, s'ajoute la question d'évaluer

la plus-value de contenus plus numériques mais clairement chronophages, compte-tenu de la valeur décroissante des informations au cours du temps. Si la dimension stratégique ne se situe pas au cœur de cet article, il convient néanmoins de noter que l'existence d'une équipe web dédiée à la seule production d'informations pour le site permettrait d'offrir des contenus pouvant s'émanciper des contraintes du papier. Une telle équipe existait autrefois au *Temps*, avant de disparaître en raison de coupes budgétaires. Comme me l'a confié un membre du desk web : « On a les forces de produire exactement ce journal papier par jour et pas plus. »

## Conclusion

Cet article propose l'une des rares description détaillée d'un système rédactionnel qualifié de *web-first*. Les trois comptes-rendus mettent en évidence l'interdépendance des supports de publication print et web au sein du journal *Le Temps*, et en particulier la rigidité matérielle du dispositif papier, qui pèse lourdement sur toute la chaîne de production. L'attelage du numérique au papier au sein même du système rédactionnel a pour conséquence une « sous-exploitation » des *affordances* du numérique.

Il serait faux de conclure à l'échec du *web-first*, en tant que système rédactionnel, sur la base d'une seule étude de cas comme la nôtre. Elle a néanmoins le mérite de montrer la contradiction entre la volonté déclarée et les pratiques effectives, et ses conséquences sur les produits finis – partiellement généralisables, à l'évidence, à d'autres rédactions similaires.

L'objet papier résiste au changement, et il est puissant. Il étend son influence sur la production du numérique, qu'il façonne à travers les journalistes qui le travaillent, et leurs outils. Les systèmes de production dites *web-first* tendent à se généraliser, notamment parce qu'elles sont supposées étendre de manière efficiente l'usage des *affordances* du journalisme numérique à l'ensemble des articles, y compris ceux publiés dans le print. Pourtant, pour que le *web-first* atteigne ses objectifs stratégiques et se réalise pleinement, il serait nécessaire de surmonter des multiples forces pour infléchir la toute-puissance du *print*. Ou alors, intégrer le compromis de manière assumée, non seulement dans les pratiques, mais aussi dans les discours.

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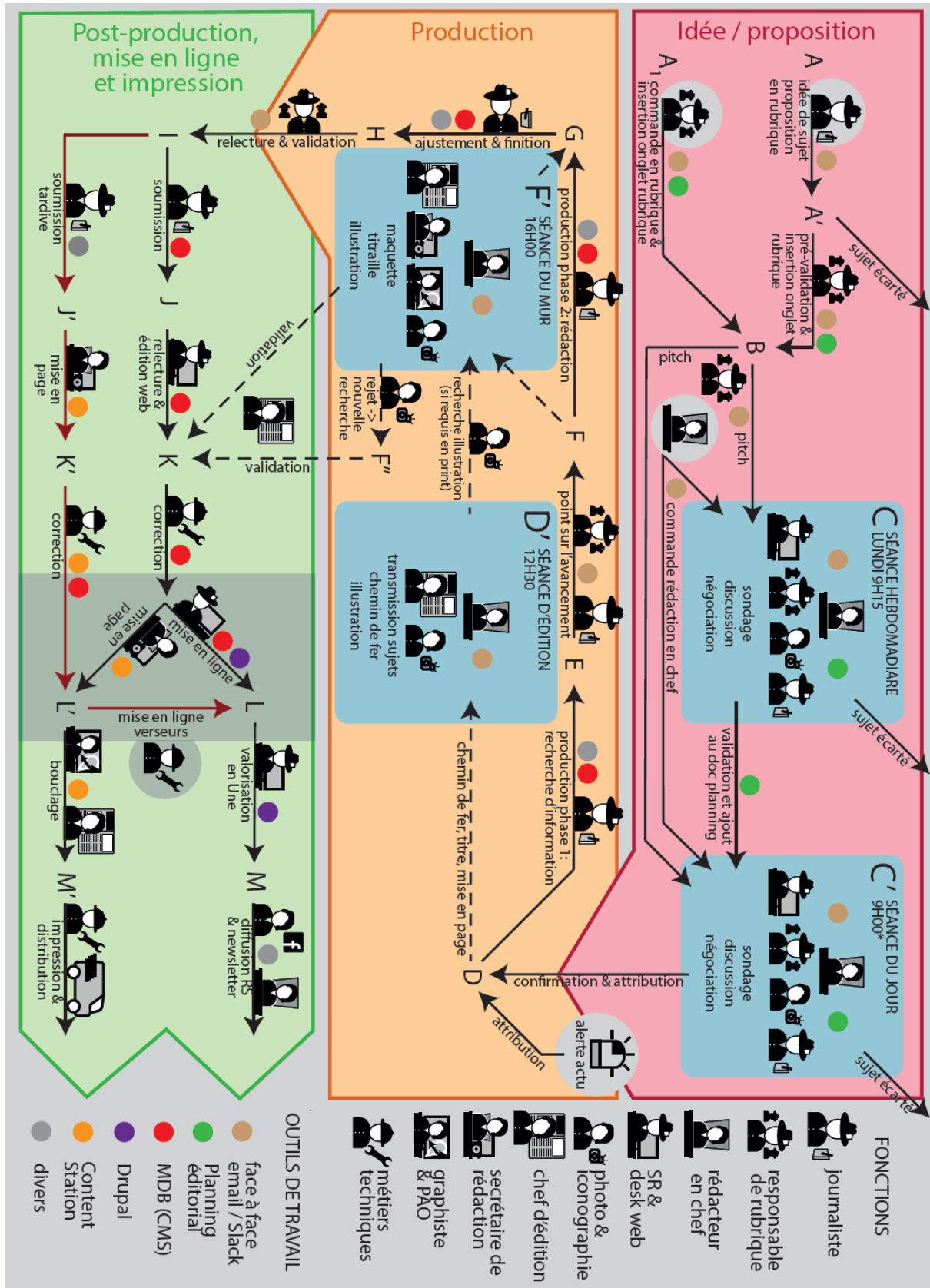
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## Annexes

### Annexe 1 : Schéma du système rédactionnel du journal *Le Temps*

Version traduite vers le français à partir de Robotham (2021)



Annexe 2 : Chemin de fer pour le journal *Le Temps* du 15.02.2018

<b>LE TEMPS</b>		<b>38</b>	Date de couverture: 15.02.2018	Version: 1 Parution principale	Parution avec the following volumes: All 20 pages	Date de modification: mer., 14.02.2018 10:4 Dernier utilisateur: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
<b>LE TEMPS</b>						
<b>Date de couverture: jeudi, 15. février 2018</b>						
<b>La Une</b>	<b>21h10</b>	<b>Conversation</b>	<b>21h05</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>20h55</b>	<b>21h00</b>
Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 18h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 18h00
LT038_SWX_2	LT038_ECONOMIE_2	LT038_CONVERSATION	LT038_TF	LT038_INTER_1	LT038_INTER_2	LT038_SUISSE_1
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
<b>Bourses</b>	<b>Economie</b>	<b>Carnet du jour</b>	<b>Finance</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Sortir</b>
Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 18h00	M
LT038_SWX_2	LT038_ECONOMIE_2	LT038_CARNET	LT038_FINANCE	LT038_SPORT	LT038_CULTURE	LT038_SORTIR
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
<b>Der</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Science</b>
Av. 18h00	Av. 18h00	Av. 18h00	Av. 18h00	Av. 18h00	Av. 18h00	Av. 18h00
LT038_DER	LT038_DEBATS	LT038_SCIENCES	LT038_SCIENCES	LT038_SCIENCES	LT038_SCIENCES	LT038_SCIENCES
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
<b>Bourses</b>	<b>Economie</b>	<b>Economie</b>	<b>Economie</b>	<b>Economie</b>	<b>Economie</b>	<b>Economie</b>
Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00	Av. 20h00
LT038_SWX_1	LT038_ECONOMIE_1	LT038_ECONOMIE_1	LT038_ECONOMIE_1	LT038_ECONOMIE_1	LT038_ECONOMIE_1	LT038_ECONOMIE_1
10	11	12	13	14	15	16

## Article 2

### *What were you synching?*

### *An ethnographic study of news scheduling at a digital first legacy newspaper*

Robotham, Andrew T. 2021. "What Were You Synching? An Ethnographic Study of News Scheduling at a Digital First Legacy Newspaper." *Digital Journalism*, October, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1988860>.

#### Abstract

*Digital first* strategies at newspapers raise complex questions of temporality and scheduling. Yet there is a lack of ethnographic accounts for web-to-print newsmaking. While research has long been concerned with time in analog newspaper production, and online news time has mostly been studied through the prism of *immediacy*, almost nothing is known about dual-platform workflows. What happens to temporalities when web and print production factors and logics collide? Ethnographic research at legacy Swiss daily newspaper *Le Temps* provides a novel insight. Using a newsmaking reconstruction approach, we conducted an in-depth case study of a single day's news production with a view to understanding publication times and scheduling. Despite their much-publicized shift to *web-to-print* production, the impetus for producing stories largely remained subordinate to filling the print pages via backwards scheduling. Tools, meetings and temporal labels defined broad categories of stories that reflected temporal publication objectives and associated production requirements. Many outside forces restricted scheduling options, while publication frequency invariably accelerated late in the day. When publication times were not imposed by external forces, the logics key newswriters applied to scheduling involved smoothing the output curve, building sequences with variation in form and content, and catering to reader habits and preferences.

Keywords: journalism, newsroom ethnography, web-first, digital first, web-to-print, time, temporality, scheduling



## Introduction

Many journalists, editors and managing editors of dual-platform web-to-print newspapers may find the following exemplum reminiscent of their own experiences of *digital first* publishing:

*Be fast and be first. Or dig deep and produce an in-depth story, rich in perspective and context. Cater to your online audience at the risk of annoying tomorrow's print reader with facts already widely available. Or write for tomorrow's print reader, but risk it feeling like 'old news' to your online audience. Do both and sacrifice considerable resources of a newsroom already stretched to its limit and whose finances are dire.*

Such tensions between the logics that apply to producing a print newspaper and its online edition were noted early on during a newsroom ethnography at Swiss legacy newspaper *Le Temps*, a precursor of *digital first* production. It raised the following questions: *For articles that are destined for both, what happens to news temporalities when print and web temporalities compete and collide?* and *Which forces determine publication time, and how?*

A dive into the literature fails to provide satisfactory answers. Furthermore, despite *web-to-print* becoming the norm in many newsrooms, underlying workflows and production logics have scarcely been theorized, let alone documented. Almost nothing is known about how *print* and *web* shape each other in *digital first* newsmaking. For the many newsrooms undergoing such radical changes to their production process, or on the verge of doing so, answers to these questions may provide useful insights.<sup>14</sup>

As we sought to address this research gap, we identified the reconfiguration of news temporalities as a key feature distinguishing dual platform publishing from print- and web-only news production. Over the years, print news temporalities have been extensively studied (Schlesinger 1977), while online news time has tended to be examined through the prism of *immediacy* (Usher 2016a), often neglecting the study of less urgent news. What is undisputed is that these temporalities fit within the respective temporal affordances, which may be summarized as follows: choosing a publication time for a print story amounts to selecting among print issues separated by 24-hour increments, while online stories may be published asynchronously, offering limitless possibilities along a temporal continuum. By contrast, *digital first* temporalities

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<sup>14</sup> While many large news media in northern and western Europe may have made the switch some years ago, many smaller ones elsewhere, comparable in scale to the one studied here, are yet fully implement a *digital first* production system. That this transition is taking this long may surprise certain readers. Indeed, the French language newspapers of Switzerland's largest news publisher Tamedia only completed their transition to a fully integrated *digital first* publishing system in 2020!

are complex (English 2011a; Wheatley and O'Sullivan 2017) because, as the exemplum above suggests, newswriters apply different logics to web and print. However, stories are not only subjected to opposing platform-specific logics, but—we would soon discover—one article's publication time may be impacted by those of others.

In seeking to understand how publication times are determined for web-print stories, this research uses newsmaking reconstruction to study one *digital first* newspaper in general, and a single day's production in particular. Observation, content analysis and semi-structured interviews revealed publication times to be strongly subordinate to print production factors and logics, not all of which were temporal. Stories were subjected to forces originating inside and outside the newsroom, distributed among different newswriters and production stages. Tools, meetings, and language all contributed to shared understandings of stories' temporal requirements. Coordinating publication times involved strategic scheduling, which included negotiating sequences, sometimes by arbitrating between conflicting interests of multiple stories, advocated for by different newsroom workers. However, much of the schedule remained beyond the control of editorial management. This was particularly the case for hotter news late in the day.

### **Literature review and key concepts**

*Digital first* newsmaking practices remain a blind spot within *Journalism Studies*. Below we explain why, despite news having been published online for decades, integrated *web-to-print* production systems have only recently become widespread, and why temporality is reconfigured once print and web become tethered. Finally, we concern ourselves with the literature that may help us conceptualize *digital first* news time, paving the way for the method.

#### **The erosion of the wall between print and web**

According to Bødker and Brügger (2018, 59) most early news websites inherited print-based temporal practices from the newspapers that spawned them. Early on, content was simply repurposed for the web, often thanks to automated systems dubbed *shovelware* (Deuze 1999a). In parallel, many newspapers introduced web-desks covering breaking news more reactively. In ethnographies of *Clarín* and *Le Parisien*, Boczkowski (2010) and Cabrolié (2010) describe new dedicated web teams sharing little with their newspapers' more classic print-focused newsrooms. While the latter remained rooted in print temporalities (notably studied by Schlesinger 1977), the former were consumed by urgency. These logics of *immediacy* have been well documented, as have many of their consequences (Domingo and Paterson 2008; Michael Karlsson 2011; Usher 2016a). Without questioning its relevance as a research topic (especially from the normative standpoint of journalism's democratic role), this focus nevertheless fed into a speed

narrative that overshadowed an important reality: beyond specialized web-desks, newspaper websites and a majority of the production systems supporting them remained stuck in a print-based news cycle (Calmon Alaves and Schmitz Weiss 2004; Lim 2012).

This focus on *immediacy* likely obscured less obvious temporal reconfigurations related to two important changes occurring in the mid-2010s: the widespread adoption of mobile devices (see for example Westlund 2013; Pignard-Cheynel and van Dievoet 2019) and the (re)emergence of paywalls (Pickard and Williams 2014; Franklin 2014).<sup>15</sup> Overall, the adoption of mobile devices created the possibility of accessing information anytime and anywhere, further stimulating demand for news that was not only more timely, but that took into account users' daily routines. In parallel, paywalls helped resolve the problem of online readers freely accessing content before print subscribers, which English (2011a, 147) has referred to as the “print-web dilemma”. As they noted, “the decision over which platform to use first has become a major—and increasingly complex—issue for media outlets as they weigh up delivering immediate news online for free, while allowing the information to be available to readers and rival publications.” According to Sjøvaag (2016, 306), the paywall “changes the way editors construct online editions, as it introduces new approaches to traditional conceptions of deadlines.” This double shift has allowed for ambitious subscription-based commercial strategies that seek to make better use of web potentialities and to conceive more fluid digital publication schedules.

### **Digital first: a fuzzy definition. Multiple temporal shifts**

Although ubiquitous in news industry discourse, *digital first* lacks a single stable definition and its use can result in confusion within the newsroom (Hendrickx and Picone 2020a). As for the literature, it has mostly sidestepped defining it, as illustrated by Dwyer's (2015a) choice to use *digital first* more as a “rhetorical departure point” than as a “consensually embraced strategy”. Describing work at *Die Welt*, García-Avilés et al. (2017a, 454) provide the following account:

“In December 2013, around 120 journalists moved into a large central newsroom geared to digital production. The motto 'online first' gave way to the 'digital to print' strategy: The journalists work for digital publishing first, and then produce daily papers out of what they had initially produced for digital channels.”

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<sup>15</sup> Although these occurred at different speeds from one market to another and from one media outlet to another, the rapid adoption of smartphones following the release of the iPhone in 2007 may be seen as the starting point for mobile news (Westlund 2013), while 2013 has been referred to as “The year of the paywall” (Sjøvaag 2016).

This example reveals both stability and variation in meaning on multiple levels. There is stability in the sense that the digital takes precedence over the analog. Variation occurs because *first* can refer to temporal orders of production as well as more strategic priorities. Thus, most (self-described) *digital first* production systems entail the following: online publication times become more flexible and can be planned according to audience-related logics. How this is planning is done, and what restricts these possibilities is a practical matter that has scarcely been studied.

Short of providing a stable definition of *digital first*, research has nevertheless been dedicated to documenting the changes it entails, including to temporalities. In their study of six European newsrooms, Menke et al. (2018, 895) find that “profoundly rooted aspects, such as channel priorities and time allocation, tend to follow the dominant print culture.” Upon analyzing four Irish newspapers, Wheatley and O’Sullivan (2017) found that non-original content tended to be published during the daytime, while original in-house stories tended to appear online subsequent to their availability in print form.

Schlesinger and Doyle’s (2015) study of the *digital first* strategies of *The Telegraph* and *The Financial Times* offers glimpses of the temporal challenges of *web-to-print*. The latter changed “from a 1-day print cycle to having journalists write more frequently ‘to keep the site dynamic’” (8). Work schedules and shift patterns also changed. Although weighed against other factors, data-driven knowledge of users’ habits was found to inform publication choices. At *The Telegraph*, stories generally went online first. However, the authors note that “the traditional routines and values associated with print production continue to exert a strong sway, as is evident from a mismatch at *FT.com* and other titles between recognized peak periods in online news readership and hourly patterns in online publication of stories by journalists” (18).

### **Concepts and lay terms for digital news temporalities**

Research has yet to develop a specific framework for the temporalities of digital journalism. Perhaps tellingly, newsroom language has not settled on temporal labels that specifically apply to online news. The dreaded *deadline* remains widespread, including when referring to online stories. Franklin et al. (2019, 312) define the deadline as:

“The latest time of day or night [...] or the latest date, by which a news story or feature must be received by the newsdesk (or by sub-editors or the newsreader) if it is to be included in the next edition of a newspaper, magazine or the next broadcast bulletin.”

Deadlines for newspaper stories are typically cyclical, predictable, and subject to the underlying production system of print media. Bødker (2017) remarks how, for news websites lacking a fixed periodicity, the notion of an issue becomes unstable. Affordances of online news are described differently, often using metaphors of material characteristics. As Widholm (2016, 24) notes, “While the linear news models of the past were characterized by delivery of static texts within strict deadlines, contemporary non-linear production practices are characterized by flexibility, elastic deadlines and constant delivery of ‘liquid’ news.” These concepts successfully translate the contrasting temporal realities of print and web. However, they do little as analytical concepts.

Instead, we may borrow from the literature on the organization of time, and in particular Zerubavel’s (1976) concept of *scheduling*, defined as the dynamic aspect of the negotiation of timetables. Parameters may include duration, sequence, timing, tempo and their linear or cyclical nature. Furthermore, three components are built into schedules: “a totally self-determined part, a totally environmentally determined part, and a socially negotiable part in-between” (Zerubavel 1976, 91). Annany (2016, 419) observes that “Many of the tensions of news time are about synchronizing inside-out and outside-in forces—making sure that sources, beats, journalists, advertisers, and audiences all share rhythms.” The value of thinking in terms of *scheduling* should be made clear: newsroom time management can be examined through the prism of an ongoing activity within which the different internal and external temporal forces of stories are constantly (re)negotiated.

By *external*, we mean located beyond the boundaries of the newsroom, whether upstream from production (e.g. sources), or downstream (e.g. audiences). A *force* should be understood as a contributory cause of a certain course of action. For practical purposes, we will divide *forces* into *factors* and *logics* in the ethnographic account below. *Factors* shall describe a more rigid or definitive effect whereas *logics* are mediated by newswriters, according to explicit or implicit rules, or rationales evaluating the best course of action in view of a desired outcome.<sup>16</sup> An example of a print production *factor* would be the maximum length of a story, defined by the print page’s template, or the last deadline set by the printer for receiving the print-ready page files.

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<sup>16</sup> Short of mobilizing a theoretical framework that defines practices in relation to (institutional) logics, while also accounting for non-human forces, we would direct interested readers to theory at the intersection of *action theory* and *material semiotics*, such as Lindberg (2014).

An example of a print *logic* would be ensuring that two interviews not be printed on the same double page. The distinction is empirical rather than absolute: a newspaper could hire more proofreaders or negotiate a later deadline, but this would require significantly more effort than printing a page with two interviews, however tedious to the end reader.

We suggest that newsrooms seem not to have developed temporal labels that relate to web publishing temporalities. As we will see, terminology used at *Le Temps* to frame stories within temporality belong to widespread newsroom language inherited from the print era. They fit Tuchman's concept of *typification*, defined as a "classification in which the relevant characteristics are central to the solution of practical tasks or problems at hand and are constituted in and grounded in everyday activity" (1973, 116). In her study, Tuchman showed how labels such as *soft* and *hard* have predictability and urgency of dissemination built into their meanings and are used for scheduling. The concept of *typification* carries theoretical implications: although the labels used may be common to a wider journalistic culture, they are associated with practical tasks and activities rooted within each newsroom. Accordingly, labels implicitly containing temporal reference were studied alongside the work being performed on the stories they describe. Rooted in practice, these *typifications* also helped define the temporal categories in the analysis below and played a key role in sampling.

### **Method: a reconstruction of a single day's newswork**

The present paper belongs to a broader ethnographic research project questioning the interconnectedness of print and digital news production in *digital first* publishing systems. At its core, it uses *newsmaking reconstruction* (Reich and Barnoy 2020), which considers specific features of news production (that which must be explained), as well as the ways in which these features came to be (the explanation). The explanation takes into account sources, technologies, as well as "more abstract and hidden practices such as the judgements and evaluations made on the way to publications" (Reich and Barnoy 2020, 967).

We used classic newsroom observation as a starting point. Having identified temporality as a key aspect of *digital first* news production, we then sought to identify temporal production factors and logics by (re)tracing the forces that (mutually) shape web and print production. This led us to study work as it occurred, as well as documents, tools, discourse and the news stories themselves, revealing a broad set of heterogenous forces. While the differences to be explained of course included textual ones within news stories themselves, these were both rare and mostly easy to explain. Online publication times on the other hand (which we locate at the level of the meta-text), became a key concern, since they are necessarily different, and subject to multiple complex forces.

If certain types of factors and logics were confined within particular production stages, others were story specific. This led to the creation, from research notes and newsroom documents, of a detailed workflow diagram (*figure 1*) allowing us to locate print/web differentiation, or unresolved tensions. Different types of stories revealed specific sets of forces. While some factors were non-human, including several inherent to the production system itself, others were rooted in practice. Again, of interest were not a particular newsworker's idiosyncrasies, but for any given story the successive actions applied to each (type of) story as it moved down the production line.

Sampling was purposefully unorthodox: early observation had identified cases where platform-specific logics were applied differently according to topic/section. Furthermore, different articles from the same issue *interfered* with one another and could therefore not be studied in isolation. This was the starting point for an in-depth case study of a single (random) day's news production. This heuristic was decisive: only once the data for a single day's production was collected would we be able to study the relationships between temporal forces of multiple stories. Method shifted our focus beyond singular deadlines to scheduling.

The stories included in this case study include those published online on 14 February 2018 (n=51), as well as all those appearing in the print issue of 15 February (39). Among these, there is an important overlap (30). The data for the specific edition includes the observation of work being carried out during the entire week between 12 and 18 February. All key editorial meetings were observed, recorded, transcribed and coded. Beyond meetings, we sought to 'follow the footsteps' of articles as they came into being. For practical reasons, we selected three stories for further investigation that best reflected the temporal variation of a day's work according to previously identified variables: their belonging to the commonly used *typifications* (*breaking, cold and hot news*), their production by different section-desks, and their online publication times. Shadowing these three stories amounted to choosing the best possible vantage point (Czarniawska-Joerges 2007, 91; Meunier and Vasquez 2008). Much data was collected subsequently, for example from change logs within the publishing system, which kept track of the parallel changes made to the web and print versions. Subsequent data collection involved working according to the empirical principle "follow the actors [...] and the traces left behind by their activity" (Latour 2005, 29).

Wherever temporality was visible or discussed, we searched upstream. From this original data, as well as graphics of publication times (*figures 3-5*), we assembled temporal accounts for our chosen day's newswork, complemented with semi-structured interviews. For the three chosen stories, interviews were conducted with eleven newsworkers involved in their production

editing and publication.<sup>17</sup> This final stage of our newsmaking reconstruction method sought to confirm previously identified factors and logics through triangulation (Cottle 2007), as well as identify new ones not visible in available data. Interviews used previously collected material for elicitation<sup>18</sup>, helping newswriters provide accounts of general practices and specifically applied logics.

During interviews, newswriters described their workday, as well as the specific actions and choices that were made during their work on the abovementioned stories. Reich and Barnoy (2020, 974) note that specific story reconstructions provide “the contextual richness of particular stories presented to them, anchored in particular real-life circumstances, constraints, decisions, actions and thoughts”. Accounts shifted between generic routines, and specific actions pertaining to the day of 14 February and—at times—others. The two editors-in-chief were asked to comment and explain if and how the edition reflected editorial strategy or revealed unresolved production problems. Data was then reassembled on two levels. First, all information pertaining to each given story was combined to create accounts of how it came into being. Second, factors and logics were sorted by type and analyzed.

