Article

Journalism
2015, Vol. 16(1) 44–60

DOI: 10.1177/1464884914545732
jou.sagepub.com
SAGE

Horseshoes, stylebooks, wheels, poles, and dummies: Objects of editing power in 20th-century newsrooms

Susan Keith
Rutgers University, USA

Abstract
This essay examines five largely unsung artifacts of 20th-century newspaper journalism – the U-shaped copy desk, stylebooks, pica sticks, proportion wheels, and paper dummies – to tell a story about power shifts in US newsrooms. The essay also offers a new model of 20th-century newsroom eras, arguing that these objects of journalism mark what might be called the age of the copy desk, a time between the 1920s and 1970s when copy-desk editors exercised a quiet control over content. That power faded over the decades, symbolized by the disappearance of the distinctively shaped copy desk and the loss of relevance of most of the other tools. It was replaced, this essay argues, by eras of the writer from the 1970s into the 1980s and the designer from the late 1980s into the 21st century.

Keywords
Copy desk, copy editor, designers, journalism, journalism history, newspaper, reporter power, reporters

Introduction

This essay examines five rarely studied objects used in newspaper production in the 20th century – the horseshoe-shaped copy desk, the stylebook, the pica measuring stick, the photo proportion wheel, and the paper page dummy – to tell a story about power shifts in US newsrooms. The essay argues that these pieces of material culture – simple products

Corresponding author:
Susan Keith, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University, 4 Huntington St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901, USA.
Email: susank@rutgers.edu

of the fields of furniture making, book publishing, graphic design, photography, and printing – together symbolized in US newspaper journalism one historical stage in construction of how the news looked. From at least the 1920s to as late as about the 1970s, this essay maintains, copy editors (known as 'sub-editors' in Britain and some other parts of the world), working at U-shaped tables, used stylebooks, pica sticks, proportion wheels, and page dummies as tools of newsroom power, designating the relative importance of different events as presented in newspapers and exerting control over both the wording and appearance of news.

These material artifacts, closely guarded in newsrooms – if an editor lost a pica stick, it could be difficult, at some newspapers, to obtain a replacement – also symbolized one type of 'editor power'. That power faded over the decades, a casualty of several factors that gradually shifted newsroom clout from copy desks to reporters and section editors in the 1970s and 1980s and of the adoption, during the later 1980s, of a different system of objects for creating newspaper pages: pagination and desktop publishing software. Although stylebooks remained a part of newsrooms, the decline in use of pica poles, photo proportion wheels, and dummies heralded a shift to the 'designer power' of the 1990s, which has been displaced by the (many would argue too-slow) drive to digital in the 21st century.

This essay draws on work by Barnhurst and Nerone (2001, 2003) but proposes a greater focus on frontline newsworkers. It also acknowledges the perspective of Latour (2005), who calls for researchers to reconsider the place of objects in social processes, seeing '*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference' as an actor (p. 71). Such copy-desk actors are particularly interesting to study in the second decade of the 21st century, as traditional editing practices are being disrupted, with many newsrooms dismantling their copy desks, centralizing copy-editing and design functions for several newspapers in one geographic location, and doing away with traditional copy editing for online stories entirely (Channick, 2011; Keith, 2009; Lypny, 2013; Myers, 2012). The essay proceeds in two parts. The first discusses objects of the copy desk and how they were or are used. The second discusses where the era of those objects fits into the history of US newspapering, proposing a rethinking of the usual ordering of 20th-century newsroom eras.

Objects of editing

Horseshoes, stylebooks, pica sticks, proportion wheels, and dummies

The most visible of the five objects of journalism examined in this essay was the U-shaped table, or 'horseshoe', around which copy editors sat, sometimes described as 'the most notable feature of the classic newsroom' (Nesvisky, 2008: 46). The middle of the U was occupied by the chief copy editor, whose position led to his being referred to as 'the slot', a term still used in many newsrooms to describe the supervisor of the copy desk. He (virtually all were men) handed paper copies of stories to copy editors sitting around the outside of the desk, who came, as a result, to be called 'rim editors' or 'rimmers'. When these rim editors finished editing the stories, they passed them back across the desk to the slot, who reviewed the copy editors' work, made changes if necessary, and sent the edited stories to the composing room to be set into type (Brown, 2010).

It is not clear when newspapers began to use the horseshoe configuration – which allowed editors 'to see and interact with everyone else at very close range' (Nesvisky, 2008: 46) – but journalists' memoirs and biographies of journalists refer to U-shaped copy desks existing as early as the 1920s and 1930s (Berkow, 2007; Currell, 2009). At some newspapers, sports and other departments that produced specialized copy had their own, often smaller, U-shaped desks (Duscha, 2005; Wilson, 2006).

Editors working at these desks employed – and encouraged reporters to use (Davis, 1992) – consistent rules of spelling, punctuation, word usage, and editorial style (appropriate abbreviations, capitalization, etc.) outlined in stylebooks. In the United States, the stylebooks used most often were those published by the Associated Press – available in something like its present form since 1953 (Moynihan, 2003) – or United Press International, though midsize and larger newspapers compiled their own primary or secondary stylebooks (Garst, 1943; Miles, 1995).

Some of the copy editors used pica sticks, also known as 'line gauges', 'printer's rulers', 'pica poles', and 'pica rulers'. These flat measuring sticks typically are 12 inches long, though they are available in 6-, 18-, and 24-inch sizes. They are marked with both inches and picas, a unit equal to one-sixth of an inch that is used to measure the width of a block of text, and sometimes with other measures (Ryan and Conover, 2004; Williams, n.d.). Pica sticks can be made of plastic or wood, but the iconic version is stainless steel calibrated with black markings and capped by a rounded head that often contains a hole for hanging the tool.

