

Affective journalism – uncovering the affective dimension  
of practice in the coverage of traumatic news

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**Declaration of authorship**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of Goldsmiths, University of London, is solely my own work.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

I declare my thesis consists of 93,500 words.

Stephen Jukes, April 2017

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Last but not least I would like to thank my wife Yvonne, and children Dominic and Timothy for their loving patience during my years of doctoral study. The refrain of 'when will it be finished?' was reminiscent of those long holiday car journeys ('are we there yet?') ...

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is an exploration of the affective processes, behaviours and practices that lie at the heart of journalists' work when covering traumatic news stories such as conflict, acts of terror and natural disasters.

The starting point is one of the central tensions of Anglo-American journalism. On the one hand, the normative values of objectivity have become deeply ingrained as a mark of professional standing. On the other hand, the practice of journalism relies on emotion to engage the public.

The apparent contradiction has often been the focus of academic analysis, sometimes from the perspective of audience reception and sometimes from that of professional and political economic tensions facing the industry. This thesis unpicks and examines in detail the component parts of the 'objectivity paradigm' and breaks new ground by uncovering the affective dimension of practice when covering traumatic news. Its analysis draws principally on affect theorists who have been influenced by a psychosocial tradition.

Empirical research is based on interviews with 25 journalists who have covered traumatic news stories where the objectivity norm has been challenged or disrupted. These include the shooting of primary school children in Dunblane, Scotland, in 1996, in the pre-Internet era, and several contemporary stories dominated by social media ranging from the Syrian conflict to terror attacks in London and Paris.

What emerges is a complex picture of journalists grappling with competing tensions – on the one hand a virtually hard-wired notion of what it is to be a professional journalist and, on the other hand, a visceral, empathic often instinctive affective dimension of practice. The research identifies two main affective behaviours of journalists covering difficult stories, that of 'cool-detached' and 'autopilot.' It also investigates the affective dimension of social media images, including potential mental health risks of working with user-

generated content, and the ‘herd instinct’ of journalists covering major breaking news.

The research highlights the moral obligation on news organisations to maintain the mental well-being of their journalists whether on assignment in the field or in the newsroom handling graphic user-generated content. It also explores the tensions between the commercial attractions of such content as a means to reengage disaffected audiences and its impact in creating a more emotionally driven news file.

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## A PERSONAL REFLECTION

*This preface sets out the personal background to my thesis and explains why I chose to investigate journalism's objectivity norms and the practice of those journalists covering traumatic news stories.*

Sept 11, 2001 was, by any definition, a seismic event in the nascent history of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Nearly 3,000 people were killed; more than a decade later the Middle East is engulfed in conflict and a spate of increasingly brazen terror attacks has dominated the political agenda ever since. The attack on the Twin Towers later caused the mighty New York Times to question in full public glare its own standards of reporting. And while it may sound trivial by comparison, Sept 11 shook the very foundations of my own career in journalism.

This is a very personal reflection on those events and the reason why I embarked on this doctoral research. It is a story I have never really told before although I am often asked about my walk-on role in Sept 11. It was my Warhol moment except, I suppose, for the fact that for me it has never really gone away.

Accuracy, impartiality, objectivity – these concepts had been driven into me from my very first days as a young reporter on the Brighton and Hove Gazette and Herald in the late 1970s. It was my first job after leaving university, I had gone back to basics to ‘do my indentures’ under the tutelage of the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), a collection of grey suited men who praised the discipline of short-hand and values that had talismanic status. The Gazette, circulation on a good week 12,000, went to press on a Thursday evening. On Friday, as the youngest of the six-strong reporting team (imagine that on a weekly today), I would sit and wait for the readers’ phone calls. There was no e-mail or social media in those days, we used typewriters after all. The dreaded calls always came, “my little one’s name has been spelt wrongly,” “you didn’t quote councillor so-and-so” ... the shame and humiliation of factual inaccuracy. Sometimes musicians would ring, complaining that the Gazette’s review of their classical music performance had been unfair. Dismissively we

batted back the criticism, how dare someone question the artistic judgement of the Gazette's review team! I don't think any of us had the faintest idea about classical music or could even play more than a basic tune on the piano.

A few years later I switched to the global news agency Reuters and quickly became a foreign correspondent in what was then West Germany. My newspaper experience was widely praised ("the best training you can get"), Reuters correspondents lived and breathed the mantra of objectivity, accuracy and freedom from bias. This was the hallmark of Reuters journalism and the reason for its widespread success in the marketplace as a wholesaler of news. It had dated back to the Suez crisis in 1956 when the then general manager of Reuters Christopher Chancellor ordered journalists, much to the disgust of Sir Anthony Eden's government, to stop referring to British troops as "our" troops. The cliché is that journalists write the first draft of history and as a foreign correspondent at the height of the Cold War I was in the thick of it. Over the next 20 years I covered and wrote about some of the biggest stories – the fall of Margaret Thatcher, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the fall of the Soviet empire; I covered summits around the world with Thatcher, Reagan, Gorbachev, Kohl and Mitterrand; Middle East crises, the assassination of Yitzak Rabin, the Iran-Iraq war; as a news editor I directed coverage of countless wars and conflicts and stories that would change the face of politics – the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, hanging chads, anthrax attacks... and always doing my best to ensure that stories were objective, accurate and free from bias.

As I rose through the ranks of Reuters, I revised style guides that advised the Reuters correspondent to avoid the use of emotional words, to always put two sides of an argument and to never let your own opinions intrude into a story. I worked alongside the trustees of Reuters to head off takeovers that could have threatened the company's neutrality and impartiality. And when the Internet threatened the Reuters business model of wholesale news, we made a virtue of objectivity, ensuring that the clean clipped style stood out from the morass of partisan rantings on the web.

The world was in order. Until, out of a clear blue September sky, two planes flew into the World Trade Center.

I was out of the country at the time, flying to London from Washington DC where we lived. As Reuters Global Head of News I was classically in the wrong place at the wrong time. As the entire New York and Washington newsrooms rushed to handle the biggest story of the new century, I confidently urged them not to forget the hallowed principles of objectivity. Cut out the emotion, forget the adjectives, just describe what happened. Fatefully, in a memo from the vacuum-like calm of the London newsroom, I reminded everyone of the phrase we always cited: “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” It had stood in the Reuters style guide for 20 years, we all knew it by heart and used it as the basis for coverage worldwide, not least in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It was a phrase that did not stand the test of Sept 11.

As I returned to DC, the storm of outrage broke. Someone had leaked my memo to the Washington Post. Their media columnist Howard Kurtz printed it in full, heaping righteous indignation on the policy and questioning why anyone in their right mind would *not* call the 9/11 hi-jackers terrorists. How could Reuters defend a value neutral stance when America was under attack?

I had clearly been out of touch with the mood of the country. The bald, glib phrase was extraordinarily insensitive. The American ‘right’ came down on me like a ton of bricks, Bill O’Reilly of Fox leading the charge. Even the left-leaning liberal press was outraged. Reuters was in crisis, a four-billion-dollar company was at risk of losing its entire U.S. business as bankers threatened to cancel their contracts for financial data and news. And yet a climb-down would mean renouncing the very journalistic creed that formed the company’s foundations. In the meantime, things got ugly. I was assigned personal protection and, in a scene reminiscent of TV cop shows, was asked some seemingly bland questions: “Did I always use the same route to drive to work?” Yes, there was only one road downtown from North West DC. “Did I always go to the same sandwich bar for lunch?” Yes, the Café Mozart next door to the DC bureau. “Perhaps I might like

to vary the patterns of my lifestyle?” And so I did. The security guard kept a discrete distance behind me for a few weeks. Reuters apologised for the insensitivity, got into fairly deep water rehearsing arguments about ‘value neutrality’ but more or less stood by their Head of News. Slowly but surely the storm subsided, America was going to war against Afghanistan and subsequently Iraq. And then it would be for the New York Times and Judith Miller to come under the spotlight.

Time changes perceptions. I left the company in 2004 after the second Gulf War and turned to the academic world. My former colleagues at Reuters still, often unprompted, speak about those days and say how I was right to take the stand I did. “You stood up for our principles,” they say.

With hindsight, the personal threats I received were only to be expected given the utter insensitivity of my actions.

I now realise that Sept 11 actually had two far more significant personal consequences, both of which gave the impetus to this thesis.

Firstly, I witnessed the impact that covering such traumatic news events can have on a newsroom and the individual journalists working on the story. It is important to realise that the New York headquarters of Reuters was staffed almost entirely by financial journalists – covering the New York stock markets, commodities, financial futures and foreign exchange. They were not hardened general news ‘hacks’ (they sat in the Washington DC bureau). But when the planes flew into the Twin Towers, many of those financial journalists ended up covering the horror of what was the biggest attack on the United States since Pearl Harbor in 1941. This was deeply upsetting for many of those in the New York newsroom of Reuters. Nor were they alone, in fact the Sept 11 attack coincided with Fashion Week and across New York business and fashion reporters found themselves covering the attack and interviewing survivors and the families of those killed.

It was at this point that I realised that a news organisation has a moral responsibility to its employees to safeguard their mental well-being. When I returned from my posting in the United States to work for Reuters in London in 2003, I began to introduce support mechanisms for the company's journalists, knowing full well that the second Gulf War was becoming more and more inevitable.<sup>1</sup> And it is for this reason that I started to work pro bono for the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, a charity focusing on these issues, and chose to investigate the subject matter academically through this thesis.

The second key perception I drew from Sept 11 revolved around journalism's objectivity paradigm. From that moment on, I knew that I needed to examine journalism's norms, to unpick all the complex component parts and try to understand better the values and practices that my experience told me were so deeply ingrained in many journalists (and indeed in myself).

Why is it that we cling to them so dearly? And why is it taboo to question them? It is not as though they have insulated the profession from crisis. Britain's press has been in the deepest mire since World War II and American journalism subjected itself to desperate soul searching just a decade ago. We know full well, if we spend a fraction of a second thinking about it, that journalism is about choice and framing – a choice of whom to interview, what to write, how it is written, how it is subbed, what headline is used... We know full well that news generates and mobilises powerful emotions. Or is it because, to paraphrase Churchill's aphorism on democracy, that objectivity is the worst form of journalism except all others that have been tried?

One way or another, Sept 11 shook the foundations of my journalism to the core. It explains the deeply personal need to understand how news reporting and emotion function, the one with the other. And underpinning this thesis is an academic determination to consider whether there may be a fresh way of thinking about how journalists cover these big breaking traumatic news stories and the impact this has on them.

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<sup>1</sup> See p 119

## INTRODUCTION

*“The words stuck in my throat. A sob wanted to replace them. A gulp or two quashed the sob, which metamorphosed into tears forming in the corners of my eyes. I fought back the emotion and regained my professionalism, but it was touch and go there for a few seconds before I could continue...” - Walter Cronkite, *A Reporter’s Life* (1997)*

*“Some of us started to introduce more emotion into reporting to make it less dry. You’re not taking sides but you do have to reflect the excitement of the moment. But the problem is that the audience have become addicts: they love emotion. They want more emotion. They want suffering children. It’s been overdone.” - Lindsey Hilsum, *International Editor Channel 4 News* (2014)<sup>2</sup>*

### *1. Introduction*

More than half a century separates the day of President Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 when the legendary news anchor Walter Cronkite shed a tear on air and Lindsey Hilsum’s observations on today’s world of multi-media journalism. For Cronkite, who epitomised a persona of determined self-control, that tear was an emotional lapse that threatened to undermine his ‘professionalism’, a carefully cultivated air of detachment that made him America’s most trusted news anchor. It was an era when journalism prized objectivity, indeed on his death in 2009 Time magazine called him “TV’s patron saint of objectivity.”<sup>3</sup> Fifty years later, Hilsum is typical of several top foreign correspondents who lament the intrusion of emotion into every day reporting and who seemingly yearn for a bygone era of objectivity when journalists stuck to the facts.

As a former foreign correspondent who was based in the United States for eight years, I had long been aware of Cronkite’s legendary reluctance to reveal his emotions on screen. Equally, after several years back in Britain, I have become

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<sup>2</sup> Remarks made during a panel discussion at the 2014 Kurt Schork journalism awards hosted by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Time Magazine obituary: Walter Cronkite – the Man with America’s Trust.  
<http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1911501,00.html>

familiar with Hilsum's views that journalism is now injecting too much emotion into news reporting. In one sense, Cronkite and Hilsum share common ground, both revealing a powerful attachment to journalism's normative values of objectivity and illustrating its enduring attraction from an era of analogue news into today's digital environment.

But in fact, on closer inspection, their words can be read very differently.

In her remarks, made in the context of news coverage of the Israeli assault on Gaza in summer 2014, Hilsum is commenting on the mediation of what has been termed 'distant suffering' (Illouz, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2013) and the practice, legitimised (as I will later examine) within journalism's objectivity paradigm, of illustrating the emotion of a news story through quoting the protagonists, victims, and survivors of a traumatic news event. This well-rehearsed technique, referred to sometimes as the 'outsourcing of emotion' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012), is a cornerstone of objective journalism practice since the reader or viewer is *not* being overtly confronted with the emotions of the reporter. Hilsum is reflecting on the current *practice* of journalism and the application of craft skills which, in her view, is being pushed too far.

Cronkite's tear is very different. It goes to the heart of what could be called the phenomenology of news journalism. It is a graphic illustration of how journalists sometimes struggle to maintain the objectivity paradigm and the fragility of the coping mechanisms and techniques they employ in an effort to uphold it. Cronkite is reflecting on the *lived experience* of journalism.

As these examples from Cronkite and Hilsum both illustrate, the normative practices of journalism in the Anglo-American model are rooted in words and concepts such as objectivity, impartiality and freedom from bias. These in turn are informed by an underlying desire to uncover the truth, support democracy and hold power to account. My main argument throughout this thesis is that there is more to these practices than meets the eye and I wanted to understand what

journalists often refer to as the instinctive or ‘gut feel’ about how they do their job when confronted by what are often termed ‘traumatic news events.’<sup>4</sup>

Through analysis of the in-depth interviews I conducted with journalists for my empirical research I will argue that practice is not just the result of history, training manuals or ‘learning on the job.’ I maintain that there are also underlying affective<sup>5</sup> processes, behaviours and practices which, *when combined* with consideration of other factors such as the nature of a story and the competitive environment, afford a better understanding of the every-day lived experience of news journalism when covering such stories. This is, in short, a study of what I term ‘affective journalism.’

## 2. Research questions and contribution to knowledge

In common with many doctoral studies, I started out by seeking to shed light on a broadly formulated research question, aiming to investigate the relationship between news, journalism and emotion. But that question quickly evolved and became more focused as I began to explore what has been called the ‘turn to affect’<sup>6</sup> and ways in which diverse theories of affect have been applied to media.

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis explores the affective practice of journalists covering *traumatic news events*. I have used this phrase as shorthand to characterise distressing stories which typically include, but are by no means limited to: conflict, terror, natural disaster and sexual assault.

The Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, a charity based at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York, defines a traumatic event as follows: “Any event to which a person is connected, that is unexpected, outside that person’s usual range of human experience, and that involves some form of loss, injury or threat of injury, whether actual or perceived.”

See: [http://dartcenter.org/sites/default/files/DCE\\_JournoTraumaHandbook.pdf](http://dartcenter.org/sites/default/files/DCE_JournoTraumaHandbook.pdf)

The charity provides support for journalists suffering from stress incurred through coverage of traumatic news stories; it also provides best practice guidelines and resources for what I call trauma-literate reporting by promoting better understanding of issues around trauma. As a trustee, I chair its European operations. Throughout this thesis I have used the American spelling of ‘Center’ to reflect the parent organisation’s New York base.

<sup>5</sup> There are many theories of affect. These are reviewed in Chapter Two, which informs my conceptual framework and sets out which scholars I have drawn on for my methodology. These are principally those who approach affect through a psychosocial perspective, such as Blackman (2007, 2010, 2012), Venn (2010) and Wetherell (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Clough is generally credited with coining the phrase “Affective Turn” in the 1990s, defining it as “a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory”. See the collection of essays in: Clough & Halley (2007). *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham: Duke University Press.



That opened up the possibility of exploring in detail the affective dimension of news journalism that operates below the threshold of conscious experience. My focus honed in on traumatic news events. This partly reflected my own interest as a news agency journalist (it is the staple diet of agency news cover). But, as I elaborate on later, such stories are also ones in which the tensions around journalism practice, emotions and norms tend to rise to the surface.

As a result, I devised two overarching research questions:

- What are the affective processes, behaviours and practices of journalism in relation to the coverage of traumatic news events?
- And is that affective dimension changing in today's digital, globally interconnected media landscape?

Specifically, I wanted to explore in detail several areas of journalism practice through the lens of affect:

- What is a journalist's relationship to norms of objectivity and detachment when covering traumatic news events?
- How do journalists cope with the stresses and strains of such cover?
- What is it that drives the herd or 'pack' instinct when journalists descend en masse on a breaking news story?
- How do journalists interview vulnerable people caught up in tragedy?
- What is the impact of gruesome user-generated content images that are now becoming a routine part of the news file?

My aim has been to make an original contribution to knowledge and journalistic debate in two ways: firstly, by uncovering, identifying and categorising through interviews with journalists the affective dimension of handling such traumatic news stories; and secondly by adding a fresh perspective that can complement more traditional methods of analysis which, although often interdisciplinary in nature, tend to focus on the political economy, professional values or norms and representational ways in which meaning is created.

The thesis does not dismiss long established methods of analysing journalism. As such it considers, as above, how within the objectivity paradigm emotion can be ‘outsourced’ to the protagonists in a story and how various linguistic formulations are used to engage audiences. It also takes into account how the political economy of news journalism and professional norms of journalism play a role in today’s practice. But I also maintain that such traditional methods of analysis are limited both in the world of ‘old media’ and in our current age of social media and that the affective dimension can add an important new perspective. Traditional methods have tended to sideline the body, sensation and affect in understanding the process of communication (Blackman, 2012). The investigation draws on work by affect scholars such as Lisa Blackman (2007, 2010, 2012), Christian Borch (2006), Richard Grusin (2010), Tony Sampson (2011, 2012), Couze Venn (2010) and Margaret Wetherell (2012). Many of these have investigated 19<sup>th</sup> century sociologists Gabriel Tarde (1902/ 1969) and Gustave Le Bon (1895/ 1986), highlighting particularly Tarde’s influence in informing contemporary contagion theories for our globally networked culture.

Tarde’s work played a pivotal role in my own research journey. Firstly, it served as a starting point for my exploration of the origins of journalism’s objectivity paradigm and what might have been had his ideas not been reworked and marginalised. This historical perspective is set out in detail in Chapter One. Secondly, Tarde’s ideas opened up for me a wider perspective on the sociology of communications and the lineage to modern theories of affect and Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and doxa. I have not drawn on Tarde’s theories as an analytical tool per se, but have highlighted in Chapter Two the influence of his thinking and how this presciently informed some current trends in media and communication.

Beckett and Deuze (2016: 1) go so far as to say that the challenge for today’s news industry is to be meaningful, insightful and trustworthy in what they term an “emerging affective media ecosystem.” The idea of using tools of affect to analyse my empirical data did, however, create a number of challenges, not least the fact there are many different strands of affect theory and that methodology is

not clearly developed. In addition, the very concept of affect focuses on trying to capture what Knudsen and Stage refer to as the immaterial and the fleeting (2015: 2). But at the same time, as the editors of *Affective Methodologies* observe, too little attention has been paid to reflecting inventively on where and how affect may be traced, approached and understood (ibid). I maintain that the affective dimension has particular relevance in today's 'age of networks' as we witness and investigate the impact of social media in events as diverse as the 2008 global banking crisis or the Arab Spring. As Sampson observes (2012: 163), Middle East dictators have recognised how revolutionary contagion spreads not just from one country to another but that the transmission of affect spreads throughout a population. But while Sampson and others investigate such broader socio-political trends, to date there has been relatively little exploration or application of affect to the actual *practice* of journalism and how, when combined with traditional perspectives, this might enrich the understanding of how the coverage of traumatic news stories works. Instead of viewing journalism from the outside through the lens of, for example, the political economy, professional norms or craft dimensions, I have adopted an 'inside-out' approach. This starts with the lived experience of the individual journalist engaged in covering traumatic news. But it also insists on viewing this in the broader interdependent context of the psychosocial, cultural, political economic and technological dimensions of the current media environment. Zelizer, for example, argues for multiple frames through which to explore journalism, maintaining that a single focus cannot provide a complete picture of what journalism is and capture its richness, complexities and internal contradictions (1993, 2005).

### 3. *A false antagonism*

Throughout, I have been keen to challenge some deeply entrenched concepts.

On the face of it, there is an inherent contradiction in Anglo-American journalism. On the one hand, the normative values of fact-based reporting, impartiality and detachment (components of journalistic practice which are often

grouped under the umbrella of objectivity<sup>7</sup>) have become deeply ingrained and codified as a mark of professional standing over the past 150 years. Although sometimes questioned, both by journalists and academics (Bell, 2012; Cunningham, 2003; McGill, 2004; Maras 2013; Rosen, 1993), these values, as Hilsum's remarks illustrate, still exert a powerful, almost talismanic, influence today (Richards & Rees, 2011). It is still a central notion of journalism, holding up a mirror to reality, putting journalists in the role of observers, recorders and scribes (Zelizer 2006: 69). On the other hand, the practice of journalism relies on emotion to engage the public and generate feeling (Seaton, 2005). I will argue that this tension is becoming more apparent and that we are witnessing a tonal shift in coverage of 'hard news' in our age of social media with its emphasis on live, unedited user-generated material. As I found to my own cost as a foreign correspondent (and as outlined in the personal reflection to this thesis), the paradox that Seaton alludes to lurks just below the surface of day-to-day reporting and with one poorly chosen phrase can suddenly burst into the full glare of public scrutiny.

In the traditional discourse of journalism, mention of the word emotion is often treated dismissively (Peters, 2011), equated with 'bad' journalism. In its crudest binary form, the journalistic norms of news reporting pit objective against subjective, fact against emotion, rationality against irrationality. Of course, these are vastly over-simplified dichotomies. It is far more complex than that and in the years since Kennedy's death journalism has come to operate in a totally different world in which many of the apparent boundaries have become blurred. It is one in which technology has destabilised the 20<sup>th</sup> Century industrial logic of media business, in which communication has become instant and global, in which anyone with a mobile phone can become a 'citizen journalist' and the traditional boundaries of what is and what is not journalism are increasingly challenged and contested. Dictators can no longer be certain of controlling the message, the extremists of Islamic State or ISIS are masters of social media and

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter One for a discussion of the evolution of the objectivity norm in journalism and its definitions.

the journalist's monopoly on information has been weakened<sup>8</sup>. These fundamental shifts in the media ecology mean it is difficult for us to conceive today of an 'Uncle Walter' figure signing off the daily network news bulletin with the words "And that's the way it is." These are not freshly discovered trends and they are the subject of intense public and academic discourse, from The Guardian's daily analysis of Islamic State's propaganda tactics, to academic research into the rise of 'citizen witnessing' and the influence of social media on the unfolding of the bloody Arab Spring (Allan, 2013; Grusin, 2010; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Papacharissi, 2015). Some scholars have highlighted the ways in which journalism is struggling with a perfect storm of technological change, marketisation and a collapsed business model, suggesting serious consequences for democracy (Currah, 2009; Davies, 2009; Phillips, 2012). Others have chosen to focus on the potential democratising impact of social media and its benefits to news journalism (Allan, 2013; Bruns, 2003, 2011). While this is not a focus of this dissertation, for the record, I place myself in the latter camp, believing that social media is now firmly a part of the news environment and that it offers a new opportunity to give voice to the voiceless.

As a former foreign correspondent and editor working around the world for Reuters, I lived and breathed an ethos of 'objective reporting', learning to strip out adjectives from copy and paring back news stories to the bare facts. That journalism was also impersonal, a by-line was rare and the cult of personality, or the journalistic 'voice', was deliberately suppressed. But since leaving the world of journalism, I have increasingly explored that 'forbidden' world, becoming deeply involved in the work of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, a charity focusing on how journalists report on – and themselves cope with – traumatic news events. While many organisations have emerged over the past decade to concentrate on the physical well-being of journalists, from the International News Safety Institute (INSI) to the Rory Peck Trust, only Dart has

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<sup>8</sup> Although it is worth noting that just five main media corporations control more than 70% of online news consumption in the UK (as measured by browsing time) according to a report in 2014 by the Media Reform Coalition:  
<http://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ElephantinthetroomFinalfinal.pdf>

explored as its main focus the mental health issues. This is all the more remarkable since, as is explored in Chapter Seven, emergency services (or ‘first responders’) such as the police, fire brigade and ambulance crews have long recognised the need for training to cope with trauma. As Phelps et al. have observed, the potential impact on the psychological wellbeing of those working in the caring professions in the aftermath of trauma and disaster has been recognised for many years, with typical symptoms including burn-out<sup>9</sup>, compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatisation (2009: 313). Equally, the British and U.S. military has had a long history of dealing, not always successfully, with trauma. It was first known as ‘shell shock’ in World War One, ‘stress response syndrome’ during the Vietnam War and then categorised in 1980 as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>10</sup> Today the British military openly recognises the risk of trauma and PTSD and has set up a programme called TRiM (Trauma Risk Management) to tackle the issue.<sup>11</sup> But while the police, paramedics and fire fighters are routinely debriefed after attending a disaster, journalists usually are not (Barnes, 2013: 285).

#### *4. A Long History*

It is also tempting to see the discussion of journalism, trauma and emotion as a modern phenomenon, rooted in the post Cold War conflicts of the Balkans, Rwanda and the Middle East. The BBC’s Fergal Keane has written passionately about the Rwandan genocide and his own emotions, not least the stresses of life as a war correspondent and his alcohol addiction.<sup>12</sup> Since the 2003 Gulf War, there has been increasing focus on the stresses facing journalists covering traumatic news stories. But it is easy to forget that journalists have been covering conflict since the Crimean War in the 1850s. In *The Cat from Hué*, the CBS correspondent John Laurence documents his personal struggles after years of covering the Vietnam War (cited in Masse, 2011: 9). The American photographer Margaret Bourke-White was one of the first to work in combat

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<sup>9</sup> In his ethnographic study of journalists covering the civil war in El Salvador, Pedelty documents the high burn-out rate, drug and alcohol addiction (1995: 140-146).

<sup>10</sup> See page 160 for a full clinical definition of PTSD.

<sup>11</sup> See the British Army’s website: <http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23245.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> In 1996 Keane broadcast his personal reflection on the birth of his son Daniel, see: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/41784.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/41784.stm)

zones in World War II and was on the scene when American forces first entered the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1945. “Using a camera,” she said, “was almost a relief. It interposed a slight barrier between myself and the horror in front of me” (cited in Sullivan, 2006: 107). The legendary Martha Gellhorn covered the Spanish Civil War, the D-Day landings and the liberation of Dachau. Shortly after visiting the camp, she said a “darkness entered my spirit” and later spoke of a ‘dark grey sludge pit’ of the mind (Moorehead, 2011: 10). When Australian journalists could no longer do their job in World Wars One and Two, their accreditation was withdrawn due to ‘ill health’, a euphemism for psychological trauma<sup>13</sup> (Anderson, 2014: 148).

Little detail is known about the stress and mental pressures faced by journalists in the times before the two world wars. Fedler (2004) argues<sup>14</sup>, however, that in the hundred years between the birth of modern U.S. reporting in the 1850s until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century American reporters endured significant stresses and strains, all of which went without recognition by employers or help. Through his historical research, Fedler was able to catalogue a series of symptoms of stress, from substance abuse to exhaustion, mental and physical breakdowns. He concluded (2004: 97):

“Early reporters never used the word ‘stress.’ Their meaning was clear, however. Early reporters said they endured hunger and exhaustion; were horrified by what they saw; felt nervous and depressed; and experienced nightmares, desperation and despair.”

##### *5. Structure of the thesis*

The personal reflection that prefaces this research sets out how, in my final years with Reuters, driven by my experience around the Sept 11 attacks, I witnessed at first hand trauma in a newsroom and resolved to investigate the component parts

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<sup>13</sup> Of the nine Australian journalists and three photographers who were accredited to the Australian military in World War One, only five lasted for longer than six months (Anderson, 2014: 149).

<sup>14</sup> For his historic research into newsroom stress, Fedler trawled through about 100 biographies, 150 autobiographies and 250 magazine articles written by and about early reporters, editors and photographers.

of the objectivity paradigm and its relationship to emotion. During the cut and thrust of news agency journalism, when success or failure can be measured against ‘opposition’ agencies in seconds, there had been no time for such questions. This thesis is, therefore, my long overdue consideration of the practice of journalism and the reflection I didn’t have time for during my 20 plus years with Reuters.

In the first chapter I have tried to set out the baseline for that consideration, tracing through the lens of a social, political and cultural history how the objectivity norm, and the avowed avoidance of emotion, became so deeply entrenched in the professional ethos of Anglo-American journalism. While those journalists today who are fighting a rear-guard action against the rise of citizen journalism decry the decline of those normative values, it is easy to forget that they are relatively new. The origins of the objectivity norm are clearly contested academically, but this thesis subscribes to the view, based on analysis of the secondary literature, that objectivity arose principally as a professional code in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, partly to add credibility to journalism as a profession and partly to distinguish it (and defend it) from other emerging disciplines, most notably Public Relations. As Carlson and Lewis observe in relation to contemporary practice (2015: 2), the struggle over such professional boundaries often leads to different actors competing to apply or remove the label of journalism.<sup>15</sup>

The chapter examines the debate, including the influence of commercial and cultural considerations, and definitions of objectivity, classically referred to as a strategic ritual (Tuchman, 1972) revolving around a state of detachment from events, impartiality, fact-based reporting and balance. Equally, it examines the

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<sup>15</sup> In 1983, the US sociologist Thomas Gieryn, referencing the field of science (not specifically Journalism), defined boundary work as the: “attribution of selected characteristics to the institution of science (i.e., to its practitioners, methods, stock of knowledge, values and work organisation) for purposes of constructing a social boundary that distinguishes some intellectual activities as ‘non-science.’” The concept of boundaries does not have a strong foothold in Journalism Studies but has become more central with the decline of ‘legacy’ media outlets and the rise of social media (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). The concept is discussed throughout this thesis, often in conjunction with Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field.



counterpoint of ‘attachment’ and its role in practice in relation to covering traumatic news events.

One of the central arguments that runs throughout this thesis, and which is borne out by interviews with senior figures from the news world, is that the code built around the concept of objectivity is still deeply entrenched and is part of that professional lineage traced in Chapter One. This is not least because of its use in establishing boundaries, distinguishing a ‘real’ journalist from an ‘amateur’ or someone seeking to impart spin to a story (Allan, 2013; Fenton & Witschge, 2011). That defensive line of reasoning is remarkably similar to the original late 19<sup>th</sup> Century motivation as the journalists of that era sought to differentiate themselves from the emerging discipline of Public Relations and establish their own distinct professional standing.

Chapter One also traces how journalists have tried – or sometimes failed - to ‘square the circle’, delivering emotional content to engage audiences as a cornerstone of modern journalism (Seaton, 2005) while upholding the normative values loosely grouped under the term objectivity. One of these methods is through the craft skills and practice of ‘outsourcing’ referred to at the start of this introduction by Hilsum. This has been well documented by Wahl-Jorgensen (2012) who has illustrated how emotion has been accommodated, rationalised and codified as acceptable practice *within* the objectivity norm by presenting the emotion experienced by the protagonist(s) in a story as opposed to that experienced by the actual journalist. This rarely acknowledged openly and constitutes a form of ‘tacit knowledge’ (ibid: 5).

In the second chapter, I shift my attention away from the evolution of journalism’s rationalist positivist framework to examine the ‘turn to affect’, reviewing the considerable body of literature and diverse strands of affect theory as they have been applied to media and specifically journalism in order to help conceptualise my own empirical research methodology. In doing so, the chapter outlines how ideas pioneered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Gabriel Tarde (1902/1969) and subsequent genealogical investigation into those ideas by today’s affect scholars spurred my interest in the affective dimension of journalism

practice. I argue that affect theories have the potential to challenge and disrupt traditional ways of thinking about journalism by shifting the focus away from analysis based solely on representation, professional norms or the political economy towards the unconscious. My review of the academic literature on affect and the media shows that there has been limited attempt to apply such theories to journalism *practice*. Certainly, academics such as Massumi (1995, 2002) have used the affective lens to investigate at length issues of power and journalism, while others have used it to investigate the phenomenon of Reality TV (Gibbs, 2010; Gorton, 2009; Kavka, 2008); still others have looked at the impact of ‘affective streams’ of news through social media on the public (Ahmed, 2004; Frosh and Pinchevski, 2009; Papacharissi, 2015). Given that there is no one single unified theory of affect, I chose to build my research methodology around ideas articulated principally by Venn (2010) and Wetherell (2012). Together with Blackman (2007, 2010, 2012), this group of theorists tends to criticise those (such as Massumi) who see a dichotomy between mind and matter, body and cognition, biology and culture (Knudsen & Stage, 2015: 4).

Chapter Three sets out my methodology and how it is applied to the analysis of my empirical research data. I decided to explore through in-depth interviews the experience of journalists who have routinely covered traumatic news stories, allowing me to focus on times when the objectivity norm is disrupted and therefore at its most vulnerable. As I know from personal experience, it is at these times that the doubts and hesitations of journalists rise to the surface. Allan and Zelizer (2004: 3) argue that conflict has often been a ‘litmus test’ for norms of objectivity because of the challenges reporters face in covering such stories.

The stories that form the backdrop to my research interviews focus on such traumatic themes, including the death of children and terror. I have concentrated on one major story from the pre-social media era, the 1996 mass killing of school children in Dunblane, Scotland. At the time, the massacre shocked an uncomprehending nation. There were no prior reference points, there had been no massacre of American school children at Columbine (1999), no shooting spree at Winnenden in south west Germany (2009) and no mass murder of 77 teenagers on the Norwegian island of Utoya (2011). Other stories that inform my

analysis are all from the current multi-media news landscape. These include, but are not limited to, the killing in 2013 of the off-duty soldier drummer Rigby in London, the use in the same year of chemical weapons against children in a suburb of Damascus during the Syrian civil war and the 2015 Isis-inspired terror attacks in Paris. This second group of stories all involved liberal use of controversially graphic user-generated still images and video, captured on mobile phones by casual passers-by or those caught up in the incidents. In the case of the Woolwich killing of drummer Rigby, his attackers actually waited for passers-by to film their statements on mobile phones. Just as was the case with Dunblane, there had been no such overt precedent.

I employed a psychosocial approach as the basis for my interviews and then used theories of affect for the analysis of my data, seeking to uncover and categorise the affective processes, behaviours and practices of journalism in the context of traumatic news stories. I interviewed a broad cross-section of journalists, from the very senior and internationally known to the junior and freelance. The common thread was that all had been deeply involved in one or more of the traumatic news stories selected, from Dunblane to recent terror attacks. I drew on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) since it was essential to be able to consider the lived experience of the journalists interviewed in relation to their world (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006), not least the stories they were covering and the many different contexts in which they were covering them (on location, in the newsroom; pre-Internet, social media era; the type of commercial or competitive pressure; the nature of the news organisation...). This is a methodology that highlights reflexivity and I also found that this sometimes posed limitations when combined with my desire to use specific theories of affect which privilege the unconscious. This was particularly the case since there were times when I brought my own experience of the past to interviews in the form of a participant or co-creator. My own experience on some common stories covered was often an ice-breaker and helped interview subjects open up. But I found quickly that it is easy to fall back into an almost secret language of one journalist interviewing another. That in turn opened up a new theoretical perspective of employing some of Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and doxa

(1984, 1990, 1998) to help analyse some of what was emerging in the interviews. I elaborate on this in the Methods chapter<sup>16</sup>.

The findings of my interviews with journalists are set out in empirical Chapters Four to Seven.

At the broadest level, what emerges is a complex picture of individuals continually grappling with competing tensions – on the one hand a deeply ingrained, virtually hard-wired notion of what it is to be a professional journalist together with commercial or competitive pressures and, on the other hand, personal feelings, internal dilemmas and hesitations. This is hardly surprising when reporters drafted in to cover, for example, the cold-blooded killing of children in a Scottish primary school also have children of the same age (in fact, in one case, in a neighbouring school just a few miles away). Or when only reporters are privy to details of child abuse revealed in court which are so disturbing that the judge rules they must not be published. Those are details the journalist has to process on his or her own, without the ability to tell readers or viewers.

Each of the four empirical chapters is designed to examine a specific aspect of journalism practice related to traumatic news and its affective dimension.

In Chapter Four, I attempt to tease out the main affective processes, behaviours and practices by focusing on those journalists who covered traumatic news stories. I identify two main affective behaviours in such hard news journalism that I have called ‘cool-detached’ and ‘autopilot,’ both of which are consistent with normative values of objectivity. Using a framework based principally on Venn (2010) and Wetherell (2012), I characterise these as often being unconscious, automatic processes, readily recognisable and reflexively related to the actions of others (Wetherell, 2012: 129). The interviews explore the fragility of these affective behaviours in the face of traumatic news stories but also the extent to which they can serve a dual purpose. They are on the one hand the

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<sup>16</sup> See p 116.

acceptable professional manifestation of the objectivity but on the other hand, they can also help journalists shield themselves from the horror of what they sometime witness.

The starting point for Chapter Five is the journalist's drive and determination to 'get the story' when traumatic news breaks. It focuses in greater detail on how cool-detached affective behaviour functions in relation to a journalist's personal sense of identity or persona, power structures within news organisations and the broader political economy of news and competition. It underscores the need to take an interdisciplinary methodological approach to the understanding of practice and attempts to illustrate how the experience of the individual journalist has to be viewed against multiple perspectives - from their own personal circumstances to the competitive environment and the nature of the story (to name but a few). The chapter examines how journalists perceive detachment as a key marker of their professional standing, particularly its ability to create boundaries in the face of citizen journalism and social media, and explores how adherence to this code – or failure to observe the code – can have an impact on a journalist's career. The chapter concludes by examining the way in which the norm of detachment can help deliver such traumatic news stories in a highly competitive environment, engage audiences or readers and thus serve the commercial needs of a news organisation.

Chapter Six examines in more detail the practice of interviewing those caught up in conflict, disaster or private grief. Almost every journalist, whether working on a local newspaper or for a domestic broadcaster, can expect to interview those exposed to violent or traumatic news stories during the course of a career whether that be global conflict, natural disasters, child abuse or domestic crime. Many journalists find violence on their doorstep in their local neighbourhood (Simpson & Côté, 2006: 2). The aim of this chapter is to explore how comfortably the professional norm of detachment, with its insistence on keeping a distance from the interview subject, and the unwritten rules or doxa of journalism sit with the journalist as a human being when confronted face to face with someone deep in personal tragedy. In this section, I attempt to identify the affective processes, the 'tricks of the trade' and the learned practice that allow a

journalist to engage with an interview subject and ‘get’ the story, while at the same time avoiding that danger of re-traumatising the person being interviewed. A review of literature in this area in this chapter shows that little attention has been paid to these issues.

In Chapter Seven, I concentrate on a different news environment, switching from journalists covering a breaking story in the field to deskwork back at news headquarters. In this chapter, the goal is to explore the explosion of social media images in today’s news landscape and the affective impact on journalists on intake desks, or social media ‘hubs’, handling what can be deeply distressing material (they are often engaged in a classic role of ‘gate-keeping’<sup>17</sup>, deciding whether to incorporate user-generated content into a mainstream news website). The newsroom used to be considered a ‘safe’ zone, in stark contrast to the world of a foreign correspondent in the field covering conflict or disaster. But today, the torrent of gruesome images and video footage flooding into the newsroom has created what has been labeled a new ‘digital frontline.’ As Sam Dubberley, one of the authors of a 2015 Eyewitness Media Hub report into secondary trauma suffered by journalists handling social media<sup>18</sup>, says:

“The impact of eyewitness media on journalism, human rights and humanitarian work means that the frontline is no longer geographic. The frontline has extended to headquarters. Staff who work with eyewitness media often see more horror on a daily basis compared to their counterparts deployed in the field.”

I examine the lived experience of those journalists working on such social media hubs and how they attempt to cope with user-generated content showing tragedy, suffering and graphic images often designed as propaganda. Here, Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and doxa provide a useful tool to investigate the

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<sup>17</sup> The term was coined by David White (a professor of journalism at Boston University) in 1950, the early days of media studies, to denote the way news/ images etc. flow into a news organisation and are selected for publication or rejected.

<sup>18</sup> Eyewitness Media Hub, 2015. Making secondary trauma a primary issue: a study of eyewitness media and vicarious trauma on the digital frontline. Available from: <http://eyewitnessmediahub.com/research/vicarious-trauma>

difference between the close-knit community of foreign correspondents bonding and supporting each other on assignment and the (often junior) desk worker in a large editorial who might be working on disturbing social media images without the same informal support network.

## *6. Major themes*

I conclude the thesis by referring back to my research questions and by pulling together the underlying themes emerging from the empirical research.

In answer to my first overarching research question, I identify two main affective behaviours of journalists covering traumatic news events as that of ‘cool-detached’ and ‘autopilot.’ These were consistently and often automatically displayed by the journalists I interviewed to uphold the norm of objectivity which to this day enjoys enduring power. These behaviours allow journalists to present an authoritative, professional and detached persona to the outside world. But at the same time, they serve to shield them from the suffering and trauma they often witness in the coverage of conflict and disaster. I argue that the vulnerability of journalists exposed to graphic user-generated content is actually reinforcing the normative behaviour of detachment as a means of protection as journalists working on social media hubs in newsrooms try to insert a distance between themselves and the material they are handling.

My second overarching research question asked whether the affective practices of journalism are changing in the digitally connected world of social media. I argue that a tonal shift in practice towards a more overt injection of emotion into news reporting can be detected and is borne out by the interviews with working journalists. It is not in the form of a wholesale adoption of what the BBC’s renowned Balkans war correspondent Martin Bell termed a ‘journalism of attachment,’<sup>19</sup> journalism that “cares as well as knows” (1996). He dismissed objectivity as an illusion and a shibboleth, complaining it produced “bystander journalism” (ibid: 16). Nor is it the impassioned appeal by Channel 4’s veteran

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter One, section 1.13 for a discussion of journalism of attachment and the tension with the norm of detachment.

news anchor Jon Snow that “something must be done” after his visit to cover the 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza<sup>20</sup>. Those are examples of journalists demonstrably breaking cover and rejecting the objectivity paradigm, expressing without reserve their personal views on the suffering of war. Both have been roundly criticised by their colleagues, the former by the BBC’s David Loyn, the latter by Channel 4’s Lindsey Hilsum. I argue that we are witnessing instead a subtler shift in the affective practice of journalism as the immediacy of social media content and what is termed a ‘new visibility’ (Thompson, 2005) afforded by mobile technology becomes all-pervasive. The journalists involved in covering the traumatic news stories that form the backdrop to this thesis still generally adhered to the shared rituals of detachment. But they did detect how user-generated content was spilling over into the wider newsroom culture and having a contagious impact on practice in the broader news environment.

Finally, I reflect on the interdisciplinary framework employed. I argue that the comprehensive picture I have been able to build up of affective processes, behaviours and practices through my interviews is only possible if the experience of journalists is viewed in the round, taking in a variety of interdependent viewpoints from the cultural and social to the economic and technological. In practical terms, those factors encompass the smallest detail, including the sometimes distressing nature of a breaking news story, the intensity of the competition to buy social media footage, the frustrations of mobile phones that do not work, the challenges of juggling the story and a family in the middle of the night ... these are the types of considerations that come together as part of the affective dimension of day-to-day practice when covering some of today’s traumatic news. Such an interdisciplinary framework, I argue, can lead to a better understanding of how journalism works today when confronted with such stories.

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<sup>20</sup> See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACgwr2Nj\\_GQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACgwr2Nj_GQ)



## CHAPTER 1

### OBJECTIVITY AND EMOTION IN JOURNALISM – TRACING THE PROFESSIONAL NORM

*“If American journalism were a religion, as it has been called from time to time, its supreme deity would be ‘objectivity.’ The high priests of journalism worship ‘objectivity’” – David Mindich (1998: 1)*

*“Information is increasingly harnessed for purposes of spectacle and entertainment is more spectacular when based in actuality<sup>21</sup>” – Misha Kavka (2008: 8)*

#### *1.1 Introduction*

Journalism, not for the first time, has been in crisis. This time the spotlight fell on England where the Leveson judicial inquiry<sup>22</sup> laid bare a tawdry tale of phone hacking, corruption and desperate levels of ‘muckraking’ aimed at propping up a constant decline in newspaper sales. Public trust in some sections of the media, particularly the written press, has plunged to an all-time low, with the late British media commentator Steve Hewlett labelling it the worst crisis to engulf the press in modern times (2011: 23). The academic Steven Barnett speaks of ‘tasteless practices’ of the British tabloids and the tawdry side of media (2016). But however irresponsible elements of the nation’s tabloid press may be<sup>23</sup> and however discredited, most of the journalists I interviewed (from diverse types of organisation but covering a similar type of ‘hard’ traumatic news) still adhered to the established norms based around notions of objectivity and fact-based

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<sup>21</sup> By ‘actuality’, Kavka is referring to information from real life but notes that a medium such as television, although promising reality, in fact transmits a view of a particular scene across distance and parses or frames the real (2008: 8). She argues that the blurring of lines between information and fiction programming is increasing.

<sup>22</sup> The former British Prime Minister David Cameron announced a two-part inquiry investigating the role of the press and police in the phone-hacking scandal on 13 July 2011. The “Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press” was chaired by Lord Justice Leveson. Its 2,000 word report, published in November 2012, recommended a new body to replace the widely discredited Press Complaints Commission and was highly critical of the newspaper industry, saying some of its behaviour ranged from the criminal to the indefensibly unethical.

See:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140122145147/http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/>

And: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140122145147/http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc1213/hc07/0780/0780.asp>

<sup>23</sup> “Few countries have a more irresponsible tabloid press than Britain” – Curran (2011: 16).

reporting. Admittedly the concept of objectivity may sometimes be disputed and there are many different ways in which journalists, in many different formats, can engage the public. But the idea of objectivity remains core to discussions about journalism as a profession and works across national frontiers (Maras, 2013: 5). In their crudest binary form, the journalistic norms of news reporting pit objective against subjective, fact against emotion, rationality against irrationality. Emotion in journalism is associated with tabloid journalism and tabloid journalism by extension is ‘bad’ journalism. As Zelizer observes, the thrust to identify certain forms of journalism practice as ‘good’ journalism and the prevailing counter-thrust to excommunicate certain practices from the elevated journalistic standard have become a consensual way of viewing the journalistic world (2000: ix). And yet as a former journalist I know from my own practice that all types of journalism, whether highbrow or tabloid, need to generate feelings and mobilise emotion to engage the public.

This chapter is designed to lay the foundations and contextual background for my investigation of this paradoxical, ambiguous and complex relationship between news, journalism and emotion. In it, I seek to trace the roots and heritage of the normative values of professional journalism in the Anglo-American sphere. It examines through the lens of academic scholarship the conflicting theories of how these values were established and became legitimised. I have attempted to trace how, by the 1930s, a common understanding and definition of objectivity had emerged, largely as a result of two main factors: competitive pressures and a drive to establish journalism as a legitimate profession clearly delineated from others. As Waisbord observes, journalists consistently engage in ‘boundary work’ to cultivate a distinct logic that sets them apart from other fields (2013: 10). The chapter also investigates why and how emotion became frowned on in the journalistic canon on both sides of the Atlantic as mass media developed through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It therefore provides a baseline for the research questions to be examined later in this thesis in which I have sought to identify, define and categorise the affective practices of news journalism in the context of covering traumatic news events.