The question of temporality guided our newsmaking reconstruction throughout, which we will explore in the results sections according to the following reframed research questions:

- “What is the hierarchy of forces imposing themselves on these schedules (environmentally determined parts of scheduling)?”
- “When scheduling options remain once these forces have been accounted for, what scheduling logics are applied (negotiated and self-determined parts)?”

Answers will come in two parts. First, we will provide an account of a day’s work at *Le Temps* and the temporal patterns it creates. Although some elements of explanation will become explicit, this descriptive account provides *that which must be explained*. Second, we identify those forces that structure the temporalities of news stories and seek to identify order and hierarchy. This second level of analysis provides the bulk of *the explanation* and, accordingly, of the answers to the above questions.

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<sup>17</sup> Two reporters and one of the section-desk chiefs, the web production manager and one of his web-desk editors, the print-production manager and one of his print production editors, the on-duty managing editor, a second managing editor and the two editors in chief.

<sup>18</sup> This included copies of the articles in question, hourly screen captures of the homepage, successive versions of the *editorial planning document*, tables indicating online stories’ publishing times, the day’s flatplan as well as other digital and physical documents provided during or immediately after observation.

## **Results I: Print hegemony and evening bottlenecks (An ethnographic thick description of a day's work at *Le Temps*)**

The French-language Swiss daily newspaper *Le Temps* was born in 1998 from the merger between two historic daily newspapers. At the time of our fieldwork, it was owned by Ringier<sup>19</sup>, one of the country's two major publishers and had a circulation of 33,000 from a linguistic catchment area of two million. It defined itself as business friendly, economically liberal, and culturally and socially progressive. Typical readership was college educated and spanned the full political spectrum. Occasionally sensitive to breaking news, it privileged in-depth coverage, analysis and debate.

Although generalizing from ethnographic case studies is necessarily problematic, there are strong arguments in favor of looking into temporalities at *Le Temps*. At the time of our fieldwork in 2018, it was the only legacy newspaper to have switched to a fully integrated *web-to-print* system within the Swiss media landscape. As such, it offered an opportunity to observe a publishing system similar to those being adopted elsewhere in Switzerland and beyond, but that had become routine in this newsroom.<sup>20</sup>

### **The production system and its workflows**

In the autumn of 2015, *Le Temps* switched to a *digital first* production and publishing strategy underpinned by a new responsive mobile-friendly website. Journalists began writing their stories directly into the content management system (CMS), from which those destined for the newspaper were exported to print publishing tools, adjusted and placed into their respective pages. Access to the website was managed via a cookie-based metered paywall, allowing non-subscribers to read seven free articles per month, beyond which a subscription was required. Editorial management told staff stories should be made available in digital form prior to their availability in print. This was no longer be considered detrimental to (print) subscribers, since content was paywall protected and all subscriptions now included online access. Digital could and would come first.

Our observation began in late 2017, a little less than two years after the switch to *digital first*. The web-desk consisted of three full-time editors from a total editorial staff of about 70. Web-editors worked overlapping shifts from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00

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<sup>19</sup> In November 2020 *Le Temps* was acquired by *Aventinus*, a Geneva based non-profit foundation.

<sup>20</sup> Willemin (2018, 128–29) cites *Le Temps* as an “emblematic” example of a *digital first* model. The following French-language Swiss daily newspapers have since made the leap from print-to-web to web-first workflow or are currently engaged in the process of doing so (publishers in parenthesis): *Le Nouvelliste* (ESH), *La Côte* (ESH), *Arcinfo* (ESH), *24heures* (Tamedia), *Tribune de Genève* (Tamedia).

p.m. respectively. One was responsible for editing stories to web standards and placing them online, and a second for managing and updating the website's homepage and looking for relevant newswire stories. On the rare occasions all three were available, the third concentrated on producing web-only stories.

Stories produced by *Le Temps* for dual print-web publication followed production stages

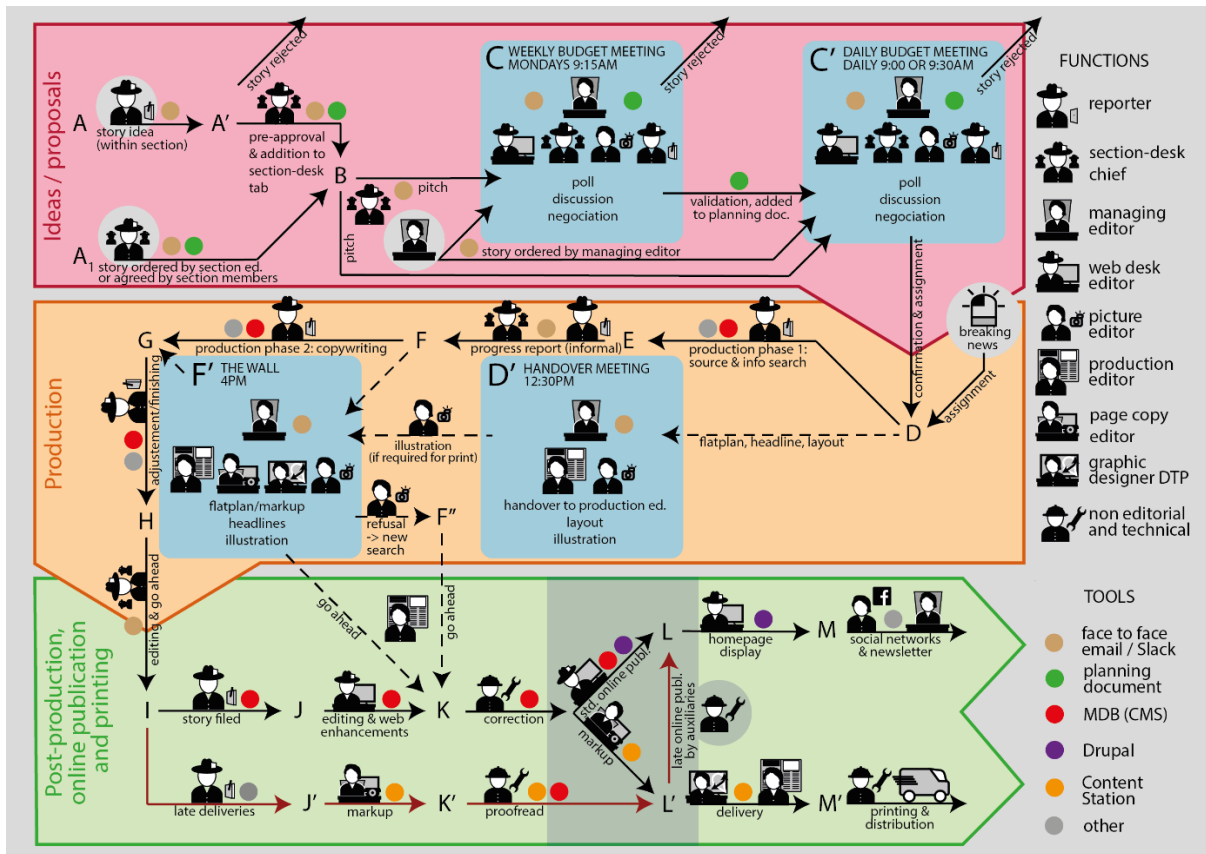


Figure 1: standard article publication process

common to most news outlets: the idea; the required proposal, argumentation (pitch) and validation in collective spaces (budget meetings); the search for facts, information and comment (gathering); the creative process (writing); editing, proofreading; final validation; publication. The workflow of the production diagram of figure 1 reproduces, from research notes, the trajectories followed by stories.

### Budget meetings and scheduling

On 14 February at 9:00 a.m. the daily budget meeting began. Chaired by the managing editor, it unfolded similarly to most other days. The web production manager gave an update on the website (relevant breaking news and stories over- or underperforming). Section-desk chiefs then presented proposals of those stories set to appear in their respective pages of the following day's print issue, and those to be published online until the following day. With a very high level

of overlap, most would belong to both (24 of the 37 discussed). Section-desk chiefs usually present a list of stories by means of what we shall call reverse engineering.<sup>21</sup> According to the space available within the pages allotted to them by the flatplan, which undergoes minor daily adjustments (fig. 2), they evaluate the preferred number of stories, and define approximate target-lengths. This evaluation involves finding a suitable match between the available templates and their reporters' story proposals, previously fished for informally or in separate section-desk meetings.

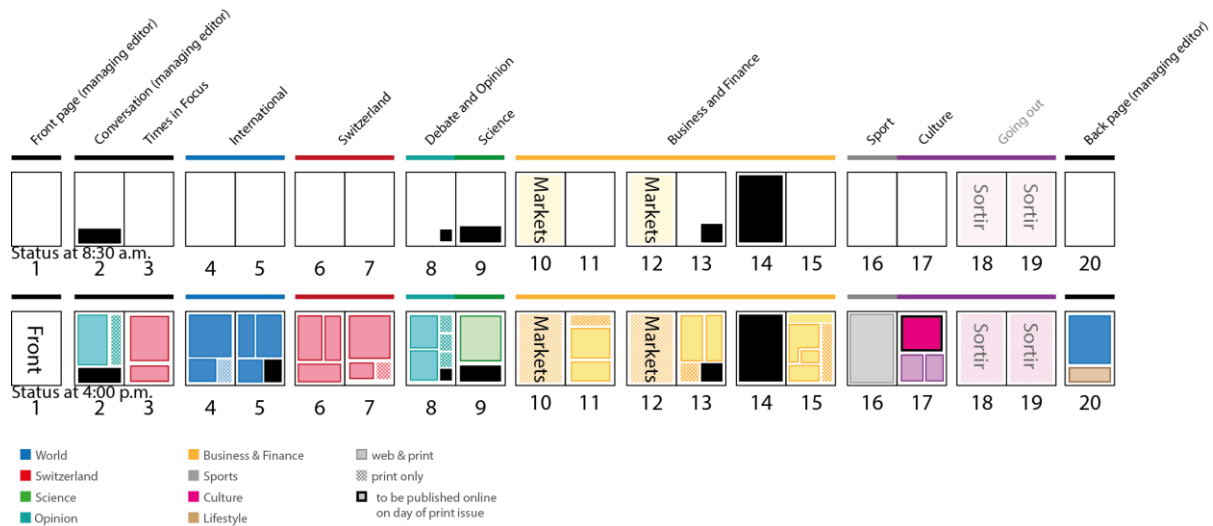


Figure 2: Flatplan, print issue 15 February 2018

The print production manager is mainly concerned with spatial variables (length and number of items) and the web production manager with publication times. During meetings, the latter frequently urges for delivery times to be brought forward. “Could we have this one earlyish?” they asked the culture section-desk chief during the 14 February meeting regarding a story about a world-famous violinist [fig. 3-4, story 26]. Pre-empting a similar request, the business and finance section-desk chief says of a Q&A interview with the CEO of a major Swiss company [story 30]: “Their PR team are always a bit complicated when it comes to approving quotations. I say this for [web production manager] who’s about to ask me when the interview will be ready.” A member of the web-desk inscribes confirmed stories into the ‘daily planning’ tab of the *editorial planning document*<sup>22</sup>, a multi-tab spreadsheet accessible to the entire newsroom. This ‘daily planning’ table is not comprehensive. Stories breaking later in the day are rarely

<sup>21</sup> In order to distinguish normal newsroom routines (observed between September 2017 and March 2018) and specific occurrences on 14 February 2018, we use the present tense for the former, and the past for the latter.

<sup>22</sup> The main reference and most used document within the newsroom; the first tab, the ‘daily planning’ contains only those stories set to be produced on any given day.

added, while those scrapped and replaced by others are often also unaccounted for. Although approximate times are indicated for some stories, no strict sequencing is inscribed here.

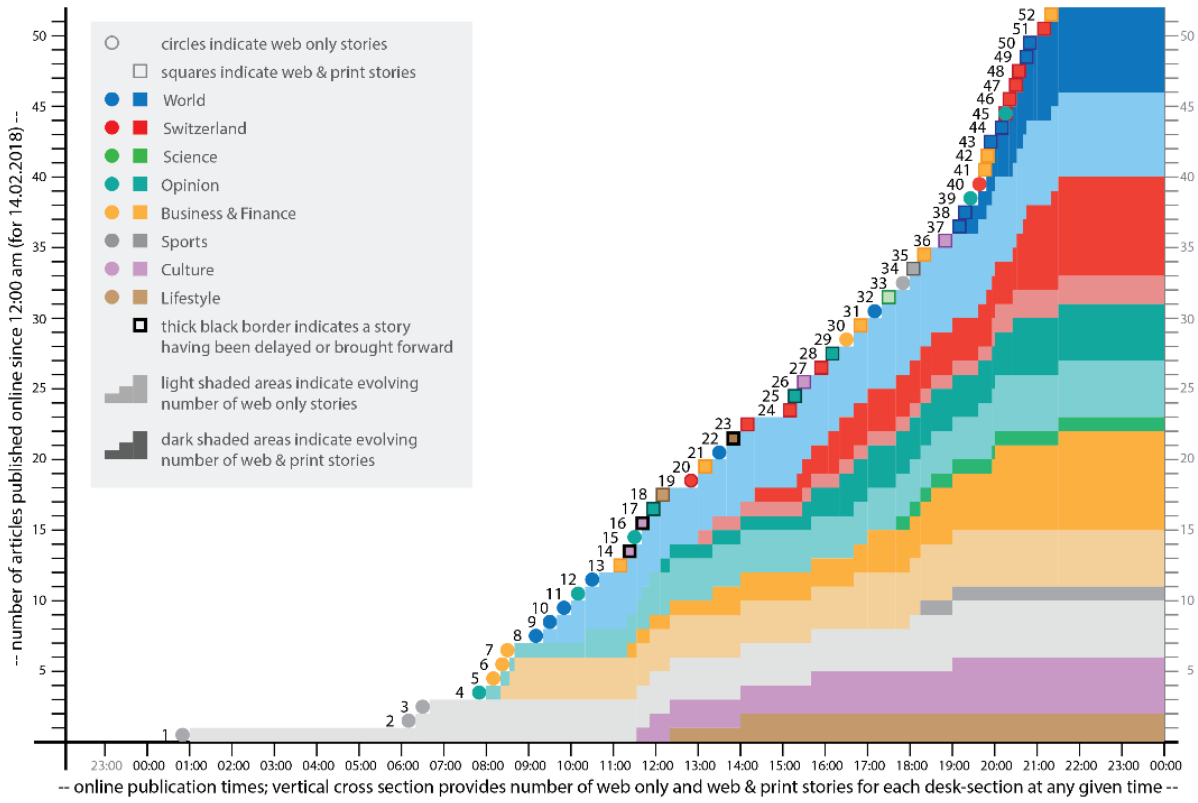


Figure 3: online publication chronology, with respective section weights, 14 February 2018

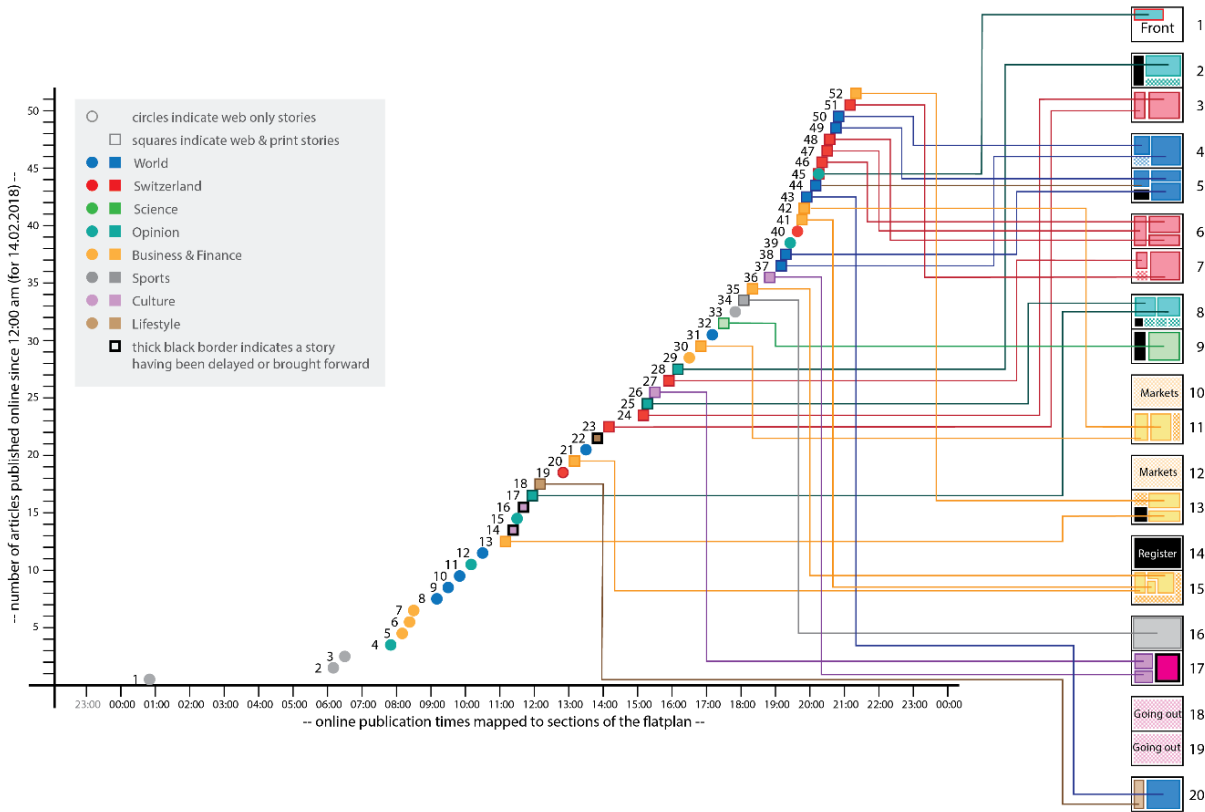


Figure 4: online publication chronology, mapped to the flatplan, 14 February 2018

There is also a weekly budget meeting held on Monday mornings, during which section-desk chiefs announce important events, significant planned stories, while the managing editor discusses the upcoming week's *Times in Focus*<sup>23</sup> stories. These are usually noted in one of the other tabs of the planning document before being added to the 'daily planning' tab on its intended day of publication, often being scheduled at a time when feature stories achieve high audiences, and/or at times of low publication frequencies. One such story concerned the Jamaican Olympic bobsleigh team [34]. Having gathered his material from a press conference and written a first draft some days earlier, the reporter had inscribed his 10,000-character feature piece into the 'sports' tab for publication on the day of the beginning of the Olympic bobsleigh event (15 February). During the 14 February daily budget meeting, the section-desk chief and web production manager agreed on a lunchtime publication time. However, with multiple references to the movie *Cool Runnings*, the video editor suggested making a video combining cuts from the 1993 blockbuster and press conference and training footage. They informed their colleagues that the video would not be ready before mid-afternoon. Those attending the budget meeting agreed that the benefits of offering an interactive online experience outweighed those of achieving the perfect publishing time. The web production manager inscribed a 6:30 p.m. publishing time in the 'daily planning tab'.

The respective editorial planning documents and budget meetings help order stories according to their temporal specificities. Although timing may be discussed, the mere inclusion in a tab, or mention during a meeting already contributes to categorizing, while newsroom language includes labels that are implicitly associated with these documents. The stories inscribed in the long-term planning tabs of the *editorial planning document* are usually discussed in the weekly budget meeting and are referred to as *magazine stories* or *cold news*. Unless told otherwise, newsroom workers will assume the story need not be published within the next couple of days (but likely before the next weekly budget meeting). Stories discussed only during a daily budget meeting will have an ephemeral presence in the 'daily planning' tab. Tacitly, everyone will understand that the story should be published in the upcoming print issue, while its online publication time is up for negotiation with the web production manager. Labels such as *hot* and *hard* news refer to such stories. Stories which break and are published within a single working day fall between budget meetings and are unlikely to be written into the planning document. Referred to as *breaking news*, these typically disrupt the workflow, interrupting work on less urgent stories.

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<sup>23</sup> A single or double page in each issue dedicated to a specific story or topic, usually planned a little over a week in advance.

### Going online

Online publication frequency is uneven over the course of the day. The irregular output, whether in terms of frequency or content-type, was both accounted for by the scheduling strategy and, according to newsroom staff, unsatisfactorily addressed by it. Charting the online publication times for 14 February according to the newspaper's sections over the course of the day reveals periods with distinct patterns.

The morning was synonymous with scarcity, especially in terms of original content. *Figures 3-4* show that web-only sports [stories 1-3], business [5-7] and international [8-10, 12] stories dominated early on. These were mostly short breaking newswire reports placed online by web editors (for story lengths, see *figure 5*), not printed in the following day's paper. Newswire stories reporting overnight events in different time zones provided an overview of the latest international news and are typical of early to mid-mornings. Other contingent factors further explain some of the day's oddities. The ongoing Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang and the announcements of several firms' annual results explain the prevalence of morning sports and business stories. Notwithstanding newswire content, the earliest published story written in-house is generally the press review. A web-only story, on 14 February it provided a colorful Valentine's Day press review [11].

The lunchtime period saw the publication of softer *feature* stories, actively promoted on the homepage. Two articles previewing the day's cinema releases [14, 16] were placed online between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. as scheduled. These were joined by the daily recommendation (a review of a shop, a café or a restaurant) [18] as well as two opinion pieces [15, 17]. The early afternoon saw the usual slowdown in publication frequency, as the web-editors successively took lunch breaks. Heavy web-editing on the *Times in Focus* stories also slowed output [23, 24].

Mid-afternoon, much of the day's harder news began to arrive at a pace the web editors could still cope with. Initially alternating topics, it came to be dominated by the day's Swiss stories, followed by the international stories. Publication frequency increased markedly between mid-afternoon and the 9:00 p.m. print deadline. Throughout the day, members of the newsroom keep an eye on *hot* and *breaking news* in their newswire feeds. Mostly published online only (e.g. story 31), these occasionally dislodge or reconfigure stories in the print edition. A sudden breakthrough in a long-running child-abduction investigation illustrates how breaking news challenges workflows. The body of 'Maëlys', a child having disappeared seven months earlier, was found off a remote road in a French national park. Alerted by a web-editor who had spotted a newswire report, the managing editor decided to wait for further facts and comment. They

ordered a web-print story from a correspondent, with a view of including details from a 6:00 p.m. press conference. It would arrive just in time for print deadline [44].

As the afternoon progressed, the stories going online began to change. Shorter, lesser stories became rarer (fig. 5), as did colder feature stories. The Jamaican bobsleigh story [34] was placed online as scheduled, marking the inflection point for harder news and increased publication frequency. As per usual, headlines became closer or identical to the ones that will appear in the following day's print issue. Hyperlinks, additional pictures and embedded web-content were reduced to a minimum. Two factors explain this shift, which occurs daily. Firstly, as print deadline approaches, the frequency of incoming stories accelerates. Page copy editors place these into the layout. They enquire about undelivered stories, adjusting pages to expected lengths. They begin firing off reminders for those overdue. Web-editors have less editing time per story, and invariably a backlog of filed stories emerges. Second, just after 6:00 p.m. the last web-editor left the office. As usual, an auxiliary—a student without journalistic training—took over publica-

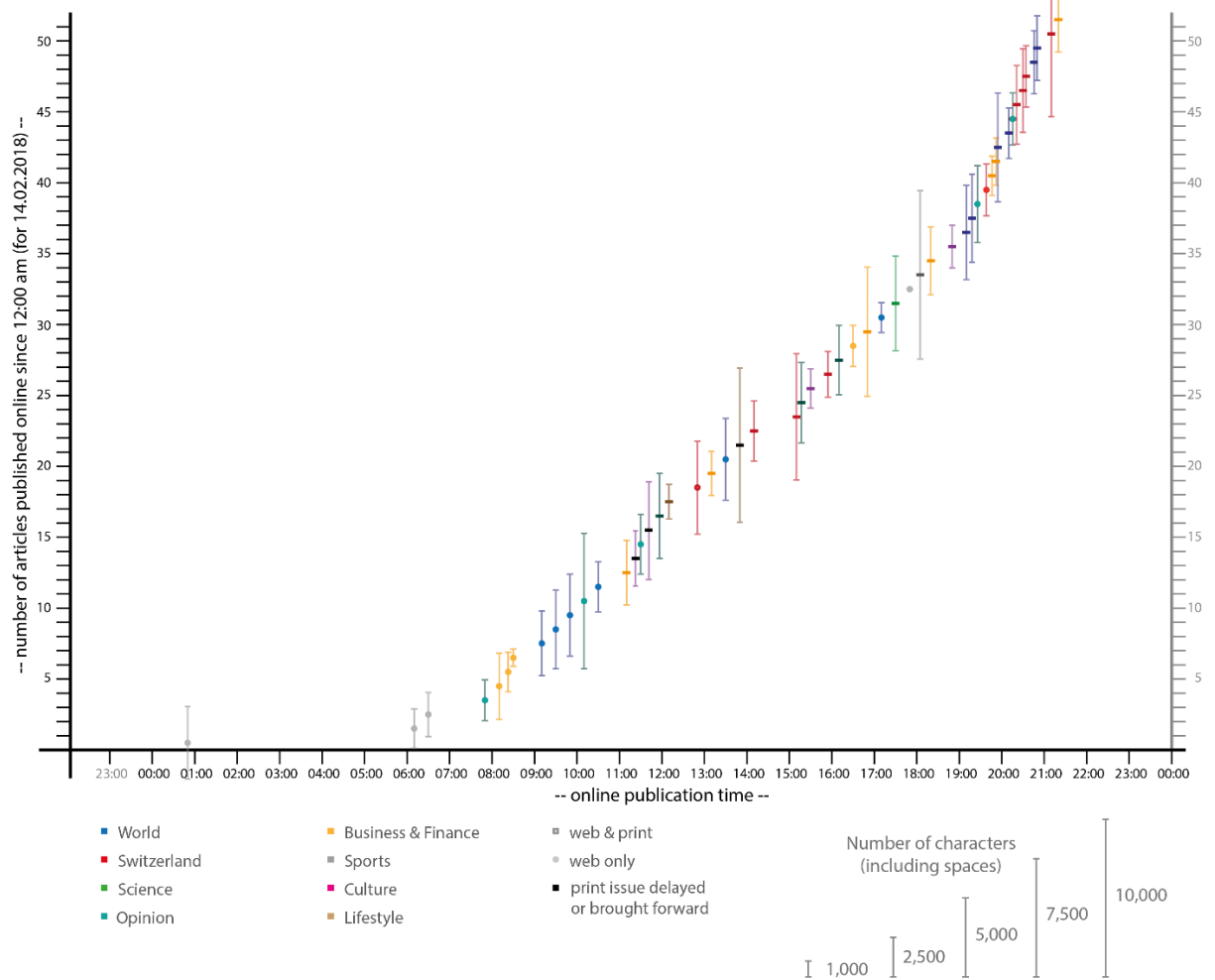


Figure 5: online publication chronology with article lengths, 14 February 2018

tion duties, placing all remaining stories online, except for those marked for delayed publication.