Proportion wheels consist of two flat circles of heavy paper or lightweight plastic, the smaller superimposed upon the larger, that are used to size photographs or illustrations. The circles, which are marked off in units of measure, are connected in the middle with a fastener so that they can turn independently. To use a proportion wheel, a copy editor would find a number on the inner circle that corresponded to the width of an original hard-copy photograph or illustration and turn that circle so that it lined up with a number on the outer circle that corresponded to the desired width of the image. A small window in the top circle would display a percentage by which the image had to be reduced or enlarged to obtain a photograph or illustration of the desired size (Gurney, 2010).

Paper dummies were sheets of paper, divided into columns corresponding to the number of columns of type on a newspaper page, on which copy or design editors drew mock-ups of finished newspaper pages, placing stories, headlines, graphics/illustrations, photos, and photo captions. These 'maps' served as guides for printers using hot type or compositors working with pre-pagination versions of photomechanical typesetting (sometimes called 'area composition') to put together pages. Later, when design was fully computerized, dummies were often used by copy editors or designers as a way to visualize pages before beginning on-screen work.

These five tools often were employed together in US newsrooms. A copy editor sitting at a horseshoe-shaped desk would edit a story, correcting errors and checking questions of style in the stylebook used in that newsroom. Next, the copy editor or a colleague designated to design pages would use the proportion wheel to determine the size of art elements and employ a pica stick as a straight edge while drawing on the paper dummy to indicate where stories, photos, headlines, and cutlines (photo captions) should be placed. The editor would label the dummy to designate which page it represented and

write information about the percentage to which photos should be reduced or enlarged on a paper tag attached to the images. In many newsrooms, photos and dummies were collected by clerks, rolled together and sent to the composing room by pneumatic tube (Bennett, 2009; Lamb, 2012).

The people who used the objects

These tools were used by copy editors, often called the 'last line of defense' against errors in newspapers because they (or their supervisor) would be the last newsroom workers to see stories, headlines, and cutlines before they appeared in print (Vane, 1997). The job of copy editor seems to have developed as a separate newsroom position in the United States around the time of the Civil War. The position did not take on a specific name, 'copyreader', however, until the 1870s and did not develop into an entity separate from the city desk until the 1880s (Solomon, 1993).

Over the decades, particularly after World War II, copy desks dealt with a series of changing technologies. They went from marking stories on paper and sending them to be set into lead type by Linotype operators,[1] to dealing with wire stories that had been sent via teletypesetting (TTS) equipment directly to those linecasting machines (Wilson, 1953). Later, many copy editors worked with optical-character recognition readers (Compaine, 1980; Randall, 1979, 1986). Computer-based editing arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, eliminating the need for a horseshoe-shaped editing desk, as stories could be handed off by the slot electronically, in a variety of models (Russial, 2003; Walsh, n.d.). At some newspapers, however, U-shaped tables continued to be used, at least as furniture on which electronic screens were positioned, well into the 1980s (Himmel and Himmel, 2009; Rhomberg, 2012; Soderlind, 2006).

Through most of these changes to the way *text* was processed at newspapers, the way routine visual decisions were made remained roughly the same as in the 1930s, when large dailies shifted responsibility of the look of the newspaper from printers to editors (Barnhurst, 1994). Copy editors – or, at some newspapers, specially designated copy-desk members called 'makeup editors' or 'layout editors' – designated how stories and images would be played on dummies that guided blue-collar production workers in the composing room.

Copy-desk workers did not, certainly, always have free rein in these decisions. They worked, especially in designing front pages, under the guidance of the newspaper's editor or managing editor. In addition, their work likely was influenced by design principles advocated by typographers such as Ben Sherbow (1921), who wrote several popular books and redesigned the *New York Tribune* in 1922. Copy editors with journalism degrees – and that was far from all of them between the 1930s and 1960s – would have received some instruction in layout if they took a course in copy editing, texts for which generally included a chapter such as 'The Principles of Makeup' (Brown, 1952). Later in the 20th century, copy editors with journalism degrees might even have had an entire course in newspaper design, such as those pioneered by Edmund Arnold, a newspaperman-turned-typographer-turned-design guru, who taught at Syracuse University and Virginia Commonwealth University (Miller, 2007).

Given, however, the speed of breaking news and the possibility of responding to developments by remaking pages in the multiple daily editions that metropolitan

newspapers once produced (Barnhurst, 2011; Hobbs, 2010), copy editors and associated newsworkers could not help having an impact, at an occupational level, on how news was presented. It was they who wielded the tools of design. That fact, and the fact that copy editors and the copy-desk supervisor (known in different newsrooms by such titles as 'the slot', 'the news editor', and 'the copy chief') were the last to touch reporters' copy, put the copy desk in a position of quiet power. In fact, one might even say that for several decades, there existed in US journalism a now largely unrecognized 'age of the copy desk' – signified by the relevance of U-shaped tables, stylebooks, pica poles, paper dummies, and proportion wheels.

Newsroom eras: A new approach

In *The Form of News* (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2001) and a related article (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003), Barnhurst and Nerone suggest that US newspapering can be read as having passed through several periods of style (visual characteristics), type (a newspaper's mode of production, encompassing 'its machinery, its business plan, and its division of labor' (Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003: 436)), and ideals (roughly the societal idea of a newspaper's purpose). They see the US colonial period as being the era of 'the printer's paper', the 1820s–1880s as being a period of both 'the editor's paper' and 'the publisher's paper', and the 1880s ushering in the 'industrial paper' in an era of increased mechanization. In their timeline, the second decade of the 20th century, when professionalizing impulses were being felt in many fields, including journalism, brought the era of the 'professional paper', which lasted until the 1950s (p. 436). The 1980s brought the beginning of the 'corporate paper', 'more sophisticated at targeting specific readership segments and packaging them for advertisers' and 'less interested in mass readership and more interested in high income and highly motivated subscribers' (p. 439).