## *1.2 Fundamental Tension*

In Chapters Two and Three, I will examine in depth the fundamental debates around emotion and affect and set out a methodology to inform my empirical research. But first, I want to take a social, cultural and historical perspective, seeking to map out in detail how the concepts of objectivity and allied ideas around detachment became so deeply ingrained and how a virtual taboo grew up around emotion. As Maras observes (2013: 2), the concept of objectivity is very much the product of history and linked to particular cultural formulations and the professional aspirations of journalists themselves. As technology advanced over the past 150 years and as each new news medium gained prominence – from the growth of newspapers to radio, television, the Internet and social media – so the ability to capture and generate the emotions of citizens and nations became an essential tool of the trade (Coward, 2013). But when it came to codifying journalism’s values, emotion was sidelined or, at least, consciously kept in check through practices that were deemed acceptable to the objectivity norm.<sup>24</sup> This is the central paradox of journalism that I referred to in the introduction to this thesis. On the one hand, journalism prides itself on dispassionate, detached observation. On the other hand, it seeks to engage feeling. Seaton (2005: 231) highlights this fundamental tension, saying:

“The reporter’s first fear is of being boring. The best news is ‘hot’, which also means that it is commanding. It crashes through routine order and ‘demands’ attention. It is fashioned in the newsroom in order to be ‘sharp’ and ‘punchy’ – to create an impact: so far from being emotionally neutral, it is designed to stir, arouse and manipulate.”

As I know all too well from my own experience, this tension lurks continually in the background of journalistic discourse. I aim to show through analysis of the secondary literature that at critical historical and cultural junctures, journalism as a profession and some academic scholarship have tended to view emotion as contaminants of objectivity, threats to the ability to promote rational discourse, and often by extension, threats to the maintenance of a liberal democratic

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<sup>24</sup> I examine these practices in detail in Chapter Three.

society. As Deuze observes (2005: 3), the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the emergence of a consensual occupational ideology among journalists, with a similar value system. But the shaping of such ideologies over time is typically accompanied by a process in which other ideas and views are excluded or marginalised (ibid: 4).

As early as 1859, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, although an advocate of freedom of speech, identified the capacity of news to whip up emotions, considering it a danger to democracy. More than 150 years later, Papacharissi (2015: 10), in exploring the relationship between social media and political life, observes that it is still common (and misplaced) to think that emotion gets in the way of rational decision-making and can lead people to behave in ways they may regret later. As I explore in later chapters, the literature shows that these tensions are likely to come of the surface at times of crisis or deep introspection in journalism, whether it be the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century or the soul searching of American journalism in the period after the Sept 11 attacks.<sup>25</sup>

An historic investigation shows that the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction, although amplified through today's social media, is by no means a new phenomenon and can be traced back to the beginnings of the modern newspaper industry in the United States and England. As such, I argue that binary oppositions in which emotion is bad and rational-intellectual is good are too simplistic, that journalism is often emotional and that emotional journalism *can* serve the public good (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004). The muckraking tradition of the U.S. press, dating back to the 1850s, understood how to use emotion to illustrate a story, inform and generate a public response. But as commercial pressures grew, sensationalism was increasingly used as a method to boost circulation and bolster profitability. As such, it is also difficult to disregard the important role of the political economy in the relationship between news, journalism and emotion - the most profitable stream of news is often found in material with strong emotional content, especially if it points to danger and loss (Richards & Rees 2011). The Leveson Inquiry showed graphically what can happen when this is pushed by harsh commercial pressure to the extreme.

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<sup>25</sup> See pages 44 and 63 respectively.

## *1.2 Chapter overview - Tracing a common heritage*

Today both the United States and United Kingdom, according to Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancin's *Comparing Media Systems* (2004), belong to the 'Liberal Model' of media and politics and tend to have "market-dominant media, professionally oriented journalists, fact-centered journalism guided by the norm of objectivity and autonomous systems of broadcast governance."<sup>26</sup> While both nations developed and defined in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century slightly different professional codes of practice around journalism, I aim to show that they share a common background and cross fertilisation of ideas over a 150-year period. This section provides a high-level overview of my argument and is then examined in detail in each of the subsequent sections of the chapter.

The first of these linkages, coinciding with the ability to print newspapers on a large-scale and distribute them widely, was the emerging discipline of European social theory and the ideas of French physician Gustav Le Bon<sup>27</sup> and sociologist Gabriel Tarde<sup>28</sup>. Tarde argued that newspapers could create what he called 'publics', bound together by mass communication and not by their physical location (1901/ 1969), identifying the potential power of the press and foreshadowing today's world of global communications and social media. But this concept of suggestion failed to gain significant traction on either side of the Atlantic. Borch (2006) argues that Le Bon and Tarde's theories of the crowd, publics, suggestibility and irrationality were fundamentally reworked and changed by American scholars such as Robert E. Park of the Chicago School<sup>29</sup>. This reworking was crucial for the origins of the objectivity norm. It severely diluted European notions of suggestion, re-categorised crowds as rational entities and fed into emerging Anglo-American theories of fact-based journalism. Further cross fertilisation of ideas emerged in the 1930s as key members of the

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<sup>26</sup> It should be said that this theory has been contested, not least by Curran (2011: 29).

<sup>27</sup> Blackman & Walkerdine characterise Le Bon as a French Royalist, the most popular of a number of thinkers who started to write about the 'crowd' following the French Revolution of 1789 (2001: 31).

<sup>28</sup> Blackman sees Tarde as an important influence on thinking for contemporary social theory and synonymous with the subject of affect (2012: 34).

<sup>29</sup> The Chicago School refers to the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology, which rose to prominence in the 1920s.

Frankfurt School<sup>30</sup>, notably Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, fled Nazi Germany in exile to the United States. Propaganda waged by the United States and Britain during World War I, coupled with unease over the manipulation of whole societies by German and Italian fascism, underscored journalism's desire to make a clean break with propaganda and the ability to manipulate the public. This also reflected a growing distrust of the emerging discipline of Public Relations. Different regulatory regimes around radio and television in the United States and the United Kingdom led the countries' respective newspaper industries to diverge in the post-World War II era. Emotion, sensation and partisanship found an outlet on U.S. radio and subsequently in the modern era of 24-hour news channels such as Fox TV, while U.S. newspapers generally maintained the normative values of fact-based reporting. In contrast, British broadcasting, characterised by public service regulation of the BBC, further codified models of objectivity. It was left to the UK tabloid press to develop a more sensational voice, most becoming ever more strident as financial pressures on newspapers mounted (Davies, 2014). Sparks (2000: 23) observes that times of particular competitive struggle have tended to produce a greater emphasis on tabloid elements in the media. These trends and cross currents of ideas are examined in more detail below.

#### *1.4 Development of fact-based reporting*

For American newspapers, "objectivity was not an issue" before the 1830s (Schudson, 1978). In the early days of U.S. press expansion, enabled by the introduction of the rotary press and then steam-powered press, newspapers were expected to present a partisan viewpoint. This began to change with the introduction of the 'penny press'<sup>31</sup> in the United States as commercial competition increased and editors competed for a wider audience by filling columns with local news concentrating on crime and (still generally partisan) politics (Schudson, 2001). Stories were often heavily dominated by sensationalist

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<sup>30</sup> The Frankfurt School refers to the group of largely neo-Marxist academics at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt am Main. Formed in 1923, many of its members fled into exile in the United States after Hitler came to power in 1933.

<sup>31</sup> The New York Sun, founded by Benjamin Day, was launched in 1833 for one penny, appealing to working class readers and undercutting the traditional market of six cent newspapers which had targeted a more affluent audience.

content, muckraking and emotion. In a move reminiscent of current debates in media, the penny press was quickly accused of vulgarity and sensationalism and of lowering standards. By contrast, in the United Kingdom, the press was generally viewed during the mid-Victorian years as an ‘educational agent’ by the dominant classes (Hampton, 2001).<sup>32</sup> According to this interpretation, the elitist Victorian vision was short-lived as commercial pressures also steered newspapers towards increasingly sensationalist content. Almost 100 years before Jürgen Habermas articulated the concept of the public sphere, its Victorian version had partly succumbed to the very pressures he himself was to conclude made it an unworkable ideal.<sup>33</sup> Hampton argues that towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the UK press became increasingly a medium which represented views of the people as contemporary discussion of the role of the press adapted theories away from the educational model.

It was in this environment of an expanding written press and driven by technological change and commercial ambition that newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic began towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to define boundaries between opinion and fact-based reporting of news. The expansion of the press during this period is generally seen in the light of a growing democratisation of politics and growth of the market economy, but the move towards objectivity also has to be seen in the context of sociological and philosophical developments of the time. The development of non-partisanship and a move towards neutrality reflected the scientific theories emerging from Newton and Darwin and an emphasis on empirical facts as the key to reality and truth (Boudana, 2011). As a result, a form of empiricism focusing on facts came to replace neutrality as the standard of objective journalism. Schudson (1978) categorises journalists at the turn of the century as “naïve empiricists” who believed in facts as aspects of the world itself, rather than human statements about the world. Schudson is sceptical of traditional explanations for the rise of objectivity in U.S. journalism at this

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<sup>32</sup> As Hampton observes, lurking just below the surface of this educational role were deep class divisions, with the dominant elite keen to ensure that the working classes held ‘proper’ opinions (2001: 215).

<sup>33</sup> The concept of the public sphere where rational critical debate can take place is most closely associated with Jürgen Habermas and his influential work first published in 1962, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. It is for Habermas instrumental in the constitution of a liberal democratic society.

time, which usually cite reasons of political economy – the need for proprietors to appeal to Democratic and Republican readers, the invention of the telegraph with its clipped terse style and the emergence of news agencies such as the Associated Press. Instead, drawing on Emile Durkheim and Max Weber,<sup>34</sup> he traces the emergence of objectivity to underlying moral values of the period and seeks to ascertain the origin of what was to become the journalistic norms that are still so valued today. These include the professionalization of journalism in the 1920s with the formation of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) in 1922 and a desire to distance journalism from the growing number of Public Relations experts and propagandists emerging around the time of World War I. Schudson (2001: 162) writes:

“Journalists grew self-conscious about the manipulability of information in the propaganda age. They felt a need to close ranks and assert their collective integrity in the face of their close encounter with the publicity agents’ unembarrassed effort to use information (or misinformation) to promote special interests.”

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, it has been argued that an increasing emphasis on ‘news’ and ‘facts’ emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, together with the development of professional standards of objectivity and a relative depoliticisation of the news (Hampton, 2001). In a parallel development to the United States, the emergence of a news agency, in this case Reuters, began to be increasingly used as a source of content, reducing the opportunity for partisan comment. Robert Blackford, editor of the socialist weekly *Clarion*, underscored this growing trend towards fact when he wrote at the turn of the century (cited in Hampton, 2001: 218):

“Figures are sacred emblems. They are the skeleton of thought. Lack of precision in figures, lack of reverence for the exactitudes in estimates, are intellectual immoralities of the deadliest kind.”

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<sup>34</sup> The French sociologist Emile Durkheim, along with his German contemporary Max Weber, is commonly regarded as one of the founders of the discipline of Sociology.



Even so, a culture of tabloid journalism, based on sensational coverage of controversial topics and associated with working class readers (Sparks, 2000: 29)<sup>35</sup>, continued to flourish in what became known as the ‘new journalism’ of the London press. Örnebring and Jönsson (2004) cite the case of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and its sensationalist campaign against juvenile prostitution. Using methods akin to today’s London tabloid ‘stings’, the Gazette’s editor, W.T. Stead, posed as a ‘vicious man’ to buy a young girl from her parents with a view to selling her on to a brothel. The subsequent articles, one of which was headlined *The Confessions of a Brothel Keeper*, caused an uproar, with some advertisers boycotting the newspaper. But the campaign also led to a change in the law, raising the age of consent to 16 years. The case clearly illustrates the power of tabloid reporting. While it is not unexpected for the boundaries between a more fact-based and more sensational news reporting to be blurred during this period of rapid development of the press, it is easy to see how the practice has been replicated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. While it is common to equate sensationalist copy with the need to sell newspapers, such journalism and crusades can, sometimes, serve the public good as well as dry factual reporting and even enrich journalism (Zelizer, 2000: x). Critics of the British press, who spoke out volubly during the Leveson Inquiry, contend that tabloid editors at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> Century lost sight of its mission to inform in favour of generating sales and cultivating political power.

### *1.5 Crowds, Publics and the Suggestive Realm*

The work of the French criminologist and sociologist Gabriel Tarde on suggestion more than 100 years ago stands as a clear counterpoint to what was emerging as the Anglo-American codification of fact-based news reporting. In the following section I trace the academic argument about how ideas around suggestion were distorted and reinterpreted by U.S. sociologists of the Chicago School, which, in turn, had a crucial impact on the development of journalism norms. Crucially, it meant that the possibility of understanding the public more

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<sup>35</sup> Sparks maintains that the social stratification of newspaper readership is starkly evident in Britain where the audience for serious newspapers tends to be well-educated while the audience for tabloid newspapers tends to be poorly educated and of low social status.

affectively was lost in favour of the Habermasian norm. Borch (2006: 83) argues that:

“The theoretical cornerstone of the European semantics, the notion of suggestion, was severely challenged in the United States.... This rejection of the suggestion doctrine paved the way for a distinctive American approach to crowds and collective behaviour in which the early European emphasis on irrationality was ignored and crowds were analysed as rational entities. This may have relieved the discomfort of irrationality but it also entirely disposed of what were in fact crucial sociological insights.”

A recent revival of interest in Tarde’s work (Blackman, 2007, 2012; Borch, 2006; Gibbs, 2008; Salmon, 2005) as part of the ‘turn to affect’ offers a critical insight into how the affective dimension of journalism could be better understood today and is explored further in Chapter Two. These scholars argue that the dominant fact-based ideology has overshadowed the immaterial. Revisiting Tarde offers a glimpse of what might have been if emerging theories of sociology, public relations and global political events had developed differently at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These insights have also helped inform my empirical methodology by opening up ideas around suggestion and contagion for exploration through my interviews with journalists.

In this chapter, I have tried to trace how ideas around suggestion and contagion were sidelined in the emerging news industry in favour of that fact-based regime. Tarde’s work<sup>36</sup>, in the wake of Gustav Le Bon’s crowd theories at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>37</sup> and in at times bitter rivalry with his contemporary Durkheim, focused on society’s suggestibility and irrationality. Le Bon, who stated that the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was an era of crowds, saw individuals as losing their identity and ability to act responsibly in a crowd. Thus, an individual in a crowd is driven by suggestion and instinct rather than reason in a state he likened to hypnotism

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<sup>36</sup> Gabriel Tarde’s *L’Opinion et La Foule*, translated as *The Public and the Crowd*, was published in 1901.

<sup>37</sup> Gustav Le Bon’s work *La Psychologie des Foules* was published in 1895 and translated into English in 1896 as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.

(Borch, 2006). This concept of the crowd clearly owed much to a contemporary fear of the 1789 French Revolution and represented the crowd in part as a destructive force that society's elite had previously been able to direct (Muhlmann, 2010). Tarde's theories came partly as a response to Le Bon in which he argued that this was instead the era of the public or publics, defining this as the "social group of the future" (cited by Clark, 1969). Such a public was indefinitely extensible thanks to printing, railways and the telegraph, which combined to create the "formidable power of the press" (ibid: 281). Essentially, this concept of a public was a group of individuals bound together not by physical space, as in the case of a crowd, but by common readership of a newspaper. Presciently, Tarde (ibid: 280) spoke of the "instantaneous transmission of thought from any distance". In part this appears to have reflected his interest in concepts of telepathy and psychic research, believing that suggestibility was the crucial mechanism through which ideas and beliefs could become part of a collective state of desire and action (Blackman, 2012: 35). By formulating the dynamic of the growing power of the press to cross physical space, it has been argued that Tarde was one of the "most perceptive commentators in the practically untouched field of mass communications and their effects" (Clark, 1969: 54). In a way he also foreshadowed the way in which forms of media, today most notably social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, can create communities of interest across geographic boundaries.

In highlighting suggestion and instinct, Tarde's theories also differed crucially from the likes of Durkheim and Weber who favoured a more rational approach to issues of society and its development. For Tarde, Durkheim, his academic rival in Paris, paid too little attention to the agency of subjects or the individual and the spontaneous and unpredictable ways in which ideas, beliefs, practices and customs would spread through populations (Blackman, 2007). Of particular relevance in the context of today's turn to affect, Tarde contended that individuals were open to affecting and being affected through a form of contagion or association, ideas closely linked to his interest in hypnotic trance. This opens up the idea that suggestion may be mediated in ways that escape the intentions of human operators (Gibbs, 2008: 136), with print (the vehicle of his

day) able to amplify suggestion. In his introduction to the English translation of Tarde's major writings, Clark (1969: 18) states:

“Much social action, Tarde pointed out, was based not on constraint from the external imposition of social norms, but grew out of spontaneous imitation of beliefs and desires that subsequently became internalised by the individual and, through a process of learning, continued to structure his behaviour.”

### *1.6 The Dreyfus Affair as a case study for Tarde*

The Dreyfus Affair, which erupted into heated public debate in France in 1897, foreshadowed many of today's debates around the power of the press, its ability to shape public opinion and the responsibility that this implies. And it was an excellent case study for Tarde to apply his emerging ideas on imitation, contagion and suggestion in relation to the growing power of the French press.

Alfred Dreyfus was a French artillery officer of Jewish background who was arrested and accused of espionage in 1894. In January 1895, he was convicted in a secret court martial, stripped of his rank and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island in French Guyana. A campaign by his family to prove his innocence exploded into the press in 1897, dividing the nation and sparking a heated debate about anti-Semitism. This debate was played out daily in the pages of the French press, pitting the 'dreyfusards' whose views were expressed in *L'Aurore*, against anti-Semitic opinion in *La Libre Parole*. In the end, Dreyfus was exonerated.

Crucially, the affair coincided with Tarde's theoretical writings on suggestion, workings of the press and concept of a public (or readership) through which ideas and opinions were communicated across physical boundaries. As such it was an ideal testing ground for his theories and Tarde made frequent reference to it in his writing, including in *L'Opinion et La Foule*. In analysing the power of the press and the suggestibility of its readers, Tarde states (Clark, 1969: 282):

“I know of areas in France where the fact that no-one has ever seen a single Jew does not prevent anti-Semitism from flowering, because people there read anti-Semitic papers.”

The affair was a living example of Tarde’s theories around imitation and contagion, with papers able to transmit “thought across distance.” It thus illustrated the growing power of the press and foreshadowed concerns that it could manipulate a suggestible readership. It showed the power of communication and pointed to its ability to challenge established power structures in society. Newspaper coverage of the affair was able to shift the locus of decision making from the secrecy of government to a public forum and began to establish the power of opinion over more traditional sources of power such as the military and judiciary (Salmon, 2005). The information put out by journalists, wrote Tarde in 1898 at the height of the affair (Clark, 1969: 304), is “in reality a force which, little by little, becomes irresistible.”

How was it then that Tarde’s emerging theories of a public (or multiple publics) and the notion of communication understood through ideas of suggestion and contagion came to be marginalised in Anglo-American journalistic norms?

### *1.7 Influence of the Chicago School*

Piecing together academic literature examining this period, I argue that it was the cross-fertilisation of scholarship from France and Germany to the United States via a few key individuals that led to a fundamental reinterpretation of Tarde’s work. Initially, U.S. academics such as the Ukrainian-born psychologist Boris Sidis took up ideas from Le Bon and Tarde to develop theories that stressed human suggestibility and the hypnotic origins of crowd behaviour (Leach, 1986). Applied to U.S. society, he used the ideas to explain the gold rush, lynch mobs and outbreaks of panic on Wall Street. During World War I, the Committee on Public Information (CPI) under president Woodrow Wilson pumped out propaganda in favour of the war effort, again drawing on European ideas to influence the public. As Schudson observes (1978: 141), during World War I many journalists were also sucked into serving as agents of the U.S. propaganda

machine. Leach and academics such as Borch trace a change in subsequent U.S. scholarship that starts to refocus ideas of Tarde's public as an instrument of positive social change capable of more rational action. The key figure in this development, the Chicago School's Robert E Park, had studied in Germany under the sociologist Georg Simmel, had been a journalist himself and was fascinated by European ideas on the crowd, including those of Le Bon and Tarde. But Park played down irrationality and concentrated instead on the constructive and transformative potential of Tarde's concept of the public (Borch, 2006) while at the same time emphasising the role of the individual. This set the tone for future developments in the United States in the area of sociology, psychology and, also, journalism. Leys (1993) goes so far as to suggest that the U.S. philosopher George Herbert Mead deliberately set out to 'defeat' Tarde's theory of imitation-suggestion and replace it with conscious deliberation.

By the mid-1920s, the U.S. academic and theoretical framework around suggestion had been fundamentally rewritten from its European heritage. Park's influence also extended into the world of journalism in which he drew a distinction between news and sensationalist human interest stories (1938: 204):

“Not everything printed in the newspapers is news. Much that is printed as news is read, at least, as if it were literature; read, that is to say, because it is thrilling and stirs the imagination and not because its message is urgent and demands action. Such, for example, are the 'human interest' stories, so called, which have been so influential in expanding and maintaining newspaper circulation. But human interest stories are not news. They are literature.”

For Park, such sensationalism had no place in news, which required a form of objectivity to allow readers to make up their own minds about a story. Journalism still had a mission to entertain, but this had to be linked to a goal of informing the public (Muhlmann, 2010). A disciple of Park, Helen M Hughes, whose classic examination of the U.S. tabloid press *News and the Human Interest Story* was published in 1940, continued in this vein, insisting that such stories have to have a basis in the 'truth' in order to provide news. She thus sets

up a divide between reality and fiction. It is a line that is still part of the journalist canon today.

### *1.7 Towards a Common Understanding of Objectivity*

During the inter-war years, journalism had taken on an increasingly professional character on both sides of the Atlantic. It is this, I argue, that is the key to understanding today's normative values around objectivity and detachment as journalists sought to establish a clear mark of distinction from other writers and erect boundaries to protect their autonomy<sup>38</sup>. Joseph Pulitzer had endowed the School of Journalism at Columbia in 1904<sup>39</sup>, declaring that he wanted to “raise journalism to the rank of a learned *profession*.<sup>40</sup>” Walter Lippmann, the journalist, intellectual and political commentator, stated that he wanted to upgrade the *professional* dignity of journalists and provide training “in which the ideal of objective testimony is cardinal” (cited by Schudson, 2001: 163). The general manager of the Associated Press, Kent Cooper, spelt out the policy: “The journalist who deals in facts diligently developed and intelligently presented exalts his *profession*, and his stories need never be colourless or dull” (ibid: 162). Pulitzer was dismissive of the French press, which had not at that time adopted the fact-based approach to reporting. He criticised French reporters for expressing their own opinions, saying (Chalaby, 1996: 311): “In America we want facts. Who cares about the philosophical speculations of our correspondents?” Chalaby (ibid: 312) attributes the slower development of Anglo-American norms in France partly to the fact that literary figures of the time such as Emile Zola, Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo were more involved in journalism<sup>41</sup> (as witnessed by the Dreyfus affair).

In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Journalists had been set up as early as 1883 (Parry, 2011: 154). Schudson (2001) sees this journalistic norm of objectivity

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<sup>38</sup> Gieryn (1999) identifies one of the three genres of boundary work that of the ‘protection of autonomy’ in which interpretive walls are erected.

<sup>39</sup> Columbia’s first postgraduate course in journalism ran in 1912.

<sup>40</sup> My italics. Pulitzer set out his goals in the North American Review of the same year:

<http://centennial.journalism.columbia.edu/reflections/planning-a-school-of-journalism-the-basic-concept-in-1904-archival/>

<sup>41</sup> The same was true in the inter-war years in France with literary figures such as Antoine de St Exupéry, Albert Camus, Jean Cocteau, André Malraux and George Simenon all in editorial positions.

developing from a social need for solidarity, increased still further by a reaction to the growing prominence and influence of Public Relations in U.S. life. Journalists closed ranks against the PR industry which, under the influence of Edward Bernays, actively sought ways to mobilise mass communications. Bernays stated in his 1928 work *Propaganda*<sup>42</sup>:

"If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it? The recent practice of propaganda has proved that it is possible, at least up to a certain point and within certain limits."

The same trends were evident in the UK although arguably, without the same intensity of backlash against a much less prominent PR industry. But by the end of the 1930s, the journalistic norms of objectivity had become firmly established along lines that are still recognisable today. While there are countless different definitions, Mindich (1998) identifies the five key components of this canon as: detachment (avoidance of reporters' opinions or preconceived views); non-partisanship (telling both sides of a story); the inverted pyramid writing style (with the most important facts in the lead paragraph); naïve empiricism (reliance on the facts); and balance (undistorted reporting). Schudson (2001: 150) takes a similar line, saying that objectivity "guides journalists to separate facts from values and report only the facts," using a "cool, rather than emotional" tone. He also adds the need for journalists to represent fairly each side of a story. The tension between detachment and attachment has been the subject of intense debate, particularly in the context of covering traumatic news events, and is discussed in detail in section 1.13 of this chapter.

Within three decades, as the objectivity paradigm became solidified, an affective understanding of mass communications as outlined in its emerging form by Tarde had been marginalised and ultimately reinterpreted in the light of the social, political, economic and cultural environment in the United States and the United Kingdom. That is not to say that ideas of suggestion, hypnosis and

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<sup>42</sup> The terms propaganda and public relations were used more or less interchangeably at the time.



imitation had no place in art and society at this time. They were in fact flourishing (Andriopoulos, 2008). But in terms of the narrower field of news journalism such ideas were being codified as a threat to the emerging norms of the newly established profession of journalism.

### *1.8 The Dangers of Hypnotism*

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century saw a fertile cross-pollination of ideas, bringing together scientists, engineers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, medical doctors, physicists, spiritualists and psychiatrists to discuss forms of communication that crossed the boundaries between the human and non-human, the material and ephemeral, the living and the dead (Blackman, 2010). This was clearly linked to ideas around affective communication and hypnotism developed by Tarde, Durkheim and others and how ideas could spread through a population by means of imitation and suggestion. For Tarde, society's cohesion came through the process of imitation, which he also likened to "somnambulism" (cited by Clark, 1969).<sup>43</sup> These ideas infused artistic life on both sides of the Atlantic from authors such as Guy de Maupassant and Franz Kafka to filmmakers who were fascinated by hypnotism and crime. Andriopoulos (2008) tells the tale of a Parisian shoemaker, Jean Mollinier, who shot himself in 1887 after believing himself to be possessed by an invisible spirit. The Parisian press saw fit to report the story under a headline "*The Dangers of Hypnotism*" (ibid: 1). A similar tale had already been the subject of a Maupassant short story, *Le Horla*, written before the suicide but published just four days later. Andriopoulos tracks in his account a series of films bearing testimony to the fascination with suggestion and hypnotism, including Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) and Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* (1922), the latter being the story of a criminal mastermind who uses powers of hypnosis and mind control to oversee rackets in the Berlin underworld.

This cross fertilisation of ideas around suggestion within the creative arts at the turn of the last century clearly foreshadows the development of Public Relations

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<sup>43</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation* originally published in 1888-1890. Contained in Clarke, N., 1969. *Gabriel Tarde on Communication and Social Influence – Selected Papers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

which had made such an impact during World War I and subsequent debate about the ability of mass media to manipulate audiences – whether it be the Hollywood dream industry encountered by exiled German academics from the Frankfurt School in the 1930s and 40s or the cultural theorists of the post-World War II era. At the same time, this reinforces the argument that the development of journalistic norms was an attempt to distance itself from the irrational in society and trends such as the pervasiveness of Public Relations and propaganda which were causing such unease among journalists of the time. Schudson (1978: 138) characterises the mood of the day among journalists in America as: “Public Relations threatened the very idea of reporting.”

In its most extreme form, suggestion spills over into panic, a theme that runs through this period from the crowd theorists such as Le Bon to the ‘Red Scares’ following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and during the Cold war. In both cases, mass hysteria developed in sections of U.S. society based on fears of Communism. But panic is also paradoxical in that it produces a situation of ‘everyone for him or herself’ while at the same time representing “the greatest moment of sensory receptivity of the human body to others – for in it, sympathetic or affective contagion is at its height” (Gibbs, 2008). Through Le Bon’s eyes, crowds are entranced and possessed by the will of a leader. In contrast, Tarde’s ideas on publics did not depend on the presence of a leader. Of critical relevance in today’s media world, was his view that a medium can amplify affective contagion.<sup>44</sup> In Tarde’s day this observation focused on newspapers but as the era of mass communications with radio and television developed, the degree to which audiences were passive or active receivers of a message would become a major topic of theoretical debate<sup>45</sup>. In defining the ability of newspaper readers to belong to several different publics at the same time, Tarde was anticipating a feature of today’s social media environment in which users can belong to many diverse special interest communities simultaneously. In theory, Tarde suggested, this may make society less cohesive

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<sup>44</sup> See later discussion in this chapter and Chapter Two on authors such as Gorton (2009), Kavka (2008), Sampson (2012) and others.

<sup>45</sup> See for example discussion in Curran & Seaton (1997).

but should have a beneficial effect of making people less susceptible to outbreaks of panic (Clark, 1969: 281).

### *1.9 A radio broadcast unleashes panic*

This was clearly not the case, however, when in 1938 an American radio broadcast led to widespread panic in what appears to have been a classic blurring of the boundaries between (what people mistakenly took to be) news and entertainment. It is for this reason that I have highlighted its importance in the historical development of journalistic norms. Orr, for example, (2006: 40) sets out the pivotal role played by the incident and how it posed the question whether rationality and reason could withstand mass illusion and delusion excited through what was then the relatively new broadcast media.

The War of the Worlds, an episode of the U.S. radio drama series *Mercury Theater on the Air*, was broadcast by CBS on 30 October 30 1938. The episode was directed and narrated by the filmmaker Orson Welles and was based on the HG Well's novel *The War of the Worlds*. The first two thirds of the hour-long broadcast was in the shape of a news bulletin, with the result that many listeners thought an invasion by Martians was underway. The anxiety caused by the broadcast, in which a reporter tells the story of a meteorite that has landed in New Jersey, can be traced in part to the fact that some listeners only heard parts of the story and missed the beginning in which it is clearly framed as fiction. The New York Times headline the next day stated: *Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact* and recounted how many people across North America had fled their homes. Over the next month, 12,500 newspaper stories referred to the panic.



The event has become pivotal in the study of media and panic, contagion and suggestion (Orr, 2006). It can be located squarely in the debate over the suggestibility of audiences and media effects. It came, as discussed earlier in this chapter, at a time when fiction and film were fascinated by hypnotism, suggestion and crime (Blackman, 2010). It also came at a time when U.S. journalists were distancing themselves from Public Relations at home (Schudson, 2001) and when the nation was learning with increasing anxiety about fascism’s mass appeal in Nazi Germany and Mussolini’s Italy.

At this time, the radio audience constituted a new configuration of shared social space (Orr, 2006). This ‘dispersed crowd’ was only just emerging in 1938 and its suggestive effect was as yet unknown. It was unclear how electronic modes of address and such new technologies of representation would alter or amplify information. Orr poses the question of the day as follows (2006: 40):

“Could rationality and the imperatives of reason withstand the mass illusions or delusions made more likely, and more mass(ive), by the senses and sensations excited through the new broadcast media?”

Analysis after the broadcast showed that the initial talk of mass panic was probably inaccurate or at least exaggerated. Newspapers were happy to play up and censure what they highlighted as the irresponsibility of radio, a relatively new medium which was already threatening to eat into their advertising revenues. “*Radio is new but it has adult responsibilities,*” said the New York Times. “*It has not mastered itself or the material it uses.*”

Hadley Cantril, a psychologist at Princeton University, conducted a study published in 1940<sup>46</sup> in which he concluded that up to 1.2 million of the six million listeners were “severely frightened or panicked.” The study showed that the majority of listeners had, however, been able to use their critical abilities to discern the true nature of the programme. As such, the study undermined prevailing theories that audiences could be wholly manipulated by media. The incident also crucially raised questions about the interplay of news and entertainment and looked forward to contemporary discussion about the blurring of boundaries and the affective potential that mixed media formats such as Reality TV and docudrama can command (see for example Kavka, 2008).

### *1.10 Mass Society*

Cantril, together with another social psychologist Gordon Allport, had been studying the effects of radio well before the War of the Worlds was broadcast. In 1935, they had concluded that there was potentially a distinction between radio audiences and crowds. Much in the way Tarde had made the distinction almost four decades earlier between crowds and publics, they observed that the “contagion of personal contact” did not exist with communities of radio listeners over the airwaves and that such listeners were therefore “less emotional and more critical, less crowdish and more individualistic” (Leach, 1986: 109).

But this tended to be a minority view in a period in which theories of the suggestibility of audiences and mass society tended to predominate. Given the developments in Nazi Germany following Hitler’s accession to power in 1933, some exiled scholars from Germany’s Frankfurt School were to take a less nuanced view than Cantril. These interpreted the media through their neo-Marxist background in a way that rendered ordinary people as a ‘mass society’ helpless to resist media manipulation (Curran & Seaton, 1997). Such an interpretation was clearly influenced by the ability of dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini to captivate the masses, indeed Hitler’s propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels had

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<sup>46</sup> Cantril, H. 1940. *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

studied Le Bon's *La psychologie des foules* in the 1920s.<sup>47</sup> Gorton (2009) argues that scholars of the Frankfurt School such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno believed that fascism in Europe had demonstrated the power of mass propaganda and the arts. Rather than working with ideas of suggestion, they drew on Freudian theory and the concept of the authoritarian personality within psychology (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001: 62)

By the summer of 1934 members of the Frankfurt School led by Horkheimer<sup>48</sup> had begun to establish themselves in exile in New York at Columbia University, regarded as having the second major department for Sociology after Chicago. By 1941, Horkheimer and a whole colony of exiled German writers, composers and playwrights – Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht and Schoenberg – had all moved to Los Angeles but many of them found the Hollywood film industry depressing (Wiggershaus, 1994) as reflected in key writings during the war period. Referring to Hollywood, Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the American film industry dominated by large profit-driven corporations created “dupes” of the masses who would mindlessly consume material (Gorton, 2009). They dedicated a chapter of their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* specifically to the Culture Industry (1944, cited by Noerr, G.S., 2002), stating:

“No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction: not by its natural structure (which collapses under reflection), but by signals. Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided.”

This deeply sceptical view reduces the audience to a passive receiver of messages, speaking of a compulsive imitation (ibid):

“The most intimate reactions of human beings have become so entirely reified, even to themselves, that the idea of anything peculiar to them survives only in extreme abstraction: personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions. That is

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<sup>47</sup> Der Spiegel. 1986. Die Masse ist faul, schwach und feige. Ausgabe 46.

<sup>48</sup> Adorno did not arrive in New York until February 1938.

the triumph of advertising in the culture industry: the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false.”

Horkheimer and Adorno’s highly negative views on mass society and the influence of big business help explain why the war years were crucial in the United States to the establishment of journalism’s normative values. On the one hand, this was a reaction against the power of suggestion that was believed to be so pervasive in society, politics and the entertainment industry. But on the other hand, newspapers, aware of their ability to shape opinion from the earliest days of their history, were also keen to set themselves above the masses. Tudor (1999), reviewing the study of ‘media effects’ in this period, characterises thinking in the 1940s and 50s as deeply hierarchical in which it was considered that the elite could exercise control over a passive mass population, with inevitable anti-democratic consequences. This viewpoint is constructed around concepts of ‘us and them’ in which “the vast ordinary population cannot resist the all-powerful constraint of the mighty media although the fact of this restraint is immediately apparent to the enlightened and therefore resistant elite” (ibid: 25).

### *1.11 The Public Good*

It was therefore against this background that the Hutchins Commission<sup>49</sup> report consolidated still further the normative path for post-war American journalism. The report (1947: vi) set out not only the requirement for a free press but also the duty on the press to serve the public good, stating clearly in its introduction: “*This report deals with the responsibilities of the owners and managers of the press to their consciences and the common good for the formation of public opinion.*” This championing of journalistic autonomy, standards and public service was anchored by adherence to the codes and procedures of objective reporting (Curran, 2011). With hindsight, the Hutchins Commission probably represents the high point in codification of journalistic norms in the Anglo-

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<sup>49</sup> The commission, officially the “*Commission on Freedom of the Press*” was set up during World War II and reported in 1947.

American sphere and its recommendations set high store by the professionalism of journalists. It recommended “the press use every means that can be devised to increase the competence, independence and effectiveness of its staff” (1947: 94). Two years later in 1949, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) introduced what it termed a “*fairness doctrine*”, requiring broadcasters to discuss controversial issues of public interest but also to ensure that contrasting views were aired.<sup>50</sup> There was a similar development to Hutchins in the United Kingdom when a 1947-49 Royal Commission<sup>51</sup> described the press as “the chief agency for instructing the public on the main issues of the day ... the main source from which information, discussion and advocacy reach the public.”

The combination of the Hutchins recommendations, ‘*fairness doctrine*’ and Royal Commission held out the prospect of a rational space in the media for discursive debate that would sustain liberal democratic society. That idea is still central to today’s discussion on the role of the media, not least because of the influence a decade later of the German philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas. Representing a second generation of the Frankfurt School academics,<sup>52</sup> Habermas had sketched out a “public sphere” of rational-critical debate with remarkably similar goals.<sup>53</sup> This public sphere was based on reason, logic and argument. Habermas traced the development of this public sphere back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century salons, coffee houses and early press. For him it was instrumental in the constitution of a liberal democratic society. But echoing the Marxist roots of the Frankfurt School, he argued that the state and corporate interest, manifested by mass media, public relations and consumerism, had subsequently made this ideal unattainable. Despite this, the translation of Habermas’s theories into an English-speaking academic environment led to discussion of the concept not as an ideal but as a reality (Curran, 2011) though

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<sup>50</sup> The doctrine was eliminated in 1987, opening the way for partisan journalism on the airways such as the right wing Rush Limbaugh Show just one year later (Curran, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> The Royal Commission on the Press began work in April 1947 under Sir William Ross. Its was set up “with the object of furthering the free expression of opinion through the Press and the greatest practicable accuracy in the presentation of news, to inquire into the control, management and ownership of the newspaper and periodical Press and the news agencies, including the financial structure and the monopolistic tendencies in control, and to make recommendations thereon.”

<sup>52</sup> Habermas had studied under Horkheimer and Adorno in the mid-50s before a row over his doctoral thesis.

<sup>53</sup> Habermas’s work *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* was published in 1962 but was not translated into English until 1989 (as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*).



many proponents and critics alike argue it has only even been an ideal (Kavka, 2008: 53).

### *1.12 Inherent Contradictions*

In their chapter on the cultural industry, Horkheimer and Adorno had articulated the very paradox of what was becoming an increasingly complex media landscape and mass communications in the post-war era. Their research on the suggestibility of audiences implied an inherent contradiction. What was a problem for the aims and practices of, for example, radio producers was at the same time an instruction manual for advertisers and marketers (Gibbs, 2008). The post-war years, marked by anxiety over the Cold War and McCarthyism and the rapid rise of television as a mass medium, highlighted these contradictions and formed a fertile ground for increased academic research into media effects.

It was during this period that emphasis began slowly to switch. The study of crowds and the inter-war fascination with hypnotism gave way to wider discussions of mass society and explanations of collective behaviour as a normative order (Borch, 2006). Following the American sociological trends of the previous decades, Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian argued in their 1957 work *Collective Behaviour* that crowd members conform to the norms of the group. This, concludes Borch (2006) in his study of the period, “introduces an aspect of rationality: crowd members follow the norms of the group not because of contagious suggestion but because of an extensive pressure towards conformity.” In her analysis of Tarde’s theories of suggestion and their repudiation by what she terms the ‘anti-mimetic turn’ that characterised the social sciences in this era, Blackman (2007) highlights how social psychology increasingly became used to offer strategies to government, the military and industry to induce suggestive commitment throughout populations. She concludes that suggestion effectively became gendered, classed and raced (ibid: 590):

“Throughout such research there has been a continual oscillation between the assumption that a suggestive realm is the ontology of the social, through to its foreclosure by attempts to replace contagious

communication with normative forms of conscious deliberation. These oscillations and translations reified the normative psychological subject as one who could exercise will and habit in order to resist social influence. Suggestion did not simply disappear but ... was refigured as a capacity that was inferior, lower and associated with the bodies of those who... were increasingly aligned with animality and primitiveness.”

A similar trend developed in cultural studies in which emerging theories began to moderate the elitist views of an anonymous passive mass society. These new ideas implied the ability of audiences to be a more active agent in interpreting and creating meaning. Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, who had also fled Nazi Germany to the United States in 1934, developed in the mid-50s a two-step model of communication in which ideas flowed from newspapers or radio to opinion leaders and then to less active or less engaged members of the population (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This still suggested an elite, which could resist manipulation, but it was also a more negotiated model of the relationship between powerful media and powerful audiences (Gorton, 2009) with a greater role for rational deliberation. The ‘uses and gratification’ theory that evolved between the mid-1940s and early 1970s also implied that consumers of media took a more active role in interpreting and using it in their lives (Tudor, 1999: 30). It went further in acknowledging the complexity of the public’s interaction with media, recognising both affective and cognitive elements of behaviour. But Tudor argues that it required the advent of Structuralist theory based on the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure and the recognition that people can construct their own meaning from texts to break the mould and usher in an era of cultural studies from the 1970s that addressed the modern media environment differently (ibid: 10). Together with theories of the active audience, pioneered by Stuart Hall at Birmingham University’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), the focus shifted away from a Marxist view of how ideology is transmitted to the masses to the process of decoding media and creating meaning.<sup>54</sup> These issues and their relevance to the examination of emotion in news and journalism will be explored further in Chapter Two.

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<sup>54</sup> Stuart Hall’s article, *The Television Discourse - Encoding and Decoding*, was published in 1974.

### 1.13 Challenging the Ideal

At this stage of its development, Anglo-American journalism had positioned itself as an elite profession, able to distance itself from what it considered to be the harmful influence of other forms of media on society, rising above the masses, holding authority to account and helping to formulate opinion for the public good. This sweeping agenda had been enshrined in the United States by Hutchins and the FCC. But no sooner were the corner stones of this value system in place, than they started to wobble. During the 1960s, the challenges came from within the ranks of journalists, from academics and from a combination of external forces (Maras, 2013: 54; Schudson, 1978). Pedelty points out the inherent contradiction in an objectivity paradigm that prevents reporters from subjective interpretation and, at the same time, demands it (since facts need to be communicated through a system of meaning shared by the reporter and reader or viewer) (1995: 7).

Some journalists starting questioning the ideal of objectivity, which at one stage even became a term of abuse and was seen as a flawed doctrine (Schudson, 1978: 160). Objectivity, which had been based on the principle of eliminating bias, came to be seen as biased in itself by refusing to question the structures of power and by reinforcing official views of reality. The daily sign-off by CBS Evening News anchor Walter Cronkite “*That’s the way it is*” was seen by some as just too smug (ibid: 161).<sup>55</sup> In America, this questioning needs to be examined initially in the context of the Cold War and Vietnam. Senator Joseph McCarthy was widely seen as exploiting the doctrine of objective news to foster his anti-Communist witch-hunt. The method of reporting simply what was said prevented journalists from denouncing his accusations as false (Boudana, 2011). Ever more intrusive news management by government, especially around the Cuban missile crisis and Vietnam War, led U.S. journalists to question why they should simply relay what were lies or disinformation from government spokesmen. As a result, a more interpretive form of journalism began to evolve on both sides of the Atlantic, injecting the opinion of reporters (again as an elite) into news. When it

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<sup>55</sup> Cronkite defined objectivity as “the reporting of reality, of facts, as nearly as they can be obtained without the injection of prejudice and personal opinion.” (cited by Maras, 2013: 7)

came to war reporting, any pretence of objectivity was sometimes dropped (Schudson, 1978: 183) and the underlying power structures were not necessarily questioned.<sup>56</sup> The Vietnam War was a case in point. While U.S. media were broadly supportive at the beginning, they later became highly critical of its conduct by the military and U.S. administration. But as Curran points out (2011), this discussion debated the execution and strategy of the war without questioning the underlying objective of Cold War containment. The U.S. press generally backed the 1990 Gulf War campaign against Iraq and for some academics such as McChesney was a propaganda organ for militarism and war (2002: 93). Similarly, the British press backed Margaret Thatcher's military operation to retake the Falkland Islands from Argentina in 1982. Even though correspondents in the field embedded with the British forces saw their stories heavily censored, they identified themselves closely with the troops and the war (Tumber, 2004: 191). The British journalist and historian Max Hastings, who covered the war, at the time quoted his father (who had also been a war correspondent) as saying (cited by Belsey & Chadwick, 1992: 115):

“When one's nation is at war, reporting becomes an extension of the war effort. Objectivity only comes back into fashion when the black-out comes down.”

Other direct challenges to objectivity, and particularly the concepts of driving out emotion and adopting a value neutral stance, came after the 1987 deregulation of the U.S. radio market and the advent of openly partisan talk radio. In television, the right-leaning Fox News Channel, launched in 1996 and owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, challenged what it saw as the liberal bias of the establishment television news networks and presented news 'with a voice' (Maras, 2013: 72). It in turn spawned a liberal leaning version in MSNBC. It can be argued that these channels and partisan journalism have become established as part of the U.S. media landscape and they are important vehicles for attracting advertising revenue. Maras (ibid: 179) argues that the channel turns back the clock to the time of partisan U.S. media in the 1800s before the codification of

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<sup>56</sup> See Chapter Three for a detailed discussion about the disruption to journalistic norms at times of crisis.

objectivity. The ‘Foxification’ of news has been rejected by several established media organisations such as the BBC (ibid: 179); its challenge is symptomatic of the often tense professional and academic debate around objectivity, the contestation of boundaries and what Gieryn (1999) called ‘credibility contests.’

A further challenge was represented by the ‘New Journalism’ of the 1960s and 70s which was “powered by feeling as well as intellect” (Hentoff cited by Schudson, 1978: 187) and featured writers such as Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe. It was a reaction to what some of these writers saw as the failure of conventional news reporting. Mailer said (cited in Weingarten, 2006: 54):

“I had felt that I had some dim intuitive feeling that what was wrong with all journalism is that the reporter tended to be objective and that that was one of the great lies of all time.”

But this new form of journalism, or combination of literature and journalism, was also not taken up by mainstream journalism. Its openly avowed subjectivity was a clear challenge to the normative values laid down earlier which ultimately prevailed. Weingarten argues that it was not just the enduring power of the objectivity norm but also economics that led to the decline of New Journalism (ibid: 292). U.S. television channels siphoned away advertising dollars from the big magazines that had been the main outlet for writers such as Mailer, Didion and Wolfe.<sup>57</sup>

Times of crisis and traumatic news can also pose a challenge to the objectivity norm, as was the case during the Balkans conflicts of the 1990s, Sept 11 and the 2003 Gulf War.<sup>58</sup> It was during the period of the wars in former Yugoslavia that the BBC correspondent Martin Bell, a veteran of conflict from Vietnam to Nicaragua, took issue with the objectivity norm and particularly the component of detachment (1997):

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<sup>57</sup> I have deliberately not gone into detail on the New Journalism movement but am citing it as symptomatic of the type of challenge that emerged to journalism’s normative values.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of how objectivity can come under pressure at a time of national or international crisis.

“When I started out as a war reporter in the mid-sixties I worked in the shadow of my distinguished predecessors and of a long and honourable BBC tradition of distance and detachment. I thought of it then as objective and necessary I would now call it bystanders’ journalism... I am no longer sure about the notion of objectivity, which seems to me now to be something of an illusion and a shibboleth.”

