Axel Bruns has written a timely book that is a welcome addition to the nascent body of research on alternative forms of online journalism. In *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production*, he takes a systematic look at the collaborative and open news-production models that characterize various websites—in particular weblogs—and asks a central question: Is this journalism?

Bruns’ basic premise is that mainstream “industrial” journalism is outmoded, a dinosaur that needs to reinvent itself in order to remain relevant to a new, more engaged, citizenry. This citizenry is one that has evolved from a mass, passive audience, consisting of people who are readers and receivers of packaged news—mere consumers of information—into smaller communities of actively involved users and producers of news content distributed in a globally networked online environment. Ready to supplement and surpass traditional journalism is the new-media news: personal, subjective, relevant, diverse, and, above all, amateur. In the book’s final line, Bruns asserts that alternative online news production in its various forms, including open publishing and even blogging, may indeed be considered journalism. That is, if we consider a prime function of journalism to “help enable, extend, and enhance public discovery, discussion and deliberation of the news” (p. 317).

This conclusion, of course, will be shocking to media critics and practitioners who subscribe to journalistic convention; such an assertion is heresy to them. But Bruns builds his case, chapter by chapter, deconstructing what we understand as news media and recasting it as a participatory, virtual endeavour undertaken by those who formerly constituted the audience. He begins by taking stock of the so-called Internet Age, posing the question typically asked by worried advocates of the status quo: If everyone is a publisher (as Marshall McLuhan famously stated) or at least has the potential to be, what are the implications for journalism as we have come to know it?

In an effort to answer this troubling question, Bruns tackles some foundational tenets of journalism, such as gatekeeping and the venerable notion of objectivity. Gatekeeping, the process whereby news organizations determine the nature of the news for public consumption, is out, he contends, at least for the new online news producers or “produsers” (a clever combination of producer and user). Bruns coins a new term, “gatewatching,” to explain the shift in balance from publishing newsworthy information to publicizing and evaluating whatever relevant content is available on the Web. Gatewatching builds on the assumption that the Web, in the words of Bruns, “is an egalitarian, open-access medium which is particularly well suited to liberating the exchange of alternative, non-mainstream content and ideas” (p. 2). Gatewatching, as Bruns defines it, is a dominant practice on a number of the websites studied here, including Slashdot and Kuro5hin, and largely characterizes the practice of blogging. The categorization and explanation of the concept of gatewatching is an important contribution of this book to the study of alternative news production online, and Bruns returns to it again and again.

Bruns’ discussion of journalistic objectivity is less convincing, however crucial it is to understanding the reconfiguration of news from an activist or alternative perspective. He offers insufficient context to fully grasp either the importance of objectivity to traditional news production or the significance of its rejection by what he calls “open news.” Bruns draws upon the open-source software phenomenon to explain this new approach to content generation and publication on the Web. In the same way that open-source software production benefits from large numbers of volunteer user-producers working collaboratively to develop and debug programs, open news relies upon Internet users as active participants in the creation of content for the various online communities to which they belong. Similarly,
inaccuracies are detected by “the power of eyeballs” or the sheer number of people reading (and similarly participating in the generation of) the news.

Extending the analogy of open source perhaps too far, Bruns develops a taxonomy of collaborative online “peer to peer” (p2p) news publishing, ranging from more traditional journalistic efforts to indirectly news-related online-publication models. Here, Bruns understands p2p in a more literal (rather than technological) way, as the “range of systems and practices enabling participants to interact amongst themselves on an equal footing and without significant intervention from editors, moderators, network administrators or other controlling powers” (p. 121). He rather successfully establishes a case for the consideration of weblogs—the virtual incarnation of the personal journal—as news sources and, in some cases, “produsers” of news; they are “guilty of journalism,” albeit not in the professional sense. Strangely, Bruns does not offer much of a history of blogs, despite their early use as correctives to errors in the mainstream media. Although the concept of open source is a powerful alternative model for organization, production, and problem solving, Bruns forces the analogy in places, sometimes moulding his discussion self-consciously rather than allowing similarities to emerge naturally from his examination of the topic.

Bruns’ theoretical grounding for *Gatewatching* is weak. He relies solely upon a book written by Herbert Gans in 1980, which proffers a multiperspectival model of the news, a two-tier system comprising mainstream and alternative news producers. The application of this model to a virtual environment is interesting, but it is a somewhat soft premise for an entire book. Bruns brings everything back to this (rather limited) model, flogging it relentlessly and, frankly, boring the reader at times. In fact, Bruns’ over-reliance on other people’s ideas is the key drawback of the book. It reads like a collection of quotes, with little evidence of an authorial voice, except in the transition to the next quote. Some of the book’s best insights come from other people. In this, Bruns acts as an aggregator (much like the Web-based news aggregators he talks about) of information about alternative online news “produsers,” rather than an original thinker on the subject.

Despite some obvious flaws, *Gatewatching* remains an important book in several ways. First, it systematically documents emerging online trends in news production, from gatewatching sites like Slashdot to original-content open-news production, as practised by Indymedia, to personal blogging. Although much more research is required in this area, Bruns’ contribution is significant. He has collected the majority of his data from the people most involved—the users and creators of the websites studied. Bruns goes directly to the source and allows the techies, bloggers, and media activists to speak freely, in their own words—a most refreshing approach. Finally, he contests status quo thinking about media making, providing a solid—even controversial—critique of mainstream journalism. His presentation of the news as incomplete, as a conversation, is more than irreverent; it shakes the foundation of an entire industry.

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