Each of those divisions is useful for understanding the broad sweep of newspaper history. This essay, however, aims to add to that timeline a layer of detail and an understanding of the shifting balance of power among frontline newsworkers, tied in part to the use of the objects of editing described here. It proposes that decades roughly analogous to Nerone and Barnhurst's professional and corporate paper eras encompass ages of the copy editor, the reporter/writer, and the designer.

Of course, periodization in history is always somewhat problematic. Although attempting to understand the past by seeing it as composed of different time periods can help us see major developments in context, the exercise is necessarily reductive, and it is rarely possible to say that one age ended cleanly at a precise point and that another immediately began. In addition, as Bentley (1996) wrote, identifying eras of history

> depends on prior decisions about the issues and processes that are most important for the shaping of human societies. … Even within the framework of a single society, changes in perspective can call the coherence of conventionally recognized periods into question. (p. 749)

Furthermore, as Kaufmann (2010) wrote, place cannot be ignored: 'Periodization relies on the historicist assumption that not everything is possible in all times, but it is also true that not everything is possible in all places' (p. 3). So the eras discussed here should be understood with the following cautions:

- Eras may have sometimes overlapped, with the power of one type of newsroom worker rising before that of another had fully faded.
- Eras likely will have been expressed differently in different locales, with, for example, reporters being more influential from the mid-20th century onward in some newsrooms than in others.
- Individual counter-examples surely existed, such as the untouchable reporter or columnist who was able to avoid the constraints of even a strong copy desk.

These limitations do not, however, seem reason to shy away from offering an alternative reading of already existing periodization of US journalism history, one that provides a different perspective on the newsroom.

The era of the copy desk

The idea that there might have been an era of the copy desk is far from the usual scholarly narrative. The copy desk has generally been portrayed, when it has been studied at all, as a place of problems, not power. There has been a persistent stereotype that copy desks were 'where grizzled reporters went when they got too old to chase fire engines or police cars' (Himmel and Himmel, 2009) or a work home of last resort for newsroom drunks (Pulford, 2005; Ramsey, 2008; Reed, 2009).

Solomon (1989, 1993) has suggested that the importance of what came to be known as the copy-editing function declined after it no longer was performed by an assistant to the city editor. (For a description of the copy-editing function as part of the city desk, see Williams and Martin, 1911.) As the newsroom division of labor increased, he has written, the esteem in which copy editors were held fell. To describe the early 20th-century copy desk, Solomon (1993) drew on a memoir by former New York deskman Charles Stewart (1943), who referred to the copy editor as one who 'seldom held his head high … [H]e had been called the old maid of the profession, he had been accused of murdering the creative talent of reporters' (p. 44).

More recently, copy editors have been conceptualized as a 'special challenge' (Willis, 1988: 154). Their generally evening work schedules remove them from day-to-day interaction with top editors. Their mandate to be pre-publication advocates for readers puts them in an adversarial position vis-a-vis reporters, sometimes giving rise to a perception that they are 'trolls in the night, slashing' (Dunlap, 2002: para. 7). Solomon (1994) argued that the introduction of the video display terminal (VDT), an early type of electronic screen, in the last quarter of the 20th century moved the copy editor away from being a wordsmith and into work that contained a large component of technological drudgery. Not surprisingly, then, copy editors were found to be more likely to be psychologically burned out than other newspaper journalists (Cook and Banks, 1993). Some have reported that they felt as though they were constrained from involvement in newsroom conversations and debates about ethics (Keith, 2005a) and were dissatisfied with their work (Zahler, 2007), including prospects for advancement (Keith, 2005b).

These fairly contemporary findings, however, are only part of the picture of the copy desk in US newspaper history. Many former newsroom workers have remembered the copy desk as a commanding presence. It was the home of 'important people who did the

final editing on every story in the newspaper' (Currell, 2009) at Toronto's *Evening Telegram* in the 1920s. The copy desk shared with the city desk prime placement in front of reporters' desks in 1948 at the *Indianapolis Times* (Wilson, 2006) and occupied a 'highly visible perch' at the 'center of it all' (Lamb, 2012: para. 3–4) in the mid-1970s at the *Christian Science Monitor.* The copy desk was 'the brain, the nerve center' (Parker, 1997: para. 2) of the *Post-Journal* of Jamestown, New York.

Even Stewart (1943), whom Solomon (1993) cited as offering evidence of the sad lot of copy editors, had more to say about desk work than Solomon quoted. Stewart went on to write,

> I knew copyreaders who could speak seven languages fluently, who could tell you the exact date of any significant event in history or how far the street numbers ran on Sixth Avenue, who could imitate a writer's style more expertly than the writer himself could handle it … and who knew where to look for every fact that wasn't at the pencil's tip. I have suggested that a certain shyness may account for the fact that some of them chose the copydesk rather than the street. That was not all. Copyreaders were usually more in demand than reporters. Even though the technicalities might be easily learned, on the desk it was harder for a beginner to fake an experience which he lacked. Frequently good newspapermen got sidetracked to the copydesk because of their special talents. Just as frequently they chose the copydesk because of the satisfaction of being the last one to see a piece of copy before it went into the paper, of doing the final polishing, and of making full use of their stores of information. (pp. 44–45)

Similarly, Duscha (2005) recalled that a copy chief of the *St Paul Dispatch* and *Pioneer Press* in the 1930s was working on a doctorate, and Davis (1992) remembered that the Winston-Salem *Journal & Sentinel* copy desk was home in the early 1950s to 'one of the first of many linguistic geniuses' (p. 175) he would meet on copy desks. This image of copy editors as talented storehouses of knowledge complicates the usual narrative of the US newspaper copy desk.