Bell coined the phrase ‘journalism of attachment’ and began a debate that is still running today, not least within the BBC. His plea was not against fact-based or impartial reporting but for, as he put it, a “journalism that cares as well as knows” and crucially not standing neutral between right and wrong or good and evil (ibid). In fact such arguments have a long tradition, and Bell himself cites the legendary BBC reporter Richard Dimbleby’s passionate coverage of the liberation of the Belsen death camp in 1945. CNN’s Christiane Amanpour, who also covered the siege of Sarajevo, does not go as far as dismissing objectivity per se but argues that not every side in a conflict should be treated equally. In the case of Bosnia, she argues against setting up a moral equivalence between the aggressor and victim, saying the West had the duty to stop the Serbs (1996). At the heart of such arguments by Amanpour is the assertion that there is no contradiction between a journalist being objective and attached or ‘caring.’ The BBC correspondent Fergal Keane has also criticised the media’s framing of traumatic conflict in tones that reflect consensual Western political thinking. Most notably, Keane argues that early reporting “bought the line” that the 1994 Rwandan massacre was part of a tribal war (1995):

“The mass of early reporting of the Rwandan killings conveyed the sense that the genocide was the result of some innate inter-ethnic loathing that had erupted into irrational violence... several of the world’s leading newspapers bought the line, in the initial stages, that the killings were a straightforward ‘tribal war’.”

But for many others, such as the BBC’s David Loyn, abandoning the ideals of impartiality or being “liberated from the yoke of objectivity” risks becoming lost in moral relativism that threatens the whole business of reporting (2003). In

terms of boundary work, Bell's practice of journalism was seen as being outside what is viewed as acceptable and thus led to what Gieryn (1999) labelled as the genre of 'expulsion.'

The 2003 Gulf War against Iraq brought the controversy to the fore again, raising the question whether simply reporting what is said (Bell's 'bystanders' journalism') can be guaranteed to tell the full story. This was classically the case with the New York Times's reporting of Iraq's ability to use Weapons of Mass Destruction (known as WMD). When the newspaper concluded in May 2004 that its correspondent Judith Miller had made a series of fundamental errors in reporting on the story, the correction was long, prominent and represented a public soul searching about journalism and the objectivity paradigm. The NYT's reporting of the build-up and aftermath of the second Gulf War, hinging crucially on whether Saddam Hussein's Iraq did or did not possess WMD, was by its own admission "not as rigorous as it should have been"<sup>59</sup>. It had been "insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged." The errors including relying on a single source (the Iraqi exile and dissident Ahmed Chalabi), basing stories on second hand statements, and failing to challenge what was being said.

This went to the heart of the debate over how the press goes about its job. Judith Miller contended it wasn't her business to assess government information and become an intelligence analyst. But her colleague Maureen Dowd, in a scathing column (New York Times, 2005), retorted that it was not the journalist's job to become the "stenographer of power." Put differently, just relaying the facts or presenting two sides of a story in what might be seen as the classic model of impartiality is viewed as lazy journalism.

The row over WMD and the New York Times coverage was just part of a wider international debate about the role of the press following the Sept 11 attacks in 2001. Many forms of American media engaged in highly jingoistic coverage and adopted the Bush administration's language of the "War on Terror". News anchors wore pins with the Stars and Stripes and statistical analyses of broadcast

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<sup>59</sup> New York Times leader column of May 26, 2004.

and text content have an overwhelming preponderance of pro-administration sources. British media, primarily the BBC, The Guardian and The Economist, were able to capitalise on growing disillusion with the highly partisan U.S. coverage following Sept 11, increasing their market share and circulation in the United States through their more objective approach. Analysis of this crisis in U.S. journalism tends to support the view that the values of objectivity favour existing power structures. It also highlights the inherent contradictions and what Brent Cunningham, the Managing Editor of the Columbia Journalism Review, called journalism's "tortured relationship" with objectivity and conflicting diktats - be disengaged but have impact; be neutral yet investigative; be fair-minded but have an edge.<sup>60</sup>

He concluded that the particular failing of the press was to allow "the principle of objectivity to make us passive recipients of news, rather than aggressive analysers and explainers of it."

#### *1.14 Technology of Intimacy*

If the Bosnian and Gulf conflicts laid bare the contradictions inherent in the pursuit of objectivity, then the advent of social media has raised even more questions about journalism's normative value system (Deuze, 2005). The blurring of boundaries between news and entertainment, between journalist and citizen, between old and new formats has left journalists, commentators and academics grappling for answers. Deuze sums this up as follows (2005: 15):

"Multimedia's careful embrace of interactivity as well as a merging of different cultures (print, broadcast, online; 'hard' and 'soft' news, marketing and editorial) within the news organisation – a perceived necessary byproduct of convergence – confronts the individual professional with multiple interpretations of objectivity."

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<sup>60</sup> Columbia Journalism Review. July-August 2003.



Some academics have argued that commercial pressures and the undermining of the traditional advertising model will weaken news gathering and threaten journalism and its values of objectivity (Currah, 2009, Davies, 2009; Phillips, 2012); others take a different emphasis, maintaining that journalism will experience a renaissance, with the Internet providing access to more sources, citizen journalism providing additional material and multi-media formats offering new means of connecting to an audience anywhere at any time (Allan, 2012; Bruns, 2003, 2011).

It is against this background of upheaval and contestation of boundaries, that academic scholars have begun to apply various theories of affect to try to understand better the affective dimension of contemporary media and the blurring of traditional lines. My literature review of their work, examined in detail in Chapter Two, shows that the focus has mainly been on how affect is transmitted to the public and, in some cases, draws on the resurgence of interest in Tarde. Kavka (2008) examines the death of Princess Diana, observing that although her picture had been used to sell thousands of magazines and newspapers (she was arguably the most photographed person of the modern era), the public did not know her. In fact, she very rarely spoke in interviews and she tended to polarise public opinion. However, the public outpouring of grief at her death in 1997 captivated a worldwide television audience of 2.5 billion people for the funeral. For Kavka, this is an illustration of television's 'technology of intimacy' (ibid: 11) and its ability to transmit affect, creating what is a 'mediated personhood' (ibid: 41). She explains this by saying that television functions by drawing viewers *close*<sup>61</sup> (spatially and temporally) and generating an affective proximity. In the case of Diana, the mediated reality of events through live television coverage appeared more 'real' than reality. It is Kavka's central paradox of television that "actuality may seem most real when mediated" (ibid: 20). The public actually asked why this was, with the *Evening Standard* newspaper framing an editorial with the question: "I didn't believe in her, so why do I feel this grief?" (1997 cited by Blackman, 1999). The outpouring of grief by what the media consistently called 'ordinary people' recalls 19<sup>th</sup> Century theories

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<sup>61</sup> Kavka's italics.

on crowds by Le Bon and others which focus on their suggestibility and the ease in which they can be swayed.

The televised framing of a major event such as Sept 11 also creates a community of viewing, particularly when transmitted live. The moment of the second plane flying into the World Trade Center was a live experience shared by millions of viewers who had turned on 24-hour news channels after hearing of the first plane's impact. In this case, a fixed camera meant everyone watching the same channel, e.g. CNN or ABC, saw the same images. Kavka (2008: 19) says:

“When televisual enframing gives me to see exactly what others are seeing, then we share not only a perspective but the affect attached to this perspective. The response to a televised catastrophe like the coverage of 9/11 – ‘my god, did you see that?’ is precisely a demand for assurance that we saw the same thing from the same perspective and hence belong, however temporarily, to the same community. Such a demand comes loaded with affect at the same time as it serves to pass that affect on.”

A third example raises another question of whether still and televisual images, particularly the way they are used in news reporting, can create affective *facts*. In a discussion of the coverage of WMD, Gibbs (2008) suggests that images of weapons silos accompanied both reports claiming that Iraq did possess these as well as subsequent reports stating that they did *not* exist. However, she cites an academic study showing that as many as 30% of Americans still believed that Iraq had WMD.<sup>62</sup> Such images can be seen therefore as a means of suggestion, often taking hold if the public's level of scepticism or willingness to question is low (as was the case after the shock and outrage in the United States after Sept 11). While watching events such as the Diana funeral or Sept 11 on television is essentially a private and often individual experience at home, millions of people across the world are at the same time part of a shared community in what some theorists have called a reconfigured or virtual public sphere. This leads Kavka, for example, to redefine the public sphere as “an ongoing accretion of the

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<sup>62</sup> Lewandowsky, S., Stritzke, W., Oberauer, K. & Morales M. 2005. Memory for Fact, Fiction and Misinformation; The Iraq war 2003. *Psychological Science*, 6 (3), pp 190-5.

affective relations of the everyday, especially as such relations are publicised and commodified through media forms like reality television” (2008: 52).

The rise to prominence of social media and vehicles such as Twitter brings into sharp focus debate about such virtual public spheres and the question of whether they produce affect and foster rational discourse at the same time (Papacharissi, 2002; 2015). The stream of information collected in a Twitter feed (identified by a single subject “#-tag”) is seen by some academics as creating an ‘affective stream’ which combines “news, opinion and emotion to the point where discerning one from the other is difficult, and doing so misses the point” (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2011). An analysis by Papacharissi and Oliveira of the Twitter feed covering the Egyptian uprising in Tahrir Square<sup>63</sup> echoes many of the trends identified through both a critical political economy and cultural studies approach to current forms of media. At a time of economic constraint, major news organisations are cutting foreign bureaux and the number of correspondents. As Sambrook observes (2010: 25):

“From the 1980s onwards there has been a relentless paring back of international resources by Western news organisations in the face of budget cuts forced by declining revenues, the need for investment in digital technology and the demands of corporate shareholders.”

At the same time, the ability of individuals to contribute to a Twitter stream radically changes the dynamics of traditional news production (Allan, 2013: 119), blurring the boundaries between fact and opinion, objectivity and subjectivity, information and entertainment.

These “hybrid and networked publics of journalists and citizens working concurrently” (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2011: 13) share the ability of other forms of media to amplify the message. Just as 24-hour news channels can replay significant footage on a loop, so too Twitter can amplify affect through the ability to ‘re-tweet’ items. Just as television mediates between the private and public, a Twitter feed can through the use of a live or ‘always-on’ environment

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<sup>63</sup> Based on #egypt from Jan 25-Feb 25, 2011.

engender a sense of shared experience, community and social cohesion. Just as television, a Twitter feed has the ability to take an ‘ordinary’ person (c.f. Reality TV) and give him or her a voice. For Papacharissi and Oliveira the function of re-tweeting an individual voice can elevate its status to ‘elite’ by a form of crowd-sourcing.

### *1.15 Conclusion*

In tracing a social history of the evolution of the objectivity norm, I have tried to show that there are stages in which each technological advance or structural shift is first perceived as a threat by the preceding generation. In 1888, the French novelist Emile Zola (cited by Chalaby, 1996: 309) bemoaned the French press and the fact that:

“The uncontrolled flow of information pushed to the extreme ... has transformed journalism, killed the great articles of discussion, killed literary critique and increasingly gives more importance to news dispatches, trivial news and to the articles of reporters and interviewers.”

In America, the penny press was criticised for its vulgarity and sensationalism by the establishment newspapers, all of them selling at six cents and worried about losing their monopoly. In the 1930s, newspapers including the New York Times seized on the opportunity to criticise radio for its irresponsibility as a mass medium after the panic induced by CBS’s War of the Worlds. When television took hold in the 1950s, the newspapers and radio teamed up to challenge the seriousness of television news. With the advent of the Internet, CBS news anchor Dan Rather began to write about the threat to his craft (Mindich, 1998), criticising the “Hollywood-isation of news” which was making serious journalists into entertainers. While some academic literature sees the advent of social media as ushering in a renaissance of journalism, it has been argued that many mainstream media organisations have sought to colonise or normalise it within their own web presence (Hermida & Thurman, 2008) and retain their existing power (Witschge, 2013). Instinctively, they have tried to stifle what they see as a threat to their business. In her analysis of boundary work and user-

generated content in relation to GuardianWitness<sup>64</sup>, Wahl-Jorgensen considers how news organisations seek to defend themselves through strategies of cooptation and segregation (2015: 169). And as Singer observes, the successive emergence and growth of new media forms throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century repeatedly generated defensive responses, couched in normative terms, from many of the established practitioners of the day (2105: 23). In their study of ‘professional’ journalists’ views of citizen journalists and other writers online, Fenton and Witschge (2011) concluded that many see such content as ‘bad’ journalism where opinion masquerades as fact. Journalists are determined to guard the borders of their profession and demarcate where journalism ends and something else begins. They consider their output to be more valuable than that of non-professional news producers because they provide ‘reliable’ and ‘factual’ information in contrast to opinion and vitriol (ibid: 156). Blogs are characterised as inaccurate and lacking the balance a newspaper provides. The irony, the authors found, is that the very qualities these professional journalists praised were becoming increasingly difficult to uphold as the digital age and its commercial pressures usher in new structures of news production, undermining profitability and independent news gathering. What is common in these criticisms, with the exception of Zola’s attempt to uphold a fading French literary tradition in the nation’s journalism, is the perception that each new generation is jeopardising the journalistic norms of objectivity and is thereby undermining standards.

This chapter started by asking how those norms came to be so entrenched and, in reviewing the academic debate over these norms, has traced a trend in Anglo-American journalism that has been remarkably linear. This has been despite periods of introspection and doubt and irrespective of shifting concepts of audience reception, which have ranged from the individual as a passive dupe in mass society to the active creator of meaning. The origin of these norms was in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century political economy of newspapers keen to widen their circulation

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<sup>64</sup> GuardianWitness, launched in 2013, states that it is the “home of readers’ content” on The Guardian. It is a separately labeled web site built into The Guardian’s online web presence. Wahl-Jorgensen argues that the site solicits audience participation as an act of *cooptation* and performs careful boundary work by *segregating* and clearly demarcating audience content. By doing this, it reasserts journalistic authority (2015: 181). For the website, see: [https://www.theguardian.com/community/series/guardianwitness?INTCMP=GW\\_VISIT\\_BETA](https://www.theguardian.com/community/series/guardianwitness?INTCMP=GW_VISIT_BETA)

and break a partisan mould. I have tried to highlight arguments that the translation by the Chicago School of European ideas around suggestion, contagion and mimesis into a fact-based model of social interaction pushed ideas of irrationality into the background and was taken up by the U.S. and UK press. This trend was fuelled by concern during the 1930s about the power of the Hollywood studios over mass society, about the growing influence of Public Relations and the propaganda of fascism in Nazi Germany. Together these socio-political factors encouraged the press to distance itself and, as a profession, develop its own norms as a counterbalance. Deregulation and the break-neck pace of technological advances in the post-war period have led to overt challenges to the objectivity norm, such as the New Journalism movement, Fox News and social media. But my review of the academic literature shows that these norms still hold currency today.

In this chapter I have attempted to set out the key defining parameters of the objectivity norm as they have developed and the ever-present tension with emotion over the past 150 years. The empirical research for this thesis will examine the lived experience of journalists as they juggle these tensions in their everyday practice, many seeking to live up the professional value system characterised by objectivity while at times covering traumatic news events unfolding before their eyes. My goal is to identify the affective processes, behaviours and practices of journalism that lurk just below the surface of the profession. But first, I want to explore in more detail the ‘turn to affect’ and how contemporary academic scholarship can help design a research methodology to support my investigation and re-inject ideas around affect, suggestion and contagion into the discourse around journalism practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### THE CHALLENGE OF AFFECT AND ITS APPLICATION TO NEWS

*“Comment is free, but facts are sacred” – CP Scott (1921)<sup>65</sup>*

*“The turn to affect has been framed as a response to the problems of cultural inscription and discourse determinism which have been argued to show up the limits of work on text, language and discourse across the humanities. Discursive approaches are seen to have sidelined the body, emotion, affect and sensation in understanding communication processes.” – Blackman (2012: xiv)*

#### *2.1 Introduction*

CP Scott’s celebrated phrase has become the mantra of Britain’s ‘quality’ press, a watchword for standards stemming from the professionalisation of journalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries set out in the previous chapter. Liz Forgan, chair of the Scott Trust<sup>66</sup>, in fact goes so far as to argue that the influence of CP Scott’s 1921 article, *A Hundred Years*, reaches far wider and “is still recognised around the world as the blueprint for independent journalism.”<sup>67</sup> As I outlined in Chapter One, this rationalist, positivist framework continues to hold sway today despite serial crises in Anglo-American journalism. Journalists cling to CP Scott’s mantra in the face of citizen journalism and social media (Fenton & Witschge, 2011) and are often sceptical of material that does not come from ‘real’ journalists as they defend the boundaries of their profession. This fact-based ethos has been carried into Higher Education journalism studies through approaches to the study of production, text and audiences, and reinforced by course accreditation through journalism bodies such as the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ).

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Prestwich Scott was the editor of the Manchester Guardian newspaper for 57 years, the longest editorship of a national newspaper anywhere in the world.

<sup>66</sup> The Scott Trust was set up in 1936 by John Scott, owner of what was then the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Manchester Evening News*. The current trust owns *The Guardian* and *The Observer* and is designed to “ensure editorial interests remain free of commercial pressures”. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/the-scott-trust/2015/jul/26/the-scott-trust>

<sup>67</sup> Forward to a reprinting of the original article by the Scott Trust, see bibliography.

But the question that has pre-occupied me since the attacks of Sept 11 is whether there is more to the practice of journalism and if there is not also a deeply rooted affective dimension at play.

This chapter reviews the rapidly growing body of academic literature on affect and the debates surrounding its definition, its nature and its transmission<sup>68</sup> or circulation. In surveying the scene, the review looks at many related but actually different theories of affect to inform my own empirical methodology, set out in Chapter Three. It identifies a broad gap in the application of the affective dimension to the actual practice of journalism (as opposed to its reception by audiences which this chapter will show has been the main thrust of academic research to date). The chapter focuses on one particular strand of the many interlocking theories around affect, namely ideas on suggestion and social contagion. In doing so, I am keen to investigate whether the theories pioneered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Gabriel Tarde (1902/ 1969) and others at the time of the expansion of mass circulation newspaper publishing could shed new light on issues in contemporary journalism practice and their affective dimension. I have, for example, been particularly interested to pursue in my empirical research what is known as the ‘herd instinct’ or ‘pack mentality’ of journalists sent in at short notice to cover a breaking news story. While I know from my own experience (and demands from the news desk) that a pack mentality can be generated by competitive and commercial pressures, I have been keen to explore whether other factors are at play in terms of the relationships, imitations and interactions between journalists.<sup>69</sup> In my subsequent empirical chapters, I draw on ideas of suggestion and contagion in investigating the lived experience of journalists who covered traumatic news stories such as the 1996 shooting of school children in Dunblane, Scotland, the 2013 killing of the off-duty soldier drummer Rigby in the south east London suburb of Woolwich, and a series of other traumatic news stories.

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<sup>68</sup> A contested word - several theorists prefer to speak of “circulation.” See later discussion in this chapter.

<sup>69</sup> There have been several journalistic accounts of the ‘pack mentality’, notably Timothy Crouse’s account of the 1972 Nixon - McGovern U.S. presidential campaign – *Boys on the Bus* - and Andrew Marr’s 2004 volume *My Trade - A Short History of British Journalism*. The literature on this is examined later in this chapter.



## 2.2 The 'Turn to Affect'

Massumi (2002: 27) refers to a growing feeling within media, literary and art theory that affect is central to an understanding of our information and image-based late capitalist culture in which, he argues, so-called master narratives are perceived to have floundered. It is against this background that I have tried to move away from sole reliance on cognitive methods of understanding forms of journalism practice to one that uses a mixed model embracing theories of affect and suggestion in order to open up new perspectives and challenge existing thinking.

The 'turn to' affect suggests a movement *away* from rationalist traditions of philosophy, which are often characterised as 'Cartesian' to signify cognitive or reason-based approaches (La Caze & Lloyd, 2011). A close examination of affect theories as discussed in this chapter shows that this is an oversimplified binary conception and affect and cognition are never fully separable (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Wetherell (2012: 20) makes the same point, arguing that it is futile to try to pull apart affect and meaning making. Over the past 20 years, terms loosely associated with affect have steadily gained currency. Concepts such as emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, emotional capital and emotional labour are now well established (Richards & Rees, 2011). Recent academic literature has added to this the emotional public sphere, the affective dimension of the public sphere of policy debate underpinning democratic processes (Richards, 2007); the emergence of body studies since the 1980s has been seen increasingly in the analysis of how films and television 'work' affectively, similarly reflecting the view of many scholars that reason and rationality have limits as a way of analysing and understanding communication processes (Blackman; 2012); the affective dimension of Reality TV, discussed briefly in the previous chapter and arguably a development from the docudrama genre, has become a recent focus of analysis (Gorton, 2009; Kavka, 2008); Richards (2007: 30) tracks the rise of what he calls a broader 'therapeutic culture' and a shift from the private to public domain; the sociologist Furedi (2003) has criticised the erosion of the boundaries between the private and

public, with confessional television (e.g. Big Brother <sup>70</sup>) deeply embedded in popular culture. Furedi goes as far as to argue that today's society takes emotion so seriously that almost every challenge or misfortune experienced in life is seen as a direct threat to a person's emotional well-being (ibid: 1).

Despite the growth in academic attention paid to such subjects (Richards, 2007: 35), my own empirical research shows that the journalists interviewed, when reflecting on their own practice, still subscribe to CP Scott's holy grail and a rational, truth seeking, fact-based approach to news. The first chapter of this thesis traced a social history of Anglo-American journalism, charting the development of normative values of fact-based reporting, freedom from bias and objectivity that became deeply ingrained and codified as a mark of professional standing over the past 150 years. This united many journalists in the Anglo-American culture through shared rituals and a shared identity, allowing the profession to set itself apart from competing sections of the information market (Peters & Broersma, 2012), not least the emergence of Public Relations. The chapter highlighted the false binary divide through which emotion often became equated with 'bad' journalism and objectivity and subjectivity were positioned as polar opposites. In the context of a liberal model of journalism, emotion was no less than the enemy of reason and even a threat to democracy. Tabloid journalism's sensationalism is perceived by some as involving emotion to such an extent that it precludes serious quality journalism (Sparks, 2000). But at the same time, as Maras points out (2013: 12), and as Chapter One illustrated, a historical picture of the development of objectivity cannot ignore the historic ties with the tabloid commercial press.

### *2.3 Challenging the status quo in Journalism Studies*

My argument in this thesis is that specific affect theories, if applied to the practice of journalism, have the potential to disrupt and challenge existing thinking. At the heart of this argument is the conviction of affect scholars that

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<sup>70</sup> The original version was broadcast on Dutch television in 1999 and has since become a worldwide franchise. Part of the show, in which contestants live in a house together, involves a 'confession room.'

sense making cannot be confined to meaning, cognition or signification (Blackman, 2012). Mainstream journalism studies have also tended to pay little attention to the turn to affect when it comes to practice (as opposed to the consumption or mediation of news). Normative approaches to journalism practice have become prevalent in Higher Education degree courses, often reinforced by professional bodies such as the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) that, not unsurprisingly, espouse the values of fact-based reporting. This tradition shares a common thread of rationality and the assumption that otherness needs to be countered. As part of this attitude, mass media became problematised in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with its supposedly bad effects influencing those with ‘irrational minds’ or those viewed as being more susceptible to outside forces (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001).

At the simplest level of content analysis, media transmits a message from the sender to the receiver on the assumption that the words have an inherent meaning (Tudor, 1999). Media exaggeration or distortion is therefore seen as misrepresenting the *true* meaning – in journalistic speak an example of bias. Lurking behind such an approach is the assumption that the ‘ordinary’ people or masses are less able to engage with the media or resist its effects than the small discerning minority (ibid: 34). While more differentiated than theories of the vulnerable and suggestible crowd put forward by Gustave Le Bon in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1895/ 1986), there is a presumption that the individual is a bounded pre-social entity existing autonomously from outside influences which is then integrated into society through various agents – for example parents, schools and the media. Rational minds will be less susceptible to distorted messages while inferior (often in a class-driven discourse working class) minds are more vulnerable. A semiotic approach to content based on Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/ 1969) and later developed by Roland Barthes (1973, 1990) and others goes beyond the simple binaries of true and false, with language the site for the production of meanings or system of signification. The relationship between the signifier (words, images) and the signified (concepts) creates the possibility of meaning (ibid: 58). Media thus both produce and frame the way people understand the social world. This in turn presupposes a very different concept of the individual, which is, then, not pre-given but constituted instead through

signification and discourse. The practice of making meaning is still understood as cognitive and rational, inferring the ability to break and decode ciphers (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001).

In terms of news consumption, there is also a tendency to construe ‘effects’ analysis – or at least public debate - through the same psychological approach to mass media that raises fears of the rational mind being distorted. The horrific 1993 abduction and murder of two-year-old James Bulger by two 10-year-old boys in Liverpool<sup>71</sup> typifies the set of discourses in place through which we interpret what they did as being the result of vulnerable, over-suggestible working class minds led astray by media (in this case a horror video called *Child’s Play 3*) (ibid: 37). Uses and Gratifications research, developed by Blumler and Katz (1974) and referred to in Chapter One, moves towards the concept of a more active audience, with some individuals choosing to use or not use media. Further developments in the 1980s and 1990s concentrated on an individual’s rational ability in relation to their own social/ cultural background to create a range of possible meanings or interpretations of a media text.

The political economy approach to media production, developed by the Frankfurt School and influenced by Marxist theory, has also been criticised for the implicit inference that the public is passive and can be easily manipulated by media producers. The German scholars Theodor Adorno (1944, 1950) and Max Horkheimer (1947) had taken up the idea of the gullible masses swayed by dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini and developed their ideas after World War Two in the light of the emerging mass consumer and mass entertainment society in the United States (where they had settled in exile after fleeing from Nazi Germany). Blackman & Walkerdine (2001: 65) argue that mainstream media theory and politically left media and cultural studies share similar assumptions about the mind and behaviour and draw on the body of work focusing on the psychology of the masses.

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<sup>71</sup> The two-year old was abducted from a shopping centre, tortured and murdered by Robert Thompson and Jon Venables. Both were released on lifelong licence on reaching the age of 18 and given new identities.

## 2.4 Definitions

Affect theorists such as Massumi argued as long ago as 1995 that the time had come to break with the linguistic, coding models based on the traditions of Saussure (2002: 4)<sup>72</sup>. The political theorist William Connolly asserts that “culture involves practices in which the porosity of argument is inhabited by more noise, unstated habit and differential intensities of affect than adamant rationalists acknowledge (cited by Leys, 2011).”

The increasing body of literature representing the turn to affect encompasses a wide range of subjects capturing political, economic and cultural transformation at a time when some see cultural criticism as exhausted (Clough, 2008). The comprehensive *Affect Theory Reader* (2010) by Gregg and Seigworth identifies no fewer than eight different orientations in affect theory drawing on interdisciplinary discourses that take in the political economy, philosophy, literary studies, cultural criticism, biotechnology, information theory, neuroscience and psychology. Cast more narrowly, the affective turn offers an opportunity to explore the practice of journalism in a different way that might cast light on the nature of an affective dimension. Indeed, one of the most common definitions of affect is that it refers to those registers of experience which *cannot* be easily seen and which can be described, variously, as non-cognitive, trans-subjective, non-conscious, non-representational, incorporeal and immaterial (Blackman, 2012: 4). Affect is generally seen as referring not to a specific thing but rather processes which circulate and pass between bodies and are therefore difficult to capture by conventional methodology. Affect thus arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*, in the capacities to act and be acted upon (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010: 1).

One way of reflecting on these issues of definition in their broadest terms is to consider the relationship between emotion, bodily sensation and cognition (Ahmed, 2004b). Definitions often try to tease out the difference between affect and emotion, albeit sometimes in different ways (Gorton, 2009; Kavka, 2008;

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<sup>72</sup> Massumi’s influential 1995 essay *The Autonomy of Affect* is reprinted in the 2002 collection *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

Leys, 2011; Massumi, 2002; Venn, 2010; Wetherell, 2012). Gorton, who applies affect to her investigation of television audiences (2009), highlights the contested nature of definitions around affect and emotion. The frequently cited difference is that emotion refers to a sociological expression of feelings while affect is more firmly rooted in biology/ neuroscience and a physical response. In this model, emotion requires a subject while affect does not. Kavka, who applies ideas of affect to Reality TV, argues in a similar fashion that affect is the zone of potential emotions, which have not yet been perceived as such, a “primordial soup” of feeling (2008: x). Affect is therefore both more and less than emotion since affect covers the whole range of feelings *before* they have been assessed or identified in relation to a particular object or source (ibid: 29). Wetherell, in her discussion of ‘affective practice’, talks about an unarticulated hinterland of possible semiotic connections – she argues that what we do is non-conscious in the sense that these possible meanings and significances exceed what can be grasped or articulated at any particular moment (2012: 129). These webs of semiotic connections, she argues, are ‘genuinely psychosocial’, dependent on shared languages, cultural repertoires and worked through personal histories (ibid). This is one of the foundation stones of the methodology that I have adopted.<sup>73</sup>

Massumi (2002: 27) differentiates between emotions as the ‘socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of experience’ and affect as being “unformed and unstructured”. For him they follow different logics and pertain to different orders:

“Emotion is... the conventional consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions into narratizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning.”

The science historian Leys (2011: 472) takes issue with the current dominance of the anti-intentionalist position within psychology and affect studies and is critical of the strict separation of affect processes from intention. She identifies this trend

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<sup>73</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of Wetherell related specifically to my research methodology.

as stemming from publication by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank in 1995 of a reader<sup>74</sup> on the work of American psychologist Silvan Tomkins in the 1960s. Under his theories, human subjects were not seen to be driven by subjectivity and sociality but rather by affects hard-wired into the brain operating outside the systems of meaning and cognition. In contrast to Freud and appraisal theorists, Tomkins and his followers saw affect and cognition as two different systems (ibid: 437). The concern for Leys in theories proposed under this model by affect theorists such as, for example, Massumi is that they shift attention away from considerations of meaning or ideology. This in turn could lead to an indifference to the role of ideas and beliefs in politics, culture and art in favour of an ontological concern with affective reactions (ibid: 451). Leys, with whose analysis I agree, criticises what she sees as a false opposition created between the mind and the body but concludes that the anti-intentionalist position may well maintain its dominance for some time to come.

### *2.5 Looking to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

The explosion of literature on affect over the past 20 years has all but passed the mainstream news industry by or at least operated on the periphery. As stated earlier, affect theories have recently been applied to the field of television and Reality Television (Gibbs, 2010; Gorton, 2009; Kavka, 2008), foregrounding the body's potential for mediation in an attempt to understand better affect's ability to bring together audiences across diverse geographies and cultures. Work has also focused on how waves of public feeling can spread and how affect circulates (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b; Massumi, 2002; Walkerdine, 2010; Wetherell, 2012). There is an emerging body of work looking at affect within the context of social media alongside ideas of the virtual public sphere (Knudsen & Stage, 2012; Sampson, 2011, 2012; Stage 2012). Digitisation and digital images open up new perspectives on the body and affect (Clough, 2008; Grusin, 2010; Hansen, 2004).

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<sup>74</sup> Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins, *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (2) (Winter, 1995), pp 496-522.

In *Cold Intimacies: the Making of Emotional Capitalism*, Illouz (2007) examines how the technology of the Internet rearticulates corporality and emotions. This body of work, some of which touches on news processes indirectly, will be reviewed later in the chapter.

But first I want to consider whether a way of thinking about affect and the practice of news journalism can be opened up by the work of the pioneering French sociologist and psychologist Gabriel Tarde whose focus in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was partly on the emergence of the mass circulation newspaper (his work has recently been scrutinised by scholars such as Blackman (2007, 2012), Gibbs (2010) and Sampson (2012)). As discussed in Chapter One, Tarde was grappling with an issue that pre-occupied many thinkers of the day, namely the way in which ideas and beliefs could spread throughout populations. This had been the subject of Gustave Le Bon's writings on crowd theory in the wake of the French Revolution (born out of fear of uncontrollable social unrest) and was later taken up by exiles of the Frankfurt School as fascism spread throughout 1930s Europe. Tarde's theories around the emergence of newspapers identified their ability to form 'publics' bounded not by the same physical space, speaking of "instantaneous transmission of thought from any distance" (Clark, 1969: 281).<sup>75</sup> Tarde's concepts of imitation, contagion and suggestion crucially focused attention on how subjects are not self-contained and clearly bounded but are open to affecting and being affected by others (Blackman, 2007, 2012). As Blackman has argued, these ideas of social contagion and suggestion developed by Le Bon, Tarde and Freud led, as psychology developed as a science, to will and inhibition becoming normalised. Those subjects considered more suggestible were often identified as the working class, poor, women and the masses (Blackman, 2012), ideas which were carried over as a legacy into some of traditional media and cultural theory (for example the Leavisite view of the 1930s which sees an elite minority as the guardians of culture (Tudor, 1999: 35)). It is surely no linguistic coincidence that we speak today of 'viral marketing' a 'viral media ecology' and of computer viruses, all terms linked to the concept of contagion. In his work *Virality*, Sampson talks about resuscitating Tarde's approach by concentrating on the networks or relational flows that

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<sup>75</sup> See also Chapter One p 41.



spread out and connect everything to everything else (2012: 7). In constructing a contagion theory for an age of social media, Sampson aligns Tarde to Deleuze and neuroscience (ibid: 13)

Other affect theorists such as Gibbs and Brennan also have taken up ideas of contagion and drawn a similar link to modern media. Gibbs, who also draws on neuroscience, gives Tarde's concept of imitation a contemporary interpretation with what she calls "mimetic communication" which she defines as "corporeally based forms of imitation, both voluntary and involuntary" (2010: 186). Contagion is everywhere in the contemporary world, "sweeping through mediatised populations at the speed of a bushfire." No longer confined to local outbreaks of infectious disease or even of hysteria, contagious epidemics now potentially occur on a global scale and, thanks to electronic media, with incredible rapidity (ibid: 186). In formulating a theory of mimetic communication, Gibbs conceives of it:

"...as a contagious process that takes place transversally across a topology connecting heterogeneous networks of media and conversation, statements and images, bodies and things."

In this interpretation, affect is an a-subjective force in which the human is an "envelope of possibilities". Gibbs, referring to a neuro-cultural approach, locates affective contagion primarily within the Tomkins framework of bio-neurological science. Brennan (2004) also explains the transmission of affect between people in neuro-physiological terms. The process of transmission is "social in origin but biological and physical in effect" (2004:3). She continues:

"The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment. But they have a physiological impact. By the transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another."

Brennan uses the word ‘entrainment’ to capture a process through which a person’s hormonal systems are brought into alignment with another’s (2004: 9). According to Brennan, pheromones, for example, molecules that communicate chemical information<sup>76</sup>, are crucial to the understanding of how we ‘feel’ an atmosphere or pick up a mood.

In my reading of the affects literature, and in my own methodology, I have agreed instead with Wetherell (2012) who rejects Gibbs’s and Brennan’s views. Wetherell argues that these fail to explain the limits of affective contagion and why sometimes a person goes along with affects others display and sometimes resists (a question that also puzzled Le Bon). Blackman is also critical of Gibbs and Brennan and suggests that the lineage of the spiritual, psychic and psychopathological espoused by Tarde has for the most part been left out of contemporary affect theory (2012: 77). As stated earlier, suggestion and ideas such as imitation tended to disappear during the development of social psychology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Instead they became reconfigured as a capacity that was inferior and associated with the bodies of those, within an evolutionary paradigm, aligned with animality and primitiveness (ibid: 79). This in turn allowed suggestion to be inscribed within the brain and ‘simpler’ instincts, while conscious deliberation became the marker of the normative subject. The revival of interest in Tarde has focused on his account of how social forces spread which relied on a combination of what he called invention, imitation and opposition.

In his foreword to the 1969 English translation of Tarde’s major works (1969: 21), Clark describes how according to this theory, inventions, the creations of talented individuals, are disseminated through social systems by a process of imitation. These imitations spread, like “ripples on the surface of a pond”, before they come into contact with some obstacle. In formulating a theory of imitation, Tarde focuses on two areas – logical and extra-logical. In the first category, inventions may be logically brought together, for example the wheel and animal in a horse drawn cart. At other times they may, however, be in opposition and

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<sup>76</sup> A chemical emitted by one body that causes the release of hormones into the blood of another body, leading to a change in the body state and to feelings and action.

one will be displaced. In extra-logical imitation ideas are communicated before their material expression (1969: 186). At all times, Tarde held out the possibility that the unconscious part of the mind could be responsible for the transmission of ideas.<sup>77</sup> Tarde and contemporaries such as the philosophers Henri Bergson and William James were members of the Institute for Psychical Research in Paris (founded in 1900) and were influenced by concepts derived from spiritualism, psychic phenomena and the studies of hypnotic trance (Blackman, 2007). Tarde's concept of imitation was "not about mechanical reproduction, but more a complex form of imitative desire which was thought through concepts derived specifically from hypnotic trance and psychical research" (ibid: 581).

Tarde himself sought to apply the transmission of feelings to the world of media as he knew it in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In *The Public and the Crowd*, originally published in 1901, he captured the way in which the mass printing of newspapers was about to transform the crowd – individuals physically in the same place – into a virtual public that is geographically disparate with an "indefinite extension" (1969: 277). This "transportation of thought across distance" required technology to bind a public's members together (in his era, the mass circulation newspaper) into a "spiritual collectivity, a dispersion of individuals who are physically separated and whose cohesion is entirely mental." This depended partly on a pre-Habermasian ideal of conversation, spurred by newspapers, merging into public opinion. But as stated above, this was not solely due to rational discourse but could also be attributed to suggestion or imitative desire. In making these observations, Tarde was presciently taking the first steps into today's world of mass communications. The idea, for example, that someone could belong to multiple publics at the same time reminds us of our ability to watch multiple channels of specialist interest on television or belong to multiple social networking communities. Katz (2000) illustrates how first radio and then television, in Britain and the United States, created a sense of national identity that Tarde ascribed in his time to the mass circulation newspaper.

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<sup>77</sup> Tarde characterised the act of instinctive imitation as somnambulism.

## 2.6 Contemporary investigation of news narratives through affect theories

But some current theorists have also been wary of transposing the 19<sup>th</sup> Century fascination with the mysterious and uncanny into the modern day.

Ahmed, in her 2004 work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, focuses on textual representation of affect in various forms of media, from newspapers and other narrative forms to political speeches, and the power of words to evoke affect in readers and observers (Wetherell, 2012). Ahmed tends not to draw a distinction between emotion and affect, focusing on how emotions circulate between bodies, “examining how they ‘stick’ as well as move” (2004b: 4). She rejects use of the word ‘contagion’ which, she fears, risks transforming emotion into a property that could be passed on as though it were always the same. For her, it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotions as such (ibid: 11). Wetherell (2012) makes the same point, also using the concept of circulation and shunning the word ‘transmission’ since it suggests “that a self-contained packet of emotional stuff is being transferred wholesale from one body to another.” Like Tarde, Ahmed applies her ideas to how news stories or campaigns can lead to waves of public feeling ranging from disgust to adulation. One example she cites is the hate figure of the ‘asylum seeker’ as found in newspapers (often tabloid), political speeches and propaganda-driven web sites such as that of the British National Party. For Ahmed emotion does not reside in a fixed object and is not a pre-existing attribute in an individual. Rather, emotions circulate and sometimes ‘stick’ – in this case the asylum seeker becomes a ‘sticky surface.’ Various emotions, such as fear, coalesce around the term. Ahmed proposes a theory in which affect is a form of capital which can grow or shrink in value (2004a: 120):

“Affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an affect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value over time). Some signs, that is, increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more they circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to ‘contain’ affect.”

In the example above, affect accumulates around the figure of the asylum seeker. Speeches by politicians are made at the same time and around the same theme, often with some “sticky words and language” such as *flood* and *swamp* (2004b: 46). Texts are therefore an important element in the construction of emotion. But for Ahmed emotions are not ‘in’ texts but rather as effects of the naming of emotions (2004b: 13). The word ‘terrorist’ – one of the starting points of this thesis - is one that sticks to some bodies, sliding into other words associated with accounts of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (for example *fundamentalism*, *Islam*, *Arab*, *repressive*, *primitive*) (2004a: 131). The work done by metonymy can then stick words like *terrorist* and *Islam* together even when politicians argue against this association. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, Ahmed’s writings focus on how they work to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social and between the individual and the collective. In applying these ideas of affect to newspapers, narrative and speeches Ahmed builds a model aimed at understanding how waves of public feeling seem to defuse through a society or culture.

I personally would argue that Ahmed’s approach still draws heavily on textual forms of analysis and a heritage of signs and representation. Wetherell is also critical of Ahmed (2012: 158) and of her definition of emotion as being a force with no particular content (saying this could in fact reduce it to any movement of signs). Instead, Wetherell argues for a more pragmatic, more embodied, interdisciplinary approach that she calls ‘*affective practice*’. As I set out in detail in Chapter Three, I have adopted this as key to the methodology for my empirical research. I have considered this approach well suited since it involves understanding a raft of processes including, amongst others, the body’s capacity to re-enact the actions of others, the power of words and considerations of culture and society; it means locating affect not just in the process of circulation but in “actual bodies and social actors, negotiating, making decisions, evaluating, communicating and interfering and relating” (2012: 159). Wetherell, coming from a standpoint of social psychology, talks about a flow of affective activity – affective practice can be short, intense episodes (e.g. panic attacks) or semi-continuous, long lasting background feelings. Again, I consider this to be appropriate for the practice of journalism which, by definition, deals with

unexpected ‘big’ events. For Wetherell, elements of the body (facial muscles, heart rate, regions of the prefrontal cortex etc.) form a pattern with thoughts, social relations, personal histories and ways of life. These flows of affect and changing patterns of affective practice can relate to one individual, to small groups or millions (ibid: 16). The scaling up of affect, as Tarde and Le Bon had identified in their analysis of crowds and publics over 100 years ago, quickly brings into play questions of power (cf Ahmed’s affective value) and the regulation of affect. In a similar vein to Wetherell, Venn (2010: 131) draws attention to how groups of people can come together as ‘collective ensembles’, binding together as an effective unit. He too sees processes that are on the one hand cognitive and the other hand affective sensing, what he characterises as the integration of feeling and calculating such that the body-mind-world meld into one organism (ibid). I have found Venn’s work of particular relevance in exploring the herd or ‘pack’ instinct of journalists and elaborate on this in discussing my research methodology in Chapter Three.

At this point I also want to mention the work of Richards<sup>78</sup> (2007) who has long used a similar tradition of social psychology to analyse issues of media, power and extremism, coining the term *emotional governance* (2007: 5). In defining this term, Richards argues that an understanding of the sources and nature of affect and emotion<sup>79</sup> are essential to understanding culture and, specifically, to understanding the nature and effects of our intensive modern communication practices. The psychosocial approach to analysis assumes that individuals are formed by social experience but also confront the social world as something outside us to which we relate (2007: 24):

“Developments at a societal level, such as trends in public opinion ... are seen to be influenced by the emotional responses of individuals to messages they are exposed to in the public field, especially when these responses are mediated by unconscious processes.”

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<sup>78</sup> I work closely with Prof Barry Richards at Bournemouth University and we collaborated on an AHRC-funded (Arts & Humanities Research Council) research project in 2007 to investigate attitudes to emotion and trauma in British journalism.

<sup>79</sup> Richards does not distinguish between the two in his work and, as we have discussed in conversations at Bournemouth University where we both work, he would not consider himself an affect scholar.

In analyzing widespread and persistent fears in society of, for example, terrorism, Richards observes that media contributions to the discourse on terror have tended to amplify the threat from early studies of moral panics to the modern digital age. This is not dissimilar from Le Bon's fear of the French revolution and 19<sup>th</sup> Century preoccupations of how to control the crowd. Richards coins the phrase *emotional public sphere* to recognise today's culture as a highly complex field of emotional forces and categorises journalism as a form of *emotional labour* (2007: 57). In this formulation, journalists make two contributions to the emotional public sphere – firstly through the way in which they bring statements from public figures to consumers of news, by framing them, selecting, contextualizing, editing and elaborating on them; secondly through the way in which media professionals make their own contributions and deliver commentary. In discussing news, which he describes as the heart of the mediated public sphere (2007: 59), Richards employs a psychoanalytical model and concentrates on the affective dynamic surrounding the production of news. Drawing on the concept of emotional labour formulated by American sociologist Arlie Hochschild in 1983<sup>80</sup>, Richards extends the idea to journalists. Although some are facing the consumer, for example television news presenters, even those who are not in physical contact with the reader or viewer must use, whether knowingly or not, their emotional responses to the world in the course of their professional practice. The product, or news story, will reflect these responses and in turn have a direct impact on those for whom it has been produced (2007: 65):

“When we pick up the familiar paper, or watch the assured presence and listen to the authoritative words of the television newscaster, we are both finding out something of what's happening in the world, and finding ourselves in relation to it, as our emotional responses are stimulated and steered by the content of what we read or see, by the emotional tone of the presentation and by the degree of containment it offers.”

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<sup>80</sup> Her influential study focused on flight attendants and the fact that as part of their job they had to smile and display other signs of emotional positivity in their dealings with passengers.

Richards' work on the psychosocial aspects of journalism practice appeals to me as a complementary perspective to Wetherell's concept of affective practice because it focuses on the grey areas around editorial decision making, taking in the contextual background and dynamic of a story, including the added element of user-generated content. Sometimes, he argues, tones of feeling will build up over time, while in other cases, such as for example in dramatic news items on terror attacks, the experience can be overwhelming. Viewing these from his angle of emotional governance (and what would appear to be a rationalist perspective), Richards warns of the risk that news coverage of such attacks, relying on images and 'raw'<sup>81</sup> terror produced by citizen journalists, will provide people with less material in order to process trauma. The continued repetition of moments of terror, made technologically possible by digital footage and 24-hour news delivery, can according to Richards lead to insufficient framing by the media which could otherwise manage panic, contain anxieties and provide explanation or context. In a similar vein, Zelizer and Allan, in their 2002 edited collection *Journalism after September 11*, suggest that journalism plays a key role in the movement of a whole population from trauma to recovery through three stages: establishing safety, engaging in remembrance and mourning, and reconnecting with ordinary life (2002: 2).

Both professionals and academics have also sought to investigate how journalists work together as a group. This goes beyond the strong professional identity and ideology that I outlined in Chapter One and focuses on journalists as a community or, to use the journalistic jargon, 'packs' and the so-called 'pack mentality.'

Zelizer, for example (1993: 219) argues the notion of viewing journalism through the single lens of a 'profession' may not be the most fruitful and can be complemented by the concept of journalists as members of an 'interpretive community.' This, she proposes, is united through its shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events. She adds (ibid: 221):

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<sup>81</sup> Images from citizens submitted to news organisations or posted online are raw in the sense that they have not been edited by journalists but are still mediated through the technology of their transmission.



“An alternative frame is needed to address the relevance and function of so-called ‘pack journalism’, media pools, briefings, membership in social clubs, and other ways that reporters absorb rules, boundaries and a sense of appropriateness about their actions without ever actually being informed of them by superiors.”

Zelizer investigates the tacit and shared understandings of journalists but mainly through the lens of discourse and how news is framed. Applying theories of affect such as those put forward by Venn and his focus on collective ensembles (2010) offers the opportunity to build on Zelizer’s work and add an affective dimension. Some other academics have seen the pack mentality as stemming from commercial pressure, either because news organisations have a tendency to prolong newsworthy stories around negative events such as crime and scandal for profit (McQuail, 2013: 113) or because competitive pressures prompt journalists to focus on the same events of most immediacy and highest priority (ibid: 135). Vasterman (2005) examined how ‘huge news waves’ can be generated around a specific story, leading to ‘media hype.’ There is, he argues, something of a self-fulfilling prophecy attached to this type of hyped story (ibid: 509):

“Hardly any news editor is able to resist the temptation of such an attractive story; it must be reported, because the competition is doing so, because it has consequences for main figures in the public arena and, of course, because the massive news wave itself is news.”

Vasterman investigates how such news waves can amplify an event but he does this through analysing what he calls ‘positive feedback loops’ as the news feeds more news, a uniformly framed ‘news theme’ emerges (in a way similar to Zelizer’s argument), and feedback from news consumers reinforces the story. Professional journalists have also emphasised the competitive element behind pack journalism and the fear of missing a story others have (Luyendijk, 2010; Marr, 2004). As Phillips observes (2015: 11), the fear of failing to get the news is probably more pressing for the majority of journalists than the surge of adrenalin that comes with the publication of a true exclusive. Tumber (2004:

190) comes closer to an affective dimension of such pack mentality in his analysis of the correspondents who were embedded with the British task force during the 1982 Falklands War. The journalists were wholly reliant on the soldiers, with the result that “the journalists not only shared the moods of the troops through collective experience but also began to identify with them by being part of the whole exercise” (ibid: 191).