Instead of the standard workflow of articles being formatted to web standards, then adjusted to print requirements by stripping them of web-only features, the workflow reverses (see arrows J', K' & L' in *fig. 1*). Stories arriving very close to print deadline are immediately placed into awaiting pages via the desktop publishing tool. Proofreading occurs inside within the page instead of the CMS. The auxiliary identifies unpublished stories in makeup and duplicates them for the web. We are now, in effect, operating according to a print-to-web workflow. *Figure 4*, which maps article publication times with their location in the newspaper flatplan, is highly revealing of the many stories placed online by the auxiliary in the hours leading up to- and just after print deadline. Upon her leaving the office, all in-house stories from the following day's issue were online, except for one culture story on page 17 (see *fig.4*). All newswire reports of less than 1,500 characters are print only (see checkered areas, *fig. 2*). The following morning, as per usual, the web-desk editor spent some downtime making minor changes to the stories placed online by the auxiliary: adjustments to headlines and added context for three leads. One subheading was added, another was modified. Additional paragraph breaks distill the text for improved mobile readability.

Late in the day we find ourselves at the heart of the tension between digital scheduling strategies and production realities of print factors and web logics. Although we may seem to have artificially grouped 'print' with 'factors' and 'web' with 'logics', this distinction reflects newsroom discourse and reveals the difference in resistance or durability of the two platforms. Similarly, online publication times are seldom referred to using the term deadline, with words such as 'planned' or 'scheduled' being more ubiquitous.

## **Results II: hierarchy of production related scheduling forces**

The above account offers a unique insight into how online publication scheduling occurs at *Le Temps* newspaper: which stories were published at what times, and their resulting temporal patterns. It identifies critical moments in the day, key temporal forces and their agents, locating these in relation to the production process. The following section further addresses the question of the hierarchy of forces imposing themselves on temporalities and, when scheduling options exist, how they are implemented. In doing so, it explores the strategic logics involved in online scheduling, and questions their operational limits.

### **Platform neutral production and publishing constraints**

We observed how a wide range of forces constrain publishing possibilities, whether in determining the date or publication time. Most aspects of the human activity reported in the news

escape the control of newswriters, who can only account for them. Reduced newsworthy activity occurs during nighttime. On the other hand, news peaks during the middle of the day, resulting in evening surges that frustrated editorial management, although they also accepted that only so much may be done about it. Commenting on publication times of 14 February, one of the editors in chief said: "There's lots of stuff late in the evening, and I get the impression we are struggling to respect the scheduled publication times." Presented with the same material, the other editor-in-chief explained:

"As usual, this is an online paper where not much happens in the morning, and then there is a lot going on at 3:00 p.m. and late in the day. We are still in a phase where we are not that good at bringing the website to life throughout the day with stories that would arrive regularly. You can see that in reality we are still very much leaning towards a print newspaper production."

Unsurprisingly, the hotter stories were the ones that really challenged scheduling objectives. For *hot* news, event and reader temporalities were mediated by newsroom production times, which not only depended on reporters themselves, but involved other newsroom workers. The backlog created by an acceleration of incoming stories as print deadline approaches could be mitigated by increased editing staff. This was pointed out by multiple persons, from web-desk editors, all the way up to editorial management. Similarly, many respondents suggested that output frequency could be more consistent with increased resources for producing in-house web-only stories. When explaining the convergence of publication times towards the late afternoon and evening, the web production manager pointed to external factors:

"You can't really take it out on the reporters for this, as the day is what it is. [...] It just occurs naturally. The day is rhythmmed the way it is, you hand in your story in the evening. And then there's the fact that news is news and things evolve and change. [...] So, it's just a fact that some things are easier than others to schedule. Obviously, science and culture, if there is no embargo, are easy. It gets tougher for Swiss and international news. Because the news is from the same day and will naturally be ready late in the day."

This also corroborates our observation that section-desks enact distinct production and publication temporalities that depend on the specific types of news being reported. Planning for culture stories occurs during a weekly team meeting, while the Swiss and international desks

seldom bothered with formal weekly meetings. Planning the former involved picking a day (print), whereas scheduling the latter involved picking a time (web).

### **Print production enacts daily online schedules**

The spatial and temporal socio-technical networks of print production framed daily output (number and types of stories), which had important time-related consequences. A web copy editor described the powerful structuring effect of the daily print news-cycle: “The thing is that we pretty much have the exact resources to produce this newspaper [\*points to newspaper in front of him\*] on any given day. So, from the morning you are already focusing on your pages”. Put differently, the requirement to fill empty pages with text determined a set of stories to be published in the following day’s print paper, and to be scheduled for online publication. Consequently, no single continuous online schedule exists. Instead, each day gives rise to a new and largely hermetic schedule, confined within the boundaries of the corresponding print issue. The daily planning tab, which begins each day as a blank slate, reflects this cyclicity. A copy editor explained:

“Of course, there are specific web contents such as long-reads that are planned ahead. But most of our stories and most of our days are defined by the contents of the following day’s print issue. [...] So, web-first is a publication order logic rather than a production logic. We are not an online newspaper. We are a print newspaper which publishes online first.”

One of the managing editors claimed that the constraints inherited from print-production were probably a good thing. As hotter content tended to accumulate in the evening anyway, the threat of empty space in print enforced deadlines that would probably not be respected in the absence of a paper edition. Beyond enforcing deadlines, the print paper served as a minimum list of stories guaranteed to go online.

### **Coordinating publication temporalities, and evasive tactics**

Temporal properties of stories also translated into specific newsroom language, which immediately provided newsroom workers with shared understandings of production requirements, including temporal ones. This language allows for coordination and scheduling once production has been subjected to the most rigid temporal forces, outlined above.

*Breaking, hot and cold* and *magazine* meet the definitions of *typifications* as defined by Tuchman: they describe not the topic of a story, but rather temporalities in concrete production terms. Although they share certain similarities with the ones proposed by Tuchman (1973), they reflect the affordances of hybrid print-digital news production and consumption. Interestingly,

discussing the contemporary relevance of her *typifications* four decades later, she admitted that her original research had overlooked the ever-evolving nature production systems (Tuchman 2016). Changing technology may create new labels, or merely modify which production realities are associated with given labels. In our observation, we found that *breaking*, *hot*, *cold* reflected their presence or absence from meetings and the temporalities built into the tabs of the planning document. Other terms were loaded with temporal meanings and translated into production/publication realities. *Hard* news and *magazine* stories respectively aligned with *hot* and *cold* news.

The inscription of a story into the different tabs of the editorial planning document was performative: it enacted schedules, with implications for newswriters. Discussing a story in the daily or weekly budget meetings was similarly performative: stories that went unmentioned in budget meetings and were absent from the planning document became less likely to achieve the ideal publication times and/or scheduling objectives set out for them. On several occasions we observed reporters or section-desk chiefs keeping a given story ‘off the radar’. One editor in chief suspected, as we had, that newswriters developed tactics for maintaining independence from the web production manager’s schedule to regain control over a story’s publication time, or to pre-empt an undesired early delivery time.

### **From ideal publishing times to integrated sequences**

Each story appeared to inherit an ‘ideal’ online publication time, determined according to specific logics. The reporter, and/or their section-desk chief would often lobby to enact these. On the other hand, we identified strategic logics applied by the web production manager for the scheduling of online publication times, some of which contradicted ‘story-level’ ones. Although the reporter and the web production manager both advocated for audience-based online publication times, the latter weighed this against what we could call macro-logics, which aim for a smooth tempo and sequences that display contrast: stories should be published regularly and vary in terms of topics and formats (*hard* and *soft*; short and long; fact, analysis, opinion; bulletin, interview, reportage). With *hotter* Swiss and international stories often arriving late in the day, compromises become inevitable: either sacrifice contrast, or delay time-sensitive stories, thereby surrendering some degree of newness. Also, the web production manager made informed decisions according to data, which sometimes contradicted the conventional audience logics advocated by reporters and section-desk chiefs. Referring to an interview with a local government minister following a major announcement about a new strategy for tourism [51], they said:

“You see this big interview of the politician here? I think unlike six months ago, today our reflex would typically be to withhold it and put it online at a time more suited for this type of content, let’s say at 8:00 a.m. the following morning.”

Ultimately, the web production manager acted as the timekeeper, but one with restricted options. When building their schedule, they were dependent on many external forces. Their control over the sequencing was elusive, especially late in the day when the frequency of incoming hotter stories exceeded maximum output speed. Conversely, mornings involved searching for web-only stories among newswire services to maintain a minimum output as well as relying on stories that were not time-sensitive. In keeping with Tuchman’s *typifications*, predictability and urgency of dissemination were factored into online scheduling. Prescheduled but nevertheless urgent stories formed pillars that could not be displaced. Unscheduled breaking news disrupted planned publications. *Cold news* and feature stories could be used freely to fill any (expected) gaps in the schedule. Nevertheless, among available options, audience preferences, informed by analytics, guided scheduling. Also, the web production manager had the authority to redefine a story’s urgency. This was often met unfavorably. On this point, our fieldwork suggested that for all stories that are not obviously feature stories, reporters tended to measure the importance and success of their story by how rapidly the web-team processes it and places it online. In interviews, editorial management spoke of what they considered to be reporter’s misguided obsession with their stories going online as fast as possible.

## Conclusion

The study of online scheduling at *Le Temps* unsurprisingly revealed a high degree of dependence on one external force in particular: the more or less predictable and (ir)regular occurrences of newsworthy events. These *platform independent constraints* originate outside the newsroom and obey multiple different temporalities, while translating into distinct production factors. Given the overlap of print and online stories, the print edition’s news cycle acts as a primary structuring force for online publishing. To a degree, this is consistent with findings by Menke et al. (2018) and Schlesinger and Doyle (2015). However, we believe that attribution of causality to a ‘print culture’ may result in calls for a ‘web mindset’, neglecting the important fact that newsroom culture is embedded within the underlying production system. We found that *print production enacts daily schedules*. Beyond making schedules cyclical rather than linear, it also determines the number of print-web items to be scheduled. The switch from a bulk *shovelware* system for placing print content online to a *digital first* production system has not avoided an

evening convergence of stories. Consistent with Wheatley and O'Sullivan (2017), a large proportion of in-house stories went online late in the day. However, we do not believe print deadline to be solely responsible for this. Print logics, we believe, can only explain so much.

What if the idea of the print deadline causing a convergence of stories towards the end of the day was wrong? What if this convergence explained the evening deadline as much as it could be explained by it? At the very least, these questions merit further investigation.

In any case, the lack of print-web stories being published in the morning is highly revealing. Different stories constrain online publication possibilities to varying degrees. This is reflected in the distinct tools, meetings and language involved in *coordinating work according to publication temporalities*. Only once this full range of environmentally determined parts has been accounted for, may online scheduling be determined or negotiated. This involves weighing *ideal publishing times* against the logics the web production manager's logics for building *integrated sequences*. Put differently, stories interfere with their respective publishing times. Journalists occasionally respond to scheduling that goes against their desired publishing times with evasive tactics. Although digital distribution facilitates rapid dissemination, gaining control over scheduling requires articles instilled with temporal flexibility. This may be found in stories that are exclusive and 'outgoing' rather than 'incoming' (Grevisse 2014); proactive rather than reactive. It is worth reaffirming that *immediacy* need not rule supreme when it comes to online news.

Beyond this case study, our research suggests that gaining a strong degree of control over scheduling times may be illusory, or simply just not worth it. Perceived failures to implement ambitious *digital first* strategies that misevaluate the full implications of the underlying production system may also create tension among newsroom workers, and with editorial management. It is revealing that since the fieldwork took place, *Le Temps* has begun to delay more (hotter) news until the following morning to reduce bottlenecks and avoid an overload of content coming online in the evening. Such adjustments reflect a certain *temporal reflexivity*, which Orlikowski and Yates (2002) define as "being aware of the human potential for reinforcing and altering temporal structures." Promoting temporal awareness within newsrooms may better equip them in view of aligning the scheduling of publication times with audience expectations and strategic considerations.

The limits of this research should be clear. Such a case study is by no means representative of the newspaper industry as a whole. It does however provide a rare account of a *digital first* publishing system, while shedding light on some of the tensions occurring between print and web. Using similar data collection methods, future research conducted on newspapers more concerned with breaking news may help achieve some degree of generalization. Questioning

the effects of the dissolution of a single hard deadline on journalists' work and on temporalities at the narrative/textual level would also constitute a promising line of inquiry.

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### Article 3

## *You said digital first!? A five-dimensional definition according to workers from three Swiss newspapers*

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Status: submitted to *Journalism Practice*

#### Abstract

When asked to explain how their print and web editions were articulated, 15 of 17 news professionals we interviewed from three different types of Swiss daily newspapers used the term *digital first*. Yet there lacks a stable definition, something we demonstrate in our in-depth review of *digital first* in the literature. Beyond helping to stabilize a definition, deconstructing the term reveals much about perceptions and realities of newsmaking. This research is based on data from 17 semi-structured interviews with news professionals from newspapers having switched their production to better account for their digital activities. The full range of properties attributed to *digital first* reflected five dimensions: temporality, content format, workflow, production mindset and business strategy. This article theorizes a *digital first* matrix, contributing to definitional clarity, while revealing how the different dimensions of *digital first* are interconnected. In practice, production and editing resources seem to determine a newspaper's success in fully implementing more ambitious visions of *digital first*: those to produce editorial content beyond those required to fill the printed pages, and those to adjust stories from their initial digital state, to their printed one. We call this print *capacity surplus*.

Keywords: digital first, web-first, newspaper, production, workflow, strategy

## Introduction

**Interviewer:** You used the term digital first when I asked you to describe how the web and print editions of your newspaper related to one another. How would you define it?

**Newsworker:** Well to me it means um, it means journalists who, who – who – who... [pauses] What does digital first mean?

Anyone having spent any amount of time recently in the newsroom of a (Swiss) newspaper will almost certainly have come across the term. Like elsewhere, over the past decade, many (Swiss) newsrooms have made changes to their newspaper's strategies and/or production processes described as *digital first*.<sup>24</sup> Yet the exact meaning of this term is difficult to pin down, including in the literature.

Someone unfamiliar with *digital first* might guess (not incorrectly) that it implies that a story appears online before it becomes available in print form. But look closer, and there is more to it. In these newsrooms, a significant number of stories are in fact withheld online and appear in print form first. Temporality does not tell the whole story...

Could it be that focusing a little more closely on this terminology might reveal something akin to a (new) newsmaking paradigm? On the other hand, maybe these terms are used and understood differently across newsrooms, or from one newsworker to the next. Or maybe it is little more than a buzzword glossing over the exacerbation of previously identified phenomena such as increased time pressure within newsrooms, already stretched thin after almost two decades of financial woes and redundancies.

Put differently, the following questions guided our research:

- What is the full range of definitions of digital first in terms of practices, discourses and perceptions? (RQ1)
- Is it possible to identify, within these definitions, common shared properties? (RQ2)
- Taken together, do these shared properties constitute a newsmaking paradigm? (RQ3)

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<sup>24</sup> In our study the term *web-first* was systematically used in French by respondents of our study. A loanword from English, *web-first* seems to be used less and less frequently in English speaking newsrooms as well as in the literature, with the synonym *digital first* more commonly used today. We suspect this may be because “web” no longer fully describes the range of digital platforms used by newspapers, and their related activities. However, the term seems to have stuck in French (and certainly in the speech community formed by the French language newsrooms (of Switzerland). Unless specified otherwise, when *web-first* was used in French, we have translated it to *digital first*. This is both because we have evidence pointing to their equivalence as respectively used in each language, and in order to facilitate reading. When used as such in the English literature, we leave it unchanged.

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To answer these questions, we sought diversity among types of newspapers and newsroom functions by interviewing 17 newswriters, occupying different roles from three Swiss dailies currently operating according to a production they define as *digital first*: a small local newspaper (hereafter referred to as *Local*); a legacy/quality national (*Legacy*); and a free advertising-based national tabloid (*Free*).

In the following literature review, we survey uses of *digital first* and conclude that it lacks a stable definition, while there has been little research dedicated to dual-media production systems. Following a brief note on method, we will describe the production systems of the above-mentioned newspapers and reveal definitions of *digital first* as provided by our interviewees. In the discussion section we develop a *digital first* matrix for categorizing various newspaper production systems and introduce the concept of *print capacity surplus*.

### **Literature review: between temporality, strategy and workflow**

There have been traces of *web-first* and *digital first* in research and non-academic texts for almost two decades. Early mentions were used to describe print newspapers having developed any kind of specific publication strategy for the web, as well as those working towards a gradual scaling down of their print activities. Among research mentioned by Usher (2016b, 1899) under the banner *web-first* are two studies of newspapers having abandoned print production entirely. More recently, Cohen (2019, 572) has equated *digital first* to “born-digital companies” such as “*The Huffington Post*, *BuzzFeed*, and *VICE*”.

These cases aside, most occurrences we found in the literature refer to some characteristic of newspapers that publish news both on paper and digitally, with the inclusion of the word “first” implying that something must come second.

Hyland (2014, 65) quotes Buttry (2011), who insists that: “[D]igital first still involves the printing of newspapers. What is different, however, is where the resources, drive and priorities are focused – online” (our emphasis). In our opinion, Buttry’s description, formulated almost a decade ago in a blog post largely dedicated to *digital first*, has stood the test of time.

In the scientific literature however, definitional fuzziness abounds. Dwyer (2015b, 31), tellingly describes it as “more as a rhetorical departure point in the debates around the transition to digital platforms, than as a consensually embraced strategy”. Hendrickx (2020, 600) refers to a meaning stemming from “convention but not strict definition”, while Hendrickx and Picone’s (2020b) 18-month study of a Flemish newsroom refers to *digital first* as a “buzzword”.

Within the literature explicitly mentioning *digital first* there are nevertheless recurring definitional elements, which consistently relate to one or several of the following: temporality,

workflow and strategy. These dimensions interlink, while they also seem to have evolved and reconfigured over time.

### Temporality

Temporality was a central feature of digital news early on and has remained so. The first era of online news saw much of newspapers' print content simply republished online thanks to automated tools referred to as *shovelware* (Deuze 1999b). But it was from the opportunity to use the web to offer breaking news, at some point around the turn of the millennium, that print and online news began to be differentiated (Boczkowski 2004). Dedicated web-desks, largely separate from print newswriters, began offering breaking news – often generic newswire reports – with an emphasis on immediacy (M. Karlsson 2011; Usher 2016b). Latest news could thus be read on the web, first, and free of charge.

English (2012, 133) provides a simple definition of *web-first*, which involves “publishing content online before it is printed in the newspaper”. Schlesinger and Doyle's (2015) claim that *digital first* dismantles the classic print deadline. Pilmis (2017b) describes one newspaper's switch to *digital first* in terms of the reorganization of the newsroom according to the creation of three distinct desks, with distinct temporalities assigned to each.

### Workflow

When defining *digital first*, workflow is often cited, seldom described. More often it sits discreetly (and implicitly) between temporality and strategy. Under closely related terms *online first* and *digital to print* García-Avilés et al. link temporality to strategy via the question of workflow. They describe newswork at *Die Welt*, which consists of stories being written according to digital publication standards, before being repurposed for print:

“In December 2013, around 120 journalists moved into a large central newsroom geared to digital production. The motto 'online first' gave way to the 'digital to print' strategy: The journalists work for digital publishing first, and then produce daily papers out of what they had initially produced for digital channels.” (García-Avilés et al. 2017b, 454)

English (2015, 84) links the implementation of *digital-first* to *convergence*: the large body of literature being concerned with newsroom organization and workflow (e.g. Menke et al. 2018). However, convergent workflows have rarely been explicitly described as *digital first*.

Workflow – as related to *digital first* – is mentioned more frequently in industry reports and the grey literature than in academic research. This might be because of limited dedicated ethnographic research. As such, there seems to be a missing link. According to Dwyer (2015b, 37),

workflow is a means by which to implement a *digital first* strategy: “A ‘digital first’ policy involves particular workflow choices, but ultimately competitive survival is the main game: their fully digital business model traffic-based advertisers underpin the revenue stream.”

### Strategy

The strategic component of *digital first* has gained in importance over time. Hyland (2014, 66) describes a web-editor of *irishtimes.com*, who believes that *digital first* is more than just a question of temporality:

“– It’s also about that in every meeting that we have, in every daily conference that we have and in every discussion we have about commissioning an article or piece of content, that the first item on the agenda is the digital output, and the reason for that is because our business model is changing, journalism is changing, and increasingly we need to recognize that digital is the most important channel-”

The same year, the now famous *New York Times Innovation Report* (2014) used *digital first* no less than 35 times in 97 pages, placing strategy at its core: “Around the [New York Times] newsroom, this phrase often is used to refer to publishing articles on the web before putting them in print. But outside our walls, digital-first is an all-encompassing strategy” (82). Thurman et al. describe *digital first* as lessening “reliance on print”, by making “digital reporting [...] the top priority” (2019, 173). Chyi and Tenenboim (2019, 157) describe it as “a mantra, a goal, and a path leading to the future”.

The broader configurations within the news industry in the mid-2010s doubtless contributed to a shift towards definitions of *digital first* more centered on strategy and business models. To put things (over)simply: newspapers shifted from recruiting print subscribers online to, to making digital a key source of revenue. Robotham (2021) has tied this to the spread of mobile devices and the adoption of paywalls, resulting in a reconfiguration of temporalities and related *digital first* workflows. Indeed, paywalls freed newspapers from the difficult question of whether or not to hold back the best, most exclusive and original stories for loyal print subscribers: something English (2011b) refers to as the “print-web dilemma”. Hendrickx (2020, 601) describes an “economic component [of *digital first*] in line with the operations of economies of scale and aligning with the newspapers’ swift adoption of a multiplatform approach”.

Reviewing the available literature, Hendrickx and Picone (2020b, 2027) describe a *digital first* strategy “that can be summarized as ‘Newsroom 3.0’”, which prioritizes online content and

uses “editorial analytics and algorithmic systems to optimize stories and capture reader attention”. Neto et al. (2019, 2408) list *online first* as one of several defining features of their *Newsroom 3.0*, itself “a conceptual framework to handle contemporary and future needs of newsrooms”. However, this emphasis on future developments, while certainly worthy of study, seems far removed from the realities of many contemporary newsrooms and their more mundane practices.

### **Manifestations of digital first in terms of other practices**

One could expect to find descriptions of what *digital first* might look like in terms of concrete practices, but here again the literature stays mostly silent. Vermeulen (2020) has described how content is selected and produced, and articulated between three *digital first* South-African newspapers and their shared digital platform. Robotham (Robotham 2021; unpublished manuscript [1]) describes work at self-described *digital first* newspaper *Legacy* in 2018, where workflow and publishing temporalities remained strongly subjugated to the blank pages of the print newspaper, far removed from “*Newsroom 3.0*”.