Also suggesting that it is counterproductive to see the copy desk as an afterthought in US journalism before 1980 is the fact that the desk was often home to, or at least associated with, the position of telegraph or wire editor. This person, and/or an assistant, evaluated news arriving by telegraph and, later, other electronic means from wire services and other sources outside the newspaper's coverage area. The position was established enough by 1894 that it could be referred to without explanation in a humorous column in a publication for train engineers and firemen (An office drama, 1894). It continued to be relevant in US newsrooms, though under different names – such as 'wire editor', 'news editor', or 'national-foreign editor' – into the 21st century. In 1911, Williams and Martin noted that 'although he often receives suggestions from the managing editor and his work is subject to the latter's direction, the judging of news is left to the telegraph editor' (p. 213). That decision-making power also was evident in White's (1950) study of 'Mr. Gates', a wire editor at an Illinois newspaper shown to be making news selections based, in part, on his personal biases. Although later work (Whitney and Becker, 1982) raised questions about whether telegraph/wire editors were merely reproducing choices already made by wire services, replications of the White research in the 1960s (Snider, 1967) and 1990s (Bleske, 1991) suggested that wire editors contributed their own professional influence to newspaper content.

Furthermore, as Nerone and Barnhurst (2003) note, the copy desk served as the vital link between the editorial and mechanical departments, acting as a funnel through which all text and images had to pass. Without reporters, one might have produced a newspaper filled with telegraph/wire copy. Without photographers or artists, one might have published a paper devoid of illustration. But without the copy desk and its special skills, one might not have been able to publish even a poor edition of the newspaper unless city editors and other section editors knew copy-desk procedures – including how to use pica poles, proportion wheels, and paper dummies – well enough to fill in.

Between the 1930s and 1960s, having a strong copy desk became a mark of minimal competency for a metropolitan US daily newspaper. Publisher Alicia Patterson is said to have viewed *Newsday*, serving the New York City suburbs on Long Island, as not as strong as it could have been in 1954, despite winning a Pulitzer Prize, because its copy desk was 'almost nonexistent … leading to amateurish style snafus' (Harris, 2007: 239).

That was certainly not the case during the 1950s and 1960s at *The New York Times*, where Theodore Bernstein – an assistant managing editor, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism professor, and author of several books on language – lay down rules for grammar, style, and usage. These rules, Talese (2007) wrote, 'were memorized by deskmen throughout the newsroom, who were held accountable by Bernstein for the maintenance of his principles; thus the deskmen, in the interest of a more readable and grammatical newspaper, gained new and rather heady power' (pp. 109–110).

The era of the reporter/writer

The power of copy desks, however, did not last. Although it is not possible to point to a precise moment when the age of the copy editor ended in US newspapers – and certain objects from it, such as stylebooks, remain key newsroom tools in the 21st century – one place to think about the beginning of the age of the reporter/writer is with the intersection of the New Journalism, 'reporter power', and journalism review movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Although non-fiction writers had been using techniques of fiction since at least the 19th century (Hartsock, 2000; Sims, 2008), such work gained new prominence as 'New Journalism' in the 1960s in the writing of Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, Gay Talese, Jimmy Breslin, Norman Mailer, and Hunter S Thompson. New Journalism tended to both highlight the writer and have a political edge. Sims writes, 'It challenged the authority of Journalism's empire of facts and the sanctity of Literature's garden of imagination … [and] confronted both Journalism and Literature with the social habits and institutional structures that sustained them' (p. 110).

That political edge connects New Journalism with the reporter-power movement, which during the late 1960s and 1970s attacked the institutional structure of newsrooms, including the primacy of editors. The movement called for reporters to have a greater stake in newsroom decision-making and more freedom to pursue various types of stories in different ways (Diamond, 1970; Dorfman, 1974, 1978), including methods common to New Journalism. The reporter-power push was part of a broader US questioning of authority and the status quo reflected in the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam war protests, the women's movement, the American Indian movement, and, at the end of this

period, the gay rights movement. Schudson (1981) has termed this 'critical culture'. As he has written, 'The rebellion of young reporters in the 1960s, then, was … one manifestation of a social and cultural movement. The movement affected younger journalists first and most profoundly, but this, in turn, influenced older and more powerful journalists' (pp. 179–181).

One of the most visible manifestations of the reporter-power movement grew out of police violence in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Reporters for the city's four daily newspapers were dismayed when, after the national press covering the convention left town, local media outlets began to accept Mayor Richard J. Daley's revisionist takes on the violence. A group of these journalists created *Chicago Journalism Review* (Macek, 2011), a publication designed to examine local media with a more critical edge than the then-7-year-old *Columbia Journalism Review* displayed (Ron Dorfman, interview with the author, 2012). The review inspired, by varying estimates, 25–40 local journalism reviews around the United States, including *St Louis Journalism Review, Philadelphia Journalism Review, Buncombe: A Review of Baltimore Journalism, [MORE]* in New York, and *The Unsatisfied Man* in Denver (Bertrand, 1978; Dennis, 2011; Keith, 2013; Klotzer and Block, 1993). James Boylan (1998), a former editor of *Columbia Journalism Review*, writes that these publications 'usually attacked the residual power of publishers, the authority of editors, or the insufficient zeal of reporters in discomfiting politicians, business, and the military' (p. 84).

None of these three inter-connected movements, however, survived intact. New Journalism 'died a long time ago', Weingarten wrote in 2005. Likewise, Boylan (1998) noted that '"Reporter power" enjoyed a brief heyday and then expired'. Struggling with inadequate financing despite drawing thousands of subscribers, *Chicago Journalism Review* lasted only 7 years, and most other reporter-produced reviews, largely run by volunteers with full-time jobs, succumbed more quickly. (Four reviews associated with universities survive.) All three movements, however, helped bring reporters increased recognition and paved the way for other changes that helped to gradually shift the balance of power in US newspaper newsrooms.