### *2.7 Television as an affective medium*

My empirical investigation of the affective dimension of covering traumatic news stories in today’s multi-media environment necessarily takes in not just print, but also images, television and social media flows such as those emanating from Twitter and Facebook. For this reason, the journalists I have interviewed for my empirical research represent a cross-section of disciplines from print to broadcast and social media. This next section looks at how theories of affect have been applied specifically to television, while I will review later the application to a multi-media environment.

Historically, analysis of television has tended to revolve around a binary approach to consumption or audience studies, with the *active* articulate, thinking middle class viewer able to engage critically with what is on the screen and the *passive* working-class masses seen as easily influenced (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001). Recent work applying ideas of affect to television and Reality TV has, however, focused on the fact that audiences can be both critically and emotionally engaged at the same time. Kavka (2008) calls television “a medium of intimacy” which brings things closer spatially, temporally and emotionally, collapsing “distance and time through the production of affective proximity” (ibid: 7). Blackman (2012: 70) points out how this work rearticulates understandings of mental touch<sup>82</sup>, which were central to ways of thinking about mediated communications in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Andriopoulos (2008: 15) goes as far as to link the emergence of television with a fascination at that time with psychic research, clairvoyance, thought transference

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<sup>82</sup> According to Blackman mental touch was conceived as a kind of psychic energy which flowed through and between bodies where bodies acted as lightning rods or conductors (2012: 51).

and telepathy. Andriopoulos states that early theories of film “described the new medium itself as exerting an irresistible hypnotic influence over its spellbound audience” (ibid: 4). People were concerned about being controlled by a hidden force. Much as Tarde considered the printing press to be an invention that facilitated affective transfer across distance and helped shape society, Kavka suggests that television’s affective force offers proximity despite spatial separation (2008: 13). In her theorisation of affect, Kavka defines affect as the zone of potential emotions which have not yet been differentiated, or aligned, with objects (2008: 31) (thus separate from emotion). She refers to a ‘cusp formation’, whereby the cusp serves as a ‘point of emergence’ for particular material forms a feeling may inhabit. If affect takes material form across a cusp, it is possible to think of one such cusp formation as the television screen (2008: 35)<sup>83</sup>. This raises the possibility in turn that affect can be generated not just by physical proximity but by technologies of mediation such as the television screen, replaying and relaying affective circuits. Grusin (2010: 96) takes a similar line, arguing that it is logical to assume that affective states should co-evolve with media and new technologies.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Kavka applies her theories of affect to two high profile news stories, the Sept 11 attacks on the United States and the death and funeral of Princess Diana. The televised framing of major events creates a community of viewing, particularly when transmitted live, and is loaded with affect (2008:19). The television screen becomes not a barrier separating people between illusory and real worlds but rather it is a ‘join’ that amplifies affect and connects real people on one side with real people on the other side. This creates a shared reality cohered by what Kavka refers to as “affective glue” (2008: 37), recalling Ahmed’s concept of “stickiness” in texts. Princess Diana’s death and funeral is also a clear example of how a global connectivity can be created between viewers and distant others (Blackman, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Kavka, 2008). The outpouring of grief by what the media consistently call ‘ordinary people’ recalls 19<sup>th</sup> Century theories on crowds by Le Bon and others which focus on their suggestibility and the ease in which they can be swayed by affect.

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<sup>83</sup> Another point of emergence that I explore later is the news interview conducted by journalists (See Chapter Six).

Kavka redefines the public sphere as “an ongoing accretion of the affective relations of the everyday, especially as such relations are publicised and commodified through media forms like reality television” (2008: 52).

It is this ability to amplify affect through volume – accretion and commoditisation – that I argue is of such relevance to today’s practice of journalism as it spills over from clearly defined containers (print, television) into multi-media formats and draws on a mass of user-generated content. I will examine this perspective next.

### *2.8 Multi-media and Affect*

One of the key insights of Tarde was his identification of the role that technological developments play in social transformation and transmission of ideas (Clark, 1969). In Tarde’s day, as observed above, this was the printing press. Subsequent advances such as the radio broadcast<sup>84</sup> and then television (as discussed by Kavka, Gorton and others) underlined the affective potential of such technology and its capacity to amplify affect. New media and multi-media formats add a further dimension to the mix. As Sampson (2012: 2) observes, ‘virals’ and ‘memes’ are the marketing buzzwords of choice in an age of networks. Human communication in a so-called age of networks, he argues, is increasingly redefined as a media virus although this metaphor suggests there is too much connectivity and therefore, in his view, is not particularly helpful in explaining affective flows (ibid: 13). Clough (2008) argues that digitisation makes possible a profound expansion of the senses. Knudsen and Stage (2012) highlight how the Internet creates a range of milieus where the ability to affect and be affected is different compared with face-to-face communication and non-digital media:

“The affective potential of the Internet ... is its intertwinement of *immediacy*<sup>85</sup> (the users relate to events as they occur), its *loosening of*

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<sup>84</sup> See Chapter One, p 51 for a discussion of the 1938 broadcast *The War of the Worlds*.

<sup>85</sup> Authors’ original italics.

*spacial constraints* (the users can be situated all over the world) and its *interactivity* (the users can communicate with each other as individuals)” (2012: 149).

Hansen (2004) illustrates the affective impact of a digital image by referring to an art installation<sup>86</sup> by the video artist Bill Viola who created an 82-minute digital video depicting imperceptibly minute changes in facial affect on three close-up images. Because the video has been radically slowed down, the viewer sees stages *in between* recognisable emotional states (echoing Gregg and Seigworth’s concept of *in-between-ness*). For Hansen, Viola’s *Anima* exemplifies the capacity of new media to expand the bodily experience of affectivity (2004: 585). This allows us to experience “the very process through which our constitutive living present continually (re) emerges from moment to moment.” Massumi has also reflected on the affective role of digital media, focusing on the dynamic of the news cycle. In an article in *The Guardian* newspaper (2011), Massumi analyses the 24-hour news cycle of the Japanese earthquake in April 2011 as it moved from the horror of the rubble to the rescue operations, the human stories of survival and Japanese people’s calm and fortitude in the face of disaster.

“... nothing can ever expunge the horror. It will be archived. The images of the disaster will be held indefinitely in store. For as long as there is an Internet, they will remain available for recirculation. It is not so much that the horror is replaced by human warmth and its accompaniments. It is rather that it ‘decays’ in the media. The horror transmutes into a different affective element, its intensity halved, then halved again, eventually reducing to trace levels. Globally, the event settles back into a more stable range of the periodic table of collective emotion.”

For Massumi, modern news media play a role of ‘affective conversion’ with predictable regularity, from the instantaneous first transmission of the event to subsequent phases of the story, creating a “continuous, low-level fear” which becomes an everyday “threat environment”. This in turn has political and power

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<sup>86</sup> *Anima*, see: <http://www.billviola.com/>

consequences in that the threat environment becomes an open field for autocratic intervention and arbitrary exercise of power. For example, the Fukushima reactor crisis became an opportunity for Japan to deploy its military which had not been since World War Two. The blurring of boundaries between war and peace is legitimated affectively through the media-driven affective circuit (ibid). Grusin (2010) also picks up on the issue of threat in his work *Premediation*, arguing that U.S. media have perpetuated an almost constant, low level of fear about a terrorist attack to prevent citizens from experiencing the kind of traumatic shock produced by Sept 11. While structures of feeling operate in media every day, it is in periods of crisis that affective forces become more intense and more visible, a phenomenon that has been amplified by social media. Grusin argues that the combination of televisual immediacy and what he terms digital hypermediacy<sup>87</sup> have the capacity to produce a collective affective sense of shock and terror (2010: 152):

“This fascination with social media on the part of mainstream media marked the transformation of the notion of perpetual or affective immediacy from the liveness of video to the connectivity of social networking.”

These ideas have almost exclusively been applied to the reception of news by consumers but are particularly relevant for my empirical investigation of journalism practice and how journalists cover traumatic news in today’s social media environment. Equally, they are helpful in my exploration of how the flows of user-generated images are handled in a newsroom and the impact they might have on journalists themselves and their practice of journalism.

Frosh and Pinchevski (2009: 295) have in a similar way suggested that today’s media saturation has transformed crises from a significant isolated ‘media event’ to a “generalised and routine background condition, a persistent crisis readiness.” Witnessing is performed *in, by* and *through* the media – witnesses appear in reports, journalists bear witness themselves, and media audiences are positioned

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<sup>87</sup> Grusin uses the term hypermediacy to refer to the proliferation of diverse and interconnected media formats of social networking (2010: 3).

as witnesses of the events (ibid: 296). The singularity of a media event can now be reproduced thanks to digital recording techniques an infinite number of times, as for example the way in which the impact of the second hi-jacked plane in the World Trade Center south tower was repeatedly broadcast on a loop. Frosh and Pinchevski argue (ibid: 301) that such reporting generates a collective trauma or “the mediated *enabling*<sup>88</sup> of crisis-emotions among those who were not physically present at the event but nevertheless felt themselves affected by it (‘this could very well happen to us’).” This collective trauma need not apply only to the public or consumers of news. In my empirical research I investigate the impact of such trends on journalists themselves, not just those covering in real-time a breaking news story, but also the experience of those handling material at one stage removed on an editorial desk operation.

In another examination of the impact of online technology, Knudsen and Stage (2012) examined the affective response to a political hunger strike, which was pursued through an online campaign driven by a web site, blogs and online debates. The Climate Justice Fast (CJF) campaign carried out in 2009 illustrated for Knudsen and Stage how the combination of a global online presence and image of the starved body was highly affective and “highly contagious” (2012: 148). Equally, the affective power of the body can be difficult to control for such a campaign because people interpret it in different ways, meaning that the “the starved body ... seems to be affectively powerful and semantically unruly” (ibid). It appears that the affective action of imitation varied from those who were mobilised to act in support of the campaign (a similar act of protest against climate change) and those who were motivated to join the hunger strike (a similar act of fasting). This unpredictable affective response recalls the uneven reactions by global television audiences of for example, the Sept 11 attacks and funeral of Princess Diana.

Stage (2012) also examines the affective impact of a social media platform such as YouTube and mobile recording technologies in an analysis of user-generated videos from a Lady Gaga<sup>88</sup> concert in Denmark in 2010. Echoing Kavka’s analysis of the amplification of affect through the television screen, Stage investigates

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<sup>88</sup> The authors’ original italics.

how the ‘liveness’ of an event can be intensified through mediation (as opposed to actually being there). The technology acts in two different ways: video screens at the concert relayed images of the live action and mobile phones were used to record action and, by using a zoom function, to deliver close-ups. For Stage, the mediation is not only a ‘sign’ for the brain to understand and decode but also a ‘signal’ or force whose social role is to affect bodily states and connect bodies with places and other bodies (2012: 3). Those spectators shooting videos are not only documenting the Lady Gaga concert to produce signs but are also part of it as contributors or producers. The videos can therefore be analysed as far more than the understanding of mediation as representation or the encoding of semiotic structures of meaning.

But online technology can also have perverse consequences and not all applications amplify affect. By drawing on the example of the 1999 Nora Ephron film *You’ve Got Mail*, Illouz (2007: 74) observes how the Internet self appears to be far more authentic than the social, public self. The central question for Illouz is how a global, impersonal matrix of computers can create deep romantic relationships. The answer implicit in the film is that the Internet is a technology that annuls the body, allowing a more authentic (disembodied) self to come through. But in some way, the technology of the Internet must rearticulate corporeality and emotions (2007: 75). In her analysis of online dating sites in *Romantic Webs*, the third lecture collated in *Cold Intimacies*, Illouz outlines how participants have to create a representation of themselves through filling out questionnaires and using their own descriptions of the self. The body is often reduced to one photograph, the process of partner selection to a rational, disembodied textual search in what is effectively a competitive marketplace. This seems to be the opposite to traditional concepts of romantic love since the Internet makes cognitive knowledge of another precede one’s sentiments in both time and importance (2007: 90). Illouz goes on to catalogue a litany of disappointment, reflecting the fact that matches are not made on the basis of attraction based in the body but rely on a mass of text-based cognitive knowledge and a prevalence of language that interferes with the process of visual and bodily recognition.



## 2.9 Conclusion

In its broadest sense, the turn to affect represents disenchantment with traditional forms of media and cultural analysis and the perceived limitations in explaining the workings of today's digitally connected global media ecology.

In his influential 1995 essay *The Autonomy of Affect*, Massumi laments the lack of a cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect and the fact that terminology was at that time wedded to theories of signification (2002: 27). Some 20 years later, the growth of literature on affect has touched on virtually every aspect of society, from mainstream forms of media such as television (Gorton, 2009; Kavka 2008), to Lady Gaga concerts captured on mobile phones (Stage, 2012); from voice hearing and telepathy (Blackman, 2012) to a dying steel making community in South Wales (Walkerdine, 2008); from abstract concepts of power, fear and threat to online dating (Grusin, 2010; Massumi, 2011; Illouz, 2007). As Gregg and Seigworth observe (2010: 4), it is sometimes hard not to have the impression of being in some form of methodological and conceptual free fall. But it is this very immateriality, lack of clear cause and effect, and *in-between-ness* that theorists seek to capture in the turn to affect, which serves to explain why there are so many diverse renderings of affect and so many tensions as illustrated by Leys in her 2011 critique.

The examples of affect theory examined in this chapter have two things in common: firstly, they all touch on the complex relationship between today's media, individuals and the circulation of affect to broader social groups; secondly, there is relatively little application to the actual practice of journalism and its affective dimensions. Massumi analyses the 24-hour news cycle to focus on the power consequences, Ahmed illustrates how news stories can generate waves of public feeling as emotions coalesce around a term such as 'asylum seeker'. A revival of interest in Tarde's ideas around suggestion, imitation and contagion more than 100 years ago serve to highlight the role of psychic phenomena, thought transference and telepathy, and the ability of technology to extend the boundaries of communication. Wetherell and Richards, building on a psychosocial tradition, recognise the role of the unconscious but play down the 19<sup>th</sup> Century fascination with the mysterious and uncanny.

In analysis of the affective potential of digital media, theorists have identified several ‘sites of emergence’ – the television screen, the mobile phone, YouTube, time-delayed video screens, and the Internet as a whole. Such technology can convey immediacy (even through recorded footage such as Reality TV); can combine communities across physical boundaries (from Tarde’s newly defined public to Internet-based climate change campaigns); can create interactivity (from blogs to online dating sites) and transform consumers of media to producers or performers. In addition, these technologies have the capacity to amplify, intensify and prolong affect.

With such a diversity of theory, I have attempted to highlight in this literature review those elements which have helped shape my research methodology to explore the affective dimension of journalism practice. I have argued that the reinvigoration of Tarde’s ideas points a way to analysing affective flows between journalists in their practice (as opposed to between journalists and their public), while insights by Grusin and Kavka are valuable in considering how technologies, including user-generated images, can amplify and spread affect. Again, my interest is how that affect might swell in a newsroom or expand across a community of journalists covering a traumatic news story as opposed to its flow to consumers of news. Equally, I will draw on the psychosocial approach set out by Wetherell, particularly her concept of ‘affective practice’, to inform my investigation. The next chapter will elaborate on the design of my research methodology.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEWS, JOURNALISM AND EMOTION

*“With a flick of a page, a change in channel or a shift into another conversation, one can sometimes surface somewhere else, in a different affective region or affective practice. Each wave of communal affect exerts a physical grab, as our bodies begin to enact anger, or compassion, or shake with laughter, and as we become positioned in relation to the available figures, narratives and affective possibilities.” - Wetherell (2012: 141)*

*“Affect has simply become an accepted background to so much work, a necessary part of the firmament through which the forms and shifts of any analysis are extruded.” - Thrift (2010: 290)*

#### *3.1. Introduction*

As Margaret Wetherell observes, it is hard to escape the waves of public feeling generated by today’s media, whether it be with a flick of a newspaper page or the zap of a channel, as the reader or viewer is swept up in waves of communal anxiety or the warm ooze of sentimental pity (2012: 140). It was the raw emotion running through the news coverage of the Sept 11 attacks that provided the starting point for this doctoral thesis and the impetus for a wider investigation into news, journalism and emotion. It was a time when the norms of fact-based reporting appeared to have been universally suspended and journalists felt thrust into what has been conceptualised as a ‘sphere of consensus’ (Hallin, 1986), adopting what has even been called a priestly or pastoral mode (Schudson, 2002) as a nation came under threat. But how does news work to generate emotion, why does a broadcast sometimes send a shiver down our spine as an individual or cause a wave of shared panic to spread across a nation? In an age of 24-hour media that can be accessed on any platform, anywhere at any time, it is difficult to escape violent and traumatic news, whether it be the civil conflicts of the Arab Spring or an act of brutality on the streets of London when a soldier is hacked to death in broad daylight. In what has been called ‘the new visibility’ (Thompson, 2005), emotive unedited footage of violence and grief is finding its way into mainstream news outlets via ordinary citizens armed with little more than a

mobile phone. Yet as I set out in Chapter Two, when it comes to the study of journalism, the concept of emotion is under-theorised (Peters, 2011) and all too often superficially conflated with ‘bad’ or tabloid practice, with sensationalism or the adverse impact of commercial pressures.

This chapter elaborates on the key research questions set out in the introductory chapter and discusses the methodology used to explore the affective dimension of journalism practice as is evidenced in the context of traumatic news events. Key to the latter is a conviction that in our global, digitally connected media environment sole reliance on traditional, cognitive methods of media analysis is insufficient to investigate the practice of journalism and that such analytical approaches have sidelined the body, sensation and affect in understanding the process of communication (Blackman, 2012). As Thrift (2010) states, applying affect theories to media, culture, society and politics has become widely accepted over the past few years. This is not to suggest that I have abandoned drawing on conventional readings of textual analysis, semiotics and media effects. Nor is to suggest that they are discrete methodologies to be kept at arm’s length from each other. As Wetherell argues, human affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and the semiotic, it being futile to try to pull them apart (2012: 20).

### *3.2 Overview of Research Questions and Methodology*

This thesis is built around an exploration through in-depth interviews of the lived experience of 25 journalists involved in the coverage of traumatic news stories both in the pre-Internet era and in today’s social media environment of user-generated content. The overarching research question I set out to address was to investigate the relationship between news, journalism and emotion. As my research progressed, I focused in detail on two overarching questions:

- What are the affective processes, behaviours and practices of news journalism in relation to the coverage of traumatic events?
- And is that affective dimension changing in today’s digital, globally interconnected media landscape?

Specifically, I wanted to explore several areas of journalism practice through the lens of affect:

- What is a journalist’s relationship to norms of objectivity and detachment when covering traumatic news?
- How do journalists cope with the stresses and strains of such cover?
- What is it that drives the herd or ‘pack’ instinct when journalists descend en masse on a breaking news story?
- How do journalists interview vulnerable people caught up in tragedy?
- What is the impact of gruesome user-generated content images that are now becoming a routine part of the news file?

In doing so, my aim was to make a contribution to knowledge by uncovering, identifying and categorising the affective dimension of news journalism in the context of such stories.

For my interviews, I employed an experiential qualitative methodology, drawing on the discipline of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I considered this the most appropriate technique to explore the lived experience of journalists *within the context of their environment*, taking into account – amongst many diverse issues - personal backgrounds, the nature of a story, the type of competitive situation and the nature of their news organisation. Throughout I have tried to complement my interview data by drawing on more than 20 years of my own experience as a foreign correspondent and editor at Reuters and on the past decade working pro bono with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma to support journalists exposed to traumatic news stories.

Through analysis of my interview data, I have sought to identify the affective dimension of journalism practice by drawing on ideas of suggestion, contagion and imitation set out mainly in the work of Venn (2010) and Wetherell (2012). I

elaborate later in this chapter on how their work in each case can be applied to the exploration journalism practice and how it is suited to today's world of social media.

I have also taken into account two further perspectives to help in my analysis of interview data. Firstly, I have been very conscious of the power of journalism's normative values and the way these influence practice to shape or frame<sup>89</sup> a story, whether that be by employing the 'inverted pyramid' structure of narrative or 'outsourcing emotion' to the subjects of a news report. I have therefore sought to tease out such issues in my interviews and tried to relate them to the affective dimension. Secondly, I have found Bourdieu's (1984, 1990, 1998) concepts of field, habitus and doxa useful in trying to analyse the environments of today's journalism practice with its hierarchies, power structures, defences and, most recently, attempts to distinguish itself from content produced by citizen journalists. This approach is closely related to boundary work which has increasingly been applied to journalism as social media challenges the norms of 'legacy' media organisations (Carlson & Lewis, 2015).

Subsequent sections in this chapter therefore set out in more detail each of these methodological perspectives of my research design, dealing with IPA, affect, Bourdieu and elements of traditional news analysis. But first of all, I set out below the news stories I selected as background to the empirical research and how I chose my interview subjects.

### *3.3 Choosing the news stories as background to the empirical investigation*

The day-to-day practice of journalism is, of course, often routine and played out within well-established pre-constructed templates or frames that tend to determine both the way a journalist approaches a story and the final product. But

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<sup>89</sup> Goffman (1974) is usually credited with coining the concept of 'framing' in relation to social interaction. In analysis of journalism, it refers to ways in which news stories represent reality and the way in which journalists select and highlight particular aspects of a story. In media studies, it is often traced back to an article by Robert Entman published in 1993: Entman, R. B., 1993. Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43, pp 51–58.

when tragedy, conflict or violence strikes, pressures on individual journalists can be immense (Berrington & Jemphrey, 2003). At such times, research (which I will outline later below) has shown that journalism's powerful objectivity norm tends to be challenged or, as in the case of Sept 11, fundamentally disrupted. I know all too well from my own experience at Reuters that it is a time when a journalist's own doubts and hesitations can rise to the surface. So it was important for me to identify a series of similar news stories to form the backdrop of my research interviews with journalists.

My goal has not been to analyse these stories, *per se*, but rather to explore the lived experience and practice of journalists caught up in them, either because they covered them in the field, or 'desked' them, or had to make editorial decisions around them. They are therefore an essential part of the environment in which journalists carry out their practice and were also a key means of identifying the journalists I chose to interview.

The background to my investigation is therefore made up of stories which fulfil the criteria of challenging the journalistic norms. I chose one story specifically from the pre-social media era: the 1996 shooting of primary school children in Dunblane, Scotland. The focus after that was on stories where journalists were in one way or another involved in covering contemporary traumatic news. These included, but as my investigation progressed were not limited to, the chemical weapons attack on a suburb of Damascus in 2013, the attempt to behead an off-duty soldier drummer Lee Rigby outside his barracks in south east London in the same year and the ISIS-inspired terror attacks on Paris in November 2015.

In choosing the Dunblane shooting, I aimed to investigate practice at a time before the influence of social media on reporting - not all correspondents sent to the scene even had a mobile phone. By contrast, the news stories in 2013 and subsequent years took place in the full glare of social media and the content provided by 'citizens', as opposed to 'professional' journalists, was key to how the stories were told. The aim was to tease out any differences or similarities in journalistic behaviour against the backdrop of changes in the technology of news. Almost all the stories discussed in the thesis contain powerful imagery,

whether in the form of traditional photography or social media content, and all strong public and political response. Each posed a serious challenge to the objectivity norm of professional journalism and allied concepts such as detachment and impartiality. Magnus Linklater (1996), a highly experienced journalist who spent a week covering the Dunblane shootings for The Times, said at the time that it was as traumatic as any story he had covered. The four stories that featured most prominently are as follows:

- *Dunblane massacre*: on March 13, 1996, shortly after 9:30 a.m., a 43-year-old gunman Thomas Hamilton entered a primary school and shot dead 16 pupils and one teacher. Alongside the 1987 Hungerford massacre and the 2010 shootings in Cumbria, it is one of the worst public shootings in the history of the United Kingdom. It quickly became an international story, with broadcasters converging on the city from all over the world. The inhabitants of Dunblane were at first welcoming but later turned against the mass press presence. British broadcasters agreed to withdraw and not cover the children's funerals. It was also therefore a good story through which to investigate the herd mentality of journalists.
- *Damascus attack*: graphic video footage on August 21, 2013 of children writhing in agony at what later turned out to be confirmed by UN inspectors as a Sarin gas attack in Damascus caused international outrage. Nabila Ramdani, a French-Arab journalist who had worked extensively in Syria, recounted how her contacts in the country sent her almost contemporaneously video footage of children dying from the effects of nerve agents. Western foreign correspondents have had extremely limited access to the Syrian conflict and media organisations have had to rely heavily on content from citizens caught up in the conflict, official government sources and opposition movements. The Arab Spring has widely been viewed as a turning point in the public sharing of amateur images (Anden-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013).



- *London street attack*: on May 22, 2013, British army drummer Lee Rigby was hacked to death in broad daylight outside his barracks in Woolwich, London. His two assailants calmly engaged passers-by in conversation, waiting to ensure that they were captured by mobile phone footage before the arrival of the police. Video of one of the attackers wielding a machete in his bloodied hands, bought by The Sun and ITN prompted 700 complaints to the broadcasting regulator Ofcom, which later launched an investigation into the decision of some broadcasters to air the footage. Most major daily newspapers used ‘screen grabs’ from the footage for their front pages the next morning.
  
- *Paris attacks*: on November 13, 2015, a series of terror attacks took place in Paris. Three suicide bombers struck outside a football match in the suburb of Saint-Denis, followed by drive-by shootings and another suicide bomb in the centre of the city. A mass shooting took place at the Bataclan Theatre where 1,500 were at a concert featuring the American rock band Eagles of Death Metal. The terrorists killed 130, including 89 at the Bataclan. People caught up in the attack captured dramatic pictures on their mobile phones.

I consciously chose ‘hard news’ stories and did not take account of ‘soft news’, opinion pieces or leader columns. Phillips (2015: 12) characterises hard news as that which used to be associated with the front pages of newspapers or used to lead a news bulletin (as opposed to soft news which can be dismissed by some as ‘infotainment’ (ibid)). To understand the issues around coverage of Dunblane, I immersed myself in one week’s worth of UK newspaper stories from The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Mirror and the Sun and coverage by public service television broadcasters the BBC and ITV (whose news is delivered by ITN, the Independent Television Network). For the contemporary stories I drew on coverage from traditional sources (newspapers and broadcasters as above) and online operations for the above newspapers, with the addition of the Mail Online (which in the intervening years had established a strong online presence).

As mentioned earlier, the choice of stories was informed by academic research into the circumstances that can lead to the disruption of journalism's norms around objectivity. Analysing Sept 11, Sreberny (2002: 221) has argued that the combination of what was a global media event watched live by millions on television and the outpouring of emotion created an "affective public sphere". The everyday taken-for-granted norms of journalism were shaken in rushed opinion and emotion, driven by trauma (ibid):

"The balance seemed to shift between the ordinary work of journalism and a kind of extraordinary writing that people seemed to need to write and others to read – writing as catharsis, writing trauma out of ourselves, trauma talk."

Other academics have identified a series of triggers, which can lead to the normative rules of journalism being challenged or disrupted. In the wake of Sept 11, Schudson (2002: 40) attempted to define the criteria that led journalists to move into Hallin's sphere of consensus in which they cast aside the more normal reporting behaviour or the "sphere of legitimate controversy" (Hallin, 1986). Schudson (ibid) identifies three typical circumstances when normative journalistic behaviour breaks down:

- i) In moments of tragedy, journalists tend to assume a pastoral role. This is characterised by hushed, reverent tones of television and radio presenters and is evident at times of political assassination (e.g. President Kennedy in 1963), state funerals or the mourning of victims;
- ii) In moments of public danger, whether from terror attacks or natural disaster (such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005) journalists tend to offer practical advice (e.g. disseminating a public health campaign) and communicate solidarity;

- iii) In moments of threats to national security (e.g. the botched American invasion of the Bay of Pigs on Cuba in 1961) journalists tend to willingly withhold or temper their reports.

For Schudson, Sept 11 fulfilled all three criteria – a tragedy, public danger and a threat to national security, which led to President George W Bush declaring ‘War on Terror’.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Rosenstiel and Kovach (2005) identified similar criteria for what they judged to be the legitimate injection of emotion as they attempted to redefine ‘feeling rules’<sup>90</sup> associated with journalism. For them, the suspension of normative professional behaviour is linked to a time when any other reaction would seem forced or out of place. As an example, they point out that Cronkite’s tears after President Kennedy’s death struck Americans as appropriate. “*It was simply what it was – a human reaction, difficult to control*” (ibid). Sept 11 and Hurricane Katrina also qualify when measured against their criteria. But they also maintain that once journalists have reacted emotionally, they should then compose themselves and address issues of responsibility for how and why things happened. In Rosenstiel and Kovach’s model, journalists should return to the objectivity norm once the news cycle becomes calmer.

Each of the news stories chosen as the backdrop to my thesis met at least two of the criteria discussed above. The Dunblane school shooting was a tragedy involving the death of young children, which led to a national outpouring of grief and traumatised the close-knit local community. The Woolwich killing of drummer Rigby, the chemical weapons attack in Damascus and terror rampage in Paris were all examples of public danger.

### *3.4 Choosing the Journalists*

Journalists were chosen for interview on the basis of their involvement in covering such traumatic news stories. Sometimes I approached them ‘cold’ having identified their role in a story through published stories (this was

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<sup>90</sup> See discussion later in this chapter, p 123.

especially the case in Dunblane where I had immersed myself in the newspaper archive coverage)<sup>91</sup>; at other times I was able to draw on personal connections and my own social capital, using my extensive network of contacts from my years at Reuters as a foreign correspondent or as the agency's Global Head of News. This clearly had its advantages in being able to open many doors, but it also ran the risks of one former journalist interviewing one current journalist in an all too comfortable environment. Very quickly I found that I shared with my interview subjects, of whatever generation, an almost secret language, a shorthand of terms, attitudes and habits. That in itself bears testimony to the powerful identity of journalism. It was also the trigger that opened up a new theoretical perspective of employing some of Bourdieu's concepts as a tool to help analyse my interview material.<sup>92</sup>

A second criterion in choosing my 25 interview subjects<sup>93</sup> was the aim of capturing three distinct areas of journalism practice, hoping to tease out common themes and potential differences – that of the correspondent sent in at short notice to cover a breaking news story; that of the journalist working back at headquarters on a desk operation; and those running an editorial operation in a management or news leadership position. Five of the journalists worked for British or American newspapers, four worked for news agencies, four were freelance journalists and 12 worked in various areas of broadcast – from the BBC to ITN and from traditional news gathering to social media hubs in the broadcast newsroom.

I was keen to investigate practice across diverse aspects of journalism where different power structures, hierarchies and seniorities are at play. I myself am familiar with each of these areas of activity, having been a foreign correspondent in the field in a number of different countries, having worked on a desk operation

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<sup>91</sup> In seeking to interview journalists who had covered a traumatic news story in the pre-Internet era, I had considered the 1966 Aberfan tragedy in which 116 children and 28 adults died when a colliery tip slid down the mountainside and engulfed a primary school. It proved, however, difficult to identify journalists who covered that story because it was so long ago. In practical terms, some of those who covered Dunblane are still active journalists today and so had the ability to make comparisons with news in the current social media environment.

<sup>92</sup> See discussion later in this chapter, p 116.

<sup>93</sup> In addition to 25 journalists, I interviewed one social worker and one senior council official, both of whom had been involved with the media in the Dunbane story.

as a sub-editor, and having been in editorial leadership and news editing roles. The selection of journalists was designed to capture a cross section of media outlets, from those writing for newspapers to those working for television and those operating with social media. By doing so, I have also taken in a cross section of ages and seniorities, reflecting the profession's natural pattern which often sees junior journalists working on social media desks and the most senior and experienced in leadership roles. I have tried to ensure that a good balance of male and female journalists was interviewed. This has been essential as part of my goal of challenging existing norms whereby, in the simplistic mindset of the objectivity norm, men are often seen as reporting 'hard news', in an objective fashion, while social stereotyping would have women journalists providing 'softer' human interest stories (Carter et al., 1998). In their analysis of the Dunblane shooting, Berrington and Jemphrey (2003: 227) observed this dynamic, with women frequently providing feature and colour stories with strong emotional content in contrast to their male colleagues who concerned themselves more with fact-based reporting. Appendix 1 sets out the profiles of those I interviewed, capturing age, gender, nationality, the medium of their work and their positions in journalism.

### *3.5 Using an experiential approach and ethical considerations*

My main approach for interviewing was based on the qualitative methodology known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Braun & Clarke 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 1996; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), reflecting my own view and personal experience that it is impossible to analyse the practice of journalism without taking into account the context of the journalist in all its aspects. IPA has a phenomenological aspect, based on the idea that a person is a self-reflexive, self-interpretative being, i.e. a person who attempts to reflect on their experiences and make sense of them (Braun & Clarke, 2013: 181). At the same time, IPA has an interpretative element. It recognises that the researcher cannot access another person's world *directly*, meaning researchers have to use their *own* interpretative resources (ibid). This dual approach means staying close to a participant/ interviewee's account of their experience while at the same time standing back on it and asking why they are

interpreting it in a certain way. I have been aware of a potential contradiction between the self-reflexive nature of IPA and the use of affect theories which privilege the unconscious but in practical terms I found that my questions did often prompt the interview subject to reflect on their experience and that in practical terms it was often very difficult to disentangle the conscious from the unconscious.

In using semi-structured face-to-face interviews, I have been careful to avoid an overly cognitive approach, an approach which comes naturally to a former 'hard news' journalist. Instead, I have sought to explore the feelings of journalists as they are confronted with a fast moving crisis or difficult news situations. Hollway & Jefferson (2013: 4) maintain that traditional interview techniques fail to bring out the confusions, ambivalences and contradictions of a subject; far richer qualitative research data comes from an interview technique that posits that a subject's inner world cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the outer world and vice-versa. This would appear to be highly relevant to journalists whose ideology and professional norms rest on being able to observe the outer world for their audience and, ostensibly at least, detaching themselves from their own feelings. Hollway and Jefferson urge an interview technique that places good listening at the forefront, allowing the interviewee to be a storyteller rather than a respondent. That can be a difficult discipline for a former journalist such as myself who worked in an agency environment where direct questions, often posed under time constraints, were the norm. But I tried to ask open questions, allowing narrative to develop and sometimes changing direction according to the interview subject's experiences.

I found very quickly, from my first interviews, that it was best to begin with the contextualisation of my thesis, namely my personal experience and my objective of investigating the normative values of journalism and unpacking the component parts of the objectivity paradigm in relation to the coverage of traumatic news stories. In doing so, I was careful not to prejudice or steer the outcomes and aimed more to 'break the ice and facilitate an open conversation. My aim throughout has been to elicit nuanced and reflexive responses that go beyond the familiar discourse of journalism's norms.

Questions were therefore designed to probe without unduly prompting, e.g.

- Can we explore a bit more...
- I am quite intrigued by that...
- How do you deal with these sorts of stories journalistically...

The following questions provided my outline for interviews:

- What do you remember most about covering Dunblane (or other story)?
- Can you talk me through how you deal with these sorts of stories journalistically?
- What would you say your aim is in covering these sorts of stories?
- When you are producing a story, what goes through your mind about the kind of story you want to create?
- Can you talk me through what sorts of decisions you have to make when you are covering this sort of story, for instance what to include, exclude?
- Do you ever think about what the editor might say or think?
- Do you ever think about what the community might say or think?
- Do you feel you should remain detached from the story?
- As a journalist, what do you do with emotion?
- (For Dunblane or a story in the pre-social media period) how would the story be covered today?

Through my own experience working with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma I am very aware of the need for care and sensitivity when conducting such interviews. Some of the interview participants had spoken or written publically about the trauma they had experienced in covering stories but this did not mean they were not at risk of retraumatisation by taking part in an interview. All participants were given the option of their data being anonymised and were given an information sheet explaining the project. I also made it clear that participants were free to withdraw from the research or not answer specific questions. In fact, all participants were willing to be quoted by name on an attributed basis. In some rare cases, when those interviewed asked for specific

responses to be ‘off the record’, I made a clear note in my notebook and subsequently flagged this section of the interview in my transcript. This material was not used in any form at all.

I am aware though my own experience that interviews of those involved with traumatic news can have different results and that these can be difficult to predict.<sup>94</sup> Throughout, I adhered to interview guidelines set out by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma.<sup>95</sup> I was also guided by what is regarded by those working at the Dart Center as one of the definitive textbooks setting out interview technique, Simpson and Coté’s *Covering Violence: a Guide to Ethical Reporting about Victims & Trauma* (2006). These guidelines are, of course, designed for journalists interviewing what would normally be members of the public caught up in a traumatic news story. However, the principles set out, such as that of empathic listening, appeared to me to be equally appropriate for my research interviews.

### *3.6 Using theories of Affect to analyse empirical data*

In Chapter Two I identified a broad definition of affect as a non-cognitive, non-conscious, non-representational and immaterial force and highlighted the criticisms of some scholars (Blackman, 2012; Leys, 2011; Wetherell, 2012) who have argued that there has been too much emphasis on neuro-science at the expense of ideas of suggestion, imitation and contagion and the historical 19<sup>th</sup> Century lineage of early French sociologists such as Tarde and Gustave Le Bon<sup>96</sup>. Following this, I have drawn most heavily on Wetherell’s concept of *affective practice* (2012) and on ideas around contagion and collective action explored by Venn (2010). The work of both – albeit in different ways - appears to be suited to analysing the practice of journalism. Knudsen and Stage (2015: 2) state in their edited collection *Affective Methodologies* that developing a practice

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<sup>94</sup> In Chapter Six, my research explores how some victims or survivors of trauma can find an interview a cathartic experience while for others it carries a risk of retraumatisation.

<sup>95</sup> See: [https://dartcenter.org/resources?type\[0\]=14&topic\[0\]=76](https://dartcenter.org/resources?type[0]=14&topic[0]=76)

<sup>96</sup> Wetherell accuses Brennan (2004) and Massumi (2002) of shamelessly cherry-picking scientific studies and of building “a few spectacular theoretical edifices ... on pretty shaky neuro-scientific ground” (2012: 10).



research method is challenging when the very nature of affect is fleeting and immaterial. They advocate (ibid: 3) a pragmatic and innovative approach in which the researcher tries to identify the affective traces of processes in empirical material. They also stress the need to ground empirical research in social contexts and the need therefore to ask questions with a “strong situational specificity” in order to transcend purely subjective accounts of affect (ibid: 4).

*Wetherell* adopts a pragmatic, interdisciplinary approach, which takes in the body’s capacity to re-enact the actions of others, the power of words and considerations of culture and society (2012: 142). She speaks of affect being located in actual bodies and social actors who are negotiating, making decisions, evaluating, communicating, interfering and relating (ibid: 159). In the course of my review of affect theory, this has seemed to me to be well aligned to the practice of a journalist, working with members of the public (as the subject of a story) and with (or against) each other in an often tightly knit group. Wetherell characterises affective practice as focusing on relations between subjects and objects through their intertwined formations and constitutions (ibid). Her designation of affective activity as being prone to both short bursts (such as panic attacks) or prolonged periods (e.g. underlying anxiety over climate change) echoes distinctions made by Richards (2007) between the mundane flow of every-day news and the dramatic event such as a terror attack. I have been keen to explore journalists’ experience and practice at these very points of drama. In discussing the conscious or unconscious (Wetherell uses the terms interchangeably), she suggests that affective practice is ‘based on a semiotic hinterland organised by personal biography’ (ibid: 153) and possible meanings. For her, affective practice unfolds relatively automatically with little conscious monitoring (ibid: 129), often too fast for any kind of strategic thought:

“We just act and this action usually turns out to be recognisable, communicative, reflexively related to the ongoing flow of others’ actions, and jointly coordinated with them. We move in and out of ‘knowing’ what we are about during this flow.”

Through ‘acts of attention’, we can move into conscious feeling, narrating affect, describing and remembering (ibid: 129). In analysing my interview data, I have sought out exactly these patterns in terms of the processes, behaviours and practices of journalism in an attempt to ascertain whether, and how, journalists relate to others and move between the unconscious and reflexive in their work of covering a traumatic news story. Equally, I have focused on this ‘semiotic hinterland’ and the way culture, training, habitus and the dynamic of a news story can shape the visceral ‘gut feeling’ of a journalist.

*Venn's* focus on how groups of people come together to form “collective ensembles” (2010: 131) involving mechanisms outside of consciousness is also useful for considering the ‘pack’ or ‘herd’ mentality of journalists covering a big news story. In a paper in *Body and Society*, Venn explores how collective patterns of behaviour that bind groups into an affective unit come into being, processes that appear to proceed by contagion at a non-conscious level (ibid). Venn speaks of patterns of behaviour that we tend to think of as ‘going with the flow’ or relating to a pervading mood and cites a study on foreign exchange traders by Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger (2002) that explores how these individuals have bonded around the electronic screen processing their business (what Venn calls the ‘dealer-technology complex’ (2010: 131)). Again, my reading of the diverse theories of affect highlights Venn’s engagement with the relationship between individuals, collective groups and technology which is of particular relevance when considering a modern newsroom. Its typical array of screens is not unlike that of a foreign exchange desk, indeed a news operation like Reuters, which derives the bulk of its revenue by selling news and financial data to the markets, often uses the same technology as traders.<sup>97</sup> In a similar way to Wetherell, Venn highlights the fluidity of processes that on the one hand appear to be cognitive (in the case of traders, rational economic calculations) and what in reality turns out to be a ‘feeling for the market.’<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Empirical Chapter Seven explores the newsroom in detail.

<sup>98</sup> Borch also draws a link between current theories of market contagion and the historical lineage of Tarde and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Crowd Theory (2007).

My analysis of interview data has also been informed by insights into modern technology by scholars whose work on affect, technology and images was reviewed in Chapter Two, notably Kavka (2008) and Grusin (2010).

Contemporary scholars of affect have highlighted the affective capacity of new media and user-generated content and have located ‘sites of emergence’. These insights have most often been applied to how communities can be bound together across geographies, the ways in which consumers of news can become producers of news, and how technologies can amplify, intensify or prolong affect. For example, still images and video of demonstrations and civilian casualties from the Arab Spring, often uploaded to websites by anti-government protestors and distributed to western news outlets, have contributed to Thompson’s (2005) ‘new visibility’ and become synonymous with the conflict. Media play a central role in how such images are framed and can have global impact, forming a space where bodies on the street can appear to distant audiences (Butler, 2011: 8):

“The street scenes become politically potent only when and if we have a visual and audible version of the scene communicated in live time, so that the media does not merely report the scene but is part of the scene and the action; indeed, the media is the scene or the space in its extended and replicable visual and audible dimensions.”

In a further example of how affect theories are being applied to contemporary media, Grusin (2010: 81) describes the affective dimension of the Abu Ghraib pictures<sup>99</sup>, in which U.S. soldiers were captured on camera humiliating Arab prisoners, as going beyond what the photographs ‘mean.’ The affect, he says, should be understood as an unqualified bodily response independent of, and perhaps prior to, our understanding of the emotions they evoke or meanings they entail. The affective power of television as a ‘technology of intimacy’ (Kavka, 2008) and its ability to create a global connectivity has also been discussed in earlier chapters (Blackman, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Kavka 2008). Chouliaraki,

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<sup>99</sup> In April 2004, the U.S. television news-magazine *60 Minutes II* broadcast a story on the abuse of Arab prisoners. It later emerged there were more than 300 photographs.

investigating contemporary television coverage of suffering, talks about the ability of news to create “a sense of being there that, albeit different from face-to-face contact, evokes feelings and dispositions to act ‘as if’ the spectator were on location” (2006: 21). Frosh and Pinchevski (2009) and Richards (2007) have highlighted how rebroadcasting moments of terror, often caught by citizen journalists, on a loop time and time again generates a collective feeling of crisis and can intensify and amplify affect but also create a continual background condition. In analysing my interviews with journalists, I have applied these insights to explore how images might have an affective impact not only on the public, but also on the journalists themselves and, by extension on their practice. Replaying distressing images on a loop can clearly have an affective impact on the public. But journalists sitting on the social media intake desk of a news organisation are potentially subjected to the same sort of experience as they sift through user-generated content, often of a graphic nature. This is one aspect of journalists’ experience that I explore in Chapter Seven.

### *3.7 Drawing on Bourdieu and boundary work*

In electing to draw on Bourdieu’s work (1984, 1990, 1998) as a tool to help analyse my interview data, I am characterising journalism as a *‘field’* (as he did), accepting that it has its own logic of practice and that it is internally coherent enough to distinguish itself from other areas of cultural production (Markham, 2011: 25). At the same time, the individual journalist or news organisations exist in relation to others, while the profession also consists of various ‘sub-fields’ which will compete against each other with slightly different logics of practice (e.g. tabloid versus quality/ broadsheet newspapers). In discussing French journalism, Bourdieu himself (1994: 5) drew a contrast between newspapers that concentrate on sensation and those which prioritise serious news and adhere to values of objectivity.

Within the field there is a collective system of dispositions, or *‘habitus’*, which means that journalists share a common learned logic (Markham, 2011: 29):

“What counts as news is a product of the interaction between journalists and editor, rather than some universal or extra discursive criterion of newsworthiness. Further these connections between journalists, editors and other field actors remain hidden to the readers of newspapers...”

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, in which past practice develops into well-established dispositions and attitudes, reflects ideas of mimesis, with emotions tending to play a conservative role (Wetherell, 2012: 107)<sup>100</sup>. Anything threatening an existing habitus tends to generate anxiety, which in turn reinforces the status quo as actors re-enact past practice in an unreflective or non-conscious manner<sup>101</sup>. In investigating the potential of applying Bourdieusian ideas to this thesis, I was very conscious of journalism’s defensive tendencies and recent boundary work, particularly in the face of citizen journalism and social media, which I have referred to in earlier chapters and elaborate on later in this section. While journalism traditionally tried to maintain separation from other fields such as politics and economics (e.g. through normative values of holding authority to account and of not being influenced by commercial considerations), citizen journalism threatens its once dominant position or de-facto monopoly on the production and dissemination of news (Waisbord, 2013: 215).

The third Bourdieusian concept I have been keen to use in my analysis of interviews is that of ‘doxa’, pre-reflexive knowledge, shaped by experience, or a set of fundamental and unquestioned beliefs closely identified with a field (Grenfell, 2012: 115). Based on my own experience of the power of professional norms based on objectivity, I have tried to identify how and when these beliefs are challenged and whether they are, in fact, consistent across different areas of journalism practice. An often-cited example of such journalistic doxa is knowing when a story is a story, or a shared understanding of newsworthiness (Schulz, 2007: 194). This concept is similar to Zelizer’s concept of journalism as an

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<sup>100</sup> There is a lineage from Tarde to Bourdieu that can be seen in the latter’s interest in what becomes embodied in terms of specific dispositions. Bourdieu, like Tarde – and unlike Durkheim – takes a more embodied approach to communication.

<sup>101</sup> Wetherell (2012: 107) questions this and observes that there are times when affect and emotions could lead to a change in habitus.

interpretive community in which she discusses the tacit and shared understandings of journalists.

It has to be said that Bourdieu decried the negative impact of the media on society (Markham, 2011: 11). Couldry (2003) has discussed the tensions between Bourdieu's detailed explanation of the media field's workings and analysis of the power of media. In addition, Benson (2005: 17) advocates in his analysis of Bourdieu as a tool to analyse journalism the need to rely on complementary macro-level factors such as the political economy and micro-level factors such as journalists' personal and professional characteristics. As such, it can supplement rather than supplant existing approaches (ibid: 7).