## **Method**

### **Sampling**

Our research sought to study French language daily Swiss newspapers having undergone significant changes, (self)described as *digital first*, to improve their online content. Our selection of newspapers aimed for a wide range of web and print related production phenomena (in terms of temporality and editorial line) as well as business model, in view of ensuring maximum significance. We therefore included one small local/regional paper (henceforth referred to as *Local*), one so-called legacy paper with a strong emphasis on analysis (*Legacy*) and one free tabloid style paper with an emphasis on immediacy and breaking news (*Free*). For each newspaper we would interview newswriters occupying different roles, positing that the function occupied may also be a significant variable. Finally, for each newspaper, we interviewed two reporters (because reporters largely outnumber other functions within the newsroom), one web-editor, one print-editor and one or two members of editorial management (depending on allocation of responsibilities).

### **Semi-structured interviews**

Interviews were strongly structured while allowing for the exploration of some ideas or issues identified within respondents’ answers. In our contact with respondents prior to interviews, there was no mention of *digital first*. Instead, we explained that we were working on a research project related to digital journalism, and that we were interested in how they perceived it.

Interviews consisted of three parts and lasted on average one hour. In the first, we asked respondents to describe how print and web related to one another and to describe the production process and trajectory of a typical article, explain the main differences between print and digital versions of a “same” article, as well as describe the underlying strategies for the two platforms. Here we wanted to know how things were usually done and whether they would use terms such as *digital first*, prior to using them ourselves. In the second, we asked them to provide their own definitions of the terms they had used in the first section, including *digital first*. For this term, having previously identified “temporality”, “workflow” and “strategy” in the literature, we then asked respondents if they believed that anything related to these dimensions – absent from their initial definitions – might also apply. In the third, we questioned respondents about how *digital first* translated into their daily individual practices within the newsroom. We sought to know more about technologies and tools and these related to *digital first*, and how they had (or had not) changed.

In our inductive data analysis, we sorted definitions and descriptions provided by respondents by types, which eventually converged towards the five “dimensions” we describe below. We were especially careful to clearly distinguish between answers provided with and without prompting. This is reflected in the below account.

## Results

Below, we present the three newspapers and provide an overview of their production systems and practices<sup>25</sup>, before considering our respondents’ definitions and discourses related to *digital first*. While some details might seem superfluous to some, the tension between how things work and how they are described provided important insight and was used to formulate a definition of *digital first*. They also provide descriptions of web and print newspapers generally lacking in the literature.

### Production system description

#### Local

Local is a local daily Swiss newspaper published by a larger media group owning several other local newspapers. It prints a 20-page issue<sup>26</sup> Mondays to Fridays and has a news website and mobile application. Its newsroom is responsible for all local content (around 10-12 pages), while national and international news is produced by a dedicated team shared with the publisher’s two other regional daily newspapers. Publishing system, tools and strategic business

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<sup>25</sup> Information related to the production process was collected during the interviews and confirmed through triangulation.

<sup>26</sup> Typically 20, the number of pages may be lower or higher on some days.

resources are also mutualized.

In-house production amounts to a dozen stories published every day in the print issue (excluding content shared with its sister publications), with the digital edition including a small number of web-only stories. *Local's* print edition has 6,300 subscribers, who automatically have access to the entire digital content.

*Local* switched to a new publishing system in 2018: this entailed an important reorganization of the workflow and roles. The newsroom currently consists of ten reporters, one of whom also works as a community manager and does some web editing. It also has one full-time web-editor, a print production manager, one editor-in-chief, and one deputy editor-in-chief overseeing digital operations.

Stories are planned during weekly and daily editorial meetings: a Thursday meeting dedicated to the news agenda and major stories of the week ahead, and a daily budget meeting that discusses the stories that will be published online over the following 24 hours, and those that will appear in the following day's print newspaper. For each story, a precise length is decided according to its destination page and the space required/available. In consultation with the editors-in-chief and reporters, the web production manager schedules desired publication times.

Reporters write directly into the content management system (CMS), respecting the precise lengths and deadlines set during the morning meeting. They provide an illustration for each article, and edit their story according to digital requirements, such as writing headlines according to SEO logics, providing context-rich leads, and adding hyperlinks and recommended further reading.

Once completed, the stories are edited by the web production manager for content, story angle, as well as according to the above-mentioned specific digital considerations. They also proofread for spelling, syntax and style. Once the digital version ready for publication, the web production exports the article to the print publishing tool, which removes any digital only elements (hyperlinks and embedded content).

The story is then published online according to the schedule (or immediately if urgent). This may occur the day prior to print publication (usually in the afternoon), or during the same day as the print issue (in the morning). The latter are less time sensitive stories, which are withheld to populate the website when stories are scarce.

The print newspaper is assembled by the two editors-in-chief and the print production manager. They copy-edit the story, adjust the layout and length to achieve a perfect fit, while taking visual balance into consideration (this includes removing paragraph breaks and the occasional subheadings). They rewrite the headline, usually shortened due to limited available space

and occasionally the lead. For factual errors or typos found during proofreading of the print versions, corrections will be made to the digital versions manually within the CMS.

### Legacy

*Legacy* is a supra-regional “quality paper”. It recently changed ownership and is undergoing significant changes to its production system.

*Legacy* publishes a 20-page newspaper<sup>27</sup> Mondays to Fridays, as well as a 30-page Saturday edition, which is feature-orientated with an emphasis on culture and society. *Legacy* has a news website, a mobile application, and publishes several newsletters and podcasts.

*Legacy* covers news of national importance, with a focus on the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland. Its newsroom has a total staff of 90-100 newswriters. It has five web-editors, as well as a small video production team (6 people), which also produces content for sponsored stories/paid partnerships. Its website publishes approximately 70-80 articles per day, of which just over 25 are included in the print edition (to which 10-15 print-only fillers are usually added).

Previous editorial management announced a switch to *digital first* in 2015. However, the new editorial management presented its changes to making news as *digital first*, which it described as a “Copernican revolution”. Below is a description of its current production process<sup>28</sup>.

There is a weekly meeting (held on Mondays), addressing important events and major upcoming planned stories, and a daily budget meeting. Desk-section chiefs are no longer supposed to concern themselves with filling section-pages in the print edition. Instead, they present a list of possible stories to managing editors, who – at first – validate them for online publication only. Approximate lengths are given according to the needs of the story (importance, available source material etc.), instead of the size of a placeholder in a destination print page. Longer stories are usually about 6,000 characters long, shorter ones 3,000. A delivery time is agreed with the web-production manager. In most cases publication will occur during the afternoon and into the evening; a certain number of stories are also withheld until the following morning.

The web-desk, which has almost doubled in size since *Legacy* changed ownership, also provides non-stop coverage of breaking news from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Outside these hours, publication of minimal newswire stories (4-6 per night) is carried out by auxiliaries based on the West Coast of the United States.

The stories retained for the print newspaper are decided in a midday meeting between the print production team and managing editors. They select content among published and scheduled stories, filling the flatplan. Occasionally stories from different sections/topics will be

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<sup>27</sup> Page count is reduced during the summer, while some days the number of pages is increased to accommodate large quantities of news.

<sup>28</sup> Robotham (2021; unpublished manuscript) provides in-depth descriptions of the production process of *Legacy* under previous ownership and editorial management, between 2015 and 2021.

grouped together in hybrid pages (e.g., Swiss/International or Culture/Society). Layouts are made to measure: graphic artists receive instructions and specifications in view of creating the pages. When makeup implies an important difference between the expected lengths agreed during the morning meeting and the available pace in the print edition, reporters will be informed.

Stories are written directly into the CMS, edited for online publication from the outset: SEO focused headlines, contextual leads, hyperlinks and recommended reading, additional photos and embedded content, etc. Completed stories are checked by desk-section chiefs and the web desk is notified that the story is available. Web editors line edit stories. Final proofreading may occur before or after stories go online.

In parallel as the stories destined for both print and web begin to arrive, the print production team duplicates stories in the CMS and imports them into the layout of the desktop publishing software. They rewrite headlines and adjust story lengths to fit their placeholders and strip the text of any digital-only features not automatically removed by the export tool. Stories arriving very late in the day are placed directly into the layout according to predefined lengths. Many of the less time sensitive ones will be published online the following morning.

### Free

*Free* is a free national tabloid newspaper published by a large Swiss publishing group. It prints a 16-page weekday print edition, available for free in boxes in city centers and public transport hubs of French-speaking Switzerland. It has a news website as well as a mobile application, and produces various multimedia content.

It places a strong emphasis on breaking news. It has an editorial staff of about 60, with 30 dedicated to producing news and editing it for the web, and a team of 10 dedicated to selecting and adapting the content into print. As of 2021, *Free* added a 20-person video unit, which produces content for the website, app and social networks. Some content, including all sports news, is produced by a team of 30 journalists shared with the publisher's other news outlets.

Its website publishes approximately 60 stories per day, as well 20-40 smaller news updates thanks to liveblogs (that do not result in stories which have their dedicated article pages). Of those, between 20 and 30 stories are adapted and published in print form (to which 5-10 externally produced sports stories are added). Approximately 20 short filler stories are added in print form; a live-blog provides similarly bite-sized breaking-news and updates within a single page of the website and mobile application. Of the three newspapers studied, *Free* has the longest history of placing stories online before repurposing them for print in several stages as of 2013, undergoing multiple adjustments since. Its editorial line focuses on fast, factual information,

with an emphasis on breaking news and being first. Its business model is entirely based on advertising revenue.

During the 10 a.m. daily budget meeting, planned video content is decided and (known) upcoming stories discussed. However, most of the day's stories cannot be planned, since they break after this meeting. The metrics of the previous day's stories are also presented.

Journalists publish newswire stories throughout the day. Web-editors spend much of their time working on keeping the homepage dynamic, teasing the most promising stories and readjusting headlines. They occasionally add digital elements to stories such as hyperlinks, further images or embeds. Stories produced by in-house reporters are written directly into the CMS, fully formatted for online publication. Proofreading often occurs after going online. Smaller stories are published as brief entries into one of several ongoing topical live-blogs. When developments occur over the day, stories are updated to add new relevant information.

Print production begins with a 1:30 p.m. meeting. The print team selects stories from those already published and those scheduled (but not yet finished) for inclusion in the following day's newspaper. This will usually include many of the in-house stories still relevant the following day, which often become their page's main story. It will also include newswire reports as secondary stories, or filler items. Further stories will be identified as the day goes by. Online stories range from 1,500 to a maximum of 4,500 characters long. Most pages of the layout allocate no more than 1,500 characters to the main story; sometimes they will include a sidebar. Most of the day's longer stories thus require being substantially if not entirely rewritten. This is done by the reporters themselves, who often also oversee the article's layout in the page. To save time, important stories falling later in the day tend to be written from the outset to match length requirements of the print version.

Many scheduled in-house stories, which are neither time sensitive, nor vulnerable to competition, will be withheld for publication online the following morning. This is not done to safeguard the print version, but to keep aside some good stories for a time when content is scarce.

### **Digital first in newswriters' discourse**

Prior to being prompted or the term being used in one of the interview questions, 15 of 17 newswriters interviewed used the term *web-first* (henceforth translated to *digital first*) to describe how their newspapers produced their web and print editions. Eleven used it in the first sentence of their answer to question 1, which asked them to describe how print and web related to one another. However, not all emphasized the same properties, and some found it difficult to provide a definition.

### Temporal properties

When asked to define or describe *digital first*, most interviewees mentioned the temporal dimension of *digital first* (i.e., news being placed online before its availability in print form). It was frequently the first feature to be mentioned, especially when it came to reporters. Four viewed it as constitutive. More often, it was cited alongside other dimensions.

Editorial management of *Legacy* explained that concretely, *digital first* resulted in the assumption that stories would be published in digital form first unless specified otherwise. A reporter explained: “Digital first means that a story must appear online very quickly” (F-J2)<sup>29</sup>, with speed being both intrinsic to (many) news stories, but also with the objective of beating the competition. Another said, “It’s a bit cliché, but you have content which should be available as quickly as possible to a large range of people” (Lg-J2).

A print production manager from *Free* echoed this point, explaining that his newspaper had an advantage over others when it came to publishing online before in print, because there was no risk of undermining the sale of the print issue. The validity of this point is however arguable, since almost all web and print newspapers in Switzerland (including *Legacy* and *Local*) now place their most valuable content behind paywalls. However, a reporter at *Legacy* also insisted on the importance of the paywall in having enabled newspapers to offer stories in digital prior to print.

Several newswriters referred to the web-to-print publication sequence as a key property, for example:

“First, we think of the website and the mobile application, in terms of style, presentation and editing of the story. Then, in a second stage we write for print. What’s important is temporality: when speed is needed, we always think of the web first.” (F-WE)

According to respondents from all three newsrooms, temporality impacted story structure and style. Several believed *digital first* extended beyond publication sequence to require keeping stories alive and updated throughout the day, as the following example illustrates:

“A truck tips over and you stay there all evening in the hope that it won’t rain. You work on your phone, you go back to your car to recharge it, and you write everything from there [...] You are almost reporting live: ‘I’m here, the crane has arrived, we hope the

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<sup>29</sup> To facilitate reading, we do not systematically refer to newsroom functions. However, for those readers who may wish to identify the newspaper and function and of the persons quoted, we use the following codes: *Local* = Lc, *Legacy* = Lg, *Free* = F; reporters = R2 & R2, web editor = WE, print editor = PE, editorial management = EM(1) & (2) (when a second member of editorial management was interviewed); The journalists from *Local* are therefore referred to as Lc-J1 and Lc-J2, the print editor from *Legacy* as Lg-PE, etc. Occasionally quotations are not attributed either due to request, or because we believe it could present a risk.

road can be cleared soon. Of course, not all of that is worthy of inclusion in the print edition.’-” (Lc-R1)

This reporter did however admit that this change of logic was often not applied. Too often, they confessed, they only filed their stories shortly before the print deadline.

The need to update stories created incompatibilities with requirements for print. One reporter found such differences in logics to be a source of frustration: “you have to think of multiple versions, with a deadline that is always moving, you don’t know whether to focus on the definitive story, or to keep updating it” (Lg-R1). The editor-in-chief of *Free* explained that online developments could be added to online stories “in layers”, usually at the bottom (with any major elements being added to the lead), whereas print stories were required to provide a sense of closure. This of course required stories to be almost entirely rewritten, something that is systematic at *Free*, but less the case in the other two. Newswriters at *Local* said they understood the principle, but explained they lacked the headcount to do so.

#### Format and digital-only elements

Many of those interviewed also viewed *digital first* as translating text-level properties, although these tended not to be considered core definitional elements. This dimension was considered self-evident to the three junior reporters: it was how they were taught to write in journalism school.

The web-editor from *Free* claimed it required specific digital editing such as the inclusion of hyperlinks, social media embeds, videos, interactive maps or infographics, as well as writing headlines according to SEO logics (for which an SEO specialist was hired). Story length was discussed by most newswriters as being related to *digital first*. In theory, many agreed, it meant no longer writing to lengths dictated by page layouts. However, on this point production realities were very different. As described above, online stories at *Free* were frequently up to three times longer than their print versions. Not being held back by print imperatives (definitive structure, concise writing, selection of which information to include) allowed them to produce news faster. At *Legacy*, the differences were smaller but nevertheless often required significant changes such as removing entire sentences or paragraphs. This was occasionally a source of tension or even conflict within the newsroom of *Legacy*, with several interviewees pointing to a recent example of the print production team having made substantial changes to articles; modifications that reporters had objected to because they considered these transformed the overall impression of the story. However, they mostly attributed it to not having fully adjusted to recent changes. Finally, at *Local* length was precisely calibrated to the newspaper layout.

### Workflow and CMS first

Several newswriters considered the question of *who* adds these features to stories, *when* and *how* as playing an important role. *Digital first* meant reporters themselves being required to file stories in a form as close as possible to the one ultimately placed online and surrendering the entire print editing process to a team dedicated to the repurposing of the content, which occurs further down the production line.

After being taken aback by our request for a definition (see introduction), a print editor eventually provided the following definition: “*Digital first* means that people work for one platform first, which is a screen, and we – as a print team – come after, in order to fill blank pages” (Lg-PE). Back when they first heard the term in the mid-2000s, it clearly came with the assumption that print would disappear. This had changed, “Today, I think it is a production method. [...] It doesn’t mean web from A to Z, but from A to P for *print*”. Recent changes at *Legacy* reflected this, with a reorganized larger desk (no longer to be called a web-desk) notably resulting in new editing and proofreading workflows. The deputy editor-in-chief responsible for digital saw print as “an appendage”.

### Digital production mindset, logics and activities

Present throughout interviews was the idea of a specific mindset, described as ‘web-thinking’:

“it means that journalists should not focus on the print outcome of their story. Some are concerned when they write that it might not come out great on the page. I tell them not to care and just write for the web, and that the print production manager and I are here to make the text compatible with print.”  
(Lc-EM1)

The editor-in-chief of *Free* insisted that his newspaper had moved beyond being just *digital first* to being *video first* as well. This included setting up a new video team (see above). *Digital first* and *video first*, should be understood as slogans that serve to “evangelize my teams” (F-EM). Such easy-to-understand terms served “as a kind of compass”. An impression shared by another member of editorial management, who expressed the need to become first and foremost a “digital media”, which required the entire newsroom to be focused on this common goal. In view of this, print-specific terms had been banished from budget meetings. Editorial management of one of the newspapers mentioned that *digital first* required a minimal level of commitment to a set of production logics and principles. Those most resistant to this had been forced to leave during a restructuring, making implementing *digital first* much easier.

### Strategy and jargon and more

Some respondents' definitions hinted at strategic dimensions. This was particularly the case for editors-in-chief and those newswriters with previous experience in editorial (middle) management. According to the deputy editor-in-chief of *Legacy*, true *digital first* is achieved once the website and mobile application "become the priority", adding that "the future of our newspaper is online". Several other respondents used *digital first* to define their newspapers' overall strategies, but seldom elaborated. Others mentioned strategy only when prompted.

For example, one newswriter believed that beyond temporality and process, the term *digital first* was emblematic of a turning point and a way of framing how their newspaper might be perceived from the outside; as such, it was also a sort of jargon that on its own lacked "magical performative power". Another wondered whether, when their newspaper changed production process, *digital first* might have been used as a sales argument aiming to boost digital subscriptions. A web-editor from *Legacy* reckoned that the term itself had evolved over the course of the last years, from merely being an issue of publication temporality, to something more complex and all-encompassing. One respondent complained that implementing his newspaper's strategy meant there would soon be more analysts and media managers than reporters.

## **Discussion**

We first sought to identify the full range of definitions of *digital first* (RQ1). This full range is described in the above results section, from the perspective of the three production systems (all described as *digital first*) as well as the of the newswriters we interviewed, who offered varying definitions: some narrow, others much broader. The questions of common shared properties, and how these may constitute a newsmaking paradigm, are addressed below.

### **The five dimensions of digital first properties**

Many respondents' commonly shared definitional properties were consistent with the dimensions identified within the literature (temporality, workflow, strategy). However, story-level features and practices – discrete in the literature – were prominent in discourse (unsurprisingly, since it was discussed in depth in the third part of the interviews), while reflecting the broad set of affordances and related (best) practices extensively studied by digital journalism scholars over the past two decades (Deuze 2003; Boczkowski 2004; Thorsen and Jackson 2018). In particular, hyperlinking (De Maeyer 2012; Michael Karlsson, Clerwall, and Örnebring 2015), video (Dagiral and Parasie 2010; Kalogeropoulos and Nielsen 2018) and embedding of social media content (Paulussen and Harder 2014; Hernández-Fuentes and Monnier 2020). Headline writing also featured prominently (Hagar and Diakopoulos 2019). This suggests that views of *digital first* are also grounded in more mundane daily practices of (digital) journalism.

We also noted that many interviewees referred to a specific way of thinking. Mindset has been identified by Ferrucci and Vos (2017, 874) as an important component of digital journalists' specific identities:

“Digital journalism, to the majority of informants, incorporates a mindset that extends itself to the newsgathering process. They believe it is essential that to be a digital journalist, a journalist must consistently be thinking about digital publication throughout the working of a story” (emphasis ours)

To the question of common shared properties (RQ2), we would increase the number of dimensions of *digital first* from the three identified within the literature, to five: temporal, story-level features, workflow, mindset and strategic.

### **A digital first matrix**

These five dimensions fit within the broader semantic meanings of *digital first*, in view of the double polysemy of the words *digital* and *first*, which we briefly explore in view of providing definitional clarity:

- Digital may be understood as referring to:
  - specific platform-related entities (e.g., a digital currency, a pdf, or digital content)
  - a broader set of considerations and features that all somehow relate to a dematerialized business activity domain (e.g., digital transformation or web 2.0)
- First may denote:
  - a primacy in terms of importance (e.g., safety first)
  - a sequential order (e.g., she arrived first at the finish line)

Complicating matters further is the fact that when it comes to digital content, both process and outcome were seen to be related to 'digital firstness'. Temporality is a good example of this, since *digital first* referred on the one hand to workflow (digital related work precedes print work), and on the other to publication sequence (the digital version of a story is available to the reader before the print version).

Combining the realities of self-described *digital first* production systems at *Local*, *Legacy* and *Free* with the discourses about them, and the above-mentioned semantic analysis, we developed the following *digital first matrix*.

		Digital		
		Content		Business activity domain
		Production side	Publication side	
First	Sequential order	a. workflow & CMS	b. Temporality	e. Business model & strategy
	Importance	c. Production logics & mindset	d. Story-level features	

On a first level, it is a 2x2 matrix that incorporates the double polysemy of *digital* and *first*. On a second level, it accounts for the above-mentioned split between production and publication properties. We then placed the five dimensions that emerged from our interviews within this table, which we believe provides a heuristic device for understanding and discussing web and print newspapers.

It is worth repeating how strongly interconnected these different dimensions are. In many newsrooms, including the three studied here, reporters have switched to writing directly into websites' content management systems (CMS) according to web editing guidelines. This might include adding hyperlinks, designing headlines around keywords favoring online search (SEO), etc. This would constitute *digital first* according to a., c., & d. But writing directly into the CMS also means that it is the web version that is ready first, before being repurposed for the print issue. This invariably increases control over publication temporality, in particular allowing breaking news to be published immediately (d). Often, changes such as these fit into some broader strategy that places an increasing importance on digital activities and revenue streams (e).

### From theory to practice: implementation and print capacity surplus

In practice, the production systems of all three newspapers include properties belonging to all five dimensions identified, although to varying degrees. The logics applying to faster moving stories differed more between web and print than for slower, more context-rich and feature-style news. Those being frequently updated often require being entirely rewritten. At *Free*, rewriting the story for print was integrated into work routines, since differing lengths between web and print meant significantly rewriting most stories anyway. At *Local* on the other hand, this was judged to be more problematic in view of the small newsroom. Paradoxically, in all three newsrooms, *digital first* was also seen to involve scheduling some online publication to occur after rather than before availability in print form, to keep the website moving during mornings,

when available content is scarce, and the day's stories are yet to be finished. Properties of *digital first* were occasionally antagonistic. In particular, the need for breaking news to be fast (temporality) conflicted with the desire to include story-level digital features, the latter being time-consuming. This was particularly visible at *Free*.

Newswriters also felt that there were significant obstacles to reaching this ideal. Many believed that their newspapers could be more *digital first* with increased staff numbers in the newsroom: more reporters to accelerate story output and to increase time available to write stories, allowing better integrations of digital features and affordances; more editors to edit and promote stories online. Respondents from *Local* and *Legacy* insisted on the importance of being able to achieve content output beyond that required for the print edition.

We believe this print capacity surplus, expressed as the total production capacity minus that required to produce the print edition, to be a key feature for enabling *digital first*. Untethered to print, leftover resources can venture where print, with its restrictive format and temporalities, cannot: cover breaking news, self-determine story lengths, produce video and audio content...

Once the newsroom reaches this capacity surplus (in producing and editing), it becomes possible to implement *digital first* more fully. This surplus, almost non-existent at *Local*, and much more significant at *Free*, seemed decisive.<sup>30</sup> At the former, the flatplan defined the total number of stories produced daily and the lengths of digital versions, which were identical to print ones. Despite some text-level features, stories tended to be print-compatible from the outset. At the latter, this surplus allowed the many online stories to better integrate the affordances of digital journalism. The live-ticker format at *Free* is a good example of a story format entirely freed from the constraints associated with classic articles (whether print or web). Within a single page, short snippets of information are added over time, in reverse chronological order, thereby improving the website's reactivity, without requiring the full editing work of a standard online story (creating a new entry in the CMS, SEO keywords, illustration etc.). The print edition, with its rewritten stories, served as a kind of digest of the day's (online) content. Indeed, several respondents from *Free* used the expression "print draws<sup>31</sup> content from the web in order to fill the print".

Returning briefly to our *digital first matrix*, we would hypothesize that the first line (dimensions a & b) corresponds to older understandings of *digital first*, while *print capacity surplus* holds the key to achieving all-encompassing ones: it allows newspapers apply a more digitally focused

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<sup>30</sup> Newswriters at *Free* also complained about insufficient resources. However, these did not claim it prevented them from achieving full *digital first*, so much as affect believe it restricted how well they did it.