Among those changes was the growth of investigative reporting. In the 1970s, Bob Greene set up an investigative reporting team at *Newsday* that became a model for others around the country (Aucoin, 2007). Greene also organized The Arizona Project, a 1976 effort in which journalists from around the country spent 6 months in Phoenix carrying on the work of *Arizona Republic* reporter Don Bolles, who was killed in a 1976 car bombing, apparently by someone angered by his reporting on organized crime (Wendland, 1977). About the same time (1974–1976), *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein were gaining national renown for their Watergate reporting, though some have suggested that the media's role in the investigation has been overstated (Feldstein, 2004). Such projects cast 'a new romantic aura over a profession whose entrepreneurial talents had lain largely dormant in the 1940s and 1950s', Lambeth (1986: 116) notes.

Meanwhile, several mid-career training and fellowship opportunities for journalists emerged, joining the Harvard Nieman Foundation fellowships, which started in 1938. What are now the John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford University were begun in 1966 (Mission and History, n.d.: para. 2). In 1973, the National Endowment for

the Humanities Journalism Fellowship, now the Knight-Wallace Fellowship, was begun at the University of Michigan (Past fellows 1973–1974, n.d.). Although these fellowships were not limited to reporters, in reality most of the awards went to writers, further increasing their newsroom stature. Writers also were the target of many conferences at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, a training center for working journalists established in 1975 as the Modern Media Institute by Nelson Poynter, publisher of the *St Petersburg* (Fla.) *Times* (A Brief History of the Poynter Institute, 2010).

During the 1980s, especially, star writers began to more often be given the freedom to write long and spend months on projects (French, 2000). Although some newspapers had been known before this time as 'a writer's newspaper', it became more common to use that term to refer to a newspaper that offered more leeway to those crafting stories (Cumming, 2010; Gaines, 2003; Kaniss, 1991; MacPherson, 2006). In short, as Underwood (1995) has written, 'this was the heyday for reporters' (p. 50).

The era of the designer

The era of the reporter/writer had challenged the power of copy editors, but the next shift, from the latter 1980s to the early 21st century, constrained both writers and traditional copy-desk operations. In this era of the designer, some writers and reporters retained power, especially at newspapers known for investigative reporting or long-form work. In other newsrooms, however, reporters lost power because design was prioritized and story length and placement began to be more often determined by efforts to make the newspaper visually appealing. In addition, newsrooms embraced new objects of journalism that writers generally did not learn how to use: proprietary pagination systems (such as those created by Harris, Hastech, Atex and, later, CCI Europe) or desktop publishing software (such as QuarkXPress, launched in 1987, and Aldus PageMaker, launched in 1985, acquired by Adobe in 1994 and updated to InDesign in 1999) (Chagnon, 2002).

The situation for copy editors was more ambiguous. Some larger metropolitan dailies moved design from the copy desk to separate design desks (Auman, 1994). At these newspapers, the copy desk, which had lost power in the era of the reporter, also lost the ability to influence the display of news. At other newspapers, the copy desk retained the design function and gained greater control over page production, freed from dependence on composing-room workers, whose jobs were eliminated (Howells and Dearman, 1996). Copy editors no longer merely conceived of page designs – using pica sticks, proportion wheels, and paper dummies – they also physically produced the designs, using some of the newest technology in the newsroom.

This change, however, forced copy desks to take over tasks once assigned to blue-collar workers, taking editors away from what had been their primary duties: editing stories for errors of fact, spelling, grammar, and style; writing headlines; and writing photo captions (Brill, 1994). One study found that paginating pages took editors 10–15 minutes more per page than drawing paper dummies, the equivalent of about five copy-editing shifts a day for a newspaper that produced 200 pages a day, with zoned edition and page makeovers (Russial, 1994). Another found that Washington state copy editors perceived that pagination simultaneously improved and hurt their newspapers,

making them more attractive but resulting in 'substantially less emphasis on traditionally journalistic tasks, such as editing for accuracy and improving text' (Underwood et al., 1994: 119). So, in a sense, although the copy editors at these newspapers *were* the designers in this age of the designer, their new work was displacing some of the traditional role of copy desks.

The era of the designer was not, however, determined solely by technology. As Barnhurst (1994) and Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) have persuasively argued, interest in newspaper design had been building for many decades before electronic tools for designing newspapers were invented. Since at least the 1920s, studies had tried to measure the legibility and readability of various typefaces, though without, Barnhurst (1994) suggests, much understanding of the structure of type. As early as the 1930s, major dailies were hiring typographic consultants to redesign their pages with the sensibilities of 20th-century modernists, rejecting the traditional design they saw as a product of 'whims of history, thriving on neglect' (Barnhurst, 1994: 178). During the 1950s and 1960s, newspaper design consultants continued their work, producing redesigns that emphasized lightness, white space, horizontal organization of text, and the use of rectangular packages, or 'modular design'[2] (Barnhurst, 1994; Barnhurst and Nerone, 2001).

Although some newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, retained a traditional look at least on the front page, design also received increased attention during the 1980s and 1990s because of high-profile cases of new or revamped newspaper products. The most notable was *USA Today*, launched in 1982 as a color-filled newspaper with short articles, relatively large photographs, numerous illustrations, color-coded sections, and a front page that functions 'as a bulletin board for what is inside' (McCartney, 1997: para. 47). This presentation – designed to promote scannability (Cooke, 2005) – defied the conventions of what a newspaper looked like at the time (Kostelnick and Hassett, 2003) and mirrored the quick-hit style of news then developing in television journalism. Another striking redesign was Knight Ridder's conversion of the *Delray Beach* (Fla.) *News* into a newspaper targeted at the disposable incomes of Baby Boomers. It was reborn in 1990 as the *Boca Raton News*, 'a pastel-colored hodgepodge of snippets of news … sold from pink newspaper boxes' (Kurtz, 1993: 84). The design and content, which were heavily influenced by focus groups (Bellew, 1991), included, at least initially, a pink flamingo incorporated into the nameplate, a 'no jumps' rule that kept front-page stories short, and maps that showed cities that appeared in the datelines of even two- and three-paragraph stories (Kurtz, 1993; Norman, 2009).