As mentioned above, in considering Bourdieu and the contestation between and within fields, I have also drawn in my analysis on the growing body of work on the boundaries of journalism (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Singer, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015) and on the sociology of professions (Dingwall & Lewis, 2014). The social history of the objectivity norm set out in Chapter One has already illustrated the way in which journalism in the United Kingdom and the United States sought to set itself apart from other professions, notably Public Relations, and established boundaries represented in part by component parts of the objectivity paradigm. Carlson and Lewis (2015: 10) conceptualise an analytical framework for the boundaries of journalism based on key concepts evolved by the US sociologist Thomas Gieryn (1999). When applied to journalism, this framework encompasses three 'genres' – *expansion* (in which, for example, some forms of user-generated content might be viewed as acceptable); *expulsion* (in which deviant practices, for example partisan news providers, might be deemed unacceptable and ostracised); and *protection of autonomy* (in which defences are erected against, for example, the influence of commercial interests/ 'Chinese walls').

While such boundaries tend to be stable when a profession is not subject to change, the rise of social media over the last decade has made the boundaries of journalism more porous and can lead to consideration of whether they should be reconceptualised (Singer, 2015). Wahl-Jorgensen identifies how boundary work

can be particularly crucial in understanding perceived incursions into professional turf (2015: 173). This framework of boundaries therefore seems particularly apposite as an additional tool for my analysis of interview data.

### *3.8 Adding my Personal Experience*

Bringing my own experience to bear on this thesis was an obvious additional element of methodology considering its starting point and my own work as a journalist. But I have also tried to apply my experience of the last 10 years during which, while working as a full time academic, I have chaired the European operations of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma in its goal of supporting journalists covering traumatic news. I have tried to draw on key moments of my own experience and analytical reflection to complement my interviews and their experience as working journalists. As Knudsen and Stage (2015: 5) state, researchers do not create the world they investigate but “are part of – affecting and affected by – the research process.”

Traditionally the concept of the journalist as an eyewitness has cast the reporter as a detached, unmoved observer who relates events actually as they are back to an audience (Anden-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013: 963). Only in the past 10 years since the second Gulf War of 2003 have major news organisations such as the BBC and Reuters<sup>102</sup> started to recognise that the role of bearing witness to human tragedy will inevitably trigger a personal response in journalists and potentially expose him or her to risk. I have been at the centre of efforts by The Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma to raise awareness of issues around emotion and trauma in reporting, both in terms of how journalists can care for their own psychological wellbeing and how they can report better on traumatic news. The pressures can be intensely personal, as journalists are exposed to disturbing and traumatic events they are covering, or they can be of a professional nature as commercial demands to secure the story grow. This in turn can often raise difficult questions of how to speak to survivors or to grieving relatives, the classic dilemma of those asked to make the so-called ‘death knock’.

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<sup>102</sup> As Global Head of News at Reuters in 2003 I was one of the main editorial executives responsible for setting up a support framework for journalists at the company.

These challenges are compounded by the fact that there is hardly any training for journalists in how to handle emotive stories (in contrast to, for instance, business journalists who would be taught how to read a balance sheet or the intricacies of monetary and fiscal policy). As Gavin Rees, the executive director of the Dart Center's European operations, observed (2013: 410):

“Partial and inaccurate reporting or journalism that is high on entertainment value and low on insight and sensitivity... is likely to compound distress, marginalize victims and survivors, and, in general, diminish a society's capacity to face key decisions.”

Academic literature (Feinstein et al., 2002)<sup>103</sup> has tended to concentrate on the one side of the equation – the impact traumatic news events can have on journalists as witnesses or ‘first responders’ on the scene of a major news story. Another study found that around one third of journalists questioned had had to announce news of death to family or friends of a victim (Pyeovich et al, 2003). But that academic investigation has not examined the potential impact of such issues on the editorial decisions journalists make, whether they reflect their own emotions and, in short, the actual practice of journalism.

As this thesis explores, there is a fundamental tension between such empathic reporting and journalism's ideology of detachment. As Richards and Rees (2011) argue, journalism is a profession steeped in its ethos of objectivity, which has traditionally been less hospitable to emotional literacy than some others. The Richards & Rees analysis, based on analysis of 40 journalists and journalism educators between 2006-8, concluded that there was a “striking inattention to questions about the emotional impact of journalists' work on audiences” (2011: 851). There were two main factors inhibiting greater take-up of an emotional literacy agenda. Firstly, the concept of objectivity had talismanic force and hung around “like the ghost at the wedding banquet” (2011: 859). They found it was still widely considered that emotion contaminates objectivity. Secondly, very

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<sup>103</sup> A study of 140 war journalists found that they had significantly more psychiatric difficulties than journalists who did not report on war. In particular, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD was similar to rates reported for combat veterans, while the rate of major depression exceeded that of the general population.



little thought was given to the life of a story after publication in terms of its impact on sources, a community or audience. The interviews in this thesis have sought to investigate whether journalists covering Dunblane, the Syrian gas attack and Woolwich killing remained detached in the face of traumatic news and how they attempted to uphold their professional values of objectivity.

I have therefore tried to bring my experience of working with journalists covering traumatic news to the analysis. As part of that, I have referred to several issues addressed by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, including what Herman (1997) refers to as the dialectic of approach and avoidance. While detachment is a hallmark of journalism's professional norms, approach and avoidance are considered to be two primary responses to traumatic events (Newman & Nelson, 2012), with journalists exhibiting the same tendencies as the general population (ibid: 22). The reliance of journalists on using official sources in coverage of traumatic news events could, these academics suggest, be due to journalists' avoidance of survivors of trauma and suffering. My questioning sought to explore the tension between approach and avoidance and how this may influence a journalist's behaviour and editorial decision-making.

A further trauma related topic for discussion with interviewees that reflects my own experience of working with other journalists is guilt. Studies of trauma have often discussed the guilt of first responders or military personnel (e.g. the guilt of not being able to save a victim, the guilt associated with triage and choosing one victim to save over another). There has, however, been relatively little consideration given to the possibility that journalists covering traumatic news events could also experience feelings of guilt. Defined as "an unpleasant feeling with an accompanying belief that one should have thought, felt or acted differently" (Kubany et al., 1996), guilt is also another difficult concept when applied to journalists since their professional code means that they are expected to witness trauma but not to intervene (Browne et al., 2012: 207)<sup>104</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> This would appear to be the only large scale academic study of journalists and trauma-related guilt.

“Not having a direct, helping role when attending to traumatic incidents may present journalists with complex ethical dilemmas. For example, morally believing the right thing is to provide aid, versus the knowledge that one should remain objective.”

Guilt could potentially come in many forms, for not helping others, for intruding into another’s grief when interviewing a victim or survivor, for not relaying their story accurately, or for making a commercial product (i.e. a story) from someone’s grief. One recent case of guilt experienced by journalists was the 2011 massacre of 69 students by Anders Breivik on the Norwegian island of Utoya. During the attack, some reporters called the mobile phone numbers of students on Utoya, only to learn later that the gunman used the ringing to track down his victims. Those journalists subsequently reported high levels of stress and guilt (Columbia Journalism Review, 2013).

Exploring such deeply personal and sensitive issues with journalists is key to understanding the sort of editorial decisions they make, for example, in how they frame a story, what material they may include or exclude from a report, and which images are used and how they are presented. I discuss these in the following section since they are important in helping to analyse my interview data. One of the key focal points in my analysis is the extent to which such decisions are the result of learned experience and training and whether this is in fact part of the affective dimension of covering traumatic news.

### *3.9 Traditional analytical tools*

As stated earlier, I chose not to conduct analysis of individual stories but to concentrate on the lived experience of journalists covering a series of traumatic news stories. These stories therefore represent the vital backdrop to their practice and not the object of research per se. It is important, however, to touch briefly on two aspects of what I would call traditional media analysis which I have used to inform my investigation of the journalists’ experience: firstly, the concept of how stories are framed in emotional terms, and secondly markers or hallmarks of journalism’s objectivity paradigm.

### 3.9.1 Frames:

The psychosocial approach adopted needs to consider the use of narrative structures which tend to pre-focus or frame stories and the anticipated emotional response from an audience. For example, the reporting of man-made or natural disasters is often informed by the moral norm of compassion and readers or viewers of news coverage are invited to feel compassion for the sufferers. Chouliaraki (2006: 11) argues that spectators do not possess ‘pure’ emotions vis-à-vis sufferers, but that their emotions are in fact shaped by values embedded in news narratives about how ‘others’ should relate to them. In a later work, *The Ironic Spectator* (2013: 140), Chouliaraki sets out how in a typical news frame around disaster or conflict a journalist employs two types of witnessing. The first is the objective dimension, by which the journalist witnesses suffering and relates it within the objectivity paradigm so that readers or viewers can judge it to be true. The second is the reflexive dimension when the journalist sets out the emotional testimony to the horror of suffering so that a moral response is evoked in the readers or viewers. This reflects the broader concept of ‘feeling rules’ or ‘conventions of feeling’ set out, amongst others, by Hochschild. In a 1979 paper, she argued that people tend to feel in ways “appropriate to the situation”, something that is often a result of socially shared, albeit often latent rules (1979: 563). These feeling rules go hand in hand with framing rules according to which we ascribe definitions and meanings to certain situations. Both, according to Hochschild, have a tendency to develop over time as changing sets of feeling rules contend for a place in people’s minds as a governing norm and, consequently, the framing also changes. In discussing the typical framing rules for disaster coverage, Pantti (2012: 78) traces a cycle that provokes in turn four different emotions. Firstly, news items tend to open with a depiction of horror, death and destruction, evoking a sense of moral shock and outrage. Secondly, there are depictions of grief, focusing on personal loss and on those who have been bereaved. Thirdly, these accounts give rise to a discourse of compassion, sometimes focusing on efforts to help victims or heroic actions of individuals. Finally, there is a discourse of anger, concentrating on questions of blame and responsibility. These depictions and discourses are also conditioned by cultural and moral norms, which can change over time. One point of my analysis has

been to examine the practice of depicting traumatic news stories over the period between the Dunblane shootings and the Arab Spring and whether this may have been shaped by changes in technology and the explosion of user-generated images and video.

### *3.9.2 Markers of Objectivity*

In my analysis, I have also been aware of standard formulations employed by journalists that, over the past century, have allowed emotion to be injected into news reporting while remaining within acceptable bounds of the objectivity norm. These include the use of anecdotal leads in contrast to those identified as core markers of fact-based journalism such as inverted pyramid writing (Mindich 1998); the so-called ‘outsourcing’ of emotion to the subjects of a story (Tuchman 1972, Wahl-Jorgensen 2012); and other grammatical constructions associated with emotion.

The classic technological argument suggests that the ‘inverted pyramid’<sup>105</sup> form of news narrative, commonly associated with the development of objectivity in journalism, stemmed from the first days of wire services<sup>106</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Because cables or ‘wires’ were expensive, and messages were often truncated, journalists kept to the simple facts, with the most important information first (Porwancher, 2011: 191).

“Because telegraph lines were expensive and often failed in mid-report, journalists transmitted the most important information first so that their papers could still print stories even if they failed to receive all of them. Editors also preferred the standardised format of the inverted pyramid because they could easily rework an article.”

This style of writing has held sway into the modern day and is a standard mantra of journalism textbooks and courses (Mindich, 1998; Tuchman, 1972), whether

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<sup>105</sup> This term appears to have been captured for the first time in an 1894 U.S. text book of journalism, *Steps into Journalism: Help and Hints for young for Young Writers* (Mindich, 1998).

<sup>106</sup> Reuters, for example, was established in 1851, coinciding with the invention of the telegraph message.

run by professional bodies such as the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) or universities. It is, says Mindich, a system that appears to strip a story of everything but the ‘facts’, and changes the way we process news (1998: 65)<sup>107</sup>. Conversely, it follows that the *absence* of such a narrative device is often associated with emotion (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012). This expresses itself in different techniques such as the use of anecdotal leads, personalised storytelling and expressions of affect (2012: 1). MacDonald (2000) argues that these techniques do tend to raise suspicions in those who are wedded to rationalist models of journalism, but they need not be synonymous with ‘dumbing down’ or ‘tabloidisation’. “Textual evidence,” she states, “suggests that personal case studies and personal testimony can enable political insight and understanding through, rather than in spite of, their affecting qualities” (2000: 264). In the anecdotal lead, a narrative will begin with a brief story to attract the reader or viewer’s attention, while personalised story telling would often draw on the personal story of a character in the news to highlight or illustrate a broader story.

Wahl-Jorgensen has argued that *alongside* Tuchman’s notion of the strategic ritual of objectivity (1972) there is also a “strategic ritual of emotionality”, a tacit yet institutionalised and systematic practice by which journalists infuse reporting with emotion (2012: 1). Because the difficult relationship between news and emotion has often been viewed as a fundamental contradiction of journalism, the use of emotion in story telling is rarely acknowledged explicitly. It constitutes, she argues, a form of tacit knowledge and need not be a contradiction (ibid: 5):

“An objective approach and compelling story telling are not necessarily mutually exclusive.... a move towards a concrete analysis of the strategic ritual of emotionality can enrich our understanding of journalism – both in terms of what it is for, and how it works.”

The tacit or implicit technique used is to ‘outsource’ the expression of emotion to the protagonists or sources of a story, i.e. those who are a) authorised to express

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<sup>107</sup> As Tuchman observes, this is actually one of the most problematic areas of objectivity since what is the most important fact involves news judgement and newspapers clearly differ in their choice of what are the material facts to go at the top of the inverted pyramid structure of a story (1972: 671).

emotions in public and b) those whose emotions journalists can authoritatively describe without implicating themselves (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012).

While I have not analysed the texts around my chosen stories, I was often able to speak to journalists during my interviews about such ‘craft skills’ and to ask them to reflect on the ways in which they sometimes try (or decide not to) uphold the objectivity norm.

### *3.10 Considering the impact of the changing media landscape*

A final consideration in the investigation turned on the impact of social media on the news environment. By selecting news stories ranging from the pre-internet era of the 1990s to today’s age of social media, the aim has been to examine whether the affective dimension of practice in covering challenging traumatic stories has changed. While the Dunblane shooting took place in an era of traditional newspaper rivalry and dominance of the BBC and ITV television networks, the Arab spring and Woolwich killing have been played out across the multiplicity of today’s multi-media channels and platforms. In tracing this changing landscape, Zelizer (2007) identifies four different cycles in the evolution of journalists’ roles as chroniclers or eyewitnesses to historic events. In the first period, as journalism began to emerge as a profession in the United States, eyewitness reports tended to emphasise “romanticised, overtly subjective and stylistically elaborate features”<sup>108</sup> in keeping with the highly emotive nature of chronicles in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In a second period, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, reports became more driven by reality; a third phase, lasting through World War II into the pre-Internet era, was still more fact driven thanks to the influence of technologies such as news photography which journalists used to lend credibility and authenticity to reports. The contemporary period has, however, often been characterised by the very absence of the journalist, with citizen journalism and raw television footage leaving reports sometimes unedited and “disembodied” (2007: 421). This would suggest that far from the journalist ‘outsourcing’ emotion through the words, in quotation marks, of protagonists of a news story, the actual *task of witnessing* events is outsourced

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<sup>108</sup> Cited pp 15-16 in Allan, S., 2013. *Citizen Witnessing*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

to private citizens armed with mobile phones and digital cameras. Zelizer argues that this risks undermining journalism's central authority in public life. Pantti's analysis of major accidents covered by the British newspapers *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* (2012: 68) between the late 1920s and late 1990s also identifies cyclical changes in the use of textual features to convey emotion. In earlier reports, the journalist did not seek to hide his or her own emotions. But the study shows that from the 1960s the reporting of natural disasters became more matter-of-fact and detached. Expression of the journalists' own emotions were largely confined to personal columns or editorials. Like Zelizer, she identifies the emergence of the public as a citizen reporter or eyewitness as the greatest change in storytelling. These arguments underline the fact that technological changes and the introduction of raw, unedited text and images warrant close investigation in assessing practice.

In the context of the changing news environment, emotion has also recently been conceptualised as part of a 'coping strategy' to defend or re-establish the authority and/ or economic viability of journalism in the face of changes to the traditional advertising-driven business model (albeit also caused by technological change). Bogaerts and Carpentier (2012) see an increasingly subjective tone of news reporting, evidenced partly by the wealth of blogs written by mainstream journalists, as an attempt to create a new claim on truth, switching from one based on objectivity to one based on *authenticity*. This personal way of engaging an audience, also seen as part of the broad evolution of a confessional society, can be interpreted as an attempt to win back an estranged public (2012: 70). Arguably journalists have become more responsive to the public for different reasons, sometimes as a commercial response to the volatile and increasingly segmented consumer and sometimes as an emotional response reflecting a more empathetic discourse (Brants, 2012). Seaton argues that news, which had historically exercised more caution in seeking to stimulate emotion, has had to compete more intensely in a time of increased competition with other media forms which find it easier to shape feelings for political or commercial advantage (2005: 237).

Another strategy identified in the social media environment is that of '*empathic responsiveness*' (Brants, 2012). In this, journalists adopt the position of moral crusaders, siding with the public, bonding with the voiceless and their sympathisers. The journalists' tone is often excited and angry. Brants cites the (now defunct) News of the World's campaign to name and shame alleged paedophiles in the 2000s and its pressure, under then editor Rebekah Brooks, to allow public access to the Sex Offenders Register. A variation on this is designated as '*populist responsiveness*' in which journalists side with anti-establishment sentiment and popular opinion, using an ironic tone in which values such as neutrality or the separation of fact and opinion are openly ignored (ibid: 25).

### *3.11 Conclusion*

The research methodology adopted employs a combination of tools to analyse the interview data, drawing on specific theories of affect together with more traditional methods in order to arrive at a deep understanding of the practice of journalism when covering traumatic news events. The lived experience of journalists is viewed in the context of the traumatic news stories they are covering *and* the social, cultural, political and economic world in which they are operating. Underpinning the design of this research methodology is the concept that the inner world cannot be understood without the outer world (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013: 4) and that it is impossible to try to pull apart affect and meaning-making which are inextricably linked (Wetherell, 2012: 20).

In order to analyse the interview data, I immersed myself in the transcripts, following IPA practice of stepping into the participants' shoes as far as possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014: 11). My aim was to triangulate their experience and reflections on their experience and practice with the external environment of the news stories chosen and the journalist's personal circumstances. At each stage I sought signs of adherence to the objectivity norm and whether I could identify affective processes, behaviours and practices that go beyond the traditional narrative of journalism in order build up a deeper understanding of practice.



The following four chapters analyse and discuss the main themes that emerged from the interviews I conducted.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF JOURNALISTS COVERING TRAUMATIC NEWS

*‘Are you sure you want to see it?’ an experienced correspondent in the capital, Khartoum, had asked. ‘Famine shelters can mess up your hard drive.’ Another advised, ‘Do it on autopilot. All you need to think is: can I use this for my article?’ – Joris Luyendijk.*

#### *4.1 Introduction*

Joris Luyendijk’s account of his time as a young and inexperienced foreign correspondent in the Middle East<sup>109</sup> caused a minor sensation when it was first published in 2006 in his home country of the Netherlands. It wasn’t so much what he wrote, a tale of everyday observation of war, violence and dictatorship from Iraq and Syria to Egypt and Sudan. Rather it was the way he told it, lifting the lid on the life of a foreign correspondent and, as The Guardian investigative journalist Nick Davies commented at the time<sup>110</sup>, being so open about the tricks of a journalist’s trade. For that short quote from Luyendijk’s book illustrates three key points that go to the heart of this chapter: firstly, that it has been well documented over the past 10 years that persistent exposure to traumatic news events can have serious consequences for the mental health of journalists; secondly, that journalists can develop a form of self-defence to be able to do the job (in this case going on ‘autopilot’); and thirdly, that it is actually rare for a journalist, in the heat of news gathering, to lose sight of the fact that somewhere in the background there is an impatient news editor demanding a good story on deadline.

But what do journalists really mean when they talk casually about ‘going on autopilot’, use phrases such as being ‘detached’ or speak of a ‘gut feeling’ of

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<sup>109</sup> Hello Everybody! One Journalist’s Search for Truth in the Middle East, see bibliography.

<sup>110</sup> His comments are included on the book jacket.

what is news? Why do they act together as a pack? Are these conscious or unconscious processes and how do they relate to journalists' dominant professional ideology of objectivity? This first empirical chapter pulls together data from my interviews with journalists in an attempt to go beyond the normative discourse of journalism to explore these questions and to investigate how they can be understood as part of an affective dimension of practice. The chapter serves as an overview, with individual elements investigated in the subsequent three chapters Five - Seven.

I have tried to capture the internal dilemmas, conflicts and hesitations experienced by journalists operating under stress when confronted with scenes of human suffering. As outlined in the previous chapter, it is at times such as these that the underlying tensions and contradictions in the practice of journalism break through the surface most visibly. The chapter does *not* focus on the emotions and feelings of those victims and survivors caught up in conflict and disaster. These are traditionally the subject of journalists' interviews and the emotions that consumers of news are exposed to every day. Rather, I am interested in exploring principally through the lens of Venn (2010) and Wetherell (2012) the affective dimension of their own practice, particularly the flows of affect and feelings experienced by, *and between*, journalists covering a story *in relation to their milieu*. At the heart of this chapter is an argument that the varied ways in which journalists try to stay loyal to the objectivity norm – for example through common behaviours such as detachment – are themselves a key manifestation of the affective dimension of journalism.

I was lucky in that my status as one of the senior editors of Reuters allowed me first name access to some of the most experienced journalists and foreign correspondents operating today. I had, after all, worked with some of them in the field and there, in contrast to the intense competition of work between rivals back at a London or Washington DC headquarters, camaraderie is quickly established. All of them were ready to be interviewed on an attributable basis and, as it emerged in some cases, to reveal personal details of how they sometimes approached difficult stories. When the lone gunman, 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton, burst into Dunblane Primary School on March 13, 1996, I

was in Washington, DC, working as the Editor of Reuters in the Americas. The small town in Scotland (although technically a city because of its cathedral) could hardly be further away than the inside-the-beltway preoccupations of the U.S. capital but it was a story that resonated around the world. And when I started research for this thesis, it turned out that I knew and had worked with some of the journalists who were drafted in to cover the killing of the 16 young children. But they had never spoken to me about it and, in several cases, had avoided speaking about it generally. In a similar fashion, the story of the chemical weapons attack on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta in 2013 was covered by several journalists whose work I knew through my association with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. I speak more in later chapters about my engagement with Dart where I have encountered at first hand the tensions between the journalist's professional code of objectivity and symptoms of trauma. It is in fact quite difficult for a journalist (albeit a former journalist) to ask another journalist questions. The temptation is to fall back on the normative language of objectivity, the common habitus and doxa, because these are so deeply ingrained and because no one wants to admit in a 'macho' news culture anything akin to human frailty or that might suggest professional ideals sometimes slip (or that they might not stand up to scrutiny). But this would have meant the interviews remaining at a superficial level. As a result, I tended to start conversations with my own story from Sept 11 and how it had prompted me to start thinking critically about issues around objectivity and trauma. It was invariably an ice-breaker, helping establish my own journalistic credentials and creating what I intended to be a safe space for conversation. I was also careful not to bias the conversation that followed by formulating very open questions, first asking interview participants to describe how they covered a specific story. In this way, issues around objectivity, emotion and trauma emerged in the course of the interview rather than being a 'hard' interview question. Of course, some of my interview subjects did try to 'stand back' on their own experience and reflect on it - not everyone allowed glimpses behind the professional façade. But many journalists I interviewed did speak openly without trying to rationalise their behaviour and just described what happened. That sometimes included the way they tried to shield themselves from the horror of what they had to report. And in

some cases, they were also open about their failure to do so. In those cases, I simply let them talk.

I will tell their stories later in this chapter as I analyse the affective dimension of their practice that emerged. But first, I wanted to set briefly the context of their work, expanding on how the pace of journalism practice has changed in today's media landscape and considering how that could be contributing to an affective dimension.

#### *4.2 From Dunblane to Damascus and Woolwich*

Seventeen years separate the Dunblane shootings and the social-media rich news coverage of the chemical weapons attack in Ghouta and London killing of drummer Rigby.<sup>111</sup> But it might as well have been light years in terms of the world of journalism. The journalists who were drafted in to cover the Dunblane massacre were hardly equipped in the way we would take for granted today. Helen Branswell, who at the time was working as the London-based correspondent for Canadian Press, borrowed a laptop (hers was in her flat miles away from the office) (Interview 4)<sup>112</sup> and flew up immediately to Scotland with the Associated Press team. But that was the extent of her electronic equipment. While today's correspondents can upload reports from the street corner with mobile phones, ubiquitous Wi-Fi, i-Pads and the like, communications in 1996 were very different. Even the BBC, with its enormous resources and regional network throughout the United Kingdom, struggled. Fran Unsworth (I 12), now one of the most senior BBC journalists as Director of the World Service Group leading more than 2,500 journalists and support staff based in 113 countries, was then Home Assignments Editor in charge of television and radio coverage of the Dunblane story. She recalled the communications nightmare when she arrived in the city:

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<sup>111</sup> A factual summary of the broad outline of these news stories is contained in Chapter Three. Much of the detail is told as part of the narrative in this and the next chapter.

<sup>112</sup> I have numbered each of the interviewees and listed them in Appendix 1. In the subsequent text they are referred to in the format I + No, eg (I 10).

“(You) never got any down time. I remember, again this is the whole stress of the thing, you forget.... I had this pathetic mobile phone, which kept running out of juice, this is right in the early days of mobile.

It was hopeless, kept running out of juice and it was too flimsy. I think it broke. It mustn't have broken because it did...or maybe I was given another one by somebody who.... But I couldn't get into a hotel, so I stayed in a B&B; nice little place. I was the only one of the team there though and the mobiles didn't work there. The news desk just phoned me all night and this poor woman who was running the B&B had to come up in the middle of the night to wake me up to talk.”

Even six or seven years ago in coverage of the Middle East conflict there was little ability to quickly upload video. Thomas Evans, the Senior Director of Coverage for CNN in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, spent three years covering the Iraq conflict from 2006-9. And during that period social media had not yet made any significant impact on coverage (I 10):

“In those days, we didn't have social media. We didn't have...not in the same way ... there were cell phones that took video but there was no sort of easy way to or a quick way to sort of post that. So, we would have a bombing in Baghdad or Fallujah. And then two weeks later, someone would come to my gate in Baghdad and show me the film.”

By the time of the Arab Spring, which began in late 2010, few journalists would struggle with mobile telephony or not know how to access material furnished by social media instantaneously. Graphic video footage in August 2013 of children writhing in agony at what later turned out to be confirmed by UN inspectors as a chemical weapons attack in Damascus caused international outrage. Nabila Ramdani, a French-Arab journalist who had worked extensively in Syria, recounted how her contacts in the country sent her almost simultaneously video film of children dying from the effects of nerve agents. Even the most sanitised images, she wrote in *The Observer* newspaper (The Observer, 2013), were

considered unpublishable to a wider audience.<sup>113</sup> The extent to which social media and citizen journalism is already becoming embedded in our culture was illustrated in May of the same year when British army drummer Lee Rigby was hacked to death in broad daylight outside his barracks in Woolwich, London. It also illustrated the perverse consequences of this new culture. Drummer Rigby's two assailants calmly engaged passers-by in conversation, waiting to ensure that they were captured by mobile phone footage before the arrival of the police. Similarly, when Amedy Coulibaly took hostages in a Paris supermarket in the wake of the 2015 Charlie Hebdo massacre, he came armed not just with a Kalashnikov but also a GoPro<sup>114</sup> camera strapped to his torso. He tried (but failed) to e-mail footage of his attack, including his killing of three shoppers, from a computer in the supermarket. For me these incidents seemed so typical of how media has become deeply embedded in our everyday life, even at the level of terror. As Deuze observes (2012: 261), people nowadays know that everything they do in life could be recorded, archived, edited, redacted and publicised on a continuous basis – it is a world that lives in the moment of recording itself. It is as if the very technology of modern media is creating an affective proximity, as Kavka says (2008: 3) foreclosing distance and blurring the lines between lived and mediated forms of reality. While Kavka applies this argument to the consumption of television, Papacharissi (2015: 52) applies similar logic to social media (such as Twitter) where the 'always-on' nature of the medium produces an "ambient information sharing environment."

Some of the journalists I interviewed were intimately connected to the technology that is now indispensable to their working day – to use Venn's phrase, 'bonding' with the technology (2010: 131). Fadah Jassem, for example, an Assistant News Editor and Producer working for ITN, was working on the intake desk at the time of the Damascus attack and was inundated with social

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<sup>113</sup> When Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons in 1988 to kill about 5,000 of his own citizens at Halabja, there were no mobile phones to capture the horror and it took days for still pictures to emerge. I was based in Bahrain at the time as a Middle East correspondent for Reuters and handled some of the incoming copy filed by my colleague Patrick Worsnip who had been flown to Halabja by the Iranian military. Transport restrictions and poor communications meant it took five days for the story to emerge in public.

<sup>114</sup> The GoPro company was founded in 2002 and specialises in small video cameras that can be 'worn' and are typically used to capture action photography and extreme sports.

media reports. Using her contacts in the Arab world (she is half Syrian, half Iraqi), she recalled how the information emerged in virtually real-time (I 15):

“I think the chemical weapon attack, there was news emerging the night before so I’d had e-mails and some text messages to alert me to it. And I think I was pretty quick to find some YouTube imagery that came out and monitored some tweets in Arabic and updates in Arabic from people who were saying something awful has happened. People are choking, you know, weren’t entirely sure some people could have predicted what it was. Obviously the next morning, (I) went into work and I think the scale of it (had) emerged and we’re just confronted by lots of really – distressing is the best way to put it – distressing images of children and adults and various people choking.”

The Ghouta chemical attack and Woolwich killing illustrate the fundamental change since 1996, meaning that it is today hardly appropriate to speak of technology and content occupying the world around us or of media as some form of external agent affecting us. As Deuze argues (2012: x), media today is fused with everything people do and everywhere people are. The research methodology outlined in Chapter Three is designed to capture the lived experience of the journalists interviewed *in the context* of the social, cultural, political, and economic world they are operating in. By adopting this approach, I have borne in mind not just the technological environment, but also the nature of the story being covered, the relationship to other journalists on the story or back at headquarters, the commercial environment of news, political and societal changes. Such an exploration of journalism as a lived practice is consistent with a growing focus on media phenomenology and is aimed at avoiding the oversimplification of attributing change to technology alone (Couldry, 2012: 32). Couldry argues the advantages of analysing media not as a text but rather as a vast weaving together of practices and resources or the “intersections between technological, economic, social and political forces” (ibid).



The remainder of this chapter examines in this context the experience of journalists covering traumatic news stories. It is divided into three sections: the first focuses on the mechanisms that journalists employ when confronted with such events to uphold their professional values of objectivity and how these might be understood affectively; the second explores what journalists know as the ‘herd’ instinct and investigates ideas of affective contagion amongst journalists when acting in close proximity to another; the third examines potential chinks in the journalist’s armour, how and in what way these affective behaviours sometimes break down and whether there are the alternative affective registers that emerge as a result. Throughout I have attempted to analyse my interview data through use of the theories around affective practice and collective ensembles articulated by Venn (2010) and Wetherell (2012).

#### *4.3 The Power of Objectivity*

The traditional academic narratives around objectivity, examined in detail in the social history of Chapter One, have focused on varying interpretations of its origin. To recap, it has been seen as a professional practice to distinguish journalism from other professions, particularly Public Relations (Schudson, 1978, 2001) (a classic case of boundary work); a way of increasing readership of newspapers by appealing to wider audiences without alienating specific political interest groups (Schudson, 1978, 2001; Carey, 1997; Muhlmann, 2008); the result of technological innovation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the advent of wire services (Conboy, 2010). It has been seen as a ritual (Tuchman, 1972) and its lasting influence remarked on (Richards & Rees, 2011; Muhlmann, 2008). In contrast, emotion has been widely viewed as a marker of unprincipled and flawed journalism (Peters, 2011: 298) or something that contaminates objectivity (Richards & Rees, 2011: 863) (again classic boundary work with the rejection or ‘expulsion’<sup>115</sup> of deviant practices). As Illouz observes in discussing the social hierarchies of emotion and their divisions (often between men and women), “cool-headed rationality is often deemed more reliable, objective and professional than, say, compassion” (2007: 4). It is the very attitude that I traced

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<sup>115</sup> See p 63.

in Chapter One and how the logic of the Age of the Enlightenment persisted into the professional ideology of modern journalism.

What emerges from those journalists I interviewed is the lasting power of the objectivity norm, bridging the period from Dunblane to today's social media environment, and the wide array of ways in which journalists try to uphold objectivity. These include the behaviour or stance of cool-detachment (epitomised by Walter Cronkite) and what Luyendijk referred to as autopilot<sup>116</sup>. I will argue that the dynamic of the story itself, including the herd<sup>117</sup> instinct of reporters and competitive pressures, also plays a crucial role in shielding the journalist. The behaviour of cool detachment outwardly displays adherence to the professional code of journalism as validated by the objectivity norm. But I also found evidence in my research interviews to map detachment or 'going on autopilot' to the characteristics of affective practice as set out by Wetherell. She describes this as being based on a semiotic hinterland in which action unfolds relatively automatically, with little conscious monitoring (2012: 153) or as Venn would put it 'moving with the flow' (2010: 131). My argument throughout this thesis is that while both these affective behaviours, reflecting such factors as milieu, biography and training, can be seen from the outside, or rationalised, as upholding the objectivity norm, they are also affective practices which serve to shield journalists from the horror of what they are sometimes called on to witness. Such behaviours are typical of the affective patterns or performances, which, because they are part of everyday life are generally known and can be assigned moral or social significance (Wetherell, 2012: 78). It is in this way, I argue, that the affective dimension of practice comes automatically to a journalist but can also be recognised as being situated within the context of the profession of journalism.

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<sup>116</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines *autopilot* as an abbreviation for automatic pilot, a device for keeping an aircraft on a set course. Transferred to the field of journalism, it suggests a mechanical action devoid of thought used to ensure the tasks involved in covering a news story are performed without going off course.

<sup>117</sup> This refers to the tendency for journalists to 'hunt in packs' when covering the same story, often seeking to interview the same people multiple times or chasing the same lead. I explore this in greater detail later in this chapter and in chapter Six.

One of the first interviews I conducted was with the highly respected former editor of The Scotsman, Magnus Linklater (I 1). At the time of the Dunblane shootings in 1996, he was working for The Times and was on the scene within two hours of the shooting. He was to write later that year that it was as traumatic a news event as he had ever experienced (1996: 15) and that by the end of five days' worth of blanket coverage the story had left indelible marks on journalists who were glad to return home to their families (ibid: 19). In my interview with him at his Edinburgh home 18 years later, Linklater recalled the story as if it were yesterday. I had brought with me some photocopies of his coverage in The Times and showed him the front page from Thursday, March 14. He had written a 'side bar' or what, in less tragic circumstances, would be called a 'colour piece.' Far from injecting his own emotion overtly into the story or editorializing, Linklater had abided by the classic style of the objectivity norm, 'outsourcing' (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012: 1) emotion to the distraught parents incorporated into his report and painting a picture in words of the scene in the hours of uncertainty following the shooting. One short passage stood out for me and struck a personal note.<sup>118</sup> It read:

“One of the most *moving* sights yesterday was to see groups of relatives, numb with shock, walking away from the school with young children dancing happily at their sides, quite unaware of the enormity of what had happened.”

In the strictest sense, and certainly it would have happened in my days at Reuters, the word 'moving' (my italics above) would have been removed by the sub-editors. That aside, Linklater had managed to convey something that was indeed very moving, the juxtaposition of innocent children looking forward to a day off school and their shocked parents who knew the reason why. When I asked Linklater about it, he remarked how vividly he remembered it as such a striking image. But this classic cool-detached behaviour was not a conscious

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<sup>118</sup> On the morning of Sept 11, I had been in the air and my wife was at her office in downtown Washington DC where she worked as a journalist for the Financial Times. While U.S. parents rushed to fetch their children from school, our two boys remained as the only ones in their class until late in the day as my wife covered the attack on the Pentagon and I was consumed by news editing for Reuters in London. It was a classic case of journalists rushing to the story as the public rushed away from it.

stance, it was, he said a mixture of professional training, adrenalin and pressure to deliver the story. It was what Wetherell describes as something deep and visceral, located in the bodies of the actors negotiating, evaluating, communicating and acting (2012: 159). Linklater described it as follows:

“... the adrenalin kicks in. Your whole concern is ‘I’m covering a very big story here. This is a real test. I’ve got to get this right. Where is my material going to come from?’ And that, you can argue, that that is a form of detachment in the sense that you’re not getting sucked into an emotional situation. You’re dealing with it in a sort of highly energised professional way. But I can’t put my hand on my heart to say that that was a conscious thing.”

Again, as Wetherell observes in her discussion of affective practice, actors move in and out of ‘knowing’ during such periods (2012: 129). That behaviour was also strong enough to overcome Linklater’s own doubts as he prepared in the cold of the late evening after the shooting to do a live radio interview with the BBC’s World Tonight programme. He told how he had initially feared that he might not get through the interview without breaking down, but when it came to it, the adrenalin kicked in and he was dry-eyed. Only later, he said, did he begin to absorb what he had witnessed on that day. This is what Wetherell calls one of the ‘acts of attention’, when a person moves into conscious feeling, narrating affect, describing and remembering (2012: 129).

Several other journalists told me a similar story about how the practice of adopting a cool-detached stance came automatically and had shielded them from events at Dunblane. Kate Fawcett (I 5), who was a BBC Scotland radio reporter, lived locally and was tipped off about the shooting within 10 minutes. Her first call was as a mother to the other primary school in Dunblane where her own children were in fact crouching under desks in their classroom. Only when she knew they were safe, did she rush to the scene as a BBC reporter. She spoke openly about the conflict between the two roles, of mother and journalist:

“Obviously, with me knowing people and knowing children that had been killed, it was like, I was two people. I was the mother who was trying to protect the children from what had been going on, but I was a journalist who felt I had a duty to report things as I saw them.

“... I sort of went on to automatic pilot and I was very lucky because, because I knew such a lot of people in Dunblane.”

The 24-hour news cycle was relentless, even with a big BBC team covering the story:

“It was very hard and I think because I had so many outlets to service, if you see what I mean, and because I was so busy and because people were asking for two-ways all the time and people were doing, you know, bulletins, et cetera, and they wanted voice pieces. I remember coming home at about 4:00 in the morning and washing my face, and I remember looking at the kids sleeping in bed, and then I just literally had to switch off and go back into, you know, reporter mode because Good Morning Scotland were wanting things.”

What she described as ‘reporter mode’ was her way of being able to cope with what had also been waves of guilt. Fawcett had tried to do a story on the gunman Thomas Hamilton a year earlier – there had been widespread suspicions about his activities with boys clubs in the area. But she had backed off the story, mothers had refused to go on the record with complaints and there were fears he would launch a legal action. As it quickly emerged that Hamilton had been the gunman, Fawcett explained to me that the only way she could cope with the guilt and do her job as a reporter was to ‘switch off’. “You don’t let anyone know,” she said, “that you’re feeling weepy... deep inside you’re weepy.”

For the BBC journalist in charge of the operation, Fran Unsworth, there was no time for emotion<sup>119</sup>. I asked her what she remembered most about Dunblane. It wasn't the emotion but the stress:

“There's something that kicks in when you've got a big story which (means) you tend to lose a bit of empathy to be honest with the story itself and what's happened. You obviously know that it's kind of the most terrible thing ever. You know that but what you feel when you're running an operation like that is high stress rather than emotion. Well, that is the emotion.”

The London newsroom of Reuters sent an American journalist, Maggie Fox, on the first flight to Scotland. She recalled (I 7) that she was the only journalist on staff who could cover the story because, at the time, she had no children of her own:

“There was a discussion of who would go and quite frankly, most of the correspondents in the bureau said they weren't sure that they could bear to go up and cover a story about small children being killed, especially such a dreadful story. And I remember volunteering and people saying, ‘Well, you're probably the only one who can go.’ Because at that point I was the only person working in the bureau who didn't have a child.”

On the face of it, such a decision appears to be based on common sense and on a duty of care for correspondents. But lurking in the background is also a consideration of whether the person covering the story would be able to maintain a sense of detachment under what was likely to be great emotional strain. And in

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<sup>119</sup> Lack of a time and the consequent shift to autopilot is a common theme among journalists covering such breaking news stories. In addition to those I interviewed for this thesis, I encountered several such historic accounts researching a conference presentation at Cardiff University to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1966 Aberfan disaster in which 116 school children were killed when a tip of coal slurry slid down the hillside. Former South Wales Evening Post reporter Malcolm Rees, who was the first journalist from the newspaper on the scene, described how he had no time to reflect on the horror of what he was covering. He said (2006): “I coped with it by just getting on with my job. I did not have time to think about it too much.”

fact when she saw the copy she had filed coming back in edited form, she felt the sub-editors in London had overwritten it and gone ‘over the top’.

Some of the journalists interviewed were keen to emphasise that tone was an important editorial consideration that they had to take into account. They felt that there were times when an over-emphasis on cool-detached did not work with audiences and could lead to public criticism. Cronkite may have viewed with hindsight his tears on Kennedy’s assassination as a sign of professional weakness but they echoed the emotions of millions of Americans. Arguably that is what helped make him their most trusted news anchor. Some of the journalists interviewed about Dunblane felt that the legendary BBC foreign correspondent Kate Adie had been far *too* clinical in her reporting of the school shooting and lacked empathy. When the coverage of Dunblane became the subject of debate at the Edinburgh Television Festival in August 1996, the then Head of Broadcasting for BBC Scotland, Colin Cameron, said that Adie’s reporting had been “too forensic”<sup>120</sup> and that she had misjudged the tone appropriate to the distressing event. It was the detached tone that appeared to be more at home in a foreign affairs report from Libya or Tiananmen Square. In an analysis of Adie’s four reports for the BBC from Dunblane, Smith and Higgins (2012: 1,090) found that she had no direct on camera interaction with any of those on the scene, preferring rather to narrate at a distance, “occupying a separate discursive space from the people of Dunblane.” This chimes with Chouliaraki’s work on ‘distant suffering’ (2006, 2013) in which news discourses are able to create ‘hierarchies of place and human life’ (2006:8) which can mean it is sometimes considered more appropriate to display emotion and generate pity closer to home.

The then newly appointed Editor-in-Chief of ITN, Richard Tait (I 6), felt that the BBC’s rival in television news managed to strike an appropriate balance between detachment, distance and engagement but believed that his reporters on the

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<sup>120</sup> His comments were widely cited in what became a furious row. See The Herald coverage: *Scots chief attacks Kate Adie Dunblane coverage, causes BBC rift*. Available from: <http://www.heraldscotland.com/sport/spl/aberdeen/scots-chief-attacks-kate-adie-dunblane-coverage-causes-bbc-rift-1.439076>

ground had done this instinctively. While Tait used the word “instinctively”, it was clear to me that he was referring to what were in effect the normative practices of journalism learnt through experience on the job but it also raised the prospect of there have been a collective, pervasive mood of what was right and wrong for the story (just as the BBC thought Adie was ‘wrong’ in her tone). The ITN reporters did not, he, said receive any instruction from head office, he trusted in their ability to strike the right note. Again, almost 20 years on, Tait could recall explicit detail of the story, the shots that prompted complaints and the way his main reporter on the scene, Colin Baker, had managed to inject that right tone:

“He was himself quite an emotional man ... he was able to show that he was moved by the story without allowing that to intrude into his reporting.”

But at the same time, Baker did show empathy and what Tait called “engagement” in the story:

“He was a good choice because he, he was a man who could report with humanity. He’s a big sort of comforting looking man and ... the sort of guy you would probably, you know, think was quite a friendly person and have a chat with. And, you know, he didn’t, he didn’t appear the sort of stereotype of newshound. He had a very comfortable delivery, very good choice of words and he wasn’t afraid to allow a little bit of emotion ... to come into his pieces. He never, he never overdid it. But you always felt at the end of a Colin Baker piece that you have some insight into what he was thinking and feeling ... without any sort of showboating or some of the sort of exaggerated tricks that second-rate reporters use to inject emotion into their pieces.”

In one classic sequence, telling a simple story without overt interpretation, ITN showed ambulances heading away from the school while parents rushed up the hill towards it. Much as Linklater had painted a picture with words, the ITN producer in Colin Baker’s main bulletin report to camera (ITN archive footage,



1996) used a simple juxtaposition of news footage to convey the anguish of the event. It was Baker who won that year's Royal Television Society award for Home News.

For some of the journalists interviewed, these kinds of behaviour and practices appear to have been successful in deflecting immediate attention from the difficult nature of the story they witnessed in Dunblane. Maggie Fox was sent to Scotland because she didn't have children. Kate Fawcett did have children, of all places in the neighbouring school, but forced herself into the role of the professional journalist. Fran Unsworth and Magnus Linklater fixed on the competitive nature of the story and adopted a form of autopilot<sup>121</sup>. Coping mechanisms are familiar territory for many professions, ranging from doctors and nurses to emergency services such as police, ambulance and fire crew but my interviews showed that scant attention has been paid to the subject in relation to journalism. In the heat of the coverage these journalistic coping practices seemed to be spontaneous and unconscious – affective practices that are part of the everyday life of a journalist covering a big breaking news story, subject to little conscious monitoring (Wetherell, 2012: 129) and weaving together the body, technology and the nature of the story. But when asked to elaborate, with the hindsight of nearly 20 years, the detachment quickly became rationalised as a hallmark of professional journalism and was couched in the familiar normative framework.

There were some journalists I interviewed where the coping mechanisms simply failed and I will elaborate on their experiences and the consequences later in this chapter. But I also was keen to explore whether this same affective dimension is in evidence today in an environment in which stories are infused with social

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<sup>121</sup> When I was revising the text of this thesis before submission, I read the reflections of Associated Press photographer Suzanne Plunkett, who had taken several iconic images during the Sept 11 attacks in New York. As the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed, she ran for her life while at the same time taking pictures in what she called "automatic mode". She writes (2016): "This is it, I'm going to die,' I think as I struggle to breathe. That sends me into automatic mode. I'm a photographer for the Associated Press news agency. I've got to send my photos. I'm on deadline and the seconds are counting down like an incessant drumbeat."

media or ‘user-generated content’ and in which the journalist no longer has the traditional monopoly on sourcing the information. Because they are part of an older generation of journalists who established their careers in the pre-internet era, I had expected those who covered Dunblane to maintain that the new environment would not change their fundamental stance on the practice of journalism. And that indeed was the case. In Chapter One, I noted how some journalists have fought a rear-guard action against social media to protect the boundaries of their profession.<sup>122</sup> However, when speaking to journalists actively engaged in covering contemporary stories such as the Woolwich killing of Drummer Rigby and Ghouta chemical weapons attack, I discovered how powerful the objectivity norm remains today and how the practices I had identified in the coverage of Dunblane appeared to be unchanged in such contemporary reporting of traumatic news. That would suggest that they are deep-seated affective practices behaviours that are indeed visceral, relating to habitus, training, technology and the dynamic of a news story.

In her job as a producer for ITN, Fadah Jassem sifts through user-generated video footage sent in from the Middle East conflicts every day. She is for the news operation hugely valuable, born of Iraqi and Syrian parents, fluent in English and Arabic and, being 25 or more years younger than many of the journalists who covered Dunblane, completely at ease with social media. I have already mentioned in Section 4.2 above, how she monitored the texts, tweets and mobile phone footage indicating that a chemical weapons attack had been made on the suburb of Ghouta. So how did she cope with the distressing images of children and adults writhing in agony? Or with the destruction of the city of Homs where Syrian fighters she had been in contact by e-mail were killed? In the newsroom, the sheer pressure of work took over, chasing down sources, trying to verify the authenticity of video and searching for eyewitnesses who could speak down a phone line to London. The death of some of her sources in Homs was particularly difficult for Jassem:

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<sup>122</sup> See p 68.

“Some of them I knew had been killed in the shelling. Everything was eaten up in Homs. There wasn’t anything left. So, that was the most difficult time for me. But because it was also the busiest time working as a journalist, I didn’t really have time to stop and think about it I think.”

The phrase ‘I didn’t have time to stop and think’ often came up in the conversations I had with journalists covering these types of stories. This epitomised for me the affective dimension of practice as described by Wetherell, unfolding relatively automatically with little conscious monitoring and often too fast for strategic thought (2012: 129).

