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To Embody and to Embalm: Collective Memory in the Final Editions of Closed Newspapers

Abstract:

Despite widespread handwringing by journalists and by the trade press, very little academic literature has examined the final editions of failed newspapers as text. This essay begins filling that gap by examining the metajournalistic discourse of four such newspapers—two that closed in the early 1980s, and two that closed in 2009. A close reading of these final editions reveals that journalists turn to collective memory to articulate the meaning of their work. Specifically, they deploy retrospective memory techniques to craft the present meanings of their newspaper closings, and they deploy prospective memory techniques to establish how and why their work should be remembered in the future. The analysis reveals the fundamental issue confronting newspaper journalism to be the dematerialization of news, and because of this, suggests the era of newspaper crisis may be continuous and coincident with the advent of electronic communication.