One important component of the shift toward designer power in newsrooms was the founding in 1979 of what is now the Society for News Design (SND), organized by journalists who had attended the first seminar on design at the American Press Institute. (A similar organization for copy editors, the American Copy Editors Society, would not emerge until 18 years later.) SND publishes a glossy magazine, *Design*, and sponsors an annual workshop that for several years in the mid-1990s drew more than 700 attendees (Annual Workshop, n.d.). It also produces an annual book that compiles images of the best of the previous year's news design, many examples displayed at near-thumbnail size. Barnhurst (1994) suggests that such display 'rewarded only those designs that stood out when greatly reduced or seen from more than an arm's length' (p. 190). As a result, it was those 'big, roomy designs' (p. 190) that were widely imitated.

The era of the designer ended early in the 21st century, as newspapers struggled with declining circulations – a drop of about 30 percent between 1990 and 2010 (Edmonds, 2012) – and print advertising revenues that were receding far faster than online ad revenues grew (Edmonds et al., 2014). With the resulting widespread layoffs and buyouts, it became less important that every newspaper page always be beautiful. At some newspapers, design desks were disbanded and copy editors were hurriedly taught to design and paginate pages, sometimes using a series of basic templates created by the few designers left (Keith, 2009). Several newspaper groups, including the United States' largest chain, Gannett Co. Inc., formed centralized design hubs where pages were created by designers working hundreds of miles from the people who would read the newspapers (Channick, 2011). As one former journalist put it, 'Design's time as a prominent part of storytelling in print at newspapers seems to have come and gone' (Zhu, 2011: para. 4).

Next?

One might reasonably ask, 'If the era of the designer recently ended, what era is next?' There is no easy answer, for if it is difficult, as this essay concedes, to precisely label the beginnings and ends of historical periods, then it is foolhardy to try to label a period that cannot be seen from some distance, in context with other times.

It does not seem a stretch, however, to wonder whether it would be prudent, some years from now, to consider whether the second decade of the 21st century might finally have been an era of news-crafters connected with newspapers' online or mobile entities: producers, digital videographers, mobile 'backpack' journalists (Martyn, 2009), and even non-professionals who create 'user generated content' (Singer, 2010). Yet newspapers' slowness to fully embrace digital media (Kirchhoff, 2009), partly because they did not make as much money as news managers hoped, makes it seem as though the current period might be merely an interstitial prelude to some other era we cannot yet conceive.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. The Linotype, invented by Otto Mergenthaler and first demonstrated in workable form in 1886, combined the processes of casting lead type and setting it into lines of text. It had been widely embraced, even at small newspapers, by the 1930s (Morano, 2002).
2. For a critique of this terminology, see Barnhurst and Nerone (2001: 214–215).

References

A Brief History of The Poynter Institute (2010) Poynter.org. Available at: http://about.poynter.org/about-us/mission-history

Annual Workshop (n.d.) *SND.org*. Available at: http://www.snd.org/about/annual-workshops/

An office drama (1894) *Locomotive Fireman's Magazine*, January, p. 904.

Aucoin JL (2007) *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Auman A (1994) Design desks: Why are more and more newspapers adopting them? *Newspaper Research Journal* 15(2): 128–142.

Barnhurst KG (1994) *Seeing the Newspaper*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Barnhurst KG (2011) The problem of time in American journalism. *KronoScope* 11(1–2): 98–123.

Barnhurst KG and Nerone J (2001) *The Form of News: A History*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Bellew B (1991) *The role of design in the newspaper redesign of the Boca Raton news: The Knight-Ridder 25/43 project*. Master's Thesis, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

Bennett S (2009) Black and white and this chapter's over. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1 January. Available at: http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/sectionfront/life/black-and-white-and-this-chapters-over-287722/

Bentley JH (1996) Cross-cultural interaction and periodization in world history. *American Historical Review* 101(3): 749–770.

Berkow I (2007) *Red: A Biography of Red Smith*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Bertrand C-J (1978) *A look at journalism reviews*. Freedom of Information Center report 19, September. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri.

Bleske G (1991) Ms. Gates takes over: An updated version of the 1949 study. *Newspaper Research Journal* 12(4): 88–97.

Boylan J (1998) Newspeople. In: Gomery D (ed.) *Media in America: The Wilson Quarterly Reader*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, pp. 78–89.

Brill A (1994) *Pagination and the newsroom: A study of implementation of new technology*. PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Brown CH (1952) *News Editing and Display*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Brown DH (2010) *Life is Just a Bowl of Memories: An Anecdotal-Autobio-Memoir*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

Chagnon B (2002) The publishing business: Desktop publishing software. *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 8(1). Available at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0008.107

Channick R (2011) Media giants centralize editing, design operations in effort to cut costs amid ongoing revenue decline. *Chicago Tribune*, 31 July. Available at: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-07-31/business/ct-biz-0731-media-streamline-20110731_1_editing-daily-circulation-media-general

Compaine BM (1980) *The Newspaper Industry in the 1980s: An Assessment of Economics and Technology*. White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry Publications.

Cook BB and Banks SR (1993) Predictors of job burnout in reporters and copy editors. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 70(1): 108–117.