There were clear commercial and competitive considerations at play in the handling of the Woolwich killing story where Jassem was also involved in ITN’s coverage. ITN bought footage of the attack on drummer Rigby from a passer-by, brought him into the newsroom by taxi and loaded the video onto the ITN server. It had a ‘scoop’ on its hands that would beat the competition. The gallery played out the footage onto the 6:30 p.m. ITV London News; the presenter Charlene White had no script and the producers had not watched the video to the end:

“I think there was a quick forward and rewind just to see quickly but it was absolute chaos. Are we going to run it? There were phone calls coming down from the editors upstairs. Should we run it? Should we not run it? And then the final decision, ‘Yes, run it.’ So, they did. They pressed play and we were all just stunned and everyone’s mouths just dropped. And this was live on air.”

For Jassem, the footage had been no more brutal than that she had been viewing every day from Syria and Iraq. But, she said, it sent chills down her spine. From an affective dimension, I would argue that the chaos and panic that she described went beyond considerations of the commercial or competitive value of the footage ITV had bought. The journalistic value of immediacy itself carried an affective dimension. The event illustrated the affective relationships within a newsroom operating under extreme pressure and caught up in an event, the ‘short bursts’ of activity that sees affective waves of feeling which are generated by a

raft of interconnected processes and the capacity of actors to re-enact the actions of others (Wetherell, 2012:142). Jassem described how the action unfolded automatically. When Venn (2010) reflects on Knorr-Cetina & Bruegger's analysis of foreign exchange dealers (2002), he identifies an affective force that welds bodies into a collective ensemble which combines in-the-moment experiences and calculation. I explore how social media has created increased pressure on journalists and the affective impact of that in more detail in Chapter Five.

In the cold light of day, after the event, the television regulator Ofcom reviewed the incident. The footage had been broadcast live to those watching the teatime news, well before the 9 p.m. watershed<sup>123</sup>. Ofcom received about 680 complaints against broadcasters who showed the footage, half of them about the first ITV bulletin. In January 2014, Ofcom ruled<sup>124</sup> that the footage had not breached broadcasting regulations and was justified by the context and “unprecedented nature of the incident.” But it did issue new guidelines on the need to give warnings before airing distressing content.

When I spoke to Lindsey Hilsum (I 20), Channel 4's vastly experienced International Editor and a veteran of the Rwandan massacre in 1994, she was adamant that broadcast news has gone too far in pursuing the feelings of the correspondent on camera, albeit in an attempt to engage the viewer and care about conflicts such as Syria.

“One of my concerns is an over emphasis on the emotion of the journalist reporting the story at the expense of trying to understand what's going on ... I worry that one's own reaction as a human being that sometimes that has become too central in the story and it cheapens the currency. And it becomes too easy because actually that is the easy bit.”

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<sup>123</sup> Ofcom defines the watershed as beginning at 9 p.m., saying that material unsuitable for children should not, in general, be shown before this time on television. It says unsuitable material can include everything from sexual content to violence, graphic or distressing imagery and swearing.

<sup>124</sup> See link to BBC story in bibliography.

That is about the craft skill of journalists, and specifically senior editors, trying to set a tone for broadcasts or a particular programme, such as the daily 7 p.m. Channel 4 News. But when it came to talking about her own feelings, there was a clear compartmentalisation between the private and professional:

“To be perfectly honest, what happens with me I get very upset usually at the time, but the very upset I do off camera. You know, I do get very upset I cry quite a lot. I'm not ashamed of that, I think it's fine. I'm a human being for God sake. But I don't do that bit on camera because that bit is losing control and I don't think you should lose control. And then if I'm honest I get over it pretty quickly and get on with things, what you have to do.”

That comment about losing control reminded me of the Cronkite tear and how such consummate professionals so rarely allow themselves to drop their guard (especially in front of another journalist). Hilsum was sitting in her kitchen at home, her foot propped up on a stool after a knee operation, and was literally several thousand miles from Aleppo. So she told me a story about two girls in Aleppo and how she couldn't get them out of her mind. I have quoted her in full here, including the way she has managed to deal with very difficult and distressing stories she is covering:

“When I was Aleppo about six weeks ago there were two particular little girls who stay with me and they will stay with me. And I suppose the reason they will stay with me is because they were two very bright little girls, one was seven and one was 10 and they were very keen to show me how they could do their numbers up to 100 in Arabic and up to 10 in English. And they were just lovely and they wanted to do it on camera, so they did it on camera and all the rest of it. And one of them has been out of school for three years because they've been displaced so much and the other one probably won't go to school at all, the one who is seven. And I suppose if I'm honest the reason they stayed with me is because I identify with them because they are bright little girls and I could

remember myself at the age of seven and 10. And they were the kind of little girls -- and you think, shit, they are not going to get to school. They are not going to, you know -- what will happen to them, will they be sold off, you know, as wives when they are 13/14. It's perfectly possible, it's happening to lots of girls in Syria.

“So you know that -- yeah, they stay with me I think about them. And so basically I talk about them. I've given quite a few talks since I came back from Syria and I've written about them. That's how one deals with it, one deals with it by continuing to do one's job.”

Hilsum had also been through all the footage that came in from Ghouta, “sifting through it”, as she said, with a chemical weapons expert looking for tell-tale signs of a chemical agent such as sarin – “yards and yards of footage of children suffering and dying, bloody hell, it was endless.” The determination to verify footage and find evidence and facts as part of the professional journalistic process was a recurring theme. This forensic, rationalist approach, based on the normative values of fact-based journalism, also had its affective dimension as a means of managing the distressing nature of the material.

#### *4.4 The herd instinct and affective contagion*

It quickly became apparent to me when I started doing research for this thesis that when an (ex) journalist and journalist sit down for an interview, they talk in a common language, often using short hand phrases that are instantly understood through a shared practice. One such phrase that kept emerging was ‘herd instinct’, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the tendency to associate or conform with one’s own kind for support...” But that definition is not, in fact, how most journalists would describe the phrase and the word ‘support’ in fact jars. More often than not, it is associated with the pack instinct of journalists all chasing the same story, or the tendency to all go for the same angle for fear of missing the story and losing out to a competitor. That was certainly the case in Dunblane, where 600 journalists, complete with TV cranes, and various support staff converged on the city of just 7,000 inhabitants. Gill Moreton, who was then

a social worker in the area and was drafted in to help the bereaved families, told me how overpowering she felt the media presence was (I 3):

“I remember being just ... being very unsettled by the kind of the media sort of juggernaut that arrived, just its physical presence, the kind of the vans and the ... just how many people that involved in the satellite issues and stuff. So, I remember people finding that difficult. I remember people feeling very protective, of the families but also of the community. Some people were protective of both and some were more protective of one or the other, but that real sense of we have to kind of fend them off in some way.”

This media juggernaut is typical of the ‘waves of news’ that can amplify an event (Vasterman, 2005)<sup>125</sup>. But I was more interested in exploring the affective dimension of herd instinct, how it spreads throughout a group of journalists covering a highly stressful news story and whether there were times when this also constituted a coping mechanism and - perhaps as the OED suggested – a support. Just as I have argued that the attitude of cool-detached is an example of affective behaviour deeply embedded in journalism practice, so too the herd instinct displays an affective contagion that can spread through a group of journalists covering the same story. As set out in Chapter Three, Venn explores collective patterns of human behaviour that bind a group of individuals into an affective unit (2010: 130), seeking explanations for what appears to transcend cognition and calculation. Venn postulates that a degree of prior learning or kind of apprenticeship is needed for such collective acts, itself instilled by a sense of belonging and acting with others (ibid: 134). In the context of journalism, I tried in my interviews to trace this affective dimension. The journalists who worked for established news organisations such as the BBC, ITN and The Times had all shared a common type of training that had emphasised the values of fact-based reporting. That drew together their understanding of professional practice and, coupled with the unspoken codes of their work, created the pre-conditions for a form of collective action.

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<sup>125</sup> See p 89.

Dunblane appears to have been a classic case of affective contagion. No one was coordinating the diverse group of journalists from national and regional broadcasters, tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. And yet, as Linklater observed in his interview with me, they acted as though in concert with each other:

“What was quite interesting about the reporting of Dunblane both on that morning and as it developed was that although there was massive interest, and by the end of the day, television crews had poured in, there was sense ... that similar sense of sort of standing back from the grief of a town, most of the families simply refused to talk to the media. And although the media were accused of intrusion, they held back, I felt, you know. There were occasional complaints about journalists, you know, insensitively stopping people in the street or knocking on doors. When you got a massive disaster ... not disaster, a massacre like that, I think there is in almost any reporter an instinct to hold back rather than intrude. And as you probably know, after they had been there for about five days, there was the most extraordinary thing which is the media unilaterally pulled out, you know, just decided to pull out. And I think it was partly, you know, because they weren't getting anywhere with a town that it sort of folded in on itself in a protective way, but also because, I think, they just felt, you know, this is too big an event for us to keep on intruding.”

This appears to be more than just the threat of competition scooping a story, it is a persuasive mood, or a 'gut feeling' akin to the 'market feeling' cited by Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger (2002). There were other examples of affective contagion experienced by and between journalists I spoke to. Helen Branswell (I 4) commented on how she felt the press had almost been out of control in Dunblane and acted as a single body:

“I've often thought about, in the aftermath of that (Dunblane), and then I was there for the death of Diana and the zoo-like coverage of that. And, you know, there's something uncontrollable about the media. Like,



we're so huge and amorphous and, you know, like I don't know, like a hydra with too many heads or something. Like, people get angry at the fact that sometimes we over-cover things, they say. It's just like...it's not like any one organisation makes the choice typically to over-cover something. It's just that there are so many of us that, you know, when we all focus our attention just the sheer volume of having us all on a story can be so overwhelming for the people who are the subject of the story, you know. I remember thinking with Diana's kids after her death, it was like the whole world wanted to hug them and while that was, you know, always the best of intentions, the sheer pressure of all those people wanting something from you even if it's wanting to get you to let them help you. That's just so huge and overwhelming, and it felt like that in Dunblane."

There had, of course, been some overt co-ordination in Dunblane, specifically over the British media's pull-out before the funerals. It was not as though one of the big three UK broadcasters was going to act unilaterally and leave the field open to its arch rivals. Unsworth's BBC colleagues had told her they didn't feel they should be covering the funerals and "little coffins"; the Sky and ITN teams on the ground felt the same. So while the decision was a policy one, signed off by top editors in London, the affective and contagious mood on the ground had been key. That mood had circulated between reporters, often crammed into the same church hall to attend press conferences, and between reporters and the people of Dunblane. As Moreton observed, it was as though the press were part of a collective decision. That in turn, she believes, helped form a bond between some of the grieving parents and journalists that enabled the press to write follow-up stories in the years to come. The question is whether such a collective mood can exist to the same extent in today's social media environment in which 'citizen journalists' can by-pass mainstream media and post live footage via mobile phones to the Internet. I examine such cases in Chapter Five.

Patrick Howse, a former BBC reporter who spent seven years in and out of Iraq as bureau chief, covered horrific bombings in the country before returning to London at the end of his stint. There was, he told me, an instinctive

understanding amongst journalists in the field in Baghdad, a community of the BBC, Reuters, the Associated Press and other big names that shared values and was mutually supportive (I 19). He spoke about being able to tap into each other's intuition in dangerous situations. "You know, it's a tremendously powerful thing," he said. "It's just a feeling but it is fed by things ... that you picked up." There is a sense here of that collective, attuned body of foreign correspondents which is sharing a pervasive mood. Training and experience played a big part in this – it is why broadcasters sometimes 'pool' or share coverage in dangerous areas in order to reduce the exposure to risk. But I also understand this as part of an affective practice, what Wetherell refers to as 'situated social activity' (2012: 77) and where the importance of milieu is paramount (Venn, 2010).

However, Howse's sense of the self-supporting collective was lacking in what were often tense discussions with the London news desk. Once he was back in London permanently, his life started to unravel. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore through the stories of those journalists I interviewed what happens when the cool-detached stance fails to work or when they reject it as inappropriate.

#### *4.5 When the mechanisms break down*

In Chapter Three, I examined the academic literature relating to the types of stories when journalism's objectivity norm is most likely to break down. In doing so, I cited Schudson's (2002: 40-41) three main categories: moments of tragedy, moments of public danger and moments when there is a threat to national security. These are times when the doubts, hesitations and dilemmas of journalists are most exposed and these are the times that I was able to explore face-to-face through my interviews. In the earlier parts of this chapter, I set out my argument that the archetypal hallmark of objectivity – what I have called the cool-detached stance – is in an affective behaviour that allows a journalist to do his or her job under extreme pressure. The experience of several of the journalists whose stories I have told above illustrated how the relentless pace of a major news event left little time for reflection, meaning they 'went with the

flow'. Often they were on autopilot, slipping into a routine of fact-based reporting, trying to rise above the stress and allowing the emotions of victims and survivors to speak for themselves. But it was never, of course, so black and white. Gill Moreton, reflecting on the aftermath of the Dunblane shooting, told me how the social working team had made a list of all those people who may have been affected, from the bereaved parents and school children to the gravediggers and those who had been on the gun range with Thomas Hamilton. She also included the journalists who covered the story, some of whom, she said, opened themselves up in an empathic way, almost as part of a social and community response. Indeed, some of the journalists I interviewed did allow a glimpse of what they experienced when the enormity of what they were witnessing struck home. It became apparent to me that there were further affective practices. In the first case, some journalists *increased their engagement*. They opened themselves up to their own emotions, dropping at least partially the cool-detached persona, or trying to maintain a balance between personal engagement and detachment. Sometimes this seemed to be an unconscious stance, one of affective contagion, while at others times it was rationalised as an attempt to understand better those they were reporting on – and effectively to secure a 'better' story. In the second case, the reverse was true. Rather than moving closer to those caught up in the news, these journalists effectively turned their back on the story and *disengaged* to an extent that went far beyond the normative stance of detachment. What follows are some of these stories, inevitably sensitive (because in the normative narrative of journalism they are considered to show weakness and failure) and at times highly personal.

For Stuart Hughes (I 14), a senior BBC television producer, the world changed one bright spring morning in 2003 when he stepped out of a vehicle in Iraq onto a landmine. An Iranian photojournalist he was travelling with, Kaveh Golestan, thinking the group of journalists was under mortar attack, ran for cover, triggered another landmine and was killed instantly. Five days later, 'medevaced' back to the United Kingdom, Hughes had his leg amputated below the knee. We met at the BBC's renovated Broadcasting House headquarters and spoke for a long time before he talked about his own injuries. On the one hand, he said, he couldn't shut himself off from the emotions of those being interviewed. But at the same

time, after years of training and being steeped in the BBC culture, he was adamant that the final product goes through a process of what he called “*distancing*.”

“I think you sort of compartmentalise your brain into sort of two parts. There is the human being part which is, if you’re in a difficult situation or a dangerous situation or you’re meeting people, interviewing people who’ve been through traumatic incidents, you can’t help but be affected by it just as a human being. So that’s the sort of the human side or the human compartment. But I think there is various levels of, call it sanitisation, call it depersonalising, call it what you will, both in terms of the storytelling, in terms of the way that you edit a piece that you go through before the final product gets on-air. You obviously want to have an emotional impact in the pictures and the audio that you use. But I think there is a sort of distancing that goes on and a lot of that, I think, particularly in television, you can do through the language that you use.”

Hughes was describing an attempt to balance conflicting pressures, adhering on the one hand to the BBC’s reputation for objective journalism and at the same time recognising that he could not block off his own feelings. It is an attempt to engage more closely with victims and survivors of traumatic news events. A recurrent theme through my interviews was how journalists tried, when reflecting on their practice, to create two personae – that of the ‘professional journalist’ and that of the ‘human being.’ This is something they had considered and felt was learnt through their experience. But what was striking was the way in which the descriptions of this phenomenon often showed there was little conscious monitoring or strategic thought to it. This also related to what Wetherell (2012: 129) refers to as an ‘act of attention’ in which people can move into conscious feeling, narrating, describing and remembering (ibid).

Sandra Laville (I 13), a Guardian journalist who has covered conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, talked to me about covering domestic crime (she was for a while crime correspondent and covered some horrific child abuse stories). She had quite clearly decided though a process of reflection that there needed to be a

balance between empathy (“to get the best out of your interviewee”) and the need to stand back and “maintain some objectivity.” She characterised empathy as being a technique, while objectivity was clearly for her a means of self-protection:

“I have to think about checking myself because I can become too involved whether it’s covering crime stories or whether it’s kind of going abroad and covering war or whatever. But, yeah, I can get too involved so I need to check myself, stand back and protect myself in a way.”

Emma Cowing, features editor of the Scottish Daily Mail (I 16), also rationalised that attempt at balance in a similar fashion, saying it was important to distinguish between sympathy (in her view bad) and empathy (in her view good) in interviews while trying to remain detached and keep a distance. She too had a narrow escape in the Middle East when, for a brief 24 hours, she became the story. On a visit to Camp Bastion and British troops stationed in Afghanistan she collapsed with acute heatstroke as temperatures soared to 54C. The soldiers she was on patrol with declared her dead as virtually all her organs shut down. Evacuated in a Chinook in a coma, she pulled through, coming back to consciousness 18 hours later. She told me how profoundly moved she was by the treatment she had received, something she wrote about in a first person article in *The Scotsman*<sup>126</sup>:

“There are moments of kindness from those strange few days that still touch me deeply today: the grizzled paratrooper whom I’d met in Camp Bastion ten days before who turned up in the intensive care unit of the base field hospital to sit and hold my hand; the nurse on the TriStar who would lift my head so I could take tiny sips of Ribena; the soldier at Birmingham’s Selly Oak Hospital who, upon seeing my lost and worried parents wandering the corridors and hearing their Scottish accents, took them straight to my bedside. The army looks after its own, but it also

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<sup>126</sup> *The Scotsman*, January 11, 2012, see bibliography.

takes time to look after those who travel with them ... you repay them by telling the world their stories.”

It is difficult to say to what extent Cowing’s experience influenced her practice as a journalist but in our discussions I could detect the tensions between the normative expectations of professionalism and her desire to engage with her subjects. This is how she explained that in terms of being able to search out a better story:

“I think you have to be malleable and flexible depending on the situation. I think if you sort of, you know, I’m cold hard objective to every story that I cover and I’m never going to be affected and I think that you have to be prepared to be open I think. And I think you have to be prepared that sometimes, it’s not...people don’t necessarily want you to show emotion sometimes but they want you to empathise. They want you to understand what they’re saying and they want you to appreciate that it’s important. I think you have to be open to different circumstances and different environments.”

But then she also described an interview she had conducted with a couple whose daughter had died in mysterious circumstances. The mother broke down in tears as she spoke about kissing her on the mortuary slab. Cowing told me how she “caught herself” as she listened, forced herself to focus on the next question but then changed the nature of the interview:

“... and I still was kicking myself afterwards thinking for goodness sake this is so unprofessional. But she I think actually appreciated the fact that I had (changed the nature of the interview).”

The BBC’s Fran Unsworth talked about the same tensions, saying how she sometimes detached herself automatically to the point at which after the story has subsided she felt guilty about it. I have quoted her at length here as she spoke to me about how she has moved to the point at which she recognises this as

something to be aware of in relation to her colleagues and how the trauma can pass from interviewee to interviewer:

“ ... people get so stressed out about making sure that they’re doing the job and that they’re not missing anything, and as we said, the competitive aspect of it. You know that this is a huge story that you’ve got to get right, that stress sort of crowds out almost the sympathy that you ought to feel for the victims of the story. I think this is the root of quite a lot of post traumatic stress that journalists suffer actually because I spent years being slightly unsympathetic towards the whole concept of post traumatic stress as it affects journalists because I spent a few years saying, ‘It didn’t happen to you. It wasn’t your children. You’re not starving. You’re not injured. You’re going home at the end of this so what’s the problem here?’

“And actually now I understand much more I think now why journalists go through this and I think there isn’t quite a strong element of guilt in it.”

That feeling of guilt was a common theme in my interviews and particularly in cases where the objectivity norm had broken down to the extent that the affective register was in fact one of disengagement. I was told by some of those I interviewed about Dunblane how some tabloid reporters, instructed by their news desks to interview parents of the dead children, made sure that their approaches were spotted by the police, and were therefore stopped in their tracks. Other journalists I interviewed told me how once the story subsided, the impact of what they had witnessed began to sink in. Branswell said she sometimes thought interviewing people who had suffered some form of tragedy was like “pressing on their wound.” ITN’s Fadah Jassem said handling graphic videos day in, day out began to take its toll to the extent that she didn’t want to socialise. By her own admission she became more withdrawn. She hated people asking her what she thought about the Syrian conflict. And there were times, as the videos of beheadings became more graphic, that she tried to avoid looking at the footage she didn’t need to view for news bulletins.

I have already mentioned Patrick Howse in the previous section. Much like Stuart Hughes and Emma Cowing, he has spoken publically about the trauma he suffered as a result of his work. In the final analysis, he is quite open about the fact that he was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)<sup>127</sup>. But first, he had no understanding of what was happening to him. When someone wiped the steam off a London underground carriage window with his sleeve, Howse visualised a map of Baghdad, could see and smell burning, and hear the screams.<sup>128</sup> He told in that article of the gulf between him and those in the newsroom he found back at the BBC in London and how he was unable to relate to them. This illustrated the importance of the collective ensemble that had been created by the milieu or setting abroad (as set out by Venn, 2010) and how difficult it can be to adjust once that disappears. Over the next months, he says he lost his marriage, his career, his family and his identity. Since the attacks of Sept 11 there have been a number of studies into the clinical symptoms of trauma and full-blown PTSD in journalists, pioneered by the Canadian-based South African psychiatrist Dr Anthony Feinstein, and a growing awareness among major news organisations of the risks of exposure to traumatic news stories. His first study, published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in 2002, was followed up by research published in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* in 2005. Together, they exploded the myth that a macho profession such as journalism is

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<sup>127</sup> PTSD is defined as follows (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV)):

A potentially debilitating psychiatric condition that develops as the result of being exposed to a traumatic occurrence 'in which a person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others' and which generates 'intense feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror' in those exposed to the trauma. This condition is characterized by a constellation of symptoms in three domains:

A. Symptoms of re-experiencing (for example, intrusive thoughts and upsetting recollections of the trauma, recurrent dreams or nightmares, and flashbacks).

B. Symptoms of avoidance and emotional numbing (for example, efforts to avoid conversations, places, and thoughts associated with the trauma; detachment from others; and a restricted range of affect).

C. Symptoms of increased arousal (for example, sleep disruption, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response).

These symptoms must meet two criteria to satisfy diagnostic criteria:

1. Symptoms must cause significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important functional domains.
2. Symptoms must be present for at least one month after exposure to the traumatic event or events.

<sup>128</sup> He described this scene in an article for the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, see bibliography.



immune from psychological stress. One piece of his research shows that for correspondents who have covered five or more conflicts, 29 percent suffer from some form of traumatic stress.<sup>129</sup> That myth is also eroding as journalists such as Howse, Hughes and others speak out about their own experiences.<sup>130</sup> But in this research, I have been more interested in the lived experiences of journalists covering such news. In my interview with Howse, I had the impression that what he found most difficult about reporting from Iraq was the relationship with the news desk back in London which, he felt, did not share his same professional passion to report news from Iraq. In such a case for him the shared collective experience of journalism broke down. He told me how he struggled to get the story of an Iraqi bombing of Sadriya in Baghdad, which killed 157 people, into the news bulletin on the day when the footballer Rio Ferdinand was giving a news conference about missing a drugs test. He eventually managed to persuade London to run it as the lead item. Twelve hours of arguing left him exhausted:

“By a horrible twist of fate, I was leaving the country the next day and had to leave at five o’clock in the morning to go to the airport. And so, I went to bed. I lay down on my bed at two o’clock in the morning and sobbed for three hours then got up and left. And that was really the start of my trauma.”

That day kept coming back to him, whether on the London underground, shopping at Tesco or in an editorial meeting. Those recurring and intrusive flashbacks were a classic symptom of PTSD. Frank Ochberg, a founding board member of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies who secured the funding to establish the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, defines the triad of disabling responses as<sup>131</sup>:

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<sup>129</sup> See also discussion in Chapter Three.

<sup>130</sup> As evidence for this, elements of training around trauma are now being introduced into ‘hostile environment’ training courses which teach journalists about physical safety. Working with Dart I have been involved in discussions on this with training companies, which have contracted out sessions on the mental wellbeing of journalists. I discuss in greater detail the work of Dart, including best practice guidelines on interview technique and handling social media in chapters Six and Seven.

<sup>131</sup> Writing for the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, see bibliography.

- Recurring intrusive recollections;
- Emotional numbing and constriction of life activity;
- A physiological shift in the fear threshold, affecting sleep, concentration, and sense of security.

Howse did continue to work, most recently as an education reporter, but, he said, it appeared that no one at the BBC really knew what to do with him. He has since left and is training journalists on hostile environment courses.

#### *4.6 Conclusion*

I began this chapter by revisiting the rationale for taking a phenomenological approach to the practice of journalism, elaborating on the need to explore the lived experience of journalists *within the context of* the shifting news environment and their personal background. I then tried to apply concepts of affect used predominantly by Venn and Wetherell to analyse my interview data and to identify the elements of the affective dimension in the practice of those journalists covering traumatic news stories such as Dunblane, the Ghouta chemical weapons attack and Woolwich killing. The two main affective behaviours that emerged were what I have called ‘cool-detached’ and ‘autopilot’, both of which could be called forms of ‘affective detachment’ and both of which are in fact consistent with the values commonly associated with the professionalism of mainstream journalism. But the interviews also revealed the fragility of these behaviours. There were instances when they were consciously diluted, rejected or simply broke down in the face of traumatic stories, with journalists either engaging more closely with their interview subjects or actually disengaging from them. I also investigated the herd instinct among journalists, tracing the affective dimension and its links to the story, competition and broader milieu.

Throughout the interviews I conducted I was struck by the enduring power of the objectivity norm, bridging the gap between Dunblane in 1996 and major contemporary news stories characterised by the contribution of social media. I had expected objectivity to be the professional anchor and starting point for those

journalists I interviewed from the BBC and Reuters since both organisations pride themselves on fact-based reporting. But no one questioned its validity and its power seemed equally intact when put to the test of today's social media. Objectivity for many of those interviewed was still the hallmark of professionalism and, while the concept was often poorly defined, it focused on the key issue of detachment. Any deviation from this was interpreted with hindsight as a failure to uphold that code. But my main conclusion from these interviews is a different one, namely that this archetypal external representation of detachment also serves another purpose. As one of the affective dimensions of practice, it allowed some of the journalists questioned to shield themselves, at least during the height of the story, from feelings of distress and guilt. Some of those I spoke to were keen to rationalise that stance after the event but for many it appeared to be automatic, linked to on-the-job experience and a common perception of what is considered to be correct behaviour among the community of journalists. As Wetherell observes in her description of affective practice, the action “usually turns out to be recognisable, communicative, reflexively related to the ongoing flow of others’ actions, and jointly coordinated with them” (2012: 129). These are patterns of behaviour that result in a pervasive feeling that involves both cognitive and affective sensing (Venn, 2010: 131). The detached behaviour was reinforced by the sheer pressure to deliver the story – pressure from news desks, pressure of deadlines, pressure not to miss an angle, pressure not to appear weak in front of peers. Sometimes that pressure meant that a journalist would shift into autopilot, again drawing on that semiotic hinterland of training, habit, past experience and routine to cope with the demands of the story and to prevent anything from disrupting the process. These two affective behaviours have one thing in common: the fact that they are driven by a belief that detached, fact-based journalism is an essential component of responsible news. In my experience, especially that of agency journalism, the ideal of fact-based journalism is based on the need to deliver a traumatic breaking news story quickly and accurately ahead of the competition. One of the drivers in this instance is clearly an economic one, an aspect I examine in more detail in the next chapter.

My interviews showed that these affective practices are also fragile. When the modes of cool-detached or autopilot broke down, the change seemed to manifest itself in one of two forms. Either journalists felt impelled to move closer to the story and interview subjects with increased empathy, at times intensifying the moment of affective contagion with their interview subject or the wider story, or they felt repelled by what they were witnessing. In both cases, the intensity and emotional nature of the story were the key reasons for the change in stance. I have argued that these affective practices of engagement and disengagement straddle either side of the normative and neutral line but equally serve as a mechanism to shield the journalist. Those who spoke of showing more empathy believed this was an important tool to build trust in an interviewee and thus produce a better story. Some cultivated this as a technique that they believed was consistent with their principles of objectivity. Those who pulled back from a story were conscious of the fact that they were not upholding the values of the profession but did so to protect themselves from secondary or vicarious traumatisation and in some cases to avoid intrusion into private grief.

Reflecting more broadly on these interviews, it is apparent that objectivity is a highly flexible and malleable concept, allowing journalists to present an authoritative, professional and detached persona to the outside world, while at the same time shielding themselves from the horrific suffering and trauma they often witness in the coverage of conflict and disaster. This in turn foreshadows an argument I will make that it is time to consider objectivity as a multi-faceted, dispersed set of practices and purposes that can simultaneously be somatic, psychic, economic, political and technological. In the macho days of journalism, the very mention of stress in the face of such stories could spell the end of a career. While there are some signs of a weakening of this culture as the work of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma gains traction and well-known journalists begin to speak out, it is by no means a universal shift. Some of the journalists I interviewed told me very personal stories of how they had failed to cope with the trauma they had witnessed and how that had spilled over into their own mental state. While all those interviewed were willing to be quoted on an attributed basis, a few of them felt uncomfortable with some details of what they said. If they asked me to keep certain responses “off the record” (the journalistic

term they used), I willingly did so. I noted such requests in my notebook during the interview, added a 'flag' later to relevant section of the transcript to ensure compliance and did not use that material in any form at all (i.e. not on an attributed basis and also not on a non-attributed anonymous basis).

A recurring theme in the interviews I conducted is 'getting the story' and the journalist's determination to produce what is validated as good journalism on deadline. In the next chapter, I explore in greater depth how the affective dimension of practice relates to a journalist's own sense of his or her professional identity, how adherence to this norm might affect career prospects and how, in a highly competitive environment, this can serve the commercial needs of news organisations.

## CHAPTER 5

### GETTING THE STORY – MORE THAN JUST PROFESSIONAL PRIDE

*“Lord Copper expects his staff to work wherever the best interests of the paper call them. I don’t think he would employ anyone of whose loyalty he was doubtful in any capacity.”*

*“You mean if I don’t go to Ishmaelia, I get the sack?”*

*“Yes,” said Mr. Salter. “In so many words that is exactly what I – Lord Copper means...”<sup>132</sup>*

*The commercial pressure in UK newsrooms is relentless, particularly for the mass-circulation titles. Tabloid editors will send out their reporters with an unmistakable message pinned painfully to the back of their heads – ‘just get the story.’ No excuses are accepted, no failure is allowed, you stand on the doorstep till she talks to you, you keep asking until you get the answer, open that miser’s paw, just get the damned story.<sup>133</sup> – Nick Davies*

#### *5.1 Introduction*

Not much seems to have changed since Evelyn Waugh’s satirical depiction of journalism in the 1930s and Nick Davies’ modern day investigation of genuine skullduggery in the Murdoch press. In the novel *Scoop*, the hapless William Boot, mistaken for an experienced journalist, is left in no doubt from his conversation with the *Daily Beast*’s foreign editor that refusal to cover a war in faraway Ishmaelia will spell the end of his career. In a similar fashion, but in the real world of today’s journalism, The Guardian’s investigative journalist Davies lays bare in his book *Hack Attack* the dirty tricks and corruption in British newspapers that became known as the ‘hacking scandal.’ In both cases, the message to the journalist is clear: get the story at any cost and failure or refusal will not be tolerated.

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<sup>132</sup> From the novel *Scoop* by Evelyn Waugh. Mr Salter is the obsequious foreign editor of a national daily newspaper, *The Daily Beast*, owned by press baron Lord Copper.

<sup>133</sup> Davies, N., 2014. *Hack Attack - How the truth caught up with Rupert Murdoch*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Waugh may have given us a lasting image of the foreign correspondent with his cleft stick<sup>134</sup>, but he was of course not the first to feature the journalist in a work of fiction. The foot-in-the-door ‘hack’ has been widely represented in many forms of popular culture. As Allan and Zelizer observe (2010: 43), such representations are as old as journalism itself and tend to range from the depiction of heroic public servants defending democracy (e.g. the film *All the President’s Men* depicting the Washington Post’s uncovering of the Watergate scandal through reporters Robert Woodward and Carl Bernstein) to immoral social misfits lurking in the shadows as they relentlessly dredge up scandals. But one way or another, getting the story has always been the goal, representing both the validation of the profession and a hallmark of success and advancement – in the 1970s, Woodward and Bernstein became the superstars of American journalism and the Washington Post won a Pulitzer prize for the story that brought down the corrupt President Nixon.

That phrase, ‘get the story’ is still regarded as the imperative of every reporter (Zelizer, 2005: 71) and was a recurring theme in almost all of the 25 interviews I conducted with journalists for my research, across the genres and across the age range, and it is key to this chapter. In Chapter Four, I attempted to identify through analysis of my interviews elements of affective journalism practice, illustrating how the concept of detachment can serve multiple purposes. My argument in this thesis is that detachment is itself an affective behaviour, designed both to uphold the normative values of journalism to colleagues and the wider public while often helping shield the journalist from the horrors of what they have been called on to witness and report. However, it also became clear from my interviews that this affective behaviour can have other functions, both for the individual journalist and for the news organisation he or she works for. For the journalist this encompasses the respect of peers in a fiercely competitive environment and the chances of career advancement, while for the media organisation my research interviews showed that the detached journalist is

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<sup>134</sup> William Boot set off to cover the war in Ishmaelia with a ton of baggage, a canoe and, famously, a cleft stick to carry his dispatches. For journalists, it has become a lasting symbol of the lengths they will go to in order to bring a story home.

considered more likely to bring home or ‘get’ the better story. As Katherine Graham (1997), the legendary publisher of the Washington Post during the Watergate years, wrote: “Good news is good business.”

This chapter therefore focuses in greater detail on how affective detachment functions in relation to a journalist’s personal sense of professional identity, power structures within news organisations and the broader political economy of news. It examines firstly examples of how journalists in the Anglo-American context perceive detachment as being part of a professional code of conduct<sup>135</sup>, then explores how they feel adherence to this code – or failure to adhere to it – can have an impact on their career. Finally, it examines the issue from the point of view of the political economy and the way in which the norm of detachment can help get the story in a competitive environment to engage audiences and thus benefit the business of journalism.

### *5.2 Detachment as a hallmark of professionalism*

I began this thesis with the legendary news anchor Walter Cronkite and his concern that by shedding a tear on President Kennedy’s death he had let his professional standards slip. These are rare occasions in mainstream broadcasting and stand out all the more when they do occur. Another such incident was when the BBC’s Ben Brown was confronted by a grieving widow after the devastation of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. The British public school stiff upper lip stance of the foreign correspondent was challenged awkwardly on camera when faced with an overt display of emotion.<sup>136</sup> Richards and Rees (2011) have observed how objectivity, and particularly the element of detachment, has gained talismanic status. Deuze (2005: 446) refers to the dominant way in which journalists validate and give meaning to their work, with a shared occupational ideology which functions to self-legitimize their position within society (and I would add among their peers). For Deuze, it is not just the embrace of objectivity

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<sup>135</sup> Phillips (2014: 60) points out that the objectivity norm is far from standard in other cultures where journalists sometimes see themselves as commentators. The one thing that journalists do tend to view as a common ideal is freedom from state control.

<sup>136</sup> See Chapter Six for a full discussion of this incident in the context of the practice of interviewing.



and detachment but also its questioning and reappraisal (for instance in the light of social media) that helps keep it alive as a cornerstone of journalism (ibid: 448).

When I interviewed journalists for this thesis I was struck by how many of them had clearly thought through what it meant to be a journalist and how it was important for them that this professional persona be recognised and at the same time that it should remain separate from another, more private self. Kate Fawcett (I 5), the BBC Scotland radio reporter whose story at Dunblane I told in Chapter Four, made it clear that she drew a clear distinction between her professional life (what she called ‘reporter mode’) and her role as a mother. This was particularly poignant for her since at the time of the shooting she had small children of her own in a nearby primary school. On the one hand, this led to conflicting emotions for her as she tried to switch between the two personae. But on the other hand the division in her mind between the roles helped her deliver the story and cope with the demands and deadlines of the news desk which was demanding stories for Good Morning Scotland.<sup>137</sup> Others I spoke to had a very clear image in their mind of what makes up a professional journalist and how those boundaries might be demarcated. The affective behaviour of detachment emerged as one important element of this. As set out in the previous chapter, my interviews led me to conclude that this affective detachment operates on many different levels. It is sometimes a stance designed to shield the journalist from trauma and sometimes a stance to create a distance from an interview subject. It is also a means of separating the professional from the personal and is inextricably linked to the journalist’s determination to get the story. This idea of separation came out in many of the interviews I conducted.

The point was graphically illustrated by the experience of Jake Wallis Simons, a journalist in his 30s who works for the Mail Online, the Daily Mail’s highly popular website.<sup>138</sup> When ISIS gunmen rampaged through Paris in November

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<sup>137</sup> See p 141.

<sup>138</sup> Mail Online reported £73m in revenues for the year to the end of September 2015, registering an annual underlying growth rate of 16%. It employs 410 editorial staff and has 13.2 million unique browsers every day although advertising revenues have been below target (The Guardian, 2015).

2015, killing 130 people, the news desk told him to get to the city as soon as possible. He dropped family plans for the weekend, grabbed his wrong digital SLR camera (which was broken) and ended up covering the story for 10 days with an iPhone, combining what he called old-fashioned reporting with a savvy 21<sup>st</sup> century use of social media. He explained how from the moment of landing in Paris he was focused entirely on the job (I 27), getting the story and adopting a professional persona:

“So by this point I was thinking professionally, I wasn’t thinking about the victims, I wasn’t thinking about how I responded to the fact that many people were killed, I wasn’t really thinking about the tragedy, I wasn’t thinking about the trauma, I was just thinking about the story because the pressure was huge ... because not only was I there and competing against various of my colleagues – who can get the lines, who can get the interviews, who can get the stories – but the media of the entire world were there all competing for the same people, and the same stories.”

In her discussion on Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, Wetherell notes how affect can act as a conservative force (2012: 106). The sort of overt commercial and competitive pressures alluded to by Simons can force an individual back into the established practice of the habitus in question (in this case that of a journalist in the field), re-enacting past practice. For me the incident illustrated how the power and grip of professional values and the affective intensity of a breaking and highly competitive traumatic news story are inextricably linked.

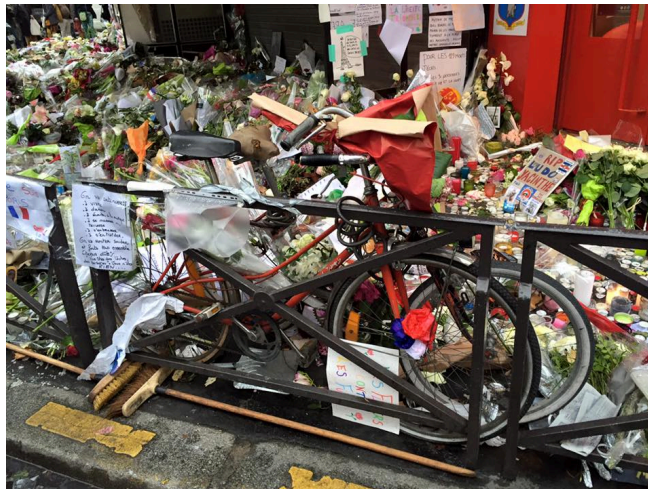
On the day after the Friday evening rampage, Simons found himself at the Place de la Republique where Parisians spontaneously joined hands and circled the central monument, the bronze statue of Marianne, a personification of the French Republic. He took pictures of the silent vigil on his iPhone and showing them later was struck by how detached he had been at the time.

“Looking at it now, I find it really moving, at the time I just thought this was great, it is almost like there is no room in your head to think like a

human being, you are just thinking as a journalist – to the extent that that evening I was sitting down and thinking I just don't feel touched by this at all. Everyone is crying, everyone is distraught and distressed, but it is not affecting me because I am just thinking about the story. It felt a bit odd.”

Like those journalists who had covered the Dunblane school shooting, it was only once the story started fading from the headlines that the enormity of it began to hit him, an ‘act of attention’ in which Simons moved into conscious feeling (Wetherell, 2012: 129). It was the sight of two bikes, chained to railings and garlanded in flowers, that triggered it. These had been the bikes of two of the diners who had been shot at one of the restaurants attacked by the gunmen.

“Towards the end, when I was going to go home, didn't have any stories to chase or have be on the job any more, there was an afternoon when I was able to walk around, visit some of the sites as a *human*<sup>139</sup> rather than a journalist and at that point it did begin to hit me. Just the small details like that (referring to the bikes) somehow bring it home to you when you have been absorbed in all of this grief and all this drama and all the horror day after day and you think you are impervious to it and then suddenly something gets through.”



Picture by Jake Wallis Simons

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<sup>139</sup> My italics.

Others I spoke with articulated a similar separation between the professional and the personal. Al-Jazeera's Juliana Ruhfus (I 17), who specialises in multi-media documentaries which often cover distressing topics around conflict and abuse, told me how she uses yoga to 'switch off' and create that barrier between the two worlds:

"I do that consciously, very consciously and I make the time for it and I pay for it because that comes out of my own money. That's absolutely worth it."

Druhti Shah, a social media producer at the BBC (I 26), talked about how the separation had been drummed into her at the BBC.

"I have loads of opinions. I have loads of opinions, I'm not supposed to have opinions, but I have loads of them. However, when I'm in my journalistic sphere all of those go to the side and I literally just look at what's in front of me and curate that which is front of me by putting what I feel what my own experiences are elsewhere."

She has two Facebook accounts, one personal and one for her journalist persona. It was, she said, a bit like Superman and Clark Kent. For her, it was important that any of the frustrations are dealt with outside the professional persona, "off stage". In a similar fashion, Lindsey Hilsum (I 20), Channel 4's International Editor, explained how she felt she was able to separate the journalist in her from the private individual:

"I think that the emotion of people on whom one is reporting is an integral part of the story. It may be the most important part of the story, it depends. But then another issue is the emotion of the journalist doing the reporting and it seems to me that those are two entirely different things."

I wrote in Chapter Four about how Hilsum felt that bringing her own reactions to a story “cheapens the currency” and has become too central to some broadcast news journalism. In one respect, the attempt at separation therefore reflects the standard normative view of journalistic objectivity. But in another respect, it struck me that this was Hilsum’s own personal validation of her professional status as a journalist. In practical terms, the attempt to separate lives is not a black and white, hard division, but rather a matter of degree:

“As the on-screen reporter you are the bridge between the person in the living room and, you know, the horror of Aleppo. You are that bridge and therefore you're not going to stand ... if you stand there like a stone, you know, showing no emotion, not indicating that you're in anyway affected by the situation around you then you're failing to do your job because then you certainly won't make people care. And if they don't care they're not even going to try and understand.

Another senior broadcast journalist, the BBC’s Stuart Hughes (I 14), used similar terms in trying to articulate a separation, talking of a type of “compartmentalisation” of his brain:

“There is the human being part which is, if you’re in a difficult situation or a dangerous situation or you’re meeting people, interviewing people who’ve been through traumatic incidents, you can’t help but be affected by it just as a human being. So that’s the sort of the human side or the human compartment. But I think there is various levels of, call it sanitisation, call it depersonalising, call it what you will, both in terms of the storytelling, in terms of the way that you edit a piece that you go through before the final product gets on-air. You obviously want to have an emotional impact in the pictures and the audio that you use. But I think there is a sort of distancing that goes on and a lot of that, I think, particularly in television, you can do through the language that you use.”

The comments from Hilsum and Hughes both echoed Chouliaraki's theoretical model<sup>140</sup> (2013: 140) that there is a dual requirement on the journalist to witness events as proof of the facts on suffering (an objective dimension) and to witness events as an emotive testimony to the "unspeakable horror of suffering" (a reflexive dimension).

The identification with the professional ideology of detachment came through so strongly in my interviews that I also became aware that those I spoke to felt guilty and defensive when they were not able to comply with the norm. Reuters journalist Maggie Fox (I 7) spoke frankly with me about those times when she felt her objectivity had come under pressure and how it was almost taboo to discuss this openly. As a young foreign correspondent she had felt sucked into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as she explained:

"I remember when I lived in Lebanon ... when the Israelis were still occupying part of the country and I was a very young and very inexperienced journalist. And there were very, very few foreigners there at that time. And I remember feeling myself all out of detachment and feeling very hostile to the Israeli occupation, as did any of the Westerners there. And that was when where I really felt that we were pulled out of journalistic detachment and really became involved in the story. Almost advocates, maybe because you were seeing how little coverage there was of the effects of the occupation on the people on Lebanon and that you felt like all the news coverage from outside was on the side of the Israelis..."

A similar example for Fox was the Chinese crackdown on Tiananmen Square in 1989 when she felt Communism was about to fall. It was, she said, easy to become caught up in the heady atmosphere and to identify with the protestors she was interviewing. But she felt that it was hardly surprising that journalists rarely discussed such subjects, precisely because they run counter to the way in which the ideology of professional journalism is framed and validated. The

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<sup>140</sup> See Chapter Three, p 123.

inference here is that such an open discussion could damage a career, an issue which is discussed in detail in section 5.4 below.

### *5.3 Resistance to social media reinforces the professional norms*

Some of the journalists who had most contact with social media also placed strong emphasis on traditional values such as detachment in order to differentiate themselves and to validate their professional status as separate and distinct from that of bloggers, citizen journalists or even those working for 'new media' news organisations such as the Huffington Post or BuzzFeed. This was again a clear example of the boundary genres of protection and exclusion. Established journalists have been quick to embrace the benefits of new technology, drawing on instruments such as Twitter and Facebook and user-generated content as part of their newsroom toolbox. But at the same time that is far from saying that all journalists embrace social media content from the public or accept it on a par with their own output (Jukes, 2015: 145). Like any occupation with professional aspirations, journalism attempts to protect and defend its turf from potential competitors (Waisbord, 2013: 18). What emerged from my interviews was a clear tension between more experienced journalists and those younger ones brought in because of their awareness of social media and their ability to handle user-generated content. The more established journalists did not feel that the younger ones always complied with the tacit unwritten rules or doxa, while arguably the latter were beginning to evolve their own doxa stemming from the web environment they operated in and an emerging culture of linking to external web sites (see Phillips 2014: 72). These doxa or universe of tacit presuppositions (Bourdieu, 1995, cited in Benson & Neveu 2005: 37) that organise action within the field were identified by the older journalists as a natural understanding or 'gut feeling' of what counts as a news story (or 'newsworthiness') and an adherence to fact-based journalism.

Sandra Laville (I 13) played a major role in The Guardian's reporting of the drummer Rigby killing in Woolwich. The story broke with a flurry of social media but she found herself relying on what she believes are professional values of journalism that were vital to the accurate telling of the story:

“That broke, in my office, it broke I think everywhere on social media ... it (was) quite a frenzy and it made me to stop... almost longer than I would have done in a way but I was waiting for confirmation and that came very slowly.

“It’s a real dilemma and I think as a professional journalist, that’s when you really have to be a professional journalist and not a bystander with a Twitter feed, you know... I think in a way social media has emphasised the needs of journalism to be ... to stand back, to try and be as objective as they can be and as detached as they can be because there is such a swirl of emotion going around nowadays on every subject really.”

Laville argues that professional journalism needs to reclaim its status through exercising its ability to stand back in the face of news breaking on social media:

“I think it’s important for us to remember our need to stand back, our need to check the facts and to try in a whirlwind of emotion to check our emotions because I think that’s what makes us special journalists, really.”