<sup>31</sup> translated from the French "piocher".

mindset and implement related logics (c) by integrating them more deeply and systematically into stories (d), thereby achieving business strategies that place digital at the core (e).

The ongoing changes at *Legacy* illustrate this well: since changing ownership, it has begun shifting from a production process similar to *Local* to one closer to *Free*, in which stories' numbers (according to topic) and lengths are decorrelated from the printed newspaper. Respondents from *Legacy* pointed to recent hirings of reporters, web-editors and print editors as being the key elements enabling the shift. The expansion of its "web-desk" – henceforth more of a "news desk" according to the deputy editor-in-chief – allowed an additional focus on breaking news coverage in line with the temporal affordances of digital (with breaking news content becoming available for inclusion in the print newspaper when relevant). One newsworker explained that all the key strategic elements had already been in place under previous management; what had lacked was the manpower to implement it. The print production manager at *Legacy* outlined the challenge ahead:

"The rule now is to completely detach print production from the web. [...] In practice, what hasn't really been successfully implemented is this airtightness between web and print. It isn't so clear cut. This doesn't bother me because we aren't the Washington Post or the New York Times with hundreds of people and the critical mass needed to operate with totally hermetic teams."

### **A newsmaking paradigm?**

Definitions of *digital first* varied from one newsworker to the next, as well as between newspapers, reflecting their specific production systems and editorial lines. Reporters seemed more likely to place story-level practices at the center, while editorial management focused more on strategy. This seems logical, although sample size prevents us from making bold claims.

Beyond differences, a an ideal-type of *digital first* as a newsmaking paradigm does emerge (RQ3):

A digital first newspaper is one that offers stories across a range of temporalities, dissolving the deadline-driven 24-hour news cycle. Its stories are published according to criteria which places the online reader at the center. For breaking-news this means immediately, but it also means delaying the publication of less-time-sensitive stories. Stories should exploit digital potentialities such as hypertextuality, multimedia, social media embeds etc. while also accounting for its constraints (e.g., the need for SEO driven

headlines). All of this is facilitated operationally by a CMS-first workflow, and culturally by a digital mindset. From a business standpoint, this activity is intertwined with a model that places online revenue at its heart.

The above forms the basis for a proposed intensional definition of *digital first*, provided in conclusion.

## Conclusion

The three newsrooms studied here have allowed us to locate *digital first* in newsworker's discourse, describe production systems defined as such, and better understand how the two relate. Newsworkers described their own newspapers as *digital first*, while insisting on practical limitations. In a sense, *digital first* seems to always lie around the next corner: "Digital first is a term that has been used in newspapers for a long time, but that has seldom been put into practice" (Lg-EM1). We believe that our *digital first matrix* unboxes the intricacies of the production systems currently being used – or considered – by many newspapers worldwide. It may also help newsworkers and other news industry professionals better communicate about the ways in which digital and print platforms relate to one another. In terms of implementation, *print capacity surplus* seems crucial.

For those who may feel that a "five-dimensional matrix" falls short our promise, we propose the following succinct contemporary definition:

Digital first occurs (and can only occur) when the production of news for digital and print come into contact. It applies to newspapers (and only newspapers), which can be said to be digital first when the print production system (workflow) and related logics (mindset) have been adapted to enable the online edition to better implement digital affordances (temporal and textual) with a view of making digital the core business activity.

This definition must be understood as expressing change. We may expect *digital first* to be used frequently as newspapers undergo digital transformation. Then, as the system stabilizes, the term itself may well gradually be forsaken, while the underlying properties remain.

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## An Account from Behind the Scenes

The elements of method as described in the two sections above look neat and tidy. Yet in reality, beyond the broad guiding research question outlined prior to these, the relationship between guiding questions, data, methodology and interpretations is one of multiple toing and froing, as is typical of much inductive research. The aim is to identify patterns and (re)create order, while the routes taken to do so are necessarily messy and unpredictable (Law 2004).

Thus far, method as presented here much resembles images needing to be placed into a wedding album: they have not been doctored but have nevertheless been staged to look as neat as possible; they say nothing about what is out of the frame, nor the often-chaotic stories of how those pictured got there; and they only tell a fragmented story of the wedding.

The temptation to present this research as having a clear and narrow research focus from the outset betrays the fact that it was the path taken that assembled the reality that I describe. As Law (2004, 45) notes, regarding the entanglement of method and results: “The argument is no longer that methods discover and depict realities. Instead, it is that they participate in the enactment of those realities.”

This section therefore provides an account of what occurred outside the viewfinder, as well as the messier (side-)stories: it explains how method, data, theory and resulting interpretations were interwoven according to ethnographic induction, or what Becker (1998, 209–14) calls not-so-rigorous analytic induction (AI), which accounts for the fact that ethnographic approaches are at the mercy of their data (rather than implying that the researcher has lacked discipline). It consists of shifting from thinking about variable, to thinking about combinations; something particularly well-suited to case-studies. To quote Becker (1998, 214): “Analytic induction's single-minded insistence on one outcome, and one set of causes that produce that outcome, which are its tricks, reduce complexity very successfully”.

As already mentioned, articles 1 and article 2 (referred to as *phase 1* – a detailed diagram of the research design/process is provided below) share a common dataset and, accordingly, the same underlying methodology. Informed by *phase 1*, article 3 (*phase 2*) on the other hand sought expand beyond a single case study, to understand how the main results might apply elsewhere. This was done by exploring the production systems of other (self-defined) *digital first* newspapers, as well as related practices.

# An Account from Behind the Scenes

Research phase	Broad research question	Narrow research question	Answer	Level	Empirical data
Phase 0	How are innovative news-formats invented and produced?		Unanswered (abandoned)		Observation (exploratory)
		How are these different to the ways normal stories are produced?	Unanswered (abandoned)		Observation (exploratory)
	How are digital and print versions newspapers produced?		(see below)		
Phase 1		How are digital and print versions of <i>Le Temps</i> produced?	Articles 1 and 2: Ethnographic accounts provided	Descriptive	<i>Le Temps</i> : observation, documentary, interviews, content analysis
		How do digital and print versions of <i>Le Temps</i> newspaper shape each other?	Article 1: According to intratextual and extratextual networks. Extratextual networks configure according to temporal and spatial relationships. Among these, the flatplan plays a defining role.	Descriptive & analytical	<i>Le Temps</i> : observation, documentary, interviews, content analysis
		What happens to temporality when print and web compete and collide? Which forces determine publication time, and how?	Article 2: News temporality is highly dependant on external forces. Online publishing schedules fit within (and are enacted by) print publishing schedules (and the 24-hours news cycle). The schedule is built by the web production manager, striving for regular output and diversity.	Descriptive & analytical	<i>Le Temps</i> : observation, documentary, interviews, content analysis
Phase 2		What is the definition of <i>digital first</i> ?	Article 3: the print production system (workflow) and related logics (mindset) have been adapted to enable the online edition to better implement digital affordances (temporal and textual) with a view of making digital the core business activity.	Definitional	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		What is the full range of definitions of digital first in terms of practices, discourses and perceptions?	Article 3: Description in article 3	Descriptive	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		Is it possible to identify, within these definitions, common shared properties?	Article 3: Common shared properties belonging to five dimensions: workflow, temporality, mindset, story-level features, strategy	Analytical	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		Taken together, do these shared properties constitute a newsmaking paradigm?	Article 3: Yes, they constitute a newsmaking paradigm	Definitional	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
Conclusion	How are digital and print versions newspapers produced?		According to a digital first production paradigm, with digital versions of newspapers and their stories struggling to fulfill their promises in terms of digital affordances. This is particularly true for newspapers that are not able to devote significantly more resources to their online activities than their print ones. This invariably means compromising.		

Research design diagram

This research borrows from diverse interconnected theoretical and methodological approaches to (techno)social science and journalism research. First and foremost, this is a *newsroom ethnography* about a medium-sized newspaper producing news in both digital and print form. Second, this is a work strongly inspired by material-semiotics in general and particularly *actor-network theory*. Third, it often displays the duality of the *newsmaking reconstruction approach*, which seeks to explain the content – or the features of that content – by rewinding through that content’s different production stages.

All three of the above-mentioned methods fit within a highly empirical – or even descriptive – approach to studying a given reality. They are constructivist, but only to the extent that they seek to explain how things are built: “In plain English, to say something is constructed means that it’s not a mystery that has popped out of nowhere, or that it has a more humble but also more visible and more interesting origin” (Latour 2005, 88). Below I frame this research within the above-mentioned methodological traditions and explain how they contributed to (re)defining the overall questions guiding this research, and the more specific questions addressed in the three articles. Finally, I explain how in *phase 2* I pursue this project’s inquiry with the help of Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel, seeking to understand what generalizations may tentatively be made. The heavy toolkit that got me there will be substituted for a lighter one, as I revert classic semi-structured interviews and triangulation between newswriters’ discourse about *digital first* and realities observed within the newsroom or the stories ultimately published. Ever in interaction with results and interpretations, what is discussed here is somehow more than mere method, yet it lacks the definitiveness and solidity of results as commonly understood (which will be presented in a final discussion).

### **A Digital and Print Newsroom Ethnography**

This research was a newsroom ethnography from the outset, and it has remained so despite its focus having shifted somewhat. Originally, it sought to study how digital news was produced at a legacy newspaper with an emphasis on digital-only productions. Ultimately, the emphasis was placed on dual-media digital-print productions. This of course happened for a reason.

The initial impetus for observing newswriting at *Le Temps* answers multiple calls for ongoing ethnographic work within news organizations, in view of a reshaped news ecosystem and a rapidly changing technological context (Cottle 2007; Robinson and Metzler 2016). Two

decades ago, Cottle (2000) called for a “second wave” that would update ethnographic work on newswork in the 1970s and 1980s in view of the profound changes having occurred since. This renewal of study from within the newsroom undoubtedly occurred throughout the 2000s and 2010s. Much of that research has been dedicated to the most innovative newsrooms, cutting-edge technologies and practices associated with emerging roles within the newsroom (Anderson 2017). This was, it must be said, the original scope of this project.

Seeking to understand how work on digital-only news formats (podcasts, interactive infographics, multimedia longforms) contrasted with more “standard production”, I began looking more closely at the latter. With time (and patience), what had initially appeared to be a rigid and strict production process of a monolithic object, gradually revealed itself to be a complex system caught between industry and craft; between routines set in stone and the negotiation of individual logics (with collective practices lying somewhere in between). Crucially, I began to see digital and print locking horns at various key stages of the workflow, albeit often in subtle ways.

It increasingly seemed to me that this double tension – between individual practice and routine, and between print and digital – represented a research gap worth pursuing a little further. Cottle’s (2000, 21) call for research that neither reduces newsmaking to “an organizational and bureaucratic accomplishment of routine” nor to entirely “individualist and organizationally decontextualized explanations” resounded with me. A further dive into the literature of digital journalism confirmed another mismatch: much research was being conducted on journalistic work that placed fringe innovative practices at the center, and little on how news was being produced by a majority of newswriters in more ordinary newsrooms (Anderson 2017).

This arguably made sense during the 2000s and early 2010s, in view of news media facing extraordinarily rapid and profound disruption. But while innovative digital news production was indeed occurring at *Le Temps*, a vast majority of newswriters went about their daily work in ways that were both fundamentally digital, and at the same time mostly unconcerned by it. Comparing work as described in the pioneering 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnographies of newswork to what was occurring at *Le Temps*, many key elements felt familiar yet different.

Schlesinger's (1977, 348–49) now famous claim that immediacy is both embraced and reviled by newswriters and that they “oscillate, then, from victim to controller” and Tuchman's (1973) accounts of deadlines and how common understandings of how temporal needs of stories were built into news discourse and routines: both seemed relevant at *Le Temps*. At the same time, many newswriters were now having to deal with delivery times expected of them by the web desk, without being able to free themselves from the centuries' old hard deadline of print. Filling the news hole<sup>32</sup> (Drew and Wilhoit 1976) remained a core focus, but catering to the online readers of *Le Temps* occasionally interfered with story-selection for the printed newspaper. Division of labor and workflow largely matched descriptions reaching as far back as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nerone and Barnhurst 2003) and even into the 19<sup>th</sup> (Solomon 1995); although digital versions of stories were subjected to equivalent processes, these were performed by newswriters with new job titles who worked with different tools, and according to adjusted logics and rhythms. In sum, differences in news production were everywhere although seldom spectacular.

The study of how platforms old and new are intertwined, seemed an enterprise that had been somewhat neglected, and thus one worth pursuing for me, a trained historian. In the words of Anderson (2017, 63 – my emphasis):

“historical amnesia is particularly acute in journalism studies research, where much scholarship has been weighted toward analyzing ‘the next big technology’ or ‘the current crisis in news’ at the expense of uncovering the technological antecedents or larger social structures that play a role shaping how journalistic change plays out over the long-to medium term.”

Many of these subtler adjustments seemed linked to what was referred to within the newsroom as *digital first*. Ultimately, it was my inability to find a satisfactory in-depth ethnographic account of the ongoing but often discrete work related to publishing the newspaper's stories online and in print, according to temporal logics differing but not entirely detached from those of print, that steered me off course. As a result, this project shifted from concerning itself with the most innovative digital news productions, to seeking to understand how a

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<sup>32</sup> The news hole is refers to the amount of editorial content (i.e., non-advertising) required to fill in the black pages of the newspaper.

digital publication platform (re)shapes print, and vice versa. To quote Posetti's (2018) now famous phrase, I would leave the study of "bright and shiny" things to someone else. Initially, I had intended this as a side project enabling me to better understand how digital only stories were produced. Soon I was entirely absorbed by this endeavor.

That each version of the newspaper somehow seemed to hold the other back confirmed that – at *Le Temps* at least – digital news and print news production could not be treated as separate 'hermetically sealed' systems and that new ways of producing news had been interwoven with the old. Although this may seem obvious, its implications had to be taken very seriously indeed: wherever print and web productions occurred with some degree of interaction, they could not be studied in isolation from each another. How was it that, online news stories were never quite as 'digital' as newswriters would have liked, and I the researcher would have expected? Instead of focusing on multiplicity of variables (like much quantitative and qualitative research), what interested me was accounting for the singularity of outcomes. To quote Becker (1998, 214): "Analytic induction's single-minded insistence on one outcome, and one set of causes that produce that outcome, which are its tricks, reduce complexity very successfully."

At this stage and for a while, the following question would guide further ethnographic work and data collection:

- How do digital and print versions of *Le Temps* newspaper shape each other?

Studying the forces at play in the struggle between digital and print platforms seen through conflicting versions of the same news story: this is how I pursued my ethnographic enquiry. Only now, it required an analytical perspective that reached beyond classic inductive ethnography; one able to follow these news stories beyond each stop along the production line, and the person working on it at any given time. Answering this question amounted to opening a giant *black box*, a task for which actor-network theory and newsmaking reconstruction are useful allies.

### **A Toolkit: ANT and "Newsmaking Reconstruction"**

Scholars of social science have strong views about ANT and that its mere use by a (novice) researcher can sound pretentious, not least because it constitutes a trendy approach often bastardized. Many works claiming to have used it fail to follow through with its (most)

basic tenets. It has also been the subject of criticism, including in its widespread use for studying (digital) journalism (Benson 2017; Couldry 2020). The main criticisms have been that it dissolves the broader social forces that constitute the social structure, its seeming inability to contribute to social critique, and its tendency to produce overly-descriptive research lacking strong causality (Ryfe 2021, 11).

Short of claiming this work to be an ANT study<sup>33</sup> (I make no such claim within the articles themselves), it would be disingenuous not to credit the immense impact the loose body of ANT-related literature had on this research. Below I explain how it shaped this study. It is worth noting that a couple of postulates aside, much of what was borrowed from the ANT literature has been formulated similarly by more classic qualitative methods. Accordingly, ANT is used more as a guiding methodology (Sayes 2014) or a set of sensibilities (Law 2009) than as a radical theory.

Instead of providing a complete (and abstract) overview of its previous applications in journalism research, which have been well-documented<sup>34</sup>, I will explain as concretely as possible, how ANT was helpful to me and shaped the results of this study. As a starting point I refer to Plesner (2009, 613), who provides one of the more grounded views of what it offers the study of newswork, and how it might be deployed : “Instead of defining our focus in advance (on interpersonal relations, institutional factors, texts, or technologies), the idea is to forget about ‘levels’ of analysis and explore what actually happens in, for instance, newswork”.

This can be interpreted as a call for more modest and grounded guiding research questions (not necessarily restricted to an ANT perspective), as well as advocating for a particular kind of fluid, non-discriminating or symmetric ethnography (in the sense that the enquiry does not end where human to human interaction ends), in line with Latour’s mantra (2005)

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<sup>33</sup> Latour (2005, 10–11) suggests that in the absence of consensus and a clear “litmus test”, the following three dimensions might be helpful in defining a work as belonging to ANT: the active role given to non-humans, the direction of explanation (the social can only be that which is explained, and never that which explains), and the fact that it must not be a work of critique in the postmodern sense.

<sup>34</sup> The usefulness of ANT and other material semiotic approaches to journalism and media studies has been advocated for by many scholars and researchers, including: Turner (2005), Plesner (2009), Domingo, Masip, and Costera Meijer (2016), Primo and Zago (2015), De Maeyer (2016), Spoehrer and Ochsner (2017). Ryfe (2021) provides a recent theoretical overview of ANT in journalism studies, including numerous examples of its use in empirical research (too numerous and diverse to be mentioned here).

to: “follow the actors themselves”. As Anderson and de Mayer (2015, 12) claim, classic newsroom ethnography “often under-theorizes the question of technology, and its complex and historicized interrelationships with journalistic practice.”

In the accounts provided in article 1 and article 2, recourse to ANT remains mostly discrete<sup>35</sup>, while underpinning the following interrelated aspects of my research:

- Focus: looking for differentiation by retracing the production processes and trajectories of news content
- Sampling and data collection: following the objects of study (content) through their traces in tools, documents and discourses, and interrogating newswriters according to a newsmaking reconstruction approach
- Analysis: recognizing the ability of objects and technologies to act and configure the environment independently from humans

Engaging with some of the basic principles and concepts of ANT will help bring into view how this research evolved, while remaining within the above-mentioned context of a newsroom ethnography.

#### Retracing news content trajectories and the question of affordances (focus)

In search of how the print and web versions of *Le Temps* shaped each other, I began looking a little closer at how they were entangled. This amounted to identifying platform-specific differentiation within newsroom discourse and practice. Some properties seemed to be platform agnostic. Story angles were (unsurprisingly) seldom differentiated between web and print. This was visible both in the published articles and in newsroom discourse describing stories throughout their production process (in the more than 30 budget meetings attended, story angle was only differentiated a handful of times). Story lengths were basically the same (print stories were frequently a little shorter, but also occasionally longer), reflecting texts that – hyperlinks and occasional multimedia elements aside – were almost identical.

For other properties however, I discovered differences, which resulted from a heterogeneous set of production forces shaping print and web news production respectively. Often digital and print collided over what the literature sometimes calls ‘affordances’ (Conole and Dyke 2004; Steensen 2011): temporality (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2018), hyperlinks,

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<sup>35</sup> Only in the theory and method section of *article 1*, do I mention ANT, providing a brief overview of how it contributed to data collection and analysis.

multimedia content, etc. In theoretical terms, Steensen and Westlund (2021, 62–63) categorize affordance theory within socio-technical perspectives of practice, alongside ANT. Short of integrating “affordance theory” (a theoretical framework with far-reaching implications), I viewed affordances from a more constructive and pragmatic viewpoint, in line with Nagy and Neff’s (2015, 5) concept of *imagined affordances*: “users’ perception for the definition of technologies’ qualities”.<sup>56</sup>

I began searching for cases where the logics or prescriptions applied to news produced for the web and for print differed within newswork and newswriters’ discourse. Since most stories were published on both platforms, successful differentiation would either require significant rewriting (in view of accommodating their platform-specific logics) or sacrificing one platform’s affordance in favor of the other’s. As already mentioned, rudimentary content analysis revealed few significant differences for most stories on a purely textual level, beyond title, paragraph breaks, and the inclusion of hyperlinks. Everything else had either to be the result of overlapping logics (i.e., the way a thing should be done is the same between digital and print), or of one set of logics being favored and prevailing over the other. Often, these differences were consistent with a list of rules and maxims (see appendix C) that I had assembled during the early phases of my observation.

Newswriters were doing their jobs: they were applying rules to how they worked on print and web versions of stories respectively. Or was it the other way around? Were newswriters not applying these rules to the way they worked on behalf of articles, in view of them fulfilling their platform-specific destinies? For heuristic purposes I also reframed the main guiding research question in more narrative terms.

- The story I want to tell is how two entities [subjects] stemming from only one (a digital and a print version of a story), seek accomplishment or fulfillment [object].
- The terms of this fulfillment (or expectations) are defined by the newsroom rules and maxims and diverge most in terms of fully exploiting their platform-specific affordances.

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<sup>56</sup> Blewett and Hugo (2016) document the evolution of the concept, from its original use in visual perception by Gibson (1979), who coined the term, to its (more constructivist) application to information technologies (Norman 1999), and further shift to “relational view of artefacts and actors, between technology and human”. According to Blewett and Hugo (2016, 67), this allows for a focus on “the interconnections between human and non-human entities”, locating *affordances* within the Latourian research perspective.

- I may expect that fulfilling these expectations will be achieved thanks to digital and print, respectively, being successful in mobilizing elements of the environment (humans, tools, etc.) [helper].

This more narrative framing was inspired by several material-semiotic works and pays attention to concepts/phenomena referred to as *program of action* (or *narrative program*) and *enrollment* within ANT's infralanguage (Callon 1984; Latour 1991; Akrich and Latour 2010; Czarniawska and Hernes 2005).

That digital and print versions of stories 'seek fulfillment', and that they go about doing so by enrolling humans and non-humans as they move through the production system, are two strong premises inherited from ANT. However, they may just as easily be viewed as merely suggesting to the researcher where and how to change the frame of reference (notably by exploring redistributions of the subject-verb-object triangle).

In any case, this unconventional framing of the tension between digital and print helped locate the textual and extratextual networks within which the struggle between print and digital was occurring (article 1).

#### Exploring the network, interrogating the actors (sampling and data collection)

The ANT literature played an important role in sampling and the approach to collecting data. By now I was ready to "follow the actors themselves", where the actors of interest are the news stories that assemble to become digital and print versions of the newspaper. This is consistent with Robinson and Metzler's (2016, 454) call to shift from product to process and their suggestion to "to reconceptualize the actor of journalism beyond a person" and to think of the "content itself as an agent". Here, Robinson and Metzler describe a shift is typical of material-semiotic studies, while refraining from specifically referring to ANT.

The decision to focus on elements of content (digital and print versions of stories) rapidly became a sampling issue. I had noticed many cases where stories, produced the same day and/or published within the same pages of the newspaper, had modified each other (the typical example being that the lengths of stories on the same page of the print paper are interdependent). Such localized contingencies appeared difficult to study within a generic analysis of the production system as a whole. Many contingencies and ah-hoc logics would remain absent from any resulting account (Becker 1998, 30–32).

The study of the relationship between digital and print during production called for an in-depth case study of the stories of a single day's newswork, and how these were assembled to become the print and web versions of *Le Temps* newspaper. Of course, the full range of contingent factors would not be identified from the observation and analysis of a single day's newswork, but I would hopefully get some general sense of from how contingency was dealt with (one of the answers was *typifications*). If done carefully enough, it could (at least partly) integrate and reconcile routine, collective practices and more individual logics (in a way that steers clear of framing the issue in classic structure vs agency terms). It could also account for the differences between those stories advancing silently through the production system, and those needing to be treated as exceptions by one or several newswriters.

Here the concept of *black box* was helpful, especially when extended beyond the predictable output of material and technical processes, to routines<sup>37</sup>: those quasi-automated tasks performed and taken for granted by newswriters. Latour and Callon (1981, 285) define black boxes as containing:

“that which no longer needs to be reconsidered, those things whose contents have become a matter of indifference. The more elements one can place in black boxes – modes of thoughts, habits, forces and objects – the broader the construction one can raise”.

Black boxes' strengths are also their weaknesses: they achieve predictable outputs for a single (or small number) of given inputs, but they strongly restrict the realm of possibilities. The limits of what is routine (and what is individual logic-based practice), what is industrial and what is craft may also be seen in terms of what is *blackboxed* and what is not.<sup>38</sup> Different stories are differently located along the spectrum running between that which is automated and predictable and that which requires special attention and is unpredictable.

A desk-section chief having ordered a 3,500-character story from a freelancer about a child abduction case might not care to know whether the quotes were gathered over the

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<sup>37</sup> Feldman and Pentland (2005) offer an in-depth insight into using ANT to understand organizational routines (which they equate to black boxes), which they describe as stabilized associations of individual and collective performances.