Cooke L (2005) A visual convergence of print, television and the internet: Charting 40 years of design change in news presentation. *New Media & Society* 7(1): 22–46.

Cumming JB Jr (2010) *Bylines: Writings from the American South, 1963–1997*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.

Currell H (2009) *Byways and Bylines*. Victoria, BC: Trafford.

Davis P (1992) *A Boy No More*. New York: R.R. Donnelley & Sons.

Dennis E (2011) Introduction to the Transaction edition. In: Dennis EE and Rivers WL (eds) *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, pp. VII–IX.

Diamond E (1970) 'Reporter power' takes root. *Columbia Journalism Review* 9(2): 12.

Dorfman R (1974) Democracy in the newsroom: Notes on the movement toward non-seigneurial journalism. In: Flippen C (ed.) *Liberating the Media: The New Journalism*. Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, pp. 118–124.

Dorfman R (1978) Truth, justice, and the American way. *Revue française d'études américaines*, Vol. 6, October, pp. 183–193.

Dunlap K (2002) Mind if we watch? *Poynter.org*, 2 November. Available at: http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/3200/mind-if-we-watch/

Duscha J (2005) *From Pea Soup to Politics: How a Poor Minnesota Boy Became a Washington Insider*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.

Edmonds R (2012) Newspapers: By the numbers. *The State of the News Media*. Available at: http://stateofthemedia.org/2012/newspapers-building-digital-revenues-proves-painfully-slow/newspapers-by-the-numbers/

Edmonds R, Guskin E, Mitchell A, et al. (2014) Newspapers by the numbers. *The State of the News Media*, 2013. Available at: http://stateofthemedia.org/2013/newspapers-stabilizing-but-still-threatened/newspapers-by-the-numbers/

Feldstein M (2004) Watergate revisited. *American Journalism Review*, August/September. Available at: http://ajrarchive.org/article.asp?id=3735

French T (2000) The verdict is in the 112th paragraph. *Nieman Reports*, fall. Available at: http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100537

Gaines D (2003) *A Misfit's Manifesto: The Sociological Memoir of a Rock and Roll Heart*. New York: Random House.

Garst RE (ed.) (1943) *Stylebook of the New York Times Nineteen Forty-Three*. New York: The New York Times.

Gurney J (2010) Dead tech: Proportional scale. In: *Gurney journey blog*, 29 January. Available at: http://gurneyjourney.blogspot.com/2010/01/dead-tech-proportional-scale.html

Harris RJ (2007) *Pulitzer's Gold: Behind the Prize for Public Service Journalism*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Hartsock JC (2000) *A History of American Literary Journalism: Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Himmel S and Himmel L (2009) *Hungry: A Mother and Daughter Fight Anorexia*. New York: Penguin Books.

Hobbs A (2010) Agonising over editionising of newspapers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Presented to the Margins of Print conference, Nottingham University, Nottingham, 15 January.

Howells J and Dearman M (1996) Beyond the Linotype, into a changed world (Tramp Printers). Pacific Grove, CA: Discovery Press.

Kaniss P (1991) *Making Local News*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Kaufmann TD (2010) Periodization and its discontents. *Journal of Historiography* 2: 1–6.

Keith S (2005a) Newspaper copy editors' perceptions of their ideal and real ethics roles. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 82(4): 930–951.

Keith S (2005b) Copy editor job satisfaction lowest at small newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal* 26 (2–3): 6–26.

Keith S (2009) Sinking subs and collapsing copy desks: The evolution of editing at newspapers and their web sites. *Paper presented at the Future of Journalism conference, Cardiff*, September. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/7934319/Sinking_Subs_and_Collapsing_Copy_Desks_The_evolution_of_editing_at_newspapers_and_their_Web_sites

Keith S (2013) Examining the critics' criticism: A bibliographic essay on journalism review research. Paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC, 8 August.

Kirchhoff SM (2009) *The U.S. Newspaper Industry in Transition*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Available at: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/634/

Klotzer C and Block E (1993) Critiquing the mainstream media: A case study of the *St. Louis Journalism Review. Serials Review* 19(1): 7–26.

Kostelnick C and Hassett M (2003) *Shaping Information: The Rhetoric of Visual Conventions*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Kurtz H (1993) Yesterday's news: Why newspapers are losing their franchise. In: Denton F and Kurtz H (eds) *Reinventing the Newspaper: Essays*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund, pp. 59–112.

Lambeth E (1986) *Committed Journalism: An Ethic for the Profession*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Lamb GM (2012) C.S. Monitor – The way we were. *Gateway Journalism Review*, Spring, p. 9. Available at: http://issuu.com/gatewayjournalismreview/docs/123234_jrnl_gjr_vol42_no326

Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lypny N (2013) Copy editors laid off more than other newsroom staffers. *King's Journalism Review*, January. Available at: http://thekjr.kingsjournalism.com/?p=12131

McCartney J (1997) *USA Today* grows up. *American Journalism Review*, September. Available at: http://ajr.org/Article.asp?id=878

Macek S (2011) The reporter's rebellion: The Chicago Journalism Review, 1968–1975. In: Peck J and Stole I (eds) *A Moment of Danger: Critical Studies in the History of U.S. Communication since World War II*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, pp. 231–254.

MacPherson M (2006) *All Governments Lie: The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I.F. Stone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Martyn P (2009) The mojo in the third millennium. *Journalism Practice* 3(2): 196–215.

Miles J (1995) Political correctness and the American newspaper: The case of the Los Angeles Times Stylebook. *English Today* 11(1): 14–18.

Miller S (2007) Edmund Arnold, 93, made papers readable. *The New York Sun*, 9 February. Available at: http://www.nysun.com/obituaries/edmund-arnold-93-made-papers-readable/48332/

Mission and History (n.d.) *John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships at Stanford*. Available at: http://knight.stanford.edu/about/mission/

Morano S (2002) Newspaper design. In: David Sloan W and Parcell LM (eds) *American Journalism: History, Principles, Practices*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, pp. 316–324.