For her, social media can be “embraced” but in the final analysis it is just another tool and it has to be treated as such<sup>141</sup>. The Guardian’s professional news team, she says, can pull a multi-media story together one hundred times better than a series of Twitter feeds. And that, she adds, is “what we need to hold on to.” Kevin Marsh, the former head of the BBC College of Journalism and Editor of the BBC Radio 4 Today programme (I 9), also believes that there is a value system attached to professional journalism that sets it apart from the content on social media:

“If you work in mainstream media where you’re investing in paid full journalism which has values, which has processing systems which are

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<sup>141</sup> This recalls the strategy of cooptation discussed by Wahl-Jorgensen in relation to GuardianWitness (2015: 169).



also value based, then that actually becomes the point of differentiation between yourself and everything else that is out there. “

In the case of the BBC, part of that is about taste. Marsh pointed out that video of Middle East hostages being beheaded may be freely available on the web but would not be seen on the BBC – a clear point of differentiation. The same was true about video footage on the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing where the BBC cut away far earlier from the graphic scenes than what can be seen on web pages such as YouTube. But for Marsh it is not just about taste or cultural difference. There is also an element of detachment that differentiates the way BBC correspondents or producers handle distressing news. At the same time, he is clear that this does not mean that news footage does not arouse emotions in the audience. Once again, echoing the dual requirement on a journalist theorised by Chouliaraki (2013: 140), Marsh turned to a classic report in 1991 by the veteran BBC correspondent Charles Wheeler reporting on a massacre of Iraqi Kurds.<sup>142</sup>

“You had to do two things. You had to describe that it was a massacre, and he (Charles Wheeler) was very clear about this that ... if all the evidence is that there has been a massacre, just because you are BBC journalist you don't say: 'They say this. They say that.' You say: 'it's a massacre.' And then secondly, your job is to describe what people are feeling about that and the emotional impact ... on the people and yet he himself would, you know, he came at that report (with) a very, very detached perspective.”

Although 25 years ago, that sort of reporting remains for Marsh a ‘gold standard’ that hasn't changed and can be traced all the way back to William Howard Russell, The Times correspondent generally thought to be the first foreign correspondent.<sup>143</sup> But this attitude didn't just prevail at the BBC where the cultural attitudes to news are so deeply entrenched and clearly codified. The

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<sup>142</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/8471440.stm>

<sup>143</sup> William Howard Russell spent 22 months covering the Crimean war, including the Charge of the Light Brigade in 1854. See Knightley, P., 2003. *The First Casualty*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. London: Andre Deutsch.

freelancer Alex Hannaford (I 18), whose material has appeared in many top news magazines, talked about how he feels the proliferation of graphic web material can desensitise an audience and has less impact than a well-crafted story by an experienced journalist. Anthony Borden (I 8), who in 1991 set up the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR) to help promote democratic media in countries in transition<sup>144</sup>, saw the concept of detachment as a differentiator in two ways – firstly in terms of his own validation as an editor and journalist and secondly in terms of the organisation’s business. I will examine the latter in detail in section 5.5 of this chapter but want to turn before that to explore the link between the detached affective behaviour of journalists and their career prospects.

#### *5.4 How the affective potential of news stories and images can influence career*

When a news organisation places so much emphasis on getting the story, it throws into sharp relief the performance of individual journalists and the economic consequences. As Evelyn Waugh’s William Boot found out to his cost, when a story is missed, the ‘chaser’ from the news desk is not far behind (a few days after arriving in Ishmaelia and joining the international press pack, Boot is scooped and receives a telegram stating: *BADLY LEFT DISGUISED SOVIET AMBASSADOR RUSH FOLLOW BEAST*). This may be a fictional parody but Nick Davies book on the Murdoch press leaves no doubt about the pressure faced by today’s journalists in the real world. He describes those pressures as relentless (2014: 10) and partly behind the misdemeanours of the British press exposed by the Leveson inquiry.

In this section of the chapter I want to examine whether journalists perceive that the ability to conform to the norm of detachment helps promote a career and explore the pressures to toe the line. Phillips observes (2014: 47) that journalists operate in a field where their news organisations are competing with others and where they themselves are competing with their peers (for the attention of

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<sup>144</sup> IWPR grew out of the Balkan wars and started as a newsletter Yugofax in 1991, founded by Anthony Borden and three others, Ben Cohen, Vanessa Quick, and Miloš Vasić. In 1995 it became War Report and then in 1998 IWPR. It is an independent, non-profit making organisation funded mainly by grants from major industrial nations to build media capacity in countries in transition, including Iraq and Afghanistan.

audiences and for the attention of those who can boost their careers). These two areas of competition constitute respectively, in Bourdieu-sian terms, economic and cultural capital, the latter represented in the journalistic field by expertise such as in-depth reporting or the kind of journalism validated and rewarded by the Pulitzer prize system (Benson & Neveu 2005: 4). In my interviews, I tried to explore the hierarchies within this competitive struggle for cultural capital and whether journalists felt obliged to adhere to normative values of detachment in order to gain promotion or – on the other side of the coin - out of fear of undermining their prospects. As Markham observes in his Bourdieu-informed examination of war correspondents (2011: 26), journalism as a field is marked by constant and permanent relations of inequality. Some news outlets, for example, dominate others, while within news organisations journalists vie for story assignments or prestigious beats.

The fear of admitting what could be construed as mental weakness as a journalist, was highlighted in a December 2015 survey conducted by the Eyewitness Media Hub<sup>145</sup> into the dangers of suffering secondary trauma from working with graphic user-generated content in the newsroom. The survey quoted anonymously one social media journalist who said:

“I feel uncomfortable talking about trauma to the management because I don't want to appear as if I am not coping and I don't like to admit I have been changed mentally. I am in a vulnerable place in my career. The bosses say ‘impress us, impress us’, I feel like I cannot say ‘no’ to looking at stuff because I want to do well in my career and I can only do that if I say ‘yes’ to everything.” I feel my career would be jeopardised if I raised this with my managers.

According to that survey, only 30% of journalists who felt under stress because of their handling of user-generated content felt comfortable speaking about it to their manager. One junior social media producer was quoted as saying:

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<sup>145</sup> For a full discussion of this survey, released on December 10, 2015 at the BBC, see Chapter Seven which focuses on user-generated content and its affective impact on journalists. The survey took in 122 responses from journalists around the world.

“I would be a bit worried about my career progression if I did say I don't want to work on a particular issue.”

The same pattern emerged in my interviews. The younger, less experienced journalists I spoke to were in many ways more vulnerable. They were often placed on social media desks handling on their screens gruesome images and video and were therefore exposed to their potential to cause distress<sup>146</sup>; their lack of experience meant they had not always learned about the coping mechanisms others had assimilated; and they felt less able to stand back and create a distance to their work for fear of being labeled weak and undermining their career. It was hardly surprising that the more experienced, established journalists I spoke to felt more self-confident and more autonomous when it came to challenging the norms.

Most of the journalists I interviewed for this thesis encountered social media in one way or another as part of their job but three of them worked directly day-in, day-out on what has become known as the ‘digital frontline.’ Dhruvi Shah, Fadah Jassem and George Sargent (Is 26, 15 & 25) at, respectively, the BBC, ITN and Thomson Reuters, all belong to that tech savvy generation of young journalists working in mainstream news organisations as what is becoming known in the industry *social media producers*. When I interviewed them, I explored the amount of peer pressure they felt they were under to conform to the cool-detached stance of journalism at a time when they can be handling large volumes of distressing user generated content of vital importance to the daily news output.

All three had come up ‘through the ranks’, so to speak, working as freelancers or on local newspapers before moving into mainstream international news organisations. Shah moved out of local newspapers as she sensed how the sector was going into rapid decline and is now one of the key members of the BBC’s user-generated content hub. She told me that senior management at the BBC had moved quickly to recognize the affective impact of graphic images on those

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<sup>146</sup> See Chapter Seven on the affective impact of social media imagery in relation to graphic stills or footage.

working on the hub<sup>147</sup> but that this had not always been felt on the newsroom floor where the competitive environment (including within her own team) had been made more stressful by job cuts.

“There's a lot of desire to try and protect the journalists ... but it doesn't always filter to the bottom. And I think that's partly because ... there's a lot of cuts happening, people are caught up in their own stresses. It's a very stressful environment anyway, so you have to sort of build yourself up that you're able to cope and be resilient. To then have that extra layer of not only you being resilient in somewhere which is incredibly competitive, you know, the push to have the best story, the push to get your stuff on air. Now it's the push to make sure you don't go completely mad.”

That environment at the BBC is sometimes called the ‘news pit’, itself testimony to its competitive nature and evoking an image of journalists scrambling to climb out into a better job. George Sargent also worked on a local newspaper before joining Thomson Reuters, freelancing to begin with and drawing on his expertise in social media. He now works on the Thomson Reuters hub, similar to that at the BBC. As a wholesale news agency, a social media feed or package is produced each day and sent to media clients around the world through what is known as RTV (Reuters TV). He too told me how it was important to work within the very strong institutional norms at Thomson Reuters, not least because he spends a lot of time repackaging social media material for what has become a very important newsfeed to other broadcasters. For him, the ethics, ethos and reputation of Reuters have to come first. The hub was also seen as a stepping stone to a further career, with Sargent starting now to work shifts as a ‘field producer’ on assignment out of the newsroom – typically a step up in the news hierarchy. Jassem, whose story I told in Chapter Four, was not considered senior enough at ITN to work in the field and so works on the social media hub at ITN’s 200 Gray’s Inn Road offices. Her Arabic language skills have been critical

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<sup>147</sup> See Chapter Seven for a detailed discussion of the BBC’s newly introduced guidelines.

in the newsroom and, she hopes, will be key to offering her chances of assignments out of the office as she attempt to advance her career.

The fear of being stigmatised for showing concern or hesitation at handling social media images also has currency in Australia. There, Cait McMahon, who heads the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma's Asia Pacific operations, has been working on a project with journalists from the ABC network to support them and build resilience. She is clear that the impact of electronic media on journalists can be just as great as that experienced in the field. And she believes it is critical that journalists do not hide their feelings or feel ashamed or embarrassed if they experience mental stress. Writing about experiences in the ABC newsroom, she said (2005):

The brain often doesn't distinguish between an image on a screen and the real thing ... you don't get the smell, or the full gamut of exposure from seeing something on a monitor as opposed to in the field. But that doesn't mean the impact from electronic means isn't real, it clearly is.

“People think they are weak if they break down and start crying, but it's not weakness.”

It was apparent from my interviews that more senior journalists, whose career path was secure and who already enjoyed an international reputation, felt far less pressure and were confident enough to step away from stories when they chose to. There has been a long debate among journalists about taking physical risks to secure a story, particularly in the case of freelancers or those specializing in covering conflict. I don't intend to examine the topic of physical safety in this thesis. It has had substantial exposure since the alarming rise in journalist deaths since the start of the Arab Spring and the very public killing by ISIS of freelancers such as James Foley and Stephen Sotloff.<sup>148</sup> The rising death toll

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<sup>148</sup> According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 72 journalists were killed in 2015. Since 1992, a total of 1,220 journalists have been killed worldwide. While 39% of those had been covering wars, a further 21% were covering human rights abuses and a further 20% corruption stories. Syria has been the deadliest country for the past three years in a row, followed by Iraq and the Philippines.

reflects how journalists have become a target but is also illustrative of the pressure that some journalists feel to get the story at all costs, including that of their own physical safety. In the case of freelancers, that pressure is often financial, to make a living, and often reflects the hope that they can be taken onto a 'staff' position and advance their career. The BBC's Stuart Hughes (I 14), a senior producer who himself lost a leg in a landmine explosion in Iraq, was quite open about how he now feels able to resist such pressure:

"I'm much more aware now of the sort of cost-benefit analysis of any kind of news coverage, why are we covering this story? What do we have to achieve? What are the risks? Obviously, I'm very mindful of that, of the consequences of what can happen when things go wrong. And I think, after you've been doing this kind of work for a while, you can't help but be much more aware of that and part of it is just getting older and having different priorities. But ... you only have to spend any time at the Frontline Club<sup>149</sup> and you will realise that there are people putting themselves in harm's way and they don't exactly know why.

"If you're a young journalist, working for Vice<sup>150</sup>, let's say, and even if you're relatively inexperienced but you get great footage from somewhere, then if you're lucky, you win a Rory Peck award ... if you get great footage from a dangerous place, it doesn't do your career any harm."

Those pressures are also mirrored when it comes to the mental wellbeing of journalists and how, once again, seniority and reputation allows some journalists to set aside normative values that equate signs of emotion with professional

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<sup>149</sup> The Frontline Club in Paddington, southwest London, was set up in 2003 and is a meeting place for journalists, often those covering conflict. It is a strong champion of independent, freelance journalism and was set up by cameraman Vaughan Smith who had run his own company Frontline News TV. All but his colleagues in that co-operative were killed covering conflicts over a 10-year period after the Romanian revolution in 1989, prompting the club's focus on freelance journalism and safety.

<sup>150</sup> Vice News was created in 2013 and has gained a reputation for reporting on the conflict in the Ukraine and Middle East. The Rory Peck awards were established in 1995 to honour the freelance cameraman Rory Peck who was killed reporting on the siege of the White House in Moscow in 1993.

weakness. Wetherell's pragmatic approach to affect discusses how affect is located in individuals who are constantly negotiating, making decisions, evaluating and relating to others, involving a 'raft of processes' in relation to culture, society and institutions (2012: 142). Senior journalists with as diverse a profile as Lindsey Hilsum and Helen Long (the first an internationally recognised figure on camera with Channel 4 News, the second operating behind the scenes in the relative anonymity of the wholesale news agency Thomson Reuters) both enjoy considerable cultural capital and voiced similar views. Hilsum was very aware how those working on a social media desk can be young and ambitious:

"They don't want to say, you know, 'I can't deal with this, I really need a day not looking at this stuff' because they don't want to lose their position or be seen as too weak and all -- they have a lot more pressure in that way than older people like me. If I sort of get to the point where I can't stand it, I'll just say, 'look I can't stand it I really' -- or whatever. It's easy for me isn't it, (but) not for them."

In a similar fashion, Long (I 22) at Thomson Reuters, who has been a field producer since the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, spoke about the need to bring about a cultural change that would mean young journalists handling social media would feel more confident in stepping away from distressing material, without fearing that it will damage their career. She and Shah also emphasised how the more senior journalists had, in her view, a role to play in setting an example for acceptable behaviour in the newsroom.

### *5.5 Competition and serving the commercial needs of the business*

When William Boot received the cabled 'chaser' for his news desk, it would be natural for him to have reflected on the hurt to his professional pride for missing a story and how that might ruin his career. But for his foreign editor (who in *Scoop* dances obsequiously to the tune of the *Daily Beast's* press baron owner) the motivation is very different – it is fear of the financial consequences if the newspaper's coverage lags behind that of its competitors. In real life Britain, the



essential background to the Leveson Inquiry (2012), and the subject matter of Nick Davies's book *Hack Attack* (2014), was the parlous state of the newspaper industry which had become ever more desperate to generate sensational stories and bolster falling circulations. To return to Bourdieu, the economic capital within the field of journalism consists of indicators such as circulation, advertising revenues and audience ratings (Benson & Neveu 2005: 4). In Chapter One, in reviewing the development of the objectivity norm in Anglo-American journalism, I highlighted the economic imperative for newspapers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to appeal to larger readerships and how a less partisan approach to politics became a cornerstone of this goal. In my interviews I wanted to explore whether the affective dimension of journalism practice and particularly the behaviour of detachment still played an economic role in today's era in which social media has disrupted the traditional business models of news (Barnett, 2016; Freedman, 2010). I tried to tease this out in the course of an interview by posing the open question why journalists still had a commitment to objectivity.

Certainly, Gavin Rees, the executive director of the Dart Center for Trauma & Journalism in Europe, subscribed to the view that the commercial imperative was still very much a driving force underpinning the practice of journalism (I 23):

“Objectivity is an idea with the news industry is very persistent because it's functional on different levels. There (is the) idea that notions of objectivity might, in certain situations provide a protection or at least a sense of a protection against the tide of toxic affective material out there. The bigger framing I'd say is that ... traditional ideas of objectivity have been very functional for the political economy of the news industry. So in other words, journalists are gathering information from sources, which is full of human resonances. Through the process of writing and production they turn it into a product in which those resonances, the ownership, the nature of the material no longer belongs to the sources but is repurposed by the journalist for the purposes of conveying information. But ultimately (for the purpose) of a product that can be sold.”

In Chapter Four, the first of my empirical chapters, I noted how the Reuters news desk in London had dispatched one of its correspondents, the American Maggie Fox (I 7), to cover the Dunblane primary school shooting.<sup>151</sup> Ostensibly, the decision was taken because she did not have children and the news desk was aware that coverage would be distressing. Fox said: “I remember volunteering and people saying, ‘Well, you’re probably the only one who can go.’ Because at that point I was the only person working in the bureau who didn’t have a child.” But in fact, the notion of ‘getting the story’ appears to be so hard-wired in journalists that, in my own experience, it is difficult to disaggregate the multiple considerations that make up news editing decisions. Even the simple consideration of who is the best reporter to send revolves around the basic question of: ‘who will cover the story best?’ In the case of Dunblane, one interpretation is that the news desk thought that Fox would be the one correspondent who would be in the best position to remain detached from the story and thus deliver it with the least risk for the news operation (ironically, the copy she sent back from Scotland to London was considered by the desk to be too dry and was rewritten to inject more drama into it).<sup>152</sup> The Times had sent Magnus Linklater who, to this day, recalls how he was driven by deadline pressures. He told me of the thoughts that kept going through his mind (I 1):

“God, I’ve got to file a thousand words. Where am I going to get the material from? Who do I have to talk to? I’ve got to get into the police press conference. I’ve got to get to, you know.... can I get an interview with the security? With the school?”

This is the very nature of a burst of affective activity that can flare up (Wetherell, 2012: 12), the interconnection between the actor, as journalist, and evaluation and decision-making which is related, in this instance, to the commercial and professional pressure of a deadline.

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<sup>151</sup> See Chapter Four, p 142.

<sup>152</sup> “I remember being a bit surprised at the kind of overwritten copy that was coming out including being written under my by-line by my colleagues in London.” (I 7)

This was not an isolated example confined to Dunblane. It was a theme that ran through my conversation with the BBC's vastly experienced Kevin Marsh (I 9); and the concept of 'getting the story', and indeed a better story, lies at the heart of the best practice advocated by journalists such as Gavin Rees (I 23) and Bruce Shapiro (I 21) working with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. The Center's mission statement advocates:

“...ethical and thorough reporting of trauma; compassionate, professional treatment of victims and survivors by journalists; and greater awareness by media organisations of the impact of trauma coverage on both news professionals and news consumers.”<sup>153</sup>

At the one level, this advocates more ethical reporting that prevents the re-traumatisation of victims or survivors and safeguards individual journalists. But the goals also encompass more insightful reporting and that in turn can lead to recognition and kudos for the quality of journalism - two newspapers, the Times-Picayune and the Sun Herald won the 2006 Pulitzer prize for their coverage of Hurricane Katrina. It can also lead to differentiation from competitors and audience/ circulation gain. The type of empathic journalism espoused by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma explored in more detail in Chapter Six can also lead to professional validation in the form of annual awards for excellent coverage of traumatic news events and prestigious fellowships. The journalistic practice put forward by the Dart Center, and the affective stance implied by it, can therefore have very tangible consequences for a journalist's standing and a news organisation's business.

The BBC of course embodies through its charter<sup>154</sup> and through its culture the concepts of accuracy, impartiality and freedom from bias. These concepts in turn have become inscribed through professional norms of practice such as detachment. But the BBC also operates in a fiercely competitive world and the

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<sup>153</sup> See: <http://dartcenter.org/mission>

<sup>154</sup> The BBC operates under Royal Charter together with an agreement with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport. The latter specifically refers to the need for accuracy and impartiality. See: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/governance/regulatory\\_framework/charter\\_agreement.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/governance/regulatory_framework/charter_agreement.html)

organisation is, as part of its remit, charged with *engaging* the public. Again, it is impossible to separate the affective dimension of journalism from its milieu and the integration of feeling and calculating articulated by Venn (2010: 131). Irrespective of the complex charter arrangements, journalists know that they need to balance delivery of the facts with a need to engage the audience. Put crudely this is about ‘selling’ a story, internally to superiors on the news desk who are making decisions about what to run, and externally to the public. Marsh (1999) says:

“What we are selling here is attention.

“What we’re selling is something that will make someone you don’t know think, ‘Oh, actually I do need to know about that thing he’s just about to tell me about’ and that’s of course when you get the emotional aspect coming across because necessarily as the journalist, you need to find the most emotional way into the story and hence you know, all those phrases like “*If it leads, it bleeds*’ and all that stuff... ‘*Anyone here been raped and speaks English*’... you know, it’s where all of that kind of culture comes from.”

It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the underlying commercial imperative and that of the journalist’s professional pride in his or her story and the desire to see it featured prominently in a broadcast or on the front page. The very phrase ‘sell’ a story is used routinely by journalists who are on a full staff contract to characterise how they will ensure that a news editor or editor accepts it for publication or broadcast. For a freelance journalist, the word ‘sell’ still has that metaphorical meaning. But it also carries the literal meaning of selling a story for money to earn a living. It is one of the paradoxes of journalism. Schudson notes the strong assumption within journalism that the press should be autonomous but that this is in practice remarkably complex (2005: 215). While journalists seek independence from their media owners, they are invariably engaged in a competitive business, both with other news organisations and amongst themselves to produce the ‘best’ story.

The Mail Online's Jake Simons talked in detail about the competitive nature of covering the ISIS shootings in Paris where journalists in the international press pack were scrambling to outbid each other for mobile phone footage of the shootings and, later, for pictures of what became known as the "*Siege of St-Denis*" when police cornered a group of attackers in a third floor apartment. At one point, reporters all crowded around a local resident who was replaying footage of the first moments of the siege on his iPhone and were at the same time attempting to video the video with their phones.

"The only way to describe it was a total and utter bun fight. All the journalists of the world were there, trying to chase down video footage people had taken with their phones and photographs and eyewitnesses. I was like everyone else, thrown into this big competition of who can you find and who can you get to speak to you.

"Throughout, I was just thinking about the story, I am sure it comes across as being quite callous because I was just focusing on this was a great story rather than somebody who has been shot ...

"But if nobody was doing that, if everyone was too busy being preoccupied with the emotional response of people who had been killed and how tragic it was, you wouldn't be able to read these stories and that is what matters."

The reward for the Mail Online came in the exclusive footage that Simons managed to buy and his scoop on a story that became known as the "*Hero of La Belle Équipe*"<sup>155</sup> in which he told how a waiter called Ludo had died in a hail of bullets as he threw himself in front of a woman to save her. The story was 'shared' 26,000 times from the Mail Online's website (which in turn drives

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<sup>155</sup> One of the restaurants in which gunmen killed diners at their tables. Ludovic Boumbas died in his attempt to save a girl attending a birthday party there. See: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3319334/Hero-La-Belle-Equipe-Frenchman-died-throwing-bullet-save-woman-s-life-massacre.html>

advertising revenue). For Simons, the reward came in the shape of praise from the news desk back in London and kudos amongst his fellow reporters from the Mail Online team working with him in Paris. And it came because he had shut out everything else, his family, the horror of what he was witnessing and the impact of that on himself. He had arrived in the city ahead of most the rest of the press pack by finding a flight from Southampton airport (all flights from Heathrow and Gatwick plus the Eurostar had been fully booked by journalists). He had hit the ground running with two early interviews:

“I filed those two interviews... those were really good hits and when I filed the copy, the editor e-mailed it around to all the rest of the team on the ground, so they all saw what I was doing and they were trying to do the same, so it is really competitive and everyone is trying to find the stories and that’s what you are there for.

“If you spent a day in the heat of the action and come out with nothing, it is a huge disappointment, so that is what I was pre-occupied with.”

### *5.6 Conclusion*

In this chapter I have attempted to tease out further the finely interwoven strands of today’s journalism practice, exploring specifically how the norm of detachment, while being one of the key elements of affective journalism during the coverage of traumatic news, is at the same time inextricably linked to professional status, career prospects and the business of news. I consider this to be the situating of affect in what Wetherell generally calls ‘social activity’ (2012: 77) and what is in this case the milieu of journalism practice and the broader news industry. The flow of affect is located not just in the body but within the flow of ordinary life, part of social interaction (ibid: 78). Time and time again, those I interviewed considered detachment to be one of the major defining characteristics of their professional identity and credentials. If anything, the advent of social media, citizen journalism and the torrent of user-generated content flooding into newsrooms accentuated this view as established journalists attempted to differentiate themselves from others, evoking what Marsh referred

to as a 'gold standard' of news values. The journalists I spoke to also saw this professional identity as distinct from their personal, private lives. They often tried to articulate a separation or compartmentalisation of personae, to the extent that some felt guilt if the imaginary boundary were breached. For the younger, less experienced journalists, strict adherence to the normative stance of detachment was also closely tied to their ambition to advance within the hierarchy of journalism, rising, for example, from work on social media hubs to that as a field producer. Several were clearly concerned that any sign of overt emotional reaction to their work with graphic social media content could be interpreted as a sign of weakness that would in turn undermine their career chances. Detachment therefore served both as a means to block out displays of emotion and as a signal to their news managers of their professionalism in the face of stressful material. By contrast, the more experienced journalists interviewed had fewer concerns. They still talked about the separation of the professional and personal but were senior enough in the hierarchy of their news organisations to be able to pick and choose their assignments or what they wanted to view or avoid on social media. Informing all these interlinked strands was the drive to 'get the story', the ultimate goal and driving force behind practice. Journalists knew that remaining detached would help them stay on track, whether parachuted into the Paris shootings or sifting through videos on a social media hub. There is an inextricable link here between the learnt practices of journalism and the affective dimension of Wetherell's 'semiotic hinterland' (2012:153) which unfolds relatively automatically. Those setting the news agenda appeared to have taken a much more commercially and competitively conscious decision that the cool-headed reporters were the ones that could best deliver on the news and, ultimately meet the commercial imperative.

In the next chapter, I want to switch the focus to one of the key components of news stories, investigating more deeply how journalists interview those caught up in traumatic news events. Nearly every correspondent will end up interviewing a victim of trauma in their career, irrespective of whether they cover wars, school shootings, plane crashes or domestic crime. How do journalists cope with the issues of intrusion and, as Kevin Marsh phrases it, uphold the human dignity of victims? Is a journalist's actual practice of

interviewing consistent with his or her professed adherence to detachment and norms of objectivity? And how can the process of interviewing be understood affectively?



## CHAPTER 6

### INTERVIEWING VICTIMS OF TRAUMA

*Anyone here been raped and speaks English? - Edward Behr.*

#### *6.1 Introduction*

It is nearly four decades since the legendary foreign correspondent Edward Behr<sup>156</sup> wrote his memoirs of a lifetime covering conflicts from India and Vietnam to Algeria and the Congo. The title of that volume, *Anyone here been raped and speaks English?* is at once a classic example of black humour and deeply shocking. It was evidently too shocking for audiences in America where the publisher insisted on a blander title. But the irreverent question, shouted out by journalists at Belgian nuns rescued from a siege at Stanleyville in Eastern Congo in 1964, still resonates today. It captures the media's fascination with the stories of victims and survivors of violence and trauma. And it epitomises the type of intrusive (and intensely practical) questions sometimes posed in the race to obtain the personal story of those suddenly thrust into the public eye. As the BBC journalist Sian Williams<sup>157</sup> observed (2014a), there is something instinctive in a journalist's drive to snatch portraits of grief and any feelings of guilt are suppressed, at least until the report has been written or broadcast. Williams is perhaps best known for her time spent hosting BBC television's morning breakfast news magazine from 2001 to 2012 but it was a stint reporting on the Asian tsunami in 2004 and the Kashmir earthquake the year after that prompted her to step back and reflect on her profession more generally. It is, however, not just high profile foreign correspondents who find themselves interviewing victims of violence and trauma. Almost every journalist, whether working on a local newspaper or for a domestic broadcaster, can expect to interview those caught up in violent or traumatic news stories during the course of a career –

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<sup>156</sup> Edward Samuel Behr (1926-2007) began his career as a journalist with Reuters in 1950. His 1978 autobiography was retitled for the U.S. market as *Bearings: A Foreign Correspondent's Life Behind the Lines*.

<sup>157</sup> See: <http://www.sianwilliamsmedia.co.uk/academic/the-impact-of-trauma-reporting/>

from global conflict and natural disasters to car crashes, child abuse and domestic crime. Put simply, many journalists find violence on their doorstep on their local news beat (Simpson & Coté, 2006: 2).

This chapter develops further my exploration of the affective dimension of journalism practice, examining how journalists interview those caught up in conflict, disaster or private grief. In Chapters Four and Five, I examined the affective behaviours and processes through which journalists can shield themselves from the distressing news they cover, sometimes drawing on normative values of detachment (and with it upholding the objectivity paradigm) and sometimes falling back on experience and relying on what I termed ‘autopilot.’ In Chapter Seven, I will investigate new threats posed to the mental health of journalists operating not in the field but within the apparent safety of a newsroom as they handle a torrent of graphic user-generated images and video. Best practice guidelines emerging also urge these journalists to create a sense of distance and detachment from such images to protect themselves. In this chapter, my goal is to deepen the picture of journalists’ experience by examining the core task of the interview.

My interest lies in the interview’s function as an affective ‘site of emergence’ in which the journalist, schooled in the professional norms of detachment, comes into contact with a victim of trauma who can be anything but detached. By site of emergence - or what Kavka (2008: 35) calls ‘a point of emergence’ - I am positioning the interview as a space in which affective forces can flow between the interviewer and interviewee. It is my contention that such sites of emergence, or ‘cusp’ (ibid: 31), can equally emerge as part of a physical interview through social interaction as much as being the result of a technological exchange (e.g. an interview conducted through Skype)<sup>158</sup>. When carrying out my own interviews for this thesis with 25 journalists from print, broadcast and social media backgrounds, I was keen to explore just what happens when these two worlds come together and the affective embodied processes in a two-way interview relationship. Based on my own experience, my hypothesis was that the rigid

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<sup>158</sup> See discussion of points of emergence on p 91.

regime of detachment is not always upheld and that journalists sometimes adopt a more empathic stance, reducing the distance to the interview subject in order to win their confidence and ‘get the story.’ That may sound callous or mercenary but it would also support the theory I have been developing in the past chapters that journalists can move flexibly in and out of what Wetherell calls an ‘affective performance’ (2012: 78) consistent with the social interaction and the broader milieu – in this case, meeting their own needs and those of the news business.

The chapter begins by recapping how the interview became a mainstay of modern Anglo-American journalism as it sought to create boundaries as a profession and distinguish itself from the partisan politics of early newspapers, the emerging discipline of Public Relations and the rise in propaganda at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The chapter then looks at the prevalence of interviews in today’s era of social media and the focus on personal voices. To illustrate this focus, and to deepen the discussion in Chapter Four about the contagious ‘herd instinct’ of journalists, I have examined some of the published criticism of journalists voiced by those interviewed in the wake of the 2015 Germanwings air crash over France. The main body of the chapter investigates through my own interviews how journalists covering both foreign and domestic news go about the process of interviewing the victims and survivors of trauma and violence in practice. I have specifically included journalists who have covered domestic violence as well as foreign correspondents. As stated above, my aim has been to explore how comfortably the professional norm of detachment, with its insistence on keeping emotions under control, and the unwritten rules or doxa of journalism (Bourdieu 1984, 1990, 1998) sit with the journalist as a human being when confronted face to face with someone deep in personal tragedy. Is the macho culture of journalism, which has seen the so-called ‘death knock’<sup>159</sup> elevated to the status of a rite of passage for journalists starting their career, appropriate for handling an individual’s traumatic story? Throughout the chapter, I develop my argument that through experience and self-reflection journalists tend to build up their own affective practice of interviewing which sometimes casts aside the harsher edges of the objectivity norm and relies

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<sup>159</sup> The death knock is a term commonly used by journalists to describe how a reporter is dispatched to interview bereaved relatives in their home.

on a more empathic approach. During my research, a consistent picture of the lack of training in interview skills became apparent. The chapter thus concludes by examining an emerging body of best practice from internationally experienced journalists seeking to foster ways of interviewing that place an increased emphasis on the emotional literacy of journalists. As part of this, it includes a discussion of proposals submitted in 2012 by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma to the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press in response to the phone hacking scandal that engulfed the British Press.<sup>160</sup>

## 6.2 *The interview - assault or therapy?*

It is worth recapping briefly on the role interviews play in modern journalism. They are, of course, core to the discipline and nowadays taken for granted. But it wasn't always that way and their origins were part of the shaping of today's norms of objectivity and the still widely held view that a journalist should remain detached from the interview subject (Maras 2013, Waisbord, 2013). As Chapter One outlined, the Anglo-American press started to develop professional boundaries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (albeit at a slightly different pace on each side of the Atlantic). From a market viewpoint, or that of the political economy, commercialisation was an essential driver in the move for journalism to designate itself as a profession (Waisbord, 2013: 20), with newspapers distancing themselves from the sensationalist and partisan politics of the early part of the century and developing practices that would allow them to be sold to larger readerships. It was at this time, as part of the boundaries being created around the emerging profession, that a number of journalism practices, techniques and unwritten rules developed. Waisbord lists these as including the inverted pyramid form of writing<sup>161</sup>, bylines, clear attribution of sources, the use of shorthand plus the *interview*<sup>162</sup> (2013: 133). These practices were consolidated during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as mass media emerged, establishing a transnational

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<sup>160</sup> I was one of the authors of this submission, together with the Executive Director of Dart, Bruce Shapiro, and the European Director Gavin Rees. Both were interviewed as experts for this chapter.

<sup>161</sup> See the discussion in Chapter Three on techniques of journalism associated with objectivity.

<sup>162</sup> My italics.

norm that is captured (though often poorly defined) by the word objectivity (Maras, 2013: 5). The interview quickly became an essential tool of the journalist, alongside and complementing the reporter's eyewitness account (Simpson & Coté, 2006: 98). And as part of that transition, ordinary people joined celebrities as subjects of interviews, particularly if they were swept up into suffering through fires, earthquakes, crime and other tragedies (ibid).

Today, it has been argued that newspapers are relying increasingly on visual, personal and emotional stories for sales (e.g. Coward, 2013; Kitch, 2000; Wardle, 2006). Elana Newman, McFarlin Professor of Psychology at the University of Tulsa, estimates that 95% of U.S. journalists cover violent or traumatic events during their career (2009). And while few journalists will be asked to cover wars or mass killings, they will generally be required to report at some time or another on a family's personal tragedy when the death of a loved one in unusual circumstances thrusts them into the public eye (Duncan, 2012: 590). This can be an isolating and disconcerting experience for a novice reporter and one for which most journalists are ill-prepared. (Duncan & Newton, 2010: 441) The psychologist Frank Ochberg has articulated how modern reporting of traumatic news events follows a standard logic and likens it to a three-act play (1999). Act One begins with the tale of horror or, as Ochberg puts it, loss of innocence, as journalists tell the story:

“We should not be surprised when editors say, “If it bleeds, it leads.” The TV news reports that show crime scenes and ambulances -- hot images rather than cool commentary -- are expectable subjects at six o'clock. Competition for audience attention is part of media business, and we the audience attend to violence. We always have, always will, and MUST. Act One of any factual story about crime, cruelty, violence or trauma will create arousal, interest and paradoxical emotion.”

But, Ochberg says, the story often moves swiftly into Act Two where the focus is on the victim, first in terms of loss and then in terms of reflection:

“Act Two, well told, includes all of the stages of trauma and recovery.

The lens is the individual who, through time, experiences every scene ... the later scenes of Act Two have a sadder, wiser tone. A person reflects upon loss but is thankful for friends. Spiritual themes emerge. The survivor considers the meaning of life. People note their attachments and their desire to help others.”

Act Three, according to Ochberg, is the one that the media most frequently ignore and concentrates, when possible, on reconciliation and healing (as for instance in coverage of Rwanda since the 1994 civil war killings of Hutu and Tutsi populations).

At the most high profile level, when famous people die, the public mourns them in the same forum where they came to ‘know’ them in life, namely the news media. The latter can sometimes take on the role of national healer (Kitch, 2000: 171). It is tempting to think of this as the ‘Diana phenomenon’ but it can be traced back before the 1997 death of the Princess of Wales to the death of Elvis Presley in 1977 and John Lennon in 1980. With mass killings, we also witness media performing this ritual function (ibid: 173), from coverage of the Scottish school shooting in Dunblane in 1996, to the series of U.S. school shootings (e.g. Columbine, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech) and the very public grieving of a German school class after the 2015 Germanwings air crash. Interviews with the bereaved and survivors of these events have concentrated since the late 1980s increasingly on personal voices (Coward, 2013: 136). Coward argues that today’s media consuming audiences want real life experience, “with all details, especially all the emotions and feelings straight from the protagonists’ mouths” (ibid: 3). Wardle’s analysis of American and British crime story coverage during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (2006) found that those stories from the 1990s, including what became known as the Soham murders<sup>163</sup>, focused much more on personal and societal angles when compared with the narratives of the 1930s and 1960s. The stories from the 1990s gave far greater prominence to the story of victims’ grieving families, with very raw, emotional coverage (ibid: 515). She concluded

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<sup>163</sup> In 2002, two 10-year old schoolgirls, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman, went missing from their home in Soham, Cambridgeshire. The case dominated newspaper and television news coverage during the summer and continued into the trial where the caretaker of the local school, Ian Huntley, was convicted of their murder.

that readers and viewers of news now actively expect public displays of emotion and the sharing of personal stories (ibid: 527). Richards (2007: 30) ascribes the way in which emotion has become “more visible, more explicit and more prominent” in everyday life as part of the rise of the therapeutic culture.

On the face of it, such coverage represents a gross intrusion into the privacy of those caught up in tragedy and grief and many press bodies and charities have developed guidelines designed to prevent this. In Chapter Four, I discussed how the Canadian Press reporter Helen Branswell had felt the press in Dunblane had been out of control.<sup>164</sup> But there are others who maintained in their conversations with me that interviews *can* have a positive, therapeutic effect, not just for a nation at large but also for an individual victim or survivor. One of those is Gavin Rees, an experienced documentary filmmaker and journalist who in 2005 interviewed some of the last living survivors of the atom bomb attack on Hiroshima in 1945<sup>165</sup>. Rees is now the executive director of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma in Europe and we often work together with journalists who have been covering traumatic news stories. I know from my own experience that the dividing line between an interview being viewed as a personal assault or therapeutic can be a narrow one. When I spoke with Rees for this chapter (I 23), he was at pains to stress that it was often not clear which way an interview might go:

“An interview is a very specific human interaction between two individuals... an interview needn’t be an assault on an individual and if you are trying to interview vulnerable people with the same kind of siege tactics you might apply to a politician, the interview is going to fail and the chances of getting good, interesting, insightful material from which you really understand what is happening with somebody, what has happened in somebody’s life, isn’t going to happen if you approach them as a door that needs a battering ram.”

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<sup>164</sup> See p 152.

<sup>165</sup> Gavin Rees was assistant producer on the documentary drama Hiroshima broadcast on BBC1 television on August 7, 2005.

But at the same time, he added:

“I am very suspicious of journalists who say that their interviews are therapeutic encounters for vulnerable people. They may well be, but the danger there is that the journalist approaches it assuming that in some way they are doing good by opening somebody up and creating space... it is a by-product ... but there is zero guarantee that the interview is going to be a therapeutic experience.”

The point Rees is making is that a journalist is neither a trained psychotherapist nor a social worker. In addition to that, in an era of social media, it is possible that the therapeutic effect of the interview can be limited and diluted by factors outside a journalist's control, an issue I explore in section 6.5 of this chapter.

### *6.3 Thrust into the media spotlight*

Later in this chapter I will focus on the personal experience of journalists engaged in such interviews and explore their approaches, including those advocated by Rees and other senior journalists who have worked with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma. But before that I want to touch on two recent news stories from Germany which illustrate from the opposite perspective how grieving individuals and communities can react when confronted by the press and thrust into the glare of a worldwide audience. The first example relating to cover of the Germanwings crash would seem to epitomise the intrusion that press codes of conduct and codes of ethics are designed to avoid. The second, relating to a school shooting at Winnenden in southwestern Germany in 2009, examines what happened when the editor of the local newspaper decided his reporters would *not* interview any of the grieving parents. Until now, I have deliberately kept my focus in the empirical chapters of this thesis on the lived experience of journalists. But for me the reactions provoked by the coverage of these two emotionally charged stories open up important considerations for exploration, including the affective dynamic between the journalist and interview subject and how these two parties engage in what can become a mutually dependent relationship involving elements of ritual and performance. As Wetherell states,



every member of society possesses a wide ranging, inarticulate knowledge about affective performance, how to enact it and how to assign moral and social significance to affective displays (2012: 78).

When the co-pilot Andreas Lubitz deliberately crashed Germanwings flight 9525 into the French Alps on May 19, 2015, all 150 people on board were killed. It didn't take long to discover that among the victims was a group of 16 students, 14 girls and two boys, and two of their teachers, from Joseph-Koenig school in Haltern am See, western Germany. The group was travelling back home from a Spanish exchange programme on the Germanwings flight and quickly became the focus of mass media attention. What followed, as German and international press descended on Haltern, a small town of 37,000 people, is similar to events in Dunblane in 1996 and caused widespread outrage among the population. One of the students who had not been on the exchange trip, Mika Baumeister, went home at lunchtime as news of the crash was breaking and returned to the school later to find the area besieged by journalists. He set out his feelings in a blog that revealed distaste for the way media frame such stories<sup>166</sup>:

“By 5.30 p.m., when I had returned to school, the scene had started to resemble a human zoo, with the press behind their barricades ogling us students. Even though there was still not 100% confirmation of the deaths, there were already lots of tears. We felt as if the press were just waiting for our response to the final confirmation to film us, the emotionally destroyed people.”

Baumeister told of the underhand tricks journalists had used to try to interview classmates of those who had died in the crash and reported that they were being offered up to 80 Euros to speak on camera:

“One journalist reportedly put on an emergency pastoral care unit waistcoat to get access to the students. It appears that others approached

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<sup>166</sup> See: <http://meistergedanke.de/2015/umgang-der-medien-mit-schuelern-und-angehoerigen-in-haltern/43#comment-89>  
and: <http://meistergedanke.de/2015/cost-what-it-may-media-in-haltern/189>

mourners at the candles with a tape recorder in their pockets to record conversations; a mobile phone in a bouquet of flowers was allegedly used to take exclusive pictures. One person tried to disguise himself as a teacher – at a school that is so small that the roughly 80 teachers are known to everyone. How in the world could someone even come up with such a desperate idea?”



*The scene outside the Joseph-Koenig school on the afternoon of the crash*

In contrast to this, a few of the German school students who did appear on television, including some on the BBC speaking immaculate English, appeared to relish the role. I spoke about this to Bruce Shapiro (I 21), a vastly experienced journalist who now heads the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma as its executive director in New York. He believes there is a pattern of the ‘professional victim’ and that easy access to such people is lazy journalism and leads to predictable frames for telling of the story:

“You know, some people just like being on TV and are gratified by being on TV and are good at it and in a conventional way. And that’s not...it ends up making boring journalism and similar journalism. It ends up doing a disservice to the whole community that’s affected, not only in the short-run but in the long-run where I have seen it in towns after mass

shootings, for instance in the months or years afterwards. Real resentments build up over whom the press pays attention to and whom they don't, whose story gets told and whose story doesn't get told.”

I discussed in Chapter Four the pack mentality of journalists who descended on Dunblane after the school shooting there and the affective contagion that can spread amongst a group of journalists covering a high profile traumatic news story under competitive deadline pressure. According to Rees, the mass media frenzy also transforms a normal space of, say, a town, into what he calls a ‘heightened performative space’ in which the presence of cameras changes the nature of simple acts such as laying flowers into a type of performance. Suddenly this small part of the world is changed into a type of theatrical stage, making it very uncomfortable for those caught up in the event to carry out the everyday actions such as mourning. This is indicative of what Deuze refers to as the ‘fusion’ of media with everything people do and what he calls the almost complete mediatisation of society (2012: x). The dynamic creates an affective space similar to what Kavka, in her study of reality TV (2008), calls a mediated and performed televisual intimacy where what is on screen can appear to be more ‘real’ than reality. In her analysis of journalists’ ability to create a moral appeal to action (for example in cases of natural disasters), Chouliaraki observes the traditional reliance of journalism on performance, on the images and stories of suffering that situate events within symbolic regimes of emotion and action (2013: 140). As part of that, there is a dual requirement on the journalist to witness events as proof of the facts on suffering (an objective dimension) and to witness events as an emotive testimony to the “unspeakable” horror of suffering (a reflexive dimension) (ibid).<sup>167</sup> In exploring in detail the experience of conducting interviews, I specifically wanted to investigate whether journalists do, and can, switch seamlessly between modes in performance of this ‘dual requirement’ and how this maps to the affective processes I have been seeking to uncover.

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<sup>167</sup> In her study, Chouliaraki explores how the performative nature of news narratives is changing in a world of social media, creating a proliferation of truth claims (not just that of the single journalist) through a stream of other voices, none of which takes priority over others (2013: 138-171).

When I visited Scotland to research parts of this thesis and the Dunblane shootings, I had also spoken to Keith Yates, then Head of Stirling Council (I 2), whose job it had been to cope with the media invasion. He made a clear distinction between local journalists, who approached parents outside the school with respect and sensitivity, and those who flew in from London and abroad.

“The sense you had is that you had these responsible Scottish and UK journalists who were behaving, as I say, impeccably, respecting the views of the local people, not trying to interfere too much, gathering the news. And then, the second tranche of journalist were those who caught the flights up from Heathrow and sort of saw it as, you know, ‘Here’s a story to be exploited. And, we will do everything we can to exploit that in a way which horrifies it even more than it has been.’”

Something similar seems to have happened in the school shooting in the German town of Winnenden in 2009 when a former student of the Albertville Realschule, 17-year-old Tim Kretschmer, killed 15 students, teachers and passers-by in a shooting spree. Within hours, 40 satellite trucks were parked outside the school. But the editor of the Winnender Zeitung local newspaper, Frank Nipkau, took a stand, criticising the rest of the press for their hunt for victims and the way people traumatised by the shooting were “dragged before the camera.”<sup>168</sup> One of the German broadcasters asked him for pictures of the attacker, promising in return to feature his newspaper in the evening news bulletin. He refused. For a local newspaper, such news stories cause an additional dilemma in that it is highly likely that the editorial team will know some of the victims or their families (the same was the case with the BBC reporter Kate Fawcett who covered the Dunblane shooting<sup>169</sup>). Within the first two hours, Nipkau made a clear decision and told his 35-strong editorial team: “We will not interview any of the victims or any of the bereaved families” (cited in Friedhoff, 2014: 7). He actually went further, deciding that the Winnender Zeitung would not publish pictures of Kretschmer or the victims and that the funerals would not be covered. The mainstream German press showed no such restraint, in fact the mass

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<sup>168</sup> <http://www.drehscheibe.org/interview-mit-frank-nipkau.html>

<sup>169</sup> See Chapter Four, p 140.

circulation tabloid Bild Zeitung was later censured by the German press watchdog<sup>170</sup> for its intrusive and “irreverent” coverage. But in a way he had not predicted, Nipkau’s decision to respect the privacy of the bereaved families backfired: some of the families started asking him why they hadn’t been interviewed. On the first anniversary of the shooting, he changed his policy and contacted all 15 families of the victims with the intention of publishing their story. Eleven of those families took up the offer. Shapiro, who is familiar with the case, points out that some survivors of trauma actually wanted to tell their story:

“Frank Nipkau is the only person I know anywhere who has just made it an absolute rule that they would not interview any survivors. He felt it was a necessarily exploitative relationship and he wanted no part of it. ... it was a long time and it waited until one guy – if my memory is right – actually walked into the bureau and said to the reporter, ‘Why haven’t you interviewed me? I really want to be interviewed.’ And that was the first time that someone’s story, some family’s story ended up in the paper.”