<sup>38</sup> More broadly black boxes are an integral part of ANT's own answer to the structure-agency debate. When applied to newsmaking, they offer an analytical tool for better understanding the above-mentioned tension between routine and individual logics and practices, in view of overcoming them.

phone, by email or face to face. And he probably won't care how many unsuccessful attempts were made to contact sources. Most copy editors won't know or care how the algorithms responsible for kerning and letter spacing shorten or lengthens the blocks of text: they just know that when they move the cursor to the left within the desktop publishing tool's user interface, the text will shrink until it fits nicely with the dedicated space in the layout.

To the contrary, that which is not constrained within a black box is unstable, or open to negotiation. For example, among different layout options, a graphic designer might apply a very strict selection process (e.g., according to the size of the page's main photo) according to specific more complex or individual logics (e.g., creating a clear hierarchy between elements, considering thematic proximity, counterbalancing the opposite facing page, individual aesthetic preferences, etc.).

Refraining for now from viewing this as a question of generalizability, the full description of the coming into being of the stories of a single day's newswork would reveal courses of action that were highly constrained by elements of the production system, and others too singular to be successfully dealt with in a systematic way. I could gain access to more singular logics applied to dealing with stories (in the digital and print forms) through interviews. Such an approach, I believe, also goes some way in painting a picture of newswork that lessens the above-mentioned routine-practice divide, outlined by Cottle (2000, 21).<sup>39</sup> The tension, throughout article 1 and article 2, between how things were usually done, and how and when the stories that interested us differed from these routines, reflects my interest in studying beyond those patterns that are easily generalizable.

**Exploring the network.** The underlying logic was to study the digital and print newspaper, and the digital and print versions of stories they contained, as they came into being, while paying particular attention to the network of forces that apply, which Latour described as *circulating entities*.

Latour (2005, 237) writes: "Object and subject might exist, but everything interesting happens upstream and downstream. Just follow the flow. Yes, follow the actors themselves or rather that which makes them act, namely the circulating entities". This meant that the

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<sup>39</sup> For readers interested in how to theorize this tension in the context of news production, I recommend Ryfe (2017) excellent paper comparing practice as viewed by Bourdieu, Giddens and Latour, and then Schatzki respectively.

observation of newswork on the day in question (14 February 2018) – in the classic understanding of the term observation as restricted to a given time and place – was merely the center point of a larger web of interrelated forces. A general understanding of “how things were done” had been acquired during the months prior, while many traces of the day’s productions were gathered during the day. Many more were gathered in the days, weeks and months after, which saw data collection and data analysis almost merge. For the three case-study articles, I very much studied upstream<sup>40</sup> and (to a lesser extent) downstream, often through a series of toing and froing between heterogenous data. Consistent with Latour (2005) I bring together data and explanations treated as incommensurable elsewhere. Transcriptions from editorial meetings, automatic logs from the content management system (CMS), newsroom tools and documents: all sit side by side in the account provided as more than just stale data. They are indeed traces, but ones of work and transformation: in the language of ANT, they are the work of mediatators rather than intermediaries. This brings us one of the key analytical principles of ANT: acknowledging non-human agency (also known as the principle of symmetry) and integrating this into the analysis and subsequent account. This will be discussed shortly.

How was this material assembled? Observation of newswork on 14 February 2018 provided me with fieldnotes, but also recordings of the day’s budget meetings (which were then transcribed). I had made copies of the editorial planning document throughout the day, gathered hourly screenshots of the *letemps.ch* homepage as well as of the *Info en continu* page (which lists published articles in reverse chronological order). I also gathered a pdf version of the printed newspaper, as well as copies of the digital versions of stories. Other documents gathered in the days and weeks that followed were change logs from the CMS (which enabled me to see which newsworker had performed what work on a given story at what time), the day’s flatplan as well as templates and various other documents. Information related to specific stories was linked in Atlas.ti, while basic story related information for all stories (print only, web only, print and web) of the weekdays spanning from 12 to 16 February was entered into a spreadsheet (this included which meetings they had been discussed in, online publication times and differences between print and digital versions such as headlines, story-length, etc.).

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<sup>40</sup> It is at this point that the “newsmaking reconstruction approach” (Reich and Barnoy 2020) provided me with a concrete (subsidiary) method for “searching upstream (see below, p. 94). We return to this shortly.

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The resulting (600 row!) table allowed me to gain a basic insight into the production trajectories of different types of news stories according to multiple variables and identify stories for which I would recreate more in-depth accounts, notably thanks to in-depth interviews. Stories I would choose for further investigation were different kinds of ‘typical stories’ (note here the similarity with Tuchman’s typifications) as described by Becker (1998, 61): “stories that work out pretty much the same way every time they happen [...] stories whose steps have a logic, perhaps even a logic as inevitable as the logic of causes”.

**Interrogating the actors.** These interviews were inspired by – and conducted according to – the *newsmaking reconstruction* approach, which was briefly outlined in the method sections of article 1 and article 2. Reich and Barnoy (2020) group together multiple ad-hoc approaches to understanding the relationship between newsmaking and the content it produces under the term *newsmaking reconstruction*, which they describe as: “a methodology that records in retrospective the ways in which news become ‘news’, based on reporters’ (or other key newsmakers’) testimony regarding a specific sample of their recently published items.” (Reich and Barnoy 2020, 967)

As already stated, *newsmaking reconstruction* consists of investigating a guiding question that is related to the features of news content, by interrogating – or reconstructing – the process by which it came about. Reich and Barnoy (2020, 968) compare it to forensic sciences “which use case reconstructions or crime scene reconstructions to integrate physical evidence and fit them into the broader jigsaw puzzle”.

Although Reich and Barnoy seem to advocate the use of *newsmaking reconstruction* through the lens of practice theory, they do not make any strong theory-related prescription. Instead, their approach seems adaptable to other practice based approaches to the study of journalism, as defined by Ryfe (2017). Reich and Barnoy’s (2020, 967) definition of practice certainly seems compatible with ANT: “Practices represent complex interrelations between micro-level activities and macro-level forces, norms and practical constraints, ‘sayings and doings’; individuals and collectives; people and material objects” (my emphasis). Strictly speaking, newsmaking reconstruction is an interview-based method for collecting data, which allows the researcher to gather information and explanations that are difficult to access otherwise from newswriters, in view of many stages of newswriting being increasingly difficult to observe. Processes may occur simultaneously in different locations, and within digital technology hiding them from plain sight.

What were these features and how did I identify them? I have already mentioned them: those differences between how print and web should be according to the newsroom rules and maxims (whether they were successfully implemented), and those effective differences (with a view of understanding if and how they relate to each platform).

Although this falls outside the scope of *newsmaking reconstruction* as described by Reich and Barnoy, pursuing the forensics comparison, for each of the stories retained for more in-depth analysis, I conducted an investigation solely based on the accounts provided by traces in tools and documents, as well as my observations on site. Only then did I interrogate ‘human witnesses’. I used documentary elicitation (Theureau 2010) during the interviews conducted with each story’s key newswriters in order help them recall the logics behind their work on specific stories.<sup>41</sup> For example, journalists were presented with their stories in print and web form, the print production manager with the day’s flatplan, web editors with hourly screen captures of the homepage and the editorial planning document, etc.

These interviews<sup>42</sup> confirmed certain elements through so-called between-method triangulation and data validation triangulation (Flick 2010, 180), for example by identifying what was widely considered to be a routine or best practice in view of the newsroom maxims (appendix C). This also allowed me to fill in missing pieces of how the stories were produced (the newsmaking reconstruction *per se*), and of course gain access to more individual and idiosyncratic logics.

At long last, all the data had been gathered. I began sketching together the different accounts of how versions of the selected digital and print stories and their platform-specific features came into being, paying particular attention to how this differentiation occurred. Here ANT makes its final but arguably most important contribution: encouraging me to be sensitive to how newsroom tools, documents and artifacts also made things happen.

#### Granting agency to tools, technologies and documents (analysis)

Beyond their purpose as mere data or objects of study, I allowed newsroom tools and technologies to become more active, by paying careful attention to (the differences between) what flows in, and what flows out of them. This is, of course, one of the distinguishing features of ANT. Whenever what enters differs from what exits, something has occurred.

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<sup>41</sup> The key newswriters having worked on these articles are consistent with the standard article publication process. Persons interviewed are listed in appendix F.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix F provides an example of an interview guide used during these reconstructions.

Consistent with its method, identifying agency beyond newswriters was achieved not thanks to some *a priori* decision to attribute causality to objects, but by accepting the possibility that they may (pre)configure and shape news stories and the way they are produced. Sayes (2014, 141) speaks of attempting to “pluralize what it means to speak of agency”.

Of course, in most cases humans were the creators of these tools, technologies and artifacts. It was, after all, them who designed the underlying production system, its workflows as well as its core technologies and tools. But the activity behind the creation of these material entities is not performed on a daily basis. Some of this activity occurred long ago in faraway places by persons – these artifacts aside – unrelated to *Le Temps* in any way. The design of the Berliner format on which *Le Temps* prints its newspaper occurred in Berlin in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A century later, 800 kilometers to the southwest, their design is (ever so discretely) involved in determining the length of the story a reporter has just filed for online publication. Deciding what is human and what is not, is just as much a matter of deciding how far to pursue the search for relationships.

One could just as well turn to Becker (1998, 50), who eloquently makes a similar point:

“Objects, then, are congealed social agreements, or rather, congealed moments in the history of people acting together. The analytic trick consists of seeing in the physical object before you all the traces of how it got that way, of who did what so that this thing should now exist as it does.”

In any case, it was the toing and froing between routine and individual practices (and underlying logics), but also the comparing of different stories (and the examination of how these were interwoven) that allowed me to identify important patterns that reflected the relationship between web and print. When looking at the text itself, it appeared that stories – which according to *digital first* production principles were supposed to be written according to digital publishing standards – were written with the paper version in mind, onto which digital-only elements were added, before being removed once again prior to being placed into the makeup. In many cases, digital remained an afterthought: one considered a nice-to-have, but never important enough to be really fully cared about.

Beyond the text, story lengths and publishing times were the result of chains of spatial and temporal configurations, many of which were linked to the flatplan: the digital version

of a story only came into being once a large number of its features had been decided by the print edition of the newspaper. The later in the production process differentiation occurred, the lesser the cost. This is what article 1 tells us about how the printed newspaper's material characteristics meddle with digital. Within this spatial-temporal configuration sequence, article 2 shows us how online publishing times were subjected to multiple forces originating inside and outside the newsroom. But breaking news aside, a story's digital publication time occurred within a timeslot decided by the print publication date.

Thus, two of the properties most closely associated with the agility of digital, publication times and story lengths, were in large part unattainable because digital was so tightly tethered to print. This was both visible in the content itself, in the work involved in its creation, while also being a recurring theme in interviews. Indeed, newswriters spoke about the difficulty of being truly *digital first* at *Le Temps*, corroborating my analysis that had shown the important role that elements of the printed newspaper's production process played in preventing digital news stories from fulfilling their potential.

If a comparable system was used by other newspapers, surely similar things would be going on there too.

### **Branching Out: Questions of Generalizability**

Article 2 highlights the *definitional fuzziness* of *digital first*, and while the two first articles do indeed paint an intricate picture of one newspaper that described itself as such back in 2018, neither contribute to definitional clarity. If *Le Temps* described its production system as digital first, which of its properties were applicable to other *digital first* newspapers? I was aware of the risk of making any broader claims about web and print newsmaking on the bases of this narrow case study (which of course mainly focused on a small number of stories from a single day's newswork). In other words, I might have described what a horse was from observing and describing a three-legged horse (or worse, a hobby horse). So, on a first level, article 3 answers a question that emerged during *phase 1* and that gradually became insufferable: what does *digital first* mean or describe? But *phase 2* was also designed with the tricky question of generalizability in mind.

Documenting further self-described *digital first* newspapers, identifying commonalities and variation (including between discourse and production realities), and contributing to definitional clarity: this constitutes a line of enquiry in its own right. The method used, discussed

briefly in article 3, was classic simple semi-structured interviewing, with triangulation of data providing validation (Flick 1992; 2010). Answers from the interviews were coded, and grouped into categories according to a streamlined version of grounded theory (Lejeune 2014).

But what article 2 does not say explicitly, is how *phase 2* was designed to measure how transportable my original ethnographic results might be, in view of making more general claims about *digital first* newspaper production. Three years later, many of Switzerland's newspapers have switched to production systems they referred to as *digital first*. Do the results from *phase 1* apply to other so-called *digital first* newspapers? Do they still apply to newsmaking at *Le Temps* in 2021? *Phase 2* would allow us to begin to generalize, by checking if what I had found applied to more than just this one expression of *digital first*. To do this, I of course also needed to know what digital first meant in terms of production realities. Beyond providing a definition that was lacking in the literature, *phase 2* was also designed to enable us to compare newspaper production systems beyond the *digital first* label. In the final part of this story from behind the scenes, I describe how *phase 2* addresses if and how *phase 1* may travel elsewhere.

The question of generalizing is controversial in qualitative research in general and in ethnography in particular, and has been the subject of extensive literature. While there is indeed disagreement about what kinds of generalizations are possible from empirical research, there above all seems to be confusion about what exactly is understood by generalizability, and whether other terms relating to how results may reach beyond or outlive the limited scope of their specific research context, might not be more suitable (e.g., transferability, external validity, applicability). Referring specifically to digital news production, Robinson and Metzler (2016, 458) argue that: "Ethnographic observation and interviewing digital-newsroom ethnographies are not meant to be generalized; instead many ethnographers refer to the seeking of a 'transportability' of meaning from one site to another". I interpret this as a useful warning against researchers' urges to jump to (faulty) conclusions while nevertheless pointing to the necessity of being able to carry elsewhere that which has been discovered. However, transportability of means has merely displaced the problem by substituting a problematic term for one that is arguably no more helpful. On this issue, Larson (2009, 25–26) is helpful, taking a pluralistic view of the generalization of qualitative research, claiming that: "different kinds of research are faced with particular problems of generalization and have to use appropriate lines of reasoning on the issue of generalization."

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After outlining two categories of (rare) cases where generalization is redundant or not appropriate, he describes three types of generalization. Among these, two seem relevant to this second phase: “generalization through context similarity” (frequently referred to as transferability) and “generalization through recognition of patterns”. I discuss each one briefly, in view of explaining how they were combined.

#### Generalization through context similarity

This is arguably the classic understanding of generalization when applied to qualitative research, inspired by quantitative research (it is frequently referred using other terms in view of the looseness of the claims made). Larsson (2009, 33) describes this form of generalization as: “The focus on similarity between the research context and other similar contexts becomes a kind of parallel to the relation between sample and population.” This, he argues, is how Geertz’s (2008) ethnographic thick descriptions may on the one hand be extremely specific, and on the other allow them to be used to interpret phenomena elsewhere, precisely because context is so deeply embedded in the accounts.<sup>43</sup>

The problem of course is that it is up to the researcher, or sometimes the reader themselves, to decide whether the contextual similarities allow generalizations to be made. Larsson (2009, 33) points to “the difficulties in judging when a similarity is present”, while underscoring the fact that it “presupposes that the context determines the phenomenon or pattern”.

This requires much contextual information about the phenomenon and an understanding of the extent to which contextual variation might threaten one’s ability to generalize. Applied to the results of articles 1 and 2, one might ask the following questions:

- Would such results be found at all newspapers producing news for both web and print?
- Would such results be found at only those newspapers producing news for both web and print which may be described as digital first newspapers? (I have indeed suggested that the key vehicle for transporting these results into another setting is a certain digital firstness)

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<sup>43</sup> Becker (1998, 80) makes a similar claim, while Latour (2005) also favors similar descriptive approaches to social science, including in their ability to make broader claims. However, he argues convincingly (if somewhat provocatively) that context is problematic precisely because it is used to box together multiple elements that researchers fail to fully explain. If context made no difference at all, it needn’t be mentioned: context itself explains, rather than providing the foundations for comparing and generalizing.

- Was news production at *Le Temps* in 2017-2018 so idiosyncratic that none of these results have any significance elsewhere?

Short of allowing me to claim that what I observed at *Le Temps* must occur at all *digital first* newspapers, it suggests that I study other *digital first* newspapers in view of verifying whether claims made in articles 1 and 2 hold elsewhere: “context similarity only indicates a pragmatic potentiality, i.e. it can be practical to be alert to the possibility that an interpretation from a research study makes sense also in this new case”(Larsson 2009, 34).

In its harder form, this *a priori* approach to generalization claims that for cases where the context is similar enough, you cannot but find the same phenomena. In its softer form, it steers you in the direction of the places you are most likely to find the same phenomena.

#### Generalization through recognition of patterns

Generalization through recognition need not base itself on contextual similarity (or stabilizing variables). According to Larsson (2009, 33): “Qualitative research often produces such interpretations – theoretical constructions, concepts or descriptions, i.e. patterns or configurations, which can be recognized in the empirical world.” These patterns, known to the user, are identified elsewhere, in new cases. Larsson especially favors this version of generalizability in cases where “objects of study are processes” (34), while at the same time warning of the dangers of lay users corrupting the original qualities of a study.

Contrary to *a priori* generalization through context similarity, *a posteriori* generalization through recognition of patterns tells you that if the pattern is similar enough (and to this I would add *and complex enough*), the phenomenon – or process – is likely to have similar causalities. Whereas generalization through context similarity suggest to you where to look, generalization through recognition of patterns does not require a similar context. However, they need not be mutually exclusive: the more similar the context, the likelier you are to recognize patterns.

#### Finding patterns by looking within the right context

The approach to *phase 2* of the research project sought to integrate both versions of generalization, thereby reducing the dangers inherent to each form, because they overcome one another’s weaknesses. To quote Larsson (2009, 34) one last time: “It is the whole configuration – interpretation in context –that is the basis of generalization – an experience of a recognition of something. Here, there is no *a priori* assumption that an interpretation can be

generalized to similar contexts”. This meant that in *phase 2* of my research, beyond conducting a mere enquiry relating to the definition of *digital first* at newspapers (self-)described as *digital first*, Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel and I would give ourselves the chance of encountering similar patterns, neither assuming that results from articles 1 and 2 necessarily applied, nor searching for them too actively (actively countering confirmation bias). Nevertheless, it helped us structure the interview guide.

To sum up my approach to generalization, talking about *digital first* (which I suspected to be necessary contextual element allowing transferability) to newswriters from two other newspapers, and the same newspaper three years down the line, enabled me to verify whether any results from the previous study at *Le Temps* might apply beyond that particular newsroom at that moment in time (to daily newspapers that were very different on other levels), while limiting the risk of confirmation bias.

This is why research interviews began by asking respondents to describe how print and news stories related to one another, and then to describe the typical trajectory of print and web stories (see the interview guide for *phase 2*, appendix G). Beyond definitional material, follow up questions could also explore any elements of answers that may display patterns previously identified and tie them to specific work processes (and related tools).

Story length – found to be an extremely important and complex issue in my observation – was discussed by many respondents without us needing to prompt them. At the same time, thanks to phase one, we were equipped to explore the relationship between the newspaper layout and story-length, and the implications of rewriting stories for the print newspaper. Crucially, the concept of *print capacity surplus* emerged from confirming multiple findings identified in my ethnography, in interviews with newswriters from other newspapers.

Results from my ethnography at *Le Temps* such as the temporal and spatial configuration of web stories by print and the existence of bottlenecks resulting in the convergence of publication times towards the evenings were found to apply, at least partly, to the newsrooms studies in 2021. How they may be meaningful when explored in other newspapers, in particular beyond French-speaking Switzerland, is discussed in the section discussion below.



## A Final Discussion

The following section provides a brief overview of the main results from this research project, before considering what broader lessons we might take from this work. I also address its limitations and weaknesses, many of which relate to the small place given to the numerous individual practices and performances, arguing that this agenda should be pursued in parallel. Lastly, I try to give at least some agency back to newswriters.

### A Summary of Results

In introduction, I set out to accomplish three different but closely related goals. First, I sought to document and describe a newspaper production system commonly referred to as *digital first* (description). Second, I sought to understand how web and print respectively generate a given set of production constraints and logics, and how each one impacts the other (analysis). Third, I sought to provide a definition of *digital first*, through descriptions of multiple production systems, through practices that newswriters relate to *digital first*, as identified within discourses about these practices (definition). Finally, I wanted to know whether the main analytics results could be extended.

On a descriptive level, in article 1 and article 2, I reconstruct the way news was produced for web and print at *Le Temps* in 2017-2018. This includes descriptions of how specific stories (as ideal-types or *typifications*) illustrate complex questions of affordances, how spatial, temporal and textual properties are dealt with at various stages of the workflow. In article 3, Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel and I describe the production systems of three further *digital first* newspapers, which differ in size, type and editorial line. All three display certain similarities: journalists write stories directly into the CMS formatted for online publication; online publication times are spread out across the day, with hotter stories being published as quickly as possible, and colder stories being strategically held back, often until the following morning. But important differences remain: the print edition configures online stories to varying degrees, while web and print versions range from being almost identical, to having only topic and story angle in common (length and structure may be very different between the two platforms).

On an analytical level, findings from my 2017-2018 observation at *Le Temps* revealed the existence of intratextual and extratextual networks that configured stories according to (conflicting) rules and best practices that govern web and print stories respectively. Although

originally written into the CMS as digital stories, they are done so with a view of an effortless conversion into print: one which allows easy removal of multimedia elements, without requiring significant rewriting (something that is too time-consuming for journalists and editors). In what I refer to as extra-textual networks, stories' spatial and temporal properties are configured. They are reverse engineered by key newswriters determining a print publication date, an allotted space within a page, itself within a section. In other words, the flatplan (indirectly) affects many attributes of stories that appear on the website.

This same newsroom ethnography also looked a little closer at how online publication times were managed, in view of online journalism's specific temporal affordances. The vision of an online newspaper emancipated from temporal constraints was, for *Le Temps* in 2017-2018 at least, more myth than reality. And while the print edition was indeed found to have a restrictive role (especially in defining online publication date), I also show how many forces outside the newsroom weigh on temporality, including the temporal nature of the news being reported, much of which naturally converges towards the end of the workday, creating a backlog. The web production manager, who is the newspaper's timekeeper, only has a limited number of options to build his schedule. When options do exist, he operates scheduling according to audience related logics, seeking a regular output, and successive stories providing patterns of differentiation, especially in terms of section (as expressions of topic).

Placed side by side, article 1 and article 2 reveal how a print and a digital tool/artifact, are differently successful in translating enacting the expectations placed on the respective editions and the stories they contain. The flatplan successfully translates within a single sheet of paper – under the control of the print production manager – many future properties of the print newspaper and the stories within. It helps print-bound stories fulfill themselves. But it exceeds its authority: it structures and configures the digital newspaper – and digital versions of stories – through the many ties that exist between the two. It defines the balance between topics as well as the lengths of stories; and it impacts time.

On the other hand, the daily planning document – a scheduling tool for the digital newspaper by design – is much less successful than the flatplan in helping the digital newspaper and its stories to fulfill themselves. This planning document cannot counter the many of the strong temporal constraints within the newsroom, such as the 24-hour news cycle and its hard print deadline, but also beyond (the more or less predictable temporalities of human activity).

The overall picture at *Le Temps* in 2017-2018 is one of an online newspaper very much subjected to the print edition and its flatplan, itself an heir to the century old Berliner format. Discussing technology in news, Parasie and Dagiral (2013, 3) claim that:

“a new technology is introduced by some actors who carry proposed definitions of how it is to be used, and that technical artifacts have embedded definitions and strategies that were not initially designed for news organizations”

They have a point. In fact, alongside a gap they describe between who designed the technical artifacts (people not specifically concerned by news organizations) and who uses it (news organizations), my results point to another, similar gap: one between when these technical artifacts were designed (many decades ago), and the present. This has been illustrated here by the flatplan. I would therefore argue that an old technology designed for newspapers may have embedded definitions and strategies not designed for newer news organizations. Much like the *Berliner* format, both the flatplan and the editorial planning document have something human built into them: they were created by the production system’s designers. At the same time, their effects (or their action) may extend beyond what they were designed for. For example, the newspaper flatplan was never designed to constrain the production possibilities of digital news. But it nevertheless does so. In other words, those editorial strategies designed in-house by editorial management were being undermined by other external ‘strategies’ inherited from the print newspaper’s own configuring network.<sup>44</sup> In layman’s terms, its effects on the digital edition may just as easily be described as unintended consequences.

The emerging view is one of a digital newspaper tethered to its print counterpart; a matter of fact that suggests the following: so long that the two are tethered or harnessed together, it is impossible for the online version to display high levels of agility and to enact the full range of its platform-specific affordances. How then to detach web from print? The most radical but also effective approach would be to renounce any form of coupling between stories altogether. However, that would come at a very high cost and undermine one of the underlying principles of dual-media publishing – an approach that fundamentally seeks to benefit from rationalization. As one editor-in-chief explained: “If we untether the two stories too

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<sup>44</sup> Law (2009, 148) dissociates strategy from intentionality: “In practice the actor network conception of strategy can be understood more broadly to include teleologically ordered patterns of relations indifferent to human intentions.”

much, it generates two full copy-editing and proofing workflows for stories that in most cases share 99% of their content”

During *phase 2*, interviews revealed that at *20 Minutes (Free)*, digital was less subordinated to the print edition. Indeed, web and print versions stories were much less tightly tethered to one another. The digital newspaper went about its own business, producing large numbers of stories. The print production team then made a selection of those stories it wanted to publish in paper form, and each story was significantly rewritten. At *La Côte (Local)* on the other hand, newswriters described a familiar dominance of print over online content. Finally, at *Le Temps*, three years down the road and under new ownership, digital seemed to be undergoing some degree of emancipation.