Moynihan S (2003) A golden anniversary for the 'AP Stylebook.' *Editor & Publisher*, 7 July. Available at: http://www.editorandpublisher.com/Archive/A-Golden-Anniversary-for-AP-Stylebook-

Myers S (2012) Denver Post, Bay Area News Group revamp story editing with fewer copy editors. *Poynter.org*, 23 May. Available at: http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/174822/denver-post-contra-costa-times-revamp-story-editing-with-fewer-copy-editors/

Nerone J and Barnhurst KG (2003) U.S. newspaper types, the newsroom, and the division of labor, 1750–2000. *Journalism Studies* 4(4): 435–449.

Nesvisky M (2008) *Covering Your Campus*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Norman B (2009) Updated: Boca Raton News shuts down. *Broward-Palm Beach County New Times*, August, p. 21. Available at: http://blogs.browardpalmbeach.com/pulp/2009/08/boca_news_on_the_block.php

Parker PA (1997) Writing headlines when type was lead, not rubber. *Jamestown Post-Journal*, 7 June. Available at: http://www.prendergastlibrary.org/?page_id=5331

Past fellows: 1973-1974 (n.d.) Knight-Wallace Fellows at Michigan. Available at: http://www.mjfellows.org/fellows/1974.html

Pulford C (2005) *Siren Society: America v the World*. Northants: Ituri Publications.

Ramsey B (2008) *Unsanctioned Voice: Garet Garrett, Journalist of the Old Right*. Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press.
Randall SD (1979) Effect of electronic editing on error rate of newspapers. *Journalism Quarterly* 56: 161–165.
Randall SD (1986) How editing and typesetting technology affects typographical error rate. *Journalism Quarterly* 63: 763–770.
Reed R (ed.) (2009) *Looking Back at the Arkansas Gazette: An Oral History*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press.
Rhomberg C (2012) *The Broken Table: The Detroit Newspaper Strike and the State of American Labor*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
Russial J (1994) Pagination and the newsroom: A question of time. *Newspaper Research Journal* 15(1): 91–101.
Russial J (2003) *Strategic Copy Editing*. New York: The Guilford Press.
Ryan W and Conover T (2004) *Graphic Communications Today*, 4th edn. Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Cengage Learning.
Schudson M (1981) *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.
Sherbow B (1921) *Making Type Work*. New York: The Century Company. Available at: https://archive.org/details/cu31924029497769
Sims N (ed.) (2008) *LIterary Journalism in the 20th Century*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
Singer JB (2010) Quality control. *Journalism Practice* 4(2): 127–142.
Snider P (1967) 'Mr. Gates' revisited: A 1966 version of the 1949 case study. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 44: 419–427.
Soderlind L (2006) *Chasing Montana: A Love Story*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
Solomon WS (1989) Tasks and status: Newspaper copy editing and the division of newsroom labor. Paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC, August.
Solomon WS (1993) Newsroom managers and workers: The specialization of editing work. *American Journalism* 10(1–2): 24–37.
Solomon WS (1994) The process of technology: Newspaper copy editors adapt to the VDT. *Journal of Mediated Communication* 9(3): 85–102.
Stewart K (1943) *News Is What We Make It: A Running Story of the Working Press*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
Talese G (2007) *The Kingdom and the Power: Behind the Scenes at the New York Times* (Paperback edition). New York: Random House.
Underwood D (1995) *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Underwood D, Giffard CA and Stamm K (1994) Computers and editing: Pagination's impact on the newsroom. *Newspaper Research Journal* 15(2): 116–127.
Vane S (1997) Copy desk blues. *American Journalism Review*, September. Available at: http://ajr.org/Article.asp?id=1698
Walsh B (n.d.) How a copy desk works. *TheSlot.com*. Available at: http://www.theslot.com/structure.html
Weingarten M (2005) *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe? How New Journalism Rewrote the World*. London: Aurum Press.
Wendland M F (1977) *The Arizona Project: How a Team of Investigative Reporters Got Revenge on Deadline*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed Andrews and McMeel. Available at: http://www.ernesthancock.com/The_Arizona_Project.pdf

White DM (1950) The gatekeeper: A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly* 27: 383–390.
Whitney CD and Becker LB (1982) 'Keeping the gates' for gatekeepers: The effects of wire news. *Journalism Quarterly* 59(1): 60–65.
Williams F (n.d.) The joy of handsetting type. Available at: http://www.apa-letterpress.com/T%20&%20P%20ARTICLES/Type/Handsetting4.html
Williams W and Martin FL (1911) *The Practice of Journalism: A Treatise on Newspaper-Making*. Columbia, MO: EW Stephens Publishing Co.
Willis WJ (1988) *Surviving in the Newspaper Business: Newspaper Management in Turbulent Times*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers.
Wilson CE (1953) Impact of Teletypesetter on publishing media. *Journalism Quarterly* 30: 372–373.
Wilson JV Jr (2006) *Meridian Street: An Illustrated Memoir*. Parker, CO: Outskirts Press.
Zahler A (2007) One-third of copy editors dissatisfied with their jobs. *Newspaper Research Journal* 28(3): 20–36.
Zhu J (2011) Copy editing, design are 'production work' only if you make them so. *Matters of Varying Insignificance*, 7 June. Available at: http://www.john-zhu.com/blog/2011/06/07/copy-editing-design-are-production-work-only-if-you-make-them-so/

Author biography

Susan Keith is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. She does research on the evolution of journalistic practice, visual communication, media ethics and law, and media history. She worked as a journalist for 16 years before earning a PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.