How was this being achieved? By forcing desk-section editors and reporters to forget about print (and especially story lengths). But just and importantly, by producing larger numbers of stories, and by growing the print team responsible for repurposing and fitting stories into the makeup. This allows web and print stories to follow different paths, from earlier in the workflow. Put differently, overcoming the digital edition’s inability to fulfil itself was being achieved by increasing the *print capacity surplus* (defined as the difference between total production resources and those required to adequately fill the news hole).

On a definitional level, the *digital first matrix*, which organizes the five dimensions of *digital first* (workflow, temporality, mindset, text-level features and strategy), not only creates a definitional framework, but improves comparability and therefore provides a gateway to transferability and generalization, including for using the more descriptive accounts of the three newspapers studied in *phases 1* and *2*. Instead of using the label of *digital first* as the entry point for understanding whether dual-media web and print production might operate according to – or be subjected to – similar forces from one newspaper to another, the breaking down of *digital first* into these dimensions allows for more nuanced comparison. Either by helping to identify more pertinent comparisons (improving context similarity), or – within the context of comparing – in providing clues for better understanding differences unaccounted for. As such, it may best be used as a map for exploring newspapers that describe themselves as *digital first*.

## On Overcoming the Impotence of Digital News Affordances

Assuming that this print hegemony is widespread, which I have argued is almost certainly the case, the question of what might be done can now be addressed. I have already suggested that increasing *print capacity surplus* may hold the key to the better fulfillment of digital editions of newspapers, and the stories they contain.

The obvious way of increasing this surplus is to expand overall capacity.<sup>45</sup> However, most newspapers are unable or unwilling to increase available resources by hiring more newsworkers, especially within the context of the industry's well-documented economic hardship. Some readers may have identified another possible path: to reduce the news hole itself, for example by reducing the newspaper's page count. Unfortunately, in pursuit of profitability most newspapers have already shrunk the news to something near the minimum viable size required to produce a daily newspaper. Go any further, and one would have to kill off one of the weekly editions, or even to switch to single (weekend) print edition, as has been considered within the industry for some time. If ambitions of this research were restricted to merely contributing (poorly) to the existing managerial literature, maybe the story would end here.

A third option would be to pursue lines of questioning that do not blindly take digital newspaper myths for granted. This might include rethinking the print newspaper's content and layout in view of freeing it from functions better fulfilled by digital, helping newsworkers become more aware of the impact of the tools and technologies they use, and taking a step back and asking the question of the necessity of filling online newspapers with digital news affordances (temporal, spatial and textual). This third way could also involve questioning whether print *flatplans* that configure digital news offerings severely limit the ambitions of the news media and its social, democratic and political functions or ambitions.<sup>46</sup> Put slightly differently:

- Does it really matter?

This includes asking such a question through the lens of the public that consumes news. Recent research has suggested that the attachment to print news remains strong (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Suenzo 2020), while continuing to produce ambivalent or seemingly

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<sup>45</sup> I would insist here that this not something that I am advocating for – this research has no prescriptive ambitions whatsoever. Instead, I am merely outlining cause and effect.

<sup>46</sup> Note here a belated introduction of questions relating to the political (in its extensive definition), which have been largely absent throughout this research, while being almost constitutive of the field of journalism studies.

contradictory results regarding the question of what audiences gain from more digital and interactive news, and how they value it.

It may also be useful at this stage to bring newswriters back into the frame. Because although the more structural elements of the underlying technical system play a crucial role, especially in defining the limits of what they can and cannot do within the production system (or rather how much effort is required of them to overcome the production system), newswriters do have the final say. And the more reflexive among them seem to have understood what much of what has been described here, almost intuitively.

As a copy editor of having worked for both web and print at *Le Temps* explained in 2018:

“I am not sure everyone realizes how much of a print newspaper we are. I am not just talking about our readers but also within the newsroom. We talk about digital first, we win prizes and that sort of stuff. But ours is basically print content. [...] I am not saying it is a problem, just that we need to be conscious of it.”

### **Giving Back Newswriters Some Agency**

Newswriters own agency has remained discrete during much of this dissertation, which opens me up to the criticisms that the methodological premises borrowed from ANT have dissolved much of the craft involved in newswriting, the more individual on the job performances, and their underlying logics. This is a fair comment and one that has been made convincingly in critiques of material-semiotic approaches to social science. I will address this issue briefly here, before giving back newswriters their voice.

Newswriters are not absent from this study so much as more present in the ethnographic accounts (and story case-studies) than they do in the ensuing analysis. This makes sense for several reasons. Indeed, although obeying rules and logics that fit within the respective sociotechnical production systems, their work mostly consists of that which cannot be adequately automated (or black-boxed). It is singular, and therefore does not lend itself well to more generic accounts of how newspapers and their stories are produced (they multiply variables rather than produce stable accounts). These more singular practices or performances could have been studied in much more detail, either by remaining within an ANT framework but shifting the object of study, or by resorting to dedicated theoretical and

methodological frameworks that place practice at the center. Results would, I suspect, be very different. However, they would in all likelihood not contradict my findings. But let's remember that this research was primarily focused on newspapers and news stories, and not on newswriters. Many insightful studies have been undertaken that indeed place newswriters and their relationship to digital at the center.

Reporters, editors and editorial management were acutely aware that they were working within a news production system that offered them faster routes to more common destinations, while slower paths were available – albeit at a much higher cost. One respondent at *Le Temps* described the print newspaper's hold on the digital edition as a “violent dictatorship”; this despite them having started their career prior to the advent of digital journalism and being very attached to print.

Achieving news stories that fulfilled their digital promise often required leaving the beaten track; or creating new pathways. One deputy editor-in-chief explained to me that print templates had failed in doing away with features that online news had rendered redundant. He was in favor of ‘hacking’ these templates, which had age-old logics embedded within them:

“I feel like we get things wrong because we build layouts that are prisons, they are literally prisons. Ours have all sorts of little spaces for fillers and latest news built into it, and so in the evening as you are finishing filling your newspaper and want to go home, and you suddenly realize ‘shit, it's 8 p.m. and I need a 500 character item’, so you go to the newswire and find the first thing available, or three key figures from AFP, and as you place it in the makeup you are frustrated because you know they provide is zero added value. [...] It made sense in a pre-digital world where these things mattered because you wouldn't find them anywhere else.”

The holding back of stories for the following day may also be viewed as such a hack, which gradually became routinized. This practice had gone from being rare at *Le Temps* in 2018 (and considered contrary to the logics of digital first), to something that was common to all three newspapers of our 2021 study.

One journalist at *La Côte* provided a striking example of individual logics, that both align with *digital first* principles, and contradict them at the same time. They were the only reporter to have managed to negotiated access to the print layout tool. They explained this allowed them to ignore story-lengths pre-defined by the print layout and write the story as they believed it should be done for the website, adjusting it for the printed paper at a later stage. At the same time, this had been accepted because they so often handed in his stories just prior to print deadline; something that deeply annoyed the print production team.

This awareness was expressed reflexively in discourse that illustrated an ongoing negotiation between stories' conflicting expectations or programs for stories. Put slightly differently, in the case of *Le Temps*, if there is a general agreement about the newsroom rules and maxims (appendix B), the relative importance of each (i.e., their hierarchy) is different from one newsworker to the next. Similarly, interpretations of what makes sense in according to digital logic are inconsistent.

Perhaps unsurprising for such a study, early on, individual idiosyncratic practices were everywhere: I could not see the forest for the trees. Thereafter, I began to identify many very neatly drawn patterns; structures that seemed inescapable and all-defining. Only belatedly did I become increasingly aware of a middle ground: the extent to which individual newsworkers operated, within the limits allowed for within the underlying sociotechnical system<sup>47</sup>, according to their own individual interpretations of what a digital news story should be – or what features and affordances are most important to consider (for example between timeliness and text-level features).

I find the following anecdote regarding headlines is revealing: a web production manager explained that they often added the verb 'to be' to online headlines: "When we speak, nobody says 'Pierre Maudet [a local government minister] guilty of such and such' – nobody speaks like that, it sounds absurd, doesn't it". This drove their colleagues crazy, they explained. But they claimed, the only reason the verb was ever removed in the first place from news headlines was to gain a few invaluable characters: in newswire reports when they were originally circulated via telegraph, and in newspaper pages where space is very limited. No such logics need apply in the same way to digital, he ascertained. One editor-in-chief illustrated the importance of resisting the convenience of adopting tools whose hidden costs

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<sup>47</sup> Or more precisely by constantly negotiating the balance between a rigid but effective industrial approach and costly ad-hoc ways of helping the newspapers and their stories fulfill their potential.

outweigh the benefits they bring. They explained that any tool designed to transpose stories from their web version to print needed to be powerful and simple at the same time: “If the maneuver requires more than three clicks, the tool is useless, because you can easily transfer anything by pressing ctrl+ A, ctrl + C and ctrl + V, which produces a simple copy and paste”

That I did not further explore this middle ground remains a frustration, not least because much of the data required to do so already lies, albeit unstructured, within the dataset. Such analysis would doubtless benefit from input from neighboring theoretical traditions, whether within classical action theory or strains of action theory such as the one developed by Schatzki (2001; see also Lindberg 2014). Investigating the interrelationships between programs of action or expectations embedded within print and digital newspapers and versions of stories – and how newswriters individually relate to these – surely seems an agenda worth pursuing, perhaps by borrowing from social theory that offers analytical insights into the fuzzy borders between the individual and the collective; for example by exploring how newswriters develop their own tactics (de Certeau 2013) or how these may relate to pragmatic regimes (Thévenot 2001). The identification of types of stories the more or less predictable trajectories that they follow is as close as I came within this study. Short of deploying such complex theoretical frameworks, Tuchman’s typifications remain very helpful conceptual tools, especially if updated to integrate digital production logics.

Nevertheless, much of what this work has to offer regarding how web and print relate at *digital first* newspapers can be understood by studying how the two are interwoven into a common production system, its processes and its materiality.



## Concluding Remarks

Although they were meticulously analyzed and deconstructed, the findings of this research owe much to the reflexivity of newswriters, whom I fear – should they read this dissertation – might find these trivial. Upon nearing the end of this research, a quote from Becker (1998, 16) resonated within me:

“An early version of Molotch's diagnosis defined a sociologist as someone who spends a hundred thousand dollars studying prostitution to discover what any cab driver could have told him.”

Had I just spent four years researching something they could have told me, had I just asked the right question? Hopefully, the main results (at the very least) have the merit of more clearly putting into words something they are intuitively aware of, but not quite able to fully express. Since their discourse has tended to dissolve in the three articles (once corroborated by their peers and triangulated thanks to an analysis of production systems and their workflows), it seems appropriate to include some quotations that I believe are relatable to people working in web and print newspapers the world over, while being consistent with my key findings.

“Well, after 20 years working with the web, I still have not seen a single convincing answer that says ‘this is how we are going to transfer or transliterate web to print, or print to web’ –”

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“Things invariably get complicated with Swiss and International news. These news stories often break sometime during the day in question, and they will just naturally converge late in the day.”

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“We currently just don’t have the time [to produce lots of digital only stories]. Almost by design, the newspaper aligns itself with the volume of content that corresponds to that required to fill the printed newspaper.”

Since the research project began, many newspapers have adopted their own versions of *digital first* production. But what awaits them next? Will this newsmaking paradigm remain, maybe undergoing minor adjustments, or will another replace it? Or will printed versions of newspapers gradually or abruptly disappear? Of course, answers to these questions will have repercussions on the relevance of this thesis, and how its research will age. Many scholars, news industry professionals and consultants in the early 2000s predicted its death before the beginning of this decade, something that several respondents taking part in my research reminded us of. Just a couple of years ago, this still seemed a long way off. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many newspapers once again questioning the future of their daily print editions. For example, short of revealing any future plans for their printed newspaper, *20 Minutes* reminded us that their advertising-based free Metro-style paper just doesn’t get read if nobody commutes to work. At the moment of writing, research is just beginning to measure how lockdowns and remote working have accelerated digital transformation and re-defined our relationship to (online) information. On the other hand, there is also research to suggest that the textuality and materiality of the print newspaper may not yet have had its final say (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Suenzo 2020).

Should print newspapers disappear into the sunset, this thesis may turn out to document how many newsrooms functioned during a brief and peculiar moment in history: when print passed on the baton to digital. Although this research was not conducted with this in mind, such an outcome would grant it a fortuitous place in posterity, more in a historical context for shedding light on the way dual-media newspapers were produced, than for its contributions to the contemporary field of journalism studies.

An editor-in-chief of *La Côte* believed that should print disappear, it might be precisely because it so restricts the possibilities of a digital newspaper. Addressing the question of the relationship between digital and print, and the future of the latter (while conjuring up a very Swiss metaphor), they explained:

“Basically, we have each of our two feet on these very different skis that are web and print, while having to somehow ski straight. We are asked to produce two separate media, at a time when we do not have anything like the resources we did in the 1970s to produce just one newspaper. [...] You’re always asking yourself how far to go in the quest for perfection of the one, while knowing that it is to the detriment of the other. Maybe one day we will tell ourselves not to care so much about the paper edition. But, when that day arrives, my answer will be that we may as well not bother with a print newspaper.”

Beyond documenting dual-production newsrooms at the turn of the 2020s, should the printed newspaper resist its forecasted decline more vehemently, one of the determinant factors of print’s dominance – ever-present in this research – may hold the key to its salvation: its inertia. By this I do not refer to inertia as meaning passivity or motionlessness. Instead, I refer to inertia in according to its Newtonian definition, as an *amount of change in velocity*. The heavier an object, the more difficult it is to deviate or pull to a stop. Print may not move fast, but it is infinitely heavier than binary code.



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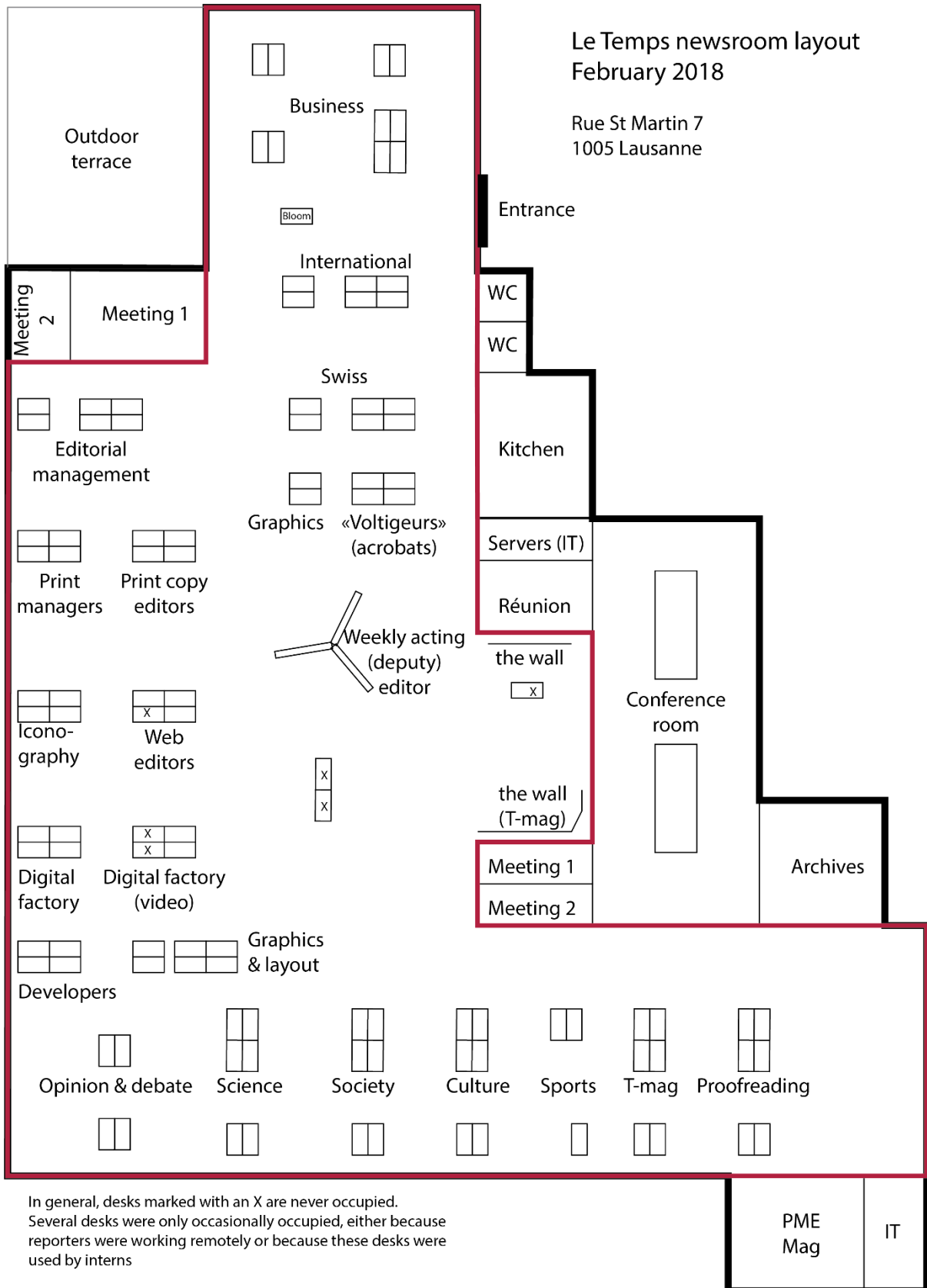
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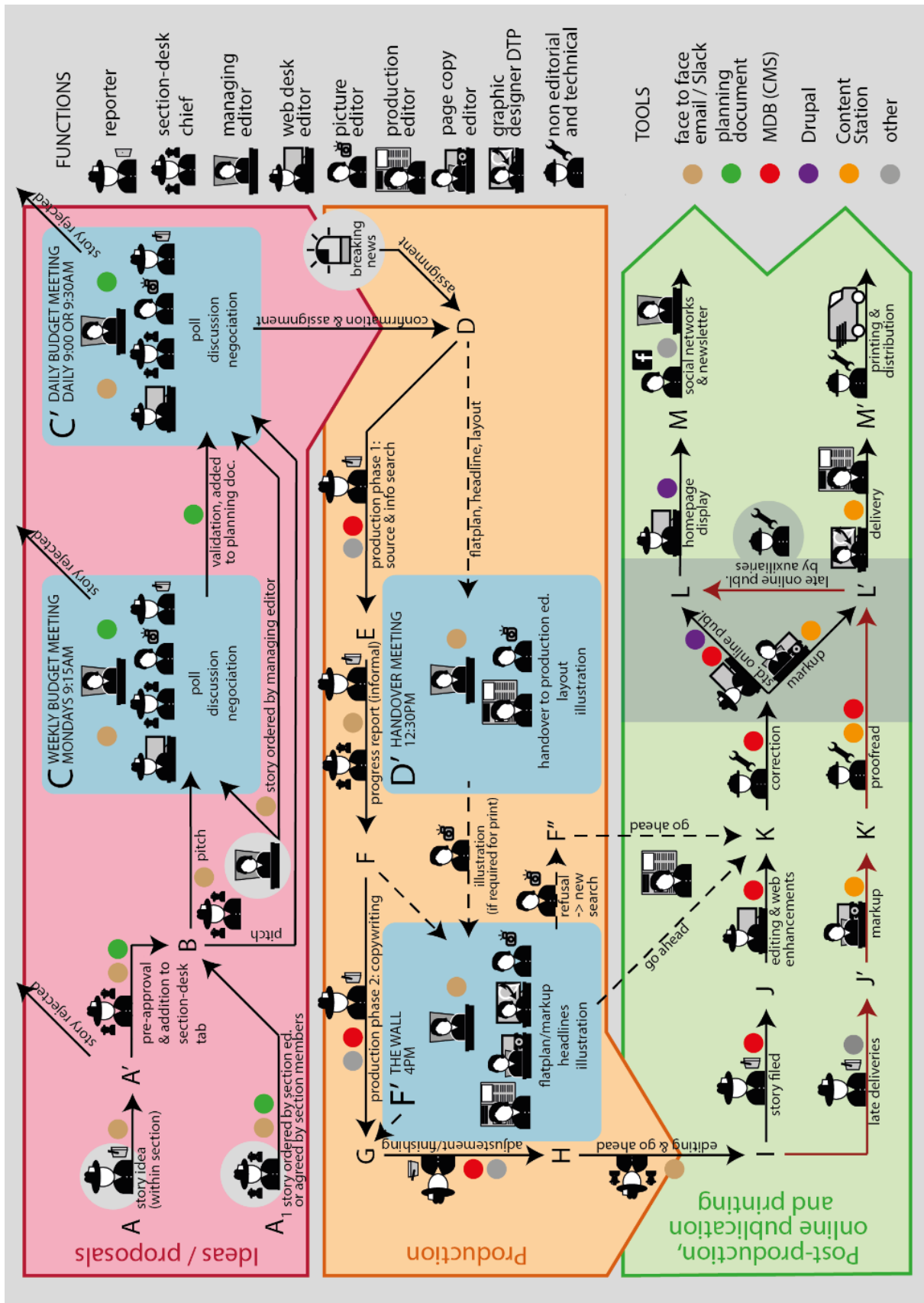


# Appendix

## Appendix A: Newsroom Layout at *Le Temps*



## Appendix B: Standard Article Publication Process (Le Temps)



### **Appendix C: Newsroom Maxims at *Le Temps***

I have identified the following production-related statements or newsroom maxims that are universally known to the permanent editorial staff at *Le Temps*.<sup>48</sup> They explained to me, identified within discourse and documents, while many were also observed during newswork. Some were also confirmed during my research interviews.

1. A 20-page newspaper (occasionally increased to 22 pages) must be published every weekday, and a 32-page newspaper must be published on Saturdays
2. The last page of the markup for the print newspaper must be sent to the printer by 9pm
3. The newspaper website publishes news throughout the week
4. The editorial line is business friendly, economically liberal and culturally and socially progressive
5. At any given time, the overall responsibility of the content falls to the on-duty managing editor, of which there are four and who alternate responsibility according to a weekly rotation
6. The web and print production managers are responsible for the production aspects of the web and print editions respectively
7. The division of topics covered by journalists is made according to their affiliation to topical desks<sup>49</sup>
8. Articles in the print newspaper are published in pages that are attributed to sections, whose topics loosely correspond to those of the desks<sup>50</sup>
9. Each desk, represented by its desk-section chief, must fill its dedicated spaces (usually a set number of pages) in the printed newspaper with stories that fall within the desk's topics; certain spaces/pages fall directly within the editorial responsibility of the managing editor

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<sup>48</sup> These maxims are heterogeneous. In many cases, they were explained to me early on during observation. As such they are not very present in newsroom discourse. However, they are often indirectly referred to when making or explaining decisions.

<sup>49</sup> These desks are: International, Switzerland, Opinion, Science, Business and finance, Sports, Culture, Society and lifestyle. There is also desk a group of agile reporters known as "voltigeurs" (translates into English as both infantry and acrobats).

<sup>50</sup> These sections are, in order of the pages (with desks responsibility indicated in parentheses): Conversation (topics generating widespread debate, usually on social media), Times in focus (managing editor), International, Switzerland, Opinion and debate, Science, Business and finance, Sports, Culture, Society, Portrait (managing editor).

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10. Page areas are set aside for advertising. These areas vary from one day to the next. They are confirmed the morning prior to publication
11. The website is structured according to sections, whose topics loosely correspond to those of the desks<sup>51</sup>
12. Notwithstanding some exceptions, stories published for the print newspaper are always published online. This is notably the case when the news is too short or insignificant to warrant a web version, when its prime purpose is to fill a blank.
13. Whenever possible (or pertinent) the stories are published online first, as soon as they are available<sup>52</sup>
14. Certain stories are published online only. This is the case when the news is very hot (and has a short shelf life), and falls the longest before the next printed issue, as well as for many of the blogs and columns written by external contributors.
15. The selection of the stories to be placed online each day and published in the following day's newspaper is discussed together during the morning budget meeting
16. Important topics, feature stories and more resource dependent stories are discussed in a weekly budget meeting, held on Monday mornings
17. The agenda for budget meetings follows the order of the sections/pages of the print newspaper
18. Approved stories are written into the planning document during the budget meeting, in the order of the print paper's sections, with scheduled online publication times.
19. Journalists write their stories into the publishing system (an augmented CMS), edited in such a way as to be ready to be published online. Freelancers and stringers send their articles by email.
20. Reporters are required to find an appropriate photograph/illustration in the available database (connected to affiliated photo agencies). For stories that will be illustrated in the print version, and for stories particularly difficult to illustrate, the photo desk is tasked with providing an appropriate image. External staff usually do not provide accompanying

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<sup>51</sup> These web-sections are World, Switzerland, Business, Opinion, Culture, Science, Sports, Society and Life-style.

<sup>52</sup> In fact, online publishing times are subjected to publishing schedule that integrates complex factors and variables.

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21. Stories that arrive late may be formatted to print requirements; these along with the remaining content that web-editors have not managed to place online during working hours, are published by auxiliary staff who are not trained journalists.

22. News, taken from newswire reports, is published online outside working hours by auxiliaries located in the USA (this news is rarely, if ever published in print form)

These statements are the basis of a certain number of routines, production logics and editorial decisions. However, other more local ones coexist alongside, and occasionally interfere with, the above.

## Appendix D: Research Design Diagram

Research phase	Broad research question	Narrow research question	Answer	Level	Empirical data
Phase 0	How are innovative news formats invented and produced?		Unanswered (abandoned)		Observation (exploratory)
		How are these different to the ways normal stories are produced?	Unanswered (abandoned)		Observation (exploratory)
	How are digital and print versions newspapers produced?		(see below)		
Phase 1		How are digital and print versions of <i>Le Temps</i> produced?	Articles 1 and 2. Ethnographic accounts provided	Descriptive	<i>Le Temps</i> : observation, documentary, interviews, content analysis
		How do digital and print versions of <i>Le Temps</i> newspaper shape each other?	Article 1: According to intratextual and extratextual networks. Extratextual networks configure according to temporal and spatial relationships. Among these, the flatplan plays a defining role.	Descriptive & analytical	<i>Le Temps</i> : observation, documentary, interviews, content analysis
		What happens to temporality when print and web compete and collide? Which forces determine publication time, and how?	Article 2: News temporality is highly dependant on external forces. Online publishing schedules fit within (and are enacted by) print publishing schedules (and the 24-hours news cycle). The schedule is built by the web production manager, striving for regular output and diversity.	Descriptive & analytical	<i>Le Temps</i> : observation, documentary, interviews, content analysis
Phase 2		What is the definition of <i>digital first</i> ?	Article 3: the print production system (workflow) and related logics (mindset) have been adapted to enable the online edition to better implement digital affordances (temporal and textual) with a view of making digital the core business activity.	Definitional	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		What is the full range of definitions of digital first in terms of practices, discourses and perceptions?	Article 3: Description in article 3	Descriptive	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		Is it possible to identify, within these definitions, common shared properties?	Article 3: Common shared properties belonging to five dimensions: workflow, temporality, mindset, story-level features, strategy	Analytical	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		Taken together, do these shared properties constitute a newsmaking paradigm?	Article 3: Yes, they constitute a newsmaking paradigm	Definitional	20 Minutes, <i>Le Temps</i> , <i>La Côte</i> : 17 semi-structured interviews
		Is the relationship between web and print at <i>Le Temps</i> unique, or are certain elements to be found in other so-called digital-first newspapers?			
Conclusion	How are digital and print versions newspapers produced?		According to a digital first production paradigm, with digital versions of newspapers and their stories struggling to fulfill their promises in terms of digital affordances. This is particularly true for newspapers that are not able to devote significantly more resources to their online activities than their print ones. This invariably means compromising.		

### **Appendix E: Observation Days at *Le Temps***

Preliminary observation days:

September 2017 11.09.2017, 14.09.2017, 22.09.2017, 25.09.2017,

October 2017 02.10.2017, 05.10.2017, 09.10.2017\*, 16.10.2017.

23.10.2017, 30.10.2017.

November 2017 06.11.2017, 13.11.2017, 17.11.2017, 20.11.2017\*,

21.11.2017, 27.11.2017.

December 2017 04.12.2017, 06.12.2017, 11.12.2017\*.

Observation days with recorded budget meetings and focused data collection

December 2017 13.12.2017,

18.12.2017, 21.12.2017.

January 2018 22.01.2018, 29.01.2018.

February 2018 05.02.2018\*, 08.02.2018, 05.02.2018.

May 2018 05.07.2018\*

Observation days of the weekly case study

February 2018 12.02.2018, 13.02.2018, (14.02.2018), 15.02.2018,

16.02.2018

Case study observation day

February 2018 14.02.2018

\*Partial observation days

## **Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interviews Phase 1 (Le Temps)**

Persons interviewed

Journalist 1 & desk-section chief

Journalist 2

Journalist 3

Web-production manager

Web-editor

Print production manager

Print editor

Associate editor-in-chief & managing editor for 14.02.2018

Associate editor-in-chief responsible for multimedia productions

Editor-in-chief (print)

Editor-in-chief (web)

20180702 11:00 Guide d'entretien -- journaliste 2

Introduction

Thèse -> journalisme numérique -> facteurs et contraintes papier qui impactent le web + inverse.

Interview ajd -> facteurs et contraintes qui vous affectent ou sont visibles en tant que journaliste

Moi: pas un expert, mais plutôt un œil extérieur -> l'expert c'est vous. Vous savez beaucoup plus que moi. -> mon avantage: multiplier les perspectives -- se déplacer librement.

Pas un audit. Pas créer un guide des bonnes pratiques. Pas une approche managériale-> ambitions plus modestes: comprendre comment ça marche -> pourquoi c'est si difficile de produire en même temps deux bons journaux.

Pourquoi cette recherche? -> Documenter les façons de faire et décortiquer c'est essayer de mieux comprendre. Nous équiper rien qu'un tout petit peu mieux face aux bouleversements -> Parce que la production et transformation et la distribution de l'information me fascinent. -> Parce que j'ai étudié et pratiqué le journalisme, mais je suis plus intéressé par comment les gens le font, que de le faire moi-même.

Anonyme et confidentiel. -> propos et idées seront utilisés pour mieux comprendre et analyser -> propos se rapportent à votre fonction au sein du journal, sans vous ériger en porte parole au nom des autres -> vous serez à priori désigné comme "journaliste de la rubrique suisse d'un journal quotidien Suisse" -> indirectement identifiable -> validation de propos jugés potentiellement sensibles -> rien ne sera publié en votre nom/fonction sans votre consentement -> protection des sources // journalistes

Intéresse à la tension entre la manière de faire en général et la spécificité de chaque journal -> 15 février, analysé de près -> discussion aller-retour entre la routine et la production du Temps Fort dans ce journal du 15 février -> la mémoire n'a pas besoin d'être parfaite -> intéressé aux facteurs et processus

Enregistré si ok, avec vidéo pour ne pas avoir à noter lorsque vous indiquez des éléments dans le journal. Environ 90 minutes.

Des questions?

Première partie: de l'exemplum au récit de pratique - Un papier "Temps Fort" [45 minutes]

10 minutes au début pour relire votre article dans le journal (versions print et web) et documents de travail

le journal en continu

Support

le journal papier

Les documents planning

[sensibilité par rapport aux temporalités et aux formats -- poursuivre avec relances lorsque la temporalité et la mise en forme sont évoqués]

Question A. Voici le journal du 15 février 2018. En page 3 se trouvent deux articles, qui constituent le Temps fort du jour. C'est de ces deux papiers, des routines de travail mais aussi des circonstances spécifiques, que je voudrais parler avec vous aujourd'hui.

Le temps qui nous sépare de cette date peut vous gêner, mais il m'est aussi utile. Il nous permettra d'alterner librement entre une discussion sur comment vous faites d'habitude, et une discussion sur ce qui a été unique dans le cadre de ce double papier. Je vous demanderai ensuite de me raconter étape par étape, et dans le plus de détail possible, la période au cours de laquelle vous avez contribué à produire ce journal.

Dites-moi ce que vous faites avec quels outils vous travaillez, avec qui vous discutez ou interagissez et à quel moment, et via quels canaux de communication.

Checklist étapes

- Comment est né ce sujet
- Proposition / validation en rubrique
- Déterminé un délai et un format de publication (quand comment est-il devenu un Temps Fort?)
- Le travail de recherche et d'écriture

Sources

- Jean-Luc Barbezat -- humoriste, candidat
  - Thierry Béguin -- ancien conseiller Etat Etats
  - Nils Soguel -- chercheur IDHEAP
  - Laurent Debrot -- doyen de fonction législatif
  - Laurent Kurt -- ++ entrepreneur Marietta
- 
- La validation triangle correction / SR mise en page et ajustements / édition web mise en ligne
  - Echanges avec les chefs d'édition ou SR
  - Un éventuel suivi après

Question B. En quoi peut-on considérer ces papiers comme ordinaires, et en quoi pourrait-on les qualifier d'uniques?

Question C. Est-ce que, durant la planification et la production de ce sujets, vous pensez au support de publication (papier, web ou les deux)?

Question D. Quel suivi pour ces deux papiers après la mise en ligne et/ou la publication dans l'édition papier du journal?

Checklist outils:

- Chemin de fer
- Document planning général
- Document planning TF et éclairages
- Document planning rubriques
- Slack
- Email
- Face to face
- InCopy / Content Station
- MDB

Deuxième partie: "Le schéma" [5+10 minutes]

Voici un schéma issu de l'observation de la production du journal papier et web. Je vous donne 5 minutes pour étudier ce schéma. Dans 5 minutes, je vous demanderai de le commenter, de le corriger ou nuancer à l'aide du stylo. Je vous demanderai ensuite de l'appliquer aux deux sujets que nous venons de discuter ensemble. Dans cet entretien, je suis évidemment particulièrement intéressé par les parties du schéma qui vous concernent directement.

Pause de 5 minutes pour se familiariser avec le schéma

Question E : Commentez le schéma et "corrigez-le" à l'aide du stylo.

Décrivez la trajectoire du sujet que nous avons discuté ensemble à partir du schéma.

Test avec le matériel en vue de filmer les entretiens (de dos, légèrement anglé, pour voir schéma/docs et les mains).

## **Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interviews Phase 2**

Persons interviewed

*La Côte* (6): junior journalist, senior journalist, web production manager, print production manager, editor-in-chief responsible for digital, editor-in-chief responsible for print.

*Le Temps* (6): junior journalist, senior journalist, web-editor, production manager, associate editor-in-chief responsible for digital, editor-in-chief.

*20 Minutes* (5): junior journalist, senior journalist, web-editor, print production manager, editor-in-chief responsible.

Interview guide

Guide d'entretien -- objectif env. 40min d'entretien

[!!! Ne pas utiliser les termes techniques et le jargon -> ceci doit venir de l'interviewé lui-même. Si la question du digital/web first n'apparaît pas, il s'agira de l'aborder]

Cadrage et modalités

Je propose de vous expliquer un peu les modalités de l'entretien, que je vais enregistrer. Ensuite, je vous demanderai si tout est en ordre, et si je peux enregistrer la suite de l'entretien.

Cet entretien a lieu dans le cadre d'une recherche portant sur le numérique tel qu'il est perçu et pratiqué dans la presse dite traditionnelle. Nous interrogeons différents membres de plusieurs rédactions différentes. Nous cherchons à multiplier les points de vue, y compris en interrogeant différents rôles ou fonctions au des rédactions et le long de la chaîne de production. Les résultats obtenus via les entretiens seront utilisés pour la rédaction d'un article (en anglais) pour l'une des revues internationales sur le journalisme.

Même si les questions sont très générales, il s'agit pour nous de vous garantir un certain niveau d'anonymat, notamment pour vous permettre de parler le plus librement possible. Vous ne serez pas mentionné nommément dans les publications qui seront issues de cette recherche, mais la description du média et de la fonction occupée au sein de celle-ci pourrait vous rendre identifiable pour les personnes ayant une connaissance extrêmement bonne de la presse romande.

Si vous jugez certaines réponses sensibles et que vous ne souhaitez à tout prix pas que vous puissiez être identifiée comme étant la source d'une l'information (même en l'absence de la mention de votre nom), n'hésitez pas à me le dire durant l'entretien, comme on ferait

en off dans un entretien classique. Nous interrogeons d'autres personnes de votre rédaction, mais ne partagerons pas vos réponses.

Est-ce que vous avez des questions?

Est-ce que c'est ok si je poursuis l'enregistrement?

Questions ?

Biographie

Pourriez-vous vous présenter, en indiquant notamment votre fonction actuelle et en quelques mots votre parcours au sein du média voire avant ?

Partie I: description de la stratégie pour faire émerger la question du web-first

1. Pouvez-vous nous décrire, en quelques mots et concrètement, comment s'articulent les versions print et web de votre journal?

a. Quelle trajectoire suit typiquement un article publié sur les deux supports?

b. Quels contenus ne paraissent que sur l'un ou l'autre des supports

c. Du point de vue des outils, comment ça se passe?

2. Quelles sont les principales différences entre la version papier et la version numérique d'un même article ?

a. y a-t-il une différence entre la théorie et la pratique? (en d'autres termes parvenez-vous à une écriture pour le web telle que vous souhaiteriez ou seriez censé la faire?)

3. Pourriez-vous décrire la stratégie de votre média pour chacun des deux supports ?  
[ajout ce qui est entendu//question de la différenciation]

a. stratégie = objectifs spécifiques pour les points suivants:

i. Les contenus spécifiques

ii. Les publics cible

iii. L'objectif ou modèle économique

b. Jusqu'où les objectifs de l'un et de l'autre sont les mêmes, et en quoi se distinguent-ils?

c. Est-ce que ces stratégies sont intégrées l'une avec l'autre?

[Si l'un des mots nn-first est utilisé 4, sinon directement à 5]

4. Vous avez utilisé le mot « xx-first ». Comment vous définiriez ce terme ?

5. On entend [aussi] parler de « digital first », « web-to-print » « web-first » ou encore « mobile first ». Est-ce que l'un ou plusieurs de ces termes vous paraît pertinent pour caractériser votre média ?

a. Est-ce que ces termes sont interchangeable selon vous ?

b. Comment vous les comprenez ou définiriez ?

c. Qu'en est-il de mobile first?

6. Selon vous, le first renvoie-t-il au format initial dans lequel est rédigé l'article, à la temporalité de publication, à un ordre de priorité stratégique, autre chose ? (à l'échelle du média ou de la rédaction de son ensemble; on reviendra à votre pratique individuelle)

7. Est-ce que vous vous souvenez de quand vous avez découvert ces termes pour la première fois. Et quand ils ont été évoqués pour la première fois dans votre rédaction?

a. Est-ce qu'il est apparu pour la première fois dans le contexte d'un changement organisationnel?

b. Comment l'usage du terme a-t-il évolué depuis?

8. [Uniquement si le journaliste se montre négatif envers ces termes]

Est-ce qu'ils représentent un jargon ou un langage marketing vide de sens ?

9. Entre l'offre numérique et le journal imprimé, lequel est, selon vous, privilégié par l'éditeur? La rédaction en chef?

a. [Pour les réd chef uniquement] En tant que red chef, êtes-vous à l'aise pour utiliser ce terme ? Et vous semble-t-il bien accueilli au sein de la rédaction ?

## Partie II: Pratiques et outils

### Général

10. Comment se traduit le "x-first" dans vos pratiques individuelles quotidiennes?

a. Qu'est-ce que ça a changé?

11. Les outils que vous utilisez au quotidien vous semblent-ils compatibles dans la logique du digital first?

a. Au contraire, vos outils sont-ils encore emprunts de logiques de production du papier?

b. Pourquoi ?

---

### Journalistes (J)

#### Passage de témoin

12. J. Lorsque vous rédigez, réfléchissez-vous à la forme et au contenu dans leurs expressions numériques spécifiques?

a. Et dans leur version papier?

13. J. Selon vous, jusqu'où devriez-vous aller dans l'édition de vos articles pour le numérique? Et pour le papier?

a. // Numérique

- i. La préparation des textes pour les réseaux sociaux
- ii. La recherche et l'ajout de l'image de une
- iii. L'intégration liens vers des lectures suggérées
- iv. La titraille (2 versions du titre)
- v. La recherche de contenus embeds (vidéos, tweets, etc.)

b. // Papier

- i. Proposition de titre papier
- ii. Suppression d'éléments numériques

14. Sur la question des responsabilités d'édition, est-ce que vous êtes plutôt en accord avec la rédaction en chef?

15. Identifiez-vous des freins à l'édition numérique dans le système tel qu'il est pensé actuellement dans votre rédaction ?

a. Relance: ces freins sont-ils

- i. Organisationnels ?
- ii. à l'échelle des outils ?
- iii. compétences/formation ?
- iv. ressources (temps à disposition) ?

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Edition web (EW)

12. EW. A quel aspect de l'édition pensez-vous le plus lorsque vous éditez les contenus avant leur parution en ligne? Quelle tâche vous prend le plus de temps?

13. EW. Selon vous, jusqu'où devraient aller les journalistes dans l'édition pour le numérique des articles qu'ils vous soumettent ?

a. // Numérique

- i. La préparation des textes pour les réseaux sociaux
  - ii. La recherche et l'ajout de l'image de une
  - iii. L'intégration liens vers des lectures suggérées
  - iv. La titraille (2 versions du titre)
  - v. La recherche de contenus embeds (vidéos, tweets, etc.)
-

14. Selon vous, les articles que vous éditiez devraient-ils être davantage prêts pour une publication en ligne?

15. Quels sont les freins à l'édition numérique qui implémente les éléments clés d'une approche digital first?

a. Relance: ces freins sont-ils

i. Organisationnels

ii. à l'échelle des outils

iii. compétences/formation

iv. ressources (temps à disposition)

---

Edition papier (EP)

12. EP. Lorsque vous recevez un article destiné au journal, quelles sont vos principales tâches pour les intégrer dans la maquette?

13. EP. Est-ce que le basculement vers le x-first a beaucoup changé vos tâches ou votre manière de travailler?

b. // Papier

i. Proposition de titre papier

ii. Suppression d'éléments numériques

iii. Sur la question des responsabilités d'édition, est-ce que vous êtes plutôt en accord avec la rédaction en chef?

14. Les articles que vous recevez devraient-ils être davantage prêts pour une publication sur papier?

15. Quels sont les problèmes posés au journal papier issus d'une production qui se pré-occupe en premier lieu de la version numérique?

---

Rédaction en chef (RC)

12. Globalement, est-ce que le système de production digital-first fonctionne de manière satisfaisante?

13. Quels sont les principaux défis de votre système de production?

14. Observez-vous des résistances au sein de vos équipes, avec la mise en place du web first?

a. Celle-ci se manifeste en particulier au niveau d'un des métiers suivants de la rédaction :

- i. Journalistes
- ii. Éditeur web
- iii. Éditeur papier

15. D'autres fonctions au sein de la rédaction ont-elles selon vous été impactées par ce passage au web first

## Appendix H: Research Data

Below is the list of data collected during the research project. Items underlined constitute key data. In blue, data that is not confidential but protected by copyright. In red, data that is considered confidential. Open data is colored black. Not all individual files are detailed.<sup>53</sup>

1 Key case study data 14.02.2018 (copies assembled in a single folder – does not include research interviews)

- 2018\_Master-table.xlsx
- 20180214\_Seance-quoti (daily budget meeting of 14.02.2018)
- 20180212\_Seance-hebdo (weekly budget meeting of 12.02.2018)
- 20140214-0950\_Seance\_prod-mep (midday print meeting 14.02.2018)
- 20180214-1000\_Planning éditorial - Newsroom Lausanne – LT (editorial planning document, 14.02.2018, 10:00 a.m.)
- 20180214-1754\_Planning éditorial - Newsroom Lausanne – LT (editorial planning document, 14.02.2018, 10:00 a.m.)
- 20180214\_MDB-Achat-avions (CMS story logs Achat d'avions)
- 20180214\_MDB-Finances-Neuch-Analyse (CMS story logs Neuchâtel: finances impossibles)
- 20180214\_MDB-Finances-Neuch-Itw-Kurth (CMS story logs, Neuchâtel: ITW Kurth)
- 20180214\_MDB-Maelys (CMS story logs, Maelys)
- 20180214\_MDB-Rasta (CMS story logs, Rasta Rockett)
- LeTemps-20170915 (print issue, 15.02.2018)
- 20180214\_1436\_Web\_Neuchatel-ITW-Kurth.png (screenshot of web version)
- 20180214\_1506\_Web\_Finances-impossibles.png (screenshot of web version)

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<sup>53</sup> For members of the jury of this thesis, the data is available from the following link, with folder structure reflecting list levels (it is password protected; the password will be provided following the return of a signed confidentiality agreement):

[https://uninech-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/andrew\\_robotham\\_unine\\_ch/EnBHSV5K7Up-Ckiy7tkKt90sBpzcFfeZS2isXbKY7E1Tokg](https://uninech-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/andrew_robotham_unine_ch/EnBHSV5K7Up-Ckiy7tkKt90sBpzcFfeZS2isXbKY7E1Tokg).

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- 20180214\_1810\_Web\_Rasta-Rockett.png (screenshot of web version)
  - 20180214\_2005\_Web\_Maelys.png (screenshot of web version)
  - 20180214\_2028\_Web\_Achat-Avions.png (screenshot of web version)
  - 20180214-1912\_LeTemps\_home.png (homepage screenshot)
  - 2021\_Digital\_first\_itw-data (interview summary *phase 2*)
- 2 Content (output) [non-confidential data protected by copyright]
- 2.1 Articles in digital form
- See URLs within articles table (folder 7)
- 2.2 Print issues from observation days (and other selected issues)
- 53 x pdf
- 2.3 Homepage screenshots & info en continu (sequential)
- Screenshots (incl. date and time) from 12.02.2018 to 19.02.2018
- 2.4 Other
- 3 Article tables (with various metadata) [open data]
- 2018\_Master-table.xlsx
- 4 Planning tools and documents [confidential]
- 4.1 Editorial planning documents
- 53 x .xlsx Exports of the editorial planning document
- 4.2 Flatplan
- 9 x .pdf of flatplan (13-20.02.2018)
- 4.3 MDB-CMS extracts
- 4 x pdf (article case studies)
- 4.4 Analytics
- 4 x (2x) png (article case studies)
- 5 Newsroom reference documents [confidential]
- 15 x internal reference documents common to the whole newsroom (procedures, style guides, etc.)
- 6 Budget meeting transcriptions [confidential]
- 6 x pdf (22.01.2018 & 12-16.02.2018)
- 7 Research notes (unstructured) [confidential]
-

- 7.1 Observation day fieldnotes
  - 7.1.1 Intermittent weekly
    - 5 x html of fieldnotes
  - 7.1.2 Focus-week-12-16.02.2018
    - 30 x html of fieldnotes
- 7.2 Other notes
- 8 Research interviews, in-depth ethnography (Le Temps 2018-2019) [confidential]
  - (audio files upon request)
- 8.1 Journalists
  - 8.1.1 Journalist 1
  - 8.1.2 Journalist 2
  - 8.1.3 Journalist 3 (audio, no transcription)
- 8.2 Print production manager
  - 8.2.1 Print production manager
- 8.3 Web production manager
  - 8.3.1 Web production manager
- 8.4 Print and web copy editor
  - 8.4.1 Print and web copy editor
- 8.5 Web desk copy editor
  - 8.5.1 Web desk copy editor
- 8.6 Deputy editor in chiefs
  - 8.6.1 Deputy editor-in-chief 1
  - 8.6.2 Deputy editor-in-chief 2
- 8.7 Editors in chief
  - 8.7.1 Editor-in-chief 1
  - 8.7.2 Editor-in-chief 2
- 9 Research interviews *phase 2* [confidential]
  - 9.1 Summarized data
    - 2021\_Digital-first\_itw-data.xlsx
  - 9.2 Interviews
    - 9.2.1 La Côte
      - 20210803\_LaCote\_OJ.mp3 (senior journalist)

- 20210707\_LaCote\_YJ.mp3 (junior journalist)
- 20210713\_LaCote\_WE.mp3 (web editor)
- 2021070714\_LaCote\_PE.mp3 (print editor)
- 20210705\_LaCote\_EM1.mp3 (editor-in-chief responsible for digital)
- 20210713\_LaCote\_EM2.mp3 (editor-in-chief responsible for print)

#### 9.2.2 20 Minutes

- 20210713\_20Min\_OJ.m4a (senior journalist)
- 20210715\_20Min\_YJ.m4a (junior journalist)
- 20210708\_20Min\_WE.m4a (web editor)
- 20210812\_20Min\_PE.m4a (print editor)
- 20210708\_20Min\_EM.m4a (editor-in-chief )

#### 9.2.3 Le Temps

- 20210708\_LeTemps\_OJ-1.mp3 (senior journalist part 1)
- 20210708\_LeTemps\_OJ-1.mp3 (senior journalist part 1)
- 20210709\_LeTemps\_YJ.mp3 (junior journalist)
- 20210708\_LeTemps\_WE.m4a (web editor)
- 20210820\_LeTemps\_PE.mp3 (print editor)
- 20210816\_LeTemps\_EM1.m4a (editor-in-chief)
- 20210903\_LeTemps\_EM2.m4a (associate editor-in-chief responsible for digital)



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“All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number –often a large number– of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation. The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often become more or less routine, producing patterns of collective activity we can call an art world.” (Becker 1982, 1)

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