I have chosen to highlight this incident because it illustrates issues of control and the difficult relationship in which neither the journalist nor the interviewee can actually be certain of the outcome. The unpredictability and different reactions to trauma make the task for journalists interviewing victims and survivors even more difficult and illustrate how the affective dimension takes in the individual and collective practice of journalists, the interviewee(s) and the broader social, cultural and economic environment of the story. Some people say they appreciate a reporter’s questions at a time of crisis, others remain angry for long afterwards (Simpson & Côté, 2006: 98). As Ochberg remarks (1999): “Survivors of near death experiences may be stunned into silence or may seek a wide audience to hear their tales of terror and relief.”

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<sup>170</sup> deutscher Presserat, a voluntary body of self-regulation. see: <http://www.zeit.de/online/2009/22/winnenden-presserat>

#### 6.4 Interviews in practice – detached doesn't always work

I have focused on stories such as the school shootings at Dunblane and Winnenden and the mass media attention on a school class in Haltern am See in order to illustrate how journalists hunting in a pack and operating under intense commercial pressure can easily alienate individuals and, in fact, whole communities caught up in a tragedy. Looking in from the outside, the stories show a wide spectrum of journalistic practice, ranging from what is perceived as gross intrusion to one local newspaper editor's thoughtful – and yet potentially misguided – reflection on the consequences of reporting. In this section, I want to explore in detail from the perspective of individual journalists how they go about interviewing victims and survivors and examine the tensions when two worlds collide. Those two fields, to use Bourdieu's terminology, are of course very different: that of journalism, with its deeply entrenched unwritten rules, procedures and cultures, and that of a grieving individual or community with all the unexpected shock, trauma and loss that this entails. But the journalist relies on the interviewee for the story and, as illustrated above, in some cases the interviewee relies on the journalist to get his or her story out (sometimes in terms of information or as a call to action). It is a form of affective dance, in which both partners are, if briefly, locked together.

I can't ever remember, in 25 years as a foreign correspondent and editor, actively being *taught* how to conduct an interview but I quickly learnt that both parties often depended on each other. I *was* taught shorthand, learned how to use successive generations of tape recorders and video cameras, studied macro-economic policy and how to read a corporate balance sheet... but in the final analysis, interviews were something I did every day, I learned from my own practice and from reading (and sometimes sub editing) interviews my colleagues had conducted. I would sometimes prepare questions and think of the order in which I might ask them, but looking back, interview technique built up over time based on experience. It was a matter of learning on the job. Of course there are different types of interview and the focus here is not on central bank governors and monetary policy. When I was interviewing people about their own lives, and their own personal grief, I calibrated my attitude in a way I thought would yield

the best results, i.e. the best story, namely that which fitted the journalistic norms and was consequently validated as a ‘good’ story. Based on my own experience, it suggests that a journalist pragmatically alters his or her style and approach, and that was something I was keen to explore in my conversations with journalists. My own perception of how I had built up my interview technique was borne out by my research interviews. I was struck in all my conversations with how experienced journalists looked back on their early attempts at interviews, reflected on mistakes, modified their approach and bemoaned the lack of training. The power of journalism’s professional values was again underlined in that the starting point for these reflections was often an assumption that a journalist had to be ‘objective’ and that part of that involved setting aside his or her own emotions. These are exactly the doxa, or universe of tacit presuppositions, inherent in membership of a field (Benson & Neveu, 2005: 37).

One of those I spoke with was Mark Brayne, who had started his career with Reuters in the Cold War cities of Moscow and East Berlin a decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall. He had then worked as a foreign correspondent for the BBC World Service in Beijing, covering the 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen Square and later the implosion of the Soviet bloc across eastern Europe. In the run-up to the 2003 war against Iraq, he was instrumental in introducing trauma awareness training into the BBC, at the same time as I was doing so at Reuters. Reflections on his own career, and what he characterises as his lack of emotional awareness when he started out, were instrumental in his drive to instill greater understanding of trauma at the BBC and then to train as a psychotherapist. We started by talking about his early days as a correspondent (I 24). I have quoted him at length below because his words seemed to encapsulate for me the tensions faced when interviewing and illustrated the power of journalistic ideology and the way such practice unfolds with little conscious monitoring (Wetherell, 2012: 129). Brayne painted a picture of himself as a young journalist who was able to shut himself off from the emotions of those he was interviewing:

“I certainly, in my active journalism days, had no conscious awareness of a need to pay particular attention or take into account of emotions, either my own ... or those of the people I was talking to. My job was to find

out what had happened ... I perhaps was sometimes quite unfeeling, perhaps, rather pushy, because I just wasn't aware of the emotional complexities of the situation. Maybe that was why I became a journalist in the first place because I was able to ask awkward, difficult questions that other people might feel bothered by ... they might feel more deeply affected by the emotions of the people they're talking to. Or maybe there's something a little bit autistic about quite a lot of journalists that allows them to climb in, regardless, bang on front doors and say, 'I'm really sorry to hear your son has died, was killed in a road accident. Can I have a picture please and how are you feeling.' You know, you've got to be pretty blunt, pretty able to manage, for better or worse, to sort of bulldoze your way through your own emotional response to things and ideally by not even being aware of it.

"I'd had no training whatsoever. I mean, absolutely nothing to point me in the direction of the emotional complexities, the emotional dimension of the stories I was covering, either in terms of the narrative of the meaning of the stories or in the practical moment-by-moment collection of information with people who'd been through difficult stuff. So, I stumbled in, bulldozed my way, bull in a China shop and intended to get what I needed."

Brayne was describing, as a journalist starting out on his career, his determined attempts to 'get the story', irrespective of the consequences, and a desire to keep his own emotions under control or, even better, ignore them entirely. For me, this discussion illustrated two main points. Firstly, that Brayne made a clear, and overly simple, distinction between what were effectively different dispositions; and secondly, that it highlighted once again a key theme that has emerged throughout this thesis - the enduring power of journalistic norms around objectivity and the culture of detachment, both as a defence mechanism to protect the journalist and a means of securing the story. The BBC's Sian Williams went through a similar process of self-reflection about her practice and is quite open about how for her the starting point of any interview had been to keep emotions in check and 'get the story'. That attitude is clearly deeply



ingrained, potentially not just through the professional norms of journalism but through her own background. Williams's father was a journalist who covered, amongst other stories, the troubles in Northern Ireland and had told her as a child how it was important not to become too emotionally involved in a story and not to bring the emotions home (I 11).<sup>171</sup>

“We knew very little about the day-to-day work he was doing and the difficulties he was encountering at work. There was none of the emotion at home, the emotion would never come home with him – I suspect that became part of my working practice when I became a journalist, that knowledge of what happens at work stays within the work environment and it is not something to be discussed openly with any member of the family.”

It was the stance she says she took to the disasters and tragedies she covered abroad for the BBC. Looking back on those assignments in a blog post entitled *Reflections from the Disaster Frontline* (2014), she wrote:

“As reporters our job is to go in, get what we need and leave. We try not to let emotion get in the way of the task as it can affect whatever objectivity we claim to have... I tried to approach each story as a detached observer, moving myself further from it the more distressing it became.”

Her reflection on her own practice was prompted by covering the 2004 Asian tsunami and the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir<sup>172</sup> and feeling, as she said, “sick with guilt” (2014) after intruding into the lives of survivors and returning back to her comfortable life. While she is committed to remaining a journalist, she has just completed a two-year Masters degree in Psychology and has been considering how best to help her BBC colleagues cope with the impact of

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<sup>171</sup> In Bourdieusian terms, Williams's attitudes can be analysed both as a product of her location within a field (of journalism) and also the historical trajectory through which she arrived there.

<sup>172</sup> Up to 230,000 were killed in the ‘Boxing Day’ tsunami; up to 90,000 people died and 2.8 million were made homeless in the Kashmir earthquake.

covering traumatic news stories.

It struck me how consistent Williams's attitude was with that of many other journalists I had interviewed for this thesis. The normative values of journalism and the affective behaviours that accompany them were deeply ingrained and illustrated the interconnected nature of affective practice that is highlighted by affect scholars such as Wetherell (2012) and Blackman (2007, 2010, 2012). In Williams's case this was not just her BBC training and the culture of the BBC but it spanned generations, stemming partly, she herself thought from her father, and her childhood memories. Speaking with Williams, I felt there was a parallel with another BBC correspondent, Ben Brown, and an interview where the tensions between that professional ethos and the human instinct to set it aside played out on screen. I mentioned in Chapter Five<sup>173</sup> the case of Brown who, while covering the Asian tsunami in Aceh, was caught on camera awkwardly having to choose between the cool detached stance of a foreign correspondent and his personal feelings. As he interviewed a woman whose entire family had been swept away into the sea, she broke down and clung to him. After a short hesitation, Brown is seen putting his arms around her to comfort her. "I was stiff and awkward," he was to write later (2005), "the classic English public schoolboy uncomfortable with big shows of emotion." There is something here that also goes to the heart of a journalistic culture of authority, recalling the almost patrician stance of Cronkite and the 'stiff upper lip' stance of detachment, while at the same time laying bare how affect becomes part of social interaction (Wetherell, 2012: 78) and can be displayed through embodied actions.

For Rees, the normative practices that have developed around objectivity are a barrier to interviewing and the perceived tension between detachment and personal feelings is not an 'either-or choice'. It is, he believes, something that journalists set aside as they become more experienced and realise that an interview cannot block out the human connection:

"I think when people start their career they have zero guidance on how to

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<sup>173</sup> See p 168.

do this (conduct interviews). And that's partly because of the traditional notions of objectivity are so solid. So a journalist who's entering the career tends to get stuck in this dilemma of, 'Oh my God. What am I going to be? Am I going to be a professional journalist or am I going to be a human being?' As if somehow entering the profession means that you need to cast off a certain kind of empathy<sup>174</sup>, a certain kind of emotional awareness and become some sort of objective recording machine. But real journalists who are doing this job know that doesn't work. And so they might not have a theory about it but that's not what they do in interview situations, so they tend to be empathic."

I will return in the final section of this chapter to discuss the core principles that Rees and Shapiro believe should underpin effective interviewing. But first, I wanted to explore the themes common to three journalists who cover one specific type of traumatic news, domestic crime and violence, and examine how they carry out their interviews in practice – The Guardian's Sandra Laville, the freelance journalist Alex Hannaford and Emma Cowing, features editor of the Scottish Daily Mail. What unites these three is the way in which each, when asked to reflect on their practice, revealed how they can seamlessly 'flip' in and out of a different affective behaviours, at times distanced, at other times empathic, engaging and disengaging. Each of them also spoke of what is effectively a tacit deal between interviewer and interviewee, each dependent on the other, a process that could be communicated through minor signs such as the nod of a head. This was illustrative for me of what Wetherell characterises as the automatic affective social interaction. It is recognisable by both parties and the participants move in and out of 'knowing' what they are about during such flows (2012: 129).

Sandra Laville had until recently been The Guardian's crime correspondent for six years and has covered some particularly distressing stories, including child abuse cases and interviewing one of the most badly injured survivors of the July 7, 2005 London bombings. She is currently working on a series of stories around

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<sup>174</sup> Simpson & Coté (2006: 102) define empathy as being the capacity to walk in someone else's shoes and to appreciate what the other person is enduring.

suicide rates in prisons. When I spoke with her (I 13), she made it clear that she had made a conscious decision to use an empathic approach to encourage her interviewees to tell a better story while at the same time trying to maintain some distance. For Laville, this was not a definitive, black and white choice between one or the other, but a constant process of calibration of her affective practice *during* an interview, a moment-by-moment judgement. It is something she considered vital for her ability to write the story:

“I’m quite a heart on a sleeve kind of person, I’m kind of a heart on a sleeve reporter, and I find you have to have empathy because you wouldn’t get the best out of your interviewee otherwise. I mean if you’re interviewing a victim of crime and cannot in any way empathise with what they’ve been through, then you wouldn’t ... it doesn’t work. You can’t write the story with any passion or energy at all. So, you know, I can’t help but get involved as a journalist in what they’ve been through. But I do need to stand back, maintain some objectivity and ... in order to do my job. So both of those things constantly go through my mind when I’m doing those kinds of stories.

“I do it instinctively. I have to think about checking myself because I can become too involved whether it’s covering crime stories or whether it’s kind of going abroad and covering war or whatever. But, yeah, I can get too involved so I need to check myself, stand back and protect myself in a way. But it’s very hard. But again, it happens interviewing perpetrators because there’s always a story there. There’s always some perhaps terrible upbringing, perhaps ... you know, there are things to empathise with and in a way that’s my objectivity because I do it to both, so I kind of balance it out.”

Some of the child abuse cases she had covered became overwhelming for her and she had to step back for a while from the reporting of them. One of those cases involved the sexual abuse and murder of 12-year-old Tia Sharp whose

body was discovered in the loft of her home in 2012.<sup>175</sup> Laville found one image of the dead girl's body shown in court, in a graphic sexual position, particularly distressing. It led to flashbacks and stress, with Laville unable to prevent the image of Tia Sharp repeatedly coming back into her consciousness to disturb her. It was a level of horrific abuse that Laville believes other professions, such as the police, would have dealt with through training and clearly documented procedures, both largely lacking in journalism. That incident alone, compounded by details of another sexual abuse trial she was covering at the same time, illustrates the grey area between detachment as a means of self-protection and engagement in a story. The same was true in Laville's interview with one of the July 7 bombing victims where she had to build up trust over a period of days before the two could sit down for a full interview. Laville believes the trust she created helped the bombing victim, who had lost two legs above the knee, tell her story:

“I went to see her in hospital and told her a bit about myself and listened. She wanted to know who I was and she wanted to see if she could trust me. So we just had a conversation about lots of things and she told me what, you know, it's obvious what happened. She was in quite acute stress at that time. And then we set up a few days later, I think it was a week later, to go and interview her, then I sat down and I had a tape recorder on and I asked her questions gently but she was ... she really wanted to talk. You didn't really have to ... I just let her talk quite a lot. I guided her a bit and, you know, after a few questions, I pushed a bit on certain areas but she was very much...she was quite an easy interview because she just talked.”

That example illustrated again the interdependence of the journalist and interviewee, the affective dimension of the interaction and a tacit 'deal' that emerges based on trust: the victim is willing to tell her story if the journalist does her best to depict the story as accurately as possible. The journalist's part of the deal is, of course, sometimes hard to uphold since he or she is not always in

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<sup>175</sup> Stuart Hazell, the former boyfriend of Tia Sharp's mother, pleaded guilty to murder and was sentenced to 38 years in prison.

control of how the material will be used, an issue I will return to later in this chapter. In this example, Laville persuaded her editors at The Guardian to use the story in the way the victim had expected. She told me how she often felt protective and responsible towards those she interviewed and would remain so until the headline was written and the article published, saying, “I am there to give them a voice, not to twist what they are saying.”

Unlike many of the journalists I spoke to for this thesis, Alex Hannaford is a freelancer and so literally needs to ‘sell’ his stories. But like Laville, he has spent a lot of time covering domestic crime and prisons, including a spell in the United States writing about the death penalty and sexual abuse in the church. One of the most difficult aspects of interviewing for him, he told me (I 18), was not knowing the impact of his work on the interview subject. In one case, he had interviewed a woman in her early 20s who had been subjected to sexual abuse by members of a church which, in turn, had tried to cover it up. At the outset of the interview, it was not clear whether the interview might re-traumatise the woman or actually provide her with some help through telling the story:

“I was the first person she'd ever told and I had an incredible amount of guilt because I thought, I'm not a psychiatrist, I can't really help her and I can't promise that my story will help her either, and actually, looking back I'm sure that it didn't help her. It probably helped other people, but yeah, I struggle with that all the time... I mean, I hear journalists all the time say that ‘talking to me is going to help’. It might not. I mean, that's the truth and it might not. It might do, but it might not.”

Hannaford tends to write longer form stories and his strategy in interviews is to let the subject talk, allowing him to record and describe in forensic detail the emotions of those he is interviewing. That does, in a classic sense, mean taking a detached stance. But signalling that he is listening can help during the interview process:

“I've interviewed some pretty horrendous people over the years and I think that, you know, my philosophy is, and this is going to sound pretty

grotesque, if you pardon the metaphor, you give them enough rope... I think that a lot of the time I go in there and I know this person's views are odious, but I'll just let them talk. And I think that this sort of understanding or not even understanding, just a nod of the head and this kind of - I'm not agreeing with them, but I'm just letting them talk - it works.”

It was clear that for Hannaford something as slight as this signal, a nod here and there, creates a relationship between the journalist and interviewee, encouraging further discussion.<sup>176</sup> And yet, at the same time, it allows him to maintain a distance. For Hannaford, it is important to create a bond with the interview subject even if both recognise full well that they fundamentally disagree on an issue. He does this through what Rossmanith, in a study of judges' affective behaviour, termed 'visual clues' which operate within a representational paradigm (2015: 171).<sup>177</sup> This practice could also be categorised as a form of 'emotional labour', a term applied by Hochschild (1983) to flight attendants and to journalism by Richards (2007: 57) – the use of emotional signals in relating to others as part of an occupational role. But in speaking with Hannaford and others there was also an additional dimension that went beyond the representational. Interviewers engaged with their subject in what was a flexible affective process, with rapid shifts in the course of the period, an empathic moment-to-moment judgment in light of the situation. In this sense they were not just transmitting or receiving signs or visual clues but were feeling and sensing the interaction with the interview subject at a level of embodied affect, a form of affective contagion.

This process was particularly evident in my discussion with Emma Cowing (I 16). She told me how she tries to be flexible during an interview, not always being “cold, hard, objective” and sometimes being prepared to open herself up.

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<sup>176</sup> In television interviews, producers will often cut in a so-called 'noddy shot' of the interviewer, nodding in reaction to something the interviewee says. It creates a sense of engagement between the two although generally such shots are taken after a single camera interview and used to cover cuts where an interview has been edited.

<sup>177</sup> In her 2015 paper, Rossmanith explores how Australian judges detect remorse in offenders they are sentencing. While they recounted how they took account of offenders' use of verbal or visual representations of remorse – in a semiotic paradigm – they also felt and sensed remorse. This, she concluded, was a form of emotional contagion.

In Chapter Four, I discussed how she sometimes caught herself changing tack mid-interview. She was also quite clear that there is an implicit ‘deal’ sensed between the interviewer and interviewee, sometimes feeling guilty herself if she could not do justice to people’s stories. She has also covered a number of stories focusing on sexual abuse, including one high profile rape case. In that last instance, she spoke for weeks to the woman who had been raped before she ran the story. She described to me how she realised on her first encounter with the woman how she was “incredibly damaged.” Each time she spoke with her, and drove back to the office, she would weigh up the pros and cons of publishing the story, until she felt that the victim was mentally strong enough. And even then, there was Cowing’s underlying guilt at taking the suffering of a stranger and making a commercial product out of it:

“She was desperate for the story to run. She was absolutely desperate for the story to run because she wanted to be believed. But I still had this sort of just very worrying feeling that something might go wrong and she might not be able to handle it, that she might not be able to handle the pressure being on front page and all the rest of it. But actually, it was incredibly empowering for her. And she has just gone from strength to strength since the story has run and she’d been on long-term kind of sick leave. She’s gone back to work. She’s got her hair. She’s looking great and she’s feeling great. And she’s obviously been very empowered by it but it’s always I think a fine line. And the idea of guilt because we know a lot of the time what we want or what our editors want. And ultimately, that’s to sell newspapers and, you know, we have to balance that with not harming the people that we interview.”

Talking in detail about the practice of interviewing with Brayne, Williams, Laville, Hannaford and Cowing, I was struck by how passionate and determined they each were to tell the story of those they were covering. We spoke about how they approached deeply vulnerable people who had been caught up in disasters or subjected to horrific crimes and abuse. In the case of child abuse, judges sometimes imposed a ban on publication of graphic details but this does not mean that journalists covering the trial will not be aware of the full story. All of



the journalists I spoke to said they had been ‘learning on the job’ and through their own self-reflection and practice had learnt to create a bond with the interviewee. But there were also times when the interview material was so distressing, that they felt they needed to become more distanced and detached. In the final section of this chapter I explore whether there are underlying principles that can serve as a guide to interviewing those caught up in traumatic news events.

### *6.5 Do industry guidelines address the issues?*

There is no shortage of industry guidelines for the media on how to cover vulnerable individuals or how to uphold legitimate expectations of privacy. But these guidelines can be extremely vague and, I would argue, sometimes are deliberately so. The UK broadcast regulator Ofcom, for example, states in its guidance notes on privacy: “When people are caught up in events which are covered by the news they still have a right to privacy in both the making and the broadcast of a programme, unless it is warranted to infringe it.”<sup>178</sup> Equally, Ofcom states: “Broadcasters should try to reduce the potential distress to victims and/or relatives when making or broadcasting programmes intended to examine past events that involve trauma to individuals (including crime) unless it is warranted to do otherwise.”

I don’t intend to review here in detail such guidelines but with Rees and Shapiro, I drafted in 2012 a submission to the Leveson Inquiry for the Dart Center on Journalism & Trauma. As part of that we pointed out that the (now defunct) Press Complaints Commission<sup>179</sup> editor’s code on intrusion was deficient, confusing the terms empathy and sympathy. The code (in clause 5), stated:

*“In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively.”*

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<sup>178</sup> See: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/privacy/>

<sup>179</sup> The self-regulatory Press Complaints Commission was closed on 8 September 2014 and was replaced by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

While empathy describes an unvoiced attempt to try and see the world from the standpoint of another and to understand where that may place them emotionally, sympathy implies either that one feels the same thing or subscribes to the same opinion. Neither interpretation, we argued, would appear appropriate for journalists. It is worth noting that the successor to the PCC, the Independent Press Standards Organisation, has adopted the earlier misleading clause word for word.

In our submission to the inquiry, we stated that the fundamental issue was not around guidelines but the lack of awareness and lack of training for journalists, arguing that what was needed was a thorough understanding of what happens to survivors and victims of trauma (2012: 3):

“The news industry needs to commit itself to formal training for reporters, editors and producers at all levels in basic trauma awareness, including the experience of victims, ethical responsibilities and effective reporting techniques. No news organisation – whether public-service broadcasters or mass-market tabloids - would expect its team to cover a football match without knowledge of the rules of play; to report on financial markets without an understanding of stocks and other financial instruments. Yet reporters, crews and editors routinely make important news judgments without training in well-established, readily available knowledge of trauma and its impact on individuals, families and communities and the implications of that for news craft and ethics.”

Discussing these issues for this thesis with Rees more than two years after we drafted the submission to the Leveson Inquiry, he stressed how he felt that rigid concepts of objectivity could hinder an interview. He advocated a flexible approach that combines elements of detachment and empathy<sup>180</sup>:

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<sup>180</sup> Care professionals recognise that empathy in the face of repeated exposure to the trauma of others can in some cases lead to the helping professional becoming traumatised and it can be important to establish and maintain emotional boundaries to protect against emotional contagion and compassion fatigue (Phelps et al, 2009: 319).

“In other words you’re neither either thing. So if one puts up a solid wall and poses a defence then it’s likely a), not to be a very good defence and b), you’re likely to get stuck on one side of it. So the real ability is being able to switch and move positions. So to see things from your professional perspective like, ‘I’ve got to get this information. I don’t want to think too much about these graphic traumatic details because that’s going to disturb me. So I’m going to protect myself a little bit.’ But at the same time one has to think, ‘What’s this person really saying? Where are they with this story? How are they changing emotionally during ... the process of narrating stuff?’ And so if I can hop between the back and forth between the walls and change my position in different levels then I have much more flexibility than if I’m trying to stay behind a set of defences.”

What Rees terms the ‘standard objectivity tool kit’ can work well when in a public forum debating, for example politics, with those in power. As journalists we are, Rees argues, very good at putting politicians on the back foot and forcing them to divulge more than they would want to. But what he calls ‘can opener techniques’ do not work with the vulnerable who have had power taken away from them by dint of the tragedy they have unwittingly become embroiled in. Here he is describing the gut feeling or instinctive ability of a journalist to sense which is the correct behaviour during an interview, much in the same way as the Australian judges studied by Rossmanith (2015) were able to go beyond the representational reading of visual or textual clues and operate at the level of embodied affect.

It is not surprising that Shapiro, who works closely with Rees, shares similar views but I was struck how he puts the issue of control – or in the case of victims the loss of control – at the very heart of his approach to conducting interviews. There is a personal history to this as well in that Shapiro himself has been ‘a victim’. In 1994, a deranged man stabbed seven people in a New Haven café. One of them was Shapiro who was critically injured and subsequently outraged, as he was recovering several months later, to find newsreel footage of him writhing in agony on an ambulance stretcher being used on television to illustrate

a story on a sentencing debate in the Connecticut legislature. He was, he said, angered that a picture of his body, contorted and bleeding, had become a propaganda image in the crime war. Shapiro was then a journalist for the weekly U.S. news magazine *The Nation* and wrote about his own experience, telling how only hours after coming out of surgery he was besieged by phone calls from the local newspaper and television stations. More than 20 years later, as we spoke, his starting point was the lack of control and the 180-degree reversal in the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee:

“One of the ways that I understand trauma is as a radical loss of power on the part of the survivor ... a close encounter with proximate death or injury leaves someone with a very shaken sense of their place in the universe of the meaning of the social contract and other impediments to both trust and to speaking, and that are also deeply tied into all of the chemical and psychosocial implications of trauma. And that poses a specific challenge for interviewing because most of our traditional toolkit for interviewing is based on the standard definition of what's news, which is people who, in one way or another, have power. Most interviewing techniques are designed for people who have more power than the reporter, so keeping politicians on the record, running down reluctant sources in government or business and so on and so forth. So, it turns the formula around when you are talking about survivors of trauma. In that case, we as journalists hold tremendous power both in our ability to be a bridge to a broad public, in our ability to frame the trauma survivor story and even just in our institutional and personal role.”

Shapiro therefore argues that understanding this loss of control, a key feature of trauma, is one of the most important lessons for journalists interviewing victims and survivors of violence. By extension, the principle of being able to shift a measure of power and control back to the interviewee is an important way of building trust with the journalist. That can involve small details of an interview, such as making sure it is the interview subject who makes the decision to go “on the record”, letting them choose the place to meet and transparency in terms of

how the interview will be used. That has something in common, Shapiro argues, with oral historians who will sometimes – much more than journalists – allow the interview subject to drive the narrative and not impose a predetermined sense of the story on it. Fairness and transparency are for him core values rather than normative ideas around detachment:

“There are some events that defy detached, true detachment, whether it’s covering the Civil Rights Movement in the early 60s or covering (Hurricane) Katrina or covering ISIS. These events defy conventional notions of detachment and interviewing survivors of these defy conventional notions of detachment. I think admitting that, and acknowledging it, and then saying what tools, techniques, compensatory steps do we need to take to ensure the credibility of our reporting in the face of outrage, in the face of empathy. I think that’s a better stance.”

It is therefore crucial for Shapiro that the journalist maintains a balance between empathy and being true to journalistic values around fairness and transparency.

“We don’t do survivors any favours if we treat empathy as (being) at odds with journalistic values. I think we end up exposing interviewees who aren’t ready to be challenged, whose stories whether true or not, accurate or not, aren’t able to withstand the glare of public scrutiny. And I don’t think we’re doing anyone a favour when we empathise to such an extent that verification, that fairness, that everything else goes out the window.”

This balance creates what I have referred to previously in this chapter as the ‘deal’ between the journalist and interviewee. Sometimes it is unspoken or implicit, as illustrated for example by the nods and signs of empathy that Hannaford cited. Another example Rees uses is how good listening skills on the part of the journalist can create a safer space for the interviewee to talk in a less tense atmosphere. But there are also times when this deal is overt. Kristen

Lombardi, a staff writer for the Center for Public Integrity<sup>181</sup>, conducted a nine-month journalistic investigation into sexual assault on college campuses and insisted when interviewing rape victims that she be allowed to research beyond the interview, including having sight of any relevant documentation.<sup>182</sup> One of the first hurdles she had to overcome was around the lack of control victims perceived they had at the hands of the media. When she approached one student who had been raped at the University of Virginia (UVA), she was immediately distrusted. The student had spent three hours in a televised interview with CBS only for it to be cut down to 20 seconds. She had spent the same amount of time with a magazine journalist and nothing appeared in print. Lombardi is very clear about the type of ‘contract’ she enters into with those she interviews. But the example from UVA illustrates a key problem for many journalists conducting interviews in that they also do not always have control over what happens to their work. The final product, as every journalist knows, can depend on a multitude of different factors, from the views of the sub-editors, editors, and producers on the one hand, to the news agenda, social priorities of the day and commercial considerations of the news organisation. Hannaford had recently been interviewing refugees fleeing the Iraqi/ Syrian conflicts in a migrant camp outside Calais. Those refugees are both vulnerable and generally have little idea how media works. It is essential, he argues, to take that into account:

“You have to be upfront with people in the first place – I make it very clear, I am writing this story, I am pretty sure we are going to use it but I can’t guarantee it. I think it is just managing expectations... it is not just that they have no control over their lives, they also have no experience with the media. It is obvious to me how a story works, and the process, but these people have no idea about that.”

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<sup>181</sup> The Washington DC-based Center for Public Integrity was founded in 1989 by Charles Lewis and is one of the country's oldest and largest non-partisan, non-profit investigative news organisations in the United States. It won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting in 2014. Its chief executive was, until his recent resignation, a former Reuters colleague of mine, Peter Bale.

<sup>182</sup> See her account of the investigation at: [http://dartcenter.org/content/covering-campus-sexual-assault#.VWb4eaZxj\\_4](http://dartcenter.org/content/covering-campus-sexual-assault#.VWb4eaZxj_4)

Although journalists may share a common logic or habitus, the hierarchies and power structures of a newsroom mean that they are vying for status and power, both across structures (e.g. reporting and editing) and within structures (e.g. pressure to win the by-line or ‘get the scoop’). Freelancers such as Hannaford are very much towards the bottom of that hierarchy. As Markham observes in his study of war reporting (2011: 30), what counts as news is the product of an interaction between journalists and editors and the connections between these actors, and others in the same field. And this generally remains hidden to the consumers of news. We also know that in some cases it can be the junior journalist in a newsroom who is sent to conduct the ‘death knock’ interview with the expectation of learning ‘on the job’ (Duncan & Newton, 2010: 443). Typically, given the power relationships of a newsroom, junior reporters have little say over how their story is used. The lesson to be drawn from this, say both Rees and Shapiro, is not to overpromise and to be transparent about what can or can’t be guaranteed by way of coverage. As Shapiro told me, he was once caught up in a huge blast of anger from trauma survivors who hadn’t understood what he had taken for granted (and hadn’t told them) about how the story process works in the chain from interview to publication or broadcast. The one factor a journalist conducting an interview can, however, influence is the fundamental accuracy of what is offered up for editing and research has shown that this is crucial in maintaining trust. Duncan and Newton (2013), who both used to be journalists and who have conducted research into grieving and death, wrote a blog for the BBC Academy’s website outlining their key findings and advice:

“Despite worries about intrusion we found bereaved families were much more likely to complain about inaccuracy. Many of the interviewees suggested that even the tiniest error in reporting can be perceived by the family as a lack of respect for their loved one. It’s basic advice but check facts with them before you leave.”

There have been cases where the bereaved have complained about the media’s depiction of those who have been killed. Reflecting on coverage of the Winnenden school shooting, one of the grieving parents, Petra Schill, said she didn’t recognise the portraits of her daughter in many of the media accounts.

Gisela Mayer, the mother of another of the school children shot dead, said her child had been taken from her twice, once by the gunman and once by the media (cited in Friedhoff, 2014: 20).

## *6.6 Conclusion*

In Chapters Four and Five of this thesis I explored the lived experience and practice of journalists when faced with complex breaking news stories, both in the pre-Internet era and in today's age of social media. Through my interviews with journalists covering such stories, and based on my own 25-year experience as a foreign correspondent and editor, I identified two main affective behaviours consistent with upholding the still prevailing objectivity norm – that of the cool-detached persona and that of autopilot. Both affective behaviours provided a measure of defence against the traumatic news journalists were covering, shielding them from stress and guilt in the heat of a story. At the same time, they performed another function, helping secure the commercial and competitive imperative of delivering the news product to deadline. However, it was also clear that these behaviours were at best fragile and often broke down in the face of the personal grief and suffering that the journalists I spoke to were witnessing. In this chapter, I have attempted to delve deeper into the actual practice of interviewing. This is partly because of its core role in modern journalism and what has been documented as an increasing reliance in the news industry on visual, personal and emotional stories to generate sales. But it is also because the interview is in itself an affective space, a site of emergence in which the interviewer and interviewee are locked in a form of affective engagement, negotiating, communicating and relating to each other.

In my exploration of the practice of interviewing, the journalists I spoke to were fully aware of the powerful professional expectation that they would be objective and detached. Indeed, some of them like Brayne and Williams freely conceded that they had gone into some interviews determined to 'get the story' while shielding themselves from any distress. But it was also clear from the long and detailed discussions I had with the journalists cited in this chapter, that they were instinctively able to create an empathic bond and an atmosphere of trust with



their interview subjects. There were times when they established a distance, or even stepped away from a story, to protect themselves from the horror of what they were witnessing, a recurring theme when covering cases of sexual abuse. There were other times when they moved closer and engaged the interview subjects, demonstrating signs of empathic listening, telling them how their story would be used and effectively entering into an unwritten contract with them. There were also times when they would give out, or ‘read’ visual clues to smooth the interview process. But this research shows that interviews also operate at a level beyond the representational and present a space for affective processes to unfold. The journalists I spoke with were engaging in an affective practice which occurred automatically and with little conscious monitoring (Wetherell, 2012: 129). Often they were being pulled in competing directions, balancing the demands of professional ideology, competition, family and many other factors.

There are obviously many different types of interview, but the ones I have focused on in this chapter have involved vulnerable people caught up unwittingly in some form of disaster or personal tragedy. In these cases, two fields collide, sometimes in the form of a horde of journalists descending in a feeding frenzy on a small town (e.g. Haltern am See, Winnenden, Dunblane) or sometimes in a one-on-one interview (for instance with rape victims). In all these cases, the traditional power dynamic of journalism, in which journalists often challenge those in authority, is reversed. Those suffering from trauma or in shock have, by definition, lost control of their lives, even if it is for a short period. As a result, journalists can deliver a further assault on their existence or afford a source of relief through providing them with the ability to tell their story (or by giving voice to a call to action). The examples I have explored in this chapter illustrate the problematic unpredictability of knowing how communities or individuals will react to the intrusion of the media. The pack mentality that results in 40 satellite trucks being parked on the doorstep of a German high school is clearly perceived as a threat and distorts every-day reality, putting ordinary people ‘on stage’ and highlighting performative aspects of journalism. It also creates its own dynamic of heightened competition for the story and can give rise to a catalogue of dirty tricks from unscrupulous journalists. Equally, the answer is not necessarily to back off entirely, as the editor of the *Winnender Zeitung*

discovered when parents of some of the murdered school children started to ask him why they had not been interviewed.

Underlying this is the fact that there is little or no training on offer for interviewing skills, with the culture of the newsroom suggesting it is still perceived as something to be learnt ‘on the job.’ This in itself underscores the instinctive nature of journalism practice, an unwritten reliance on automatic affective practices that can become routines and dispositions (Wetherell, 2012: 129). The ‘death knock’ can still be perceived as a challenge or rite of passage for the office junior, arguably the least well equipped member of the office to cope with the task. It is in this culture that over the past 10 years the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma has sought to develop a better understanding amongst journalists of what survivors and victims of trauma experience. This, I would argue, is a fundamental starting point for the practice of responsible interviewing and just as important as an awareness of codes of conduct published by various regulatory regimes. One of the key devices advocated is a balance between empathy and transparent journalistic values of fairness and accuracy. Creating a safe space and sense of trust not only results in a ‘better’ story but also helps give back a measure of control for an interviewee. That can be easier said than done in that the interviewing journalist does not always have control in the editorial hierarchy over the final news product. But those at the Dart Center believe that understanding these issues, and being transparent about them with the person being interviewed, is an important part of improving a journalist’s emotional literacy.

In the next chapter, I aim to explore in greater depth the experiences of the journalists I interviewed in their dealings with social media and specifically what have become known as ‘social media hubs’. This examination of what is being called the ‘digital frontline’ (Eyewitness Media Hub, 2015: 16) will focus on the immediacy and affective dimension of traumatic images stemming from terror attacks such as that in Woolwich or the spate of beheading videos emerging from Iraq and Syria. While the normative value of detachment is alive and well for those journalists covering ‘hard’ news, the chapter will also examine whether we

are witnessing within that framework a subtle tonal shift towards a more overt presence of emotion in news reporting.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE AFFECTIVE CONTAGION OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA IMAGE AND THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR JOURNALISTS

*“The ubiquity of the image in our lives, and the new ontology of imagery, is the stage on to which Jihadi John<sup>183</sup> and the other Islamic State murderers have made their swaggering entrance ... ours is the culture of the repeat, the freeze-frame and the slow-motion action sequence; ours is the highly advanced civilisation that developed the capability to put a camera on the nose of a laser-guided bomb so that, like Major ‘King’ Kong (the deranged cold war warrior played by Slim Pickens in Kubrick’s *Dr Strangelove*), we could ‘ride’ – albeit virtually – the ordnance all the way down to its computer-selected target. – Will Self*

#### *7.1 Introduction*

It is hard to think of today’s news coverage without focusing on the all-pervasive nature of digital images. They become engraved in our mind as readers and viewers of the news, not least, as the author and journalist Will Self observes in his essay *Click Away Now – How Bloodshed in the Desert Lost its Reality* (2014), because of the ability to freeze the digital frame or replay scenes on a continual loop. Whether those images are the U.S. military’s ‘surgical strikes’ during the first Gulf War in 1991, sanitised as if part of a video game, or the shocking images of prisoner abuse from Abu Ghraib; whether they are ISIS insurgents pointing a knife at an orange clad U.S. hostage or the attackers of drummer Rigby on the streets of London, they all have one thing in common – these images were not taken by professional news photographers. Rather, they exemplify the ubiquitous nature of today’s ‘user-generated content.’ And that content is coming to dominate our diet of daily news, from Facebook newsfeeds

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<sup>183</sup> Jihadi John was the name given by the British media to the masked ISIS militant seen as an executioner in many of its beheading videos. He was subsequently revealed to be Muhammad Emwazi, of Iraqi origin, whose family had settled in North Kensington, London, when he was six years old.

to Twitter and what Beckett and Deuze term the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of media in everyday life (2016: 1).

In Chapters Four to Six I explored the lived experience of top journalists through their coverage of traumatic news stories, both in the pre-internet age and in today's social media environment. It investigated the affective dimension of journalism practice and argued that the normative professional value of objectivity also serves as a coping mechanism to shield journalists from the horror of what they are sometimes called on to report. This chapter aims to investigate in greater depth the affective impact of graphic user-generated images on journalists handling such material. It is important to emphasise that the narrow focus here on such imagery – which is often propaganda - is not designed to dismiss the benefits of other user-generated content which, particularly in the current Middle East conflicts, has provided invaluable content for news organisations. Johnston, in her analysis of the BBC's use of such material during the Syrian uprising, sets out the value of engaging with Syrian citizens on the ground, not least because of the logistical difficulties and physical dangers of reporting in the country (2015: 182). Their voices had been marginalised at the beginning of the conflict in 2011 and such engagement has been vital for the BBC's ability to cover the country without a continuous presence there (*ibid*).

Much has been written about the immediacy and affective nature of the images of Sept 11 (Allan, 2013, Chouliaraki, 2006; Grusin, 2010, Seidler, 2013) or the gruesome 'selfies' taken by U.S. soldiers as they tortured prisoners of war at the Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq (Grusin, 2010; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Linfield 2015). In each case, the focus has been on the affective force of such images on the public and on public opinion. But what do such ideas mean when applied to journalists going about their daily work and how can that be understood affectively? Discussing graphic images, Grusin (2010: 81) speaks of "an unqualified bodily response independent of, and perhaps phenomenally prior to, our understanding of the emotions they evoke or the meanings they entail." It is such a response that I have tried to explore through my research into those journalists who are working with graphic images (as opposed to other user-generated content of a different nature).

Chris Cramer, the vastly experienced BBC, CNN and Reuters journalist and executive has argued that the news industry has been far too slow to focus on issues of trauma and journalism:

“It has taken the media industry far too long to realise that it is perfectly natural for journalists, like other people, to feel the effects of trauma ... the media need to wake up to traumatic stress as a subject worthy of debate.”<sup>184</sup>

My experience from working with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma shows that the journalists handling graphic images are typically inexperienced, hired for their web-savvy skills, sometimes freelance, and are operating in a completely different environment from those in the field on assignment as a foreign correspondent. The work on a broadcast intake desk or in trawling social media for contributions to a newspaper article can be a solitary task and, as some of those journalists I have interviewed note, devoid of the sort of camaraderie observed in Chapter Four by those journalists covering, for example, the Dunblane massacre.

The chapter begins by setting the context, exploring the explosion of social media images in today’s news landscape and drawing the distinction, technological and otherwise, between the relatively rare iconic analogue images of old (which we invariably remember) and today’s pervasive digital material. It discusses how such digital images have contributed to academic debates around the mediatisation of our environment (Deuze, 2012; Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2010; Livingstone, 2009) and mediality<sup>185</sup> (Grusin, 2010), leading to a focus on the affective dimension in addition to representational methods of constructing meaning. The chapter touches on analyses of the affective impact of images such as those from Abu Ghraib on audiences before switching its main focus to the

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<sup>184</sup> Cited in Masse, M., (2011). *Trauma Journalism – On Deadline in Harm’s Way*. New York: Continuum Books.

<sup>185</sup> Grusin uses the phrase ‘mediality’ to illustrate his argument that there can no longer be a distinction between ‘old media’ and ‘new media’ since all forms of news media are now produced and circulated through networked digital technologies (2010: 6).

impact on the journalists actually handling such images in the newsroom. This section of the chapter begins with an analysis of how the news environments in which such journalists often work are different from that of a foreign correspondent, drawing on a framework informed by Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and doxa.<sup>186</sup> It then explores, through a series of interviews at major news organisations (al-Jazeera, the BBC, ITN and Thomson Reuters), the lived experience of those journalists working with graphic user-generated content and how they attempt to cope with images of tragedy and suffering which are often designed as propaganda. This has been termed the new 'digital frontline' (Eyewitness Media Hub, 2015: 16) but, based on my research, could also be considered to be a new 'affective frontline.' Psychologists are familiar with the risks of what they call secondary or vicarious traumatisation in emergency workers in cases where exposure to trauma is repeated (detailed in Cohen & Collens, 2013). Some of the journalists I spoke to showed clear symptoms of stress, avoidance and withdrawal, which in turn they believe is having a contagious impact on the wider newsroom. These are core issues that are emerging in my work for the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma and ones that major news organisations such as the BBC and ITN have only recently begun to recognise at a senior level in news management. The chapter concludes by outlining newsroom measures now being introduced which are designed to shield staff from the impact of having to watch difficult images day in, day out. It also attempts to go further than that by examining just how the affective force of user-generated images, and the new milieu provided by social media hubs, is starting to influence practice.

## *7.2 From Analogue to Digital – From Zapruder to ISIS*

News organisations have traditionally relied on images. Indeed, aside from the cliché that a picture is worth 1,000 words<sup>187</sup>, there has been detailed academic investigation of the way in which pictures play a powerful role in attracting

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<sup>186</sup> For a discussion of Bourdieu and the relevance to the empirical investigation in this thesis, see Chapter Three, p 116.

<sup>187</sup> The phrase dates back to slogans used in U.S. newspapers in the period immediately before World War I.

readers and viewers to news (Domke et al, 2002), including a series of influential eye tracking studies in the pre-Internet era (e.g. Garcia & Stark, 1991). More recently, academic research has shown how news organisations have started to pick up on the power of emotive social media content to drive traffic and promote audience engagement (Myrik & Wojdyski, 2015: 15). The veteran television journalist and foreign correspondent Jim Lederman asserted: “television news is enslaved to images. If an idea cannot be recorded in the form of an image, it will rarely, if ever, be given extensive time on a nightly network newscast.” (cited in Domke et al, 2002: 132). Until the early part of this century such images were captured by *professional* news photographers or cameramen and the sheer economics and logistics of managing an editorial operation imposed practical limits on the volume. But in the last 10-15 years, the floodgates have opened. Since the watershed news stories that were Sept 11, the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004 and the July 7 London bombings the next year, *amateur* photography has become a powerful – and problematic – new source for the established news organisations (Anden-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2011). Moreover, as Linfield notes (2015), a further dimension has been added by what she calls the “perpetrator image” or “terrorist selfie” through which social media can be used to celebrate acts of violence:

“We live in the age of the fascist image. The cell-phone camera and lightweight video equipment - along with YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and all the other wonders of social media - have allowed perpetrators of atrocities to document, and celebrate, every kind of violence, no matter how grotesque.”

The explosion in the number of images has been accompanied by the speed of their circulation, both through social media and by their inclusion within the various outlets of professional news organisations. The opportunities and threats of user-generated content has been well rehearsed in academic literature over the past decade. On the one hand, it provides coverage of events the consumer of news would otherwise never have seen and often in real time (Allan, 2013: 92); it has played a key role in helping a news organisation such as the BBC cover crises and conflicts in recent years (Johnston, 2015: 184); it provides an



inexpensive opportunity for news organisations to intensify their links to their customers and generate public trust at a time of economic pressure on the industry (Pantti & Bakker, 2009); the fact that images are not edited or digitally enhanced can make the impersonal detachment of mainstream news photography and journalism's preferred framing seem outmoded (Allan, 2014: 146); in this sense, such material is considered by the public to be "more real and less packaged" adding drama and human emotion to an otherwise dry news environment (Williams et al, 2011). On the other hand, when amateur images are pulled into the mainstream media, their often personal point of view and their sometimes "untamed"<sup>188</sup> graphic content may clash with the normative values, or boundaries, of journalism (Anden-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2011: 9) and cause tensions in the news industry.<sup>189</sup> Helen Boaden, who was the BBC's Director of News at the time of the London bombings in 2005, identified the attacks as a watershed and "the point at which the BBC knew that newsgathering had changed forever" (2008). In a reflection on the changing news landscape and July 7, she wrote:

"Within 24 hours, the BBC had received 1,000 stills and videos, 3,000 texts and 20,000 e-mails. What an incredible resource. Twenty-four hour television was sustained as never before by contributions from the audience; one piece on the Six O'clock News was produced entirely from pieces of user-generated content. At the BBC, we knew then that we had to change. We would need to review our ability to ingest this kind of material and our editorial policies to take account of these new forms of output."<sup>190</sup>

As Singer observes (2015: 26), by the mid-2000s journalists were starting to recognise the value of user-generated content and the boundaries around content

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<sup>188</sup> The authors are referring to the lack of editing of such material.

<sup>189</sup> I explored this tension between 'professional' journalists and 'citizen journalists' in a book chapter entitled *Uneasy Relationships* included in an edited volume: Shumow, M., (2015). *Mediated Communities*. New York: Peter Lang.

<sup>190</sup> The BBC was one of the first major news organisations to set up a user-generated content 'hub', acting shortly after the July 7 bombings. Earlier doubts from senior BBC news executives that social media would undermine the BBC's code of accuracy, impartiality and objectivity were put to one side after the bombings revealed the value of material from the public (Belair-Gagnon, 2015).

were becoming more porous. Although such content may not conform to some normative goals, it was seen as contributing to other goals, most notably a diversity of information and of information sources. Journalists' response shifted, she argues, from disapprobation to accommodation (ibid).

In an age of citizen witnessing<sup>191</sup>, it is sometimes easy to forget that we have been here before in the pre-digital age, albeit rarely. The now legendary Abraham Zapruder frames of the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, captured on 8mm Kodachrome safety film, are widely cited (e.g. Allan, 2013) as the first example of citizen journalism. But it took a full 12 years for the 486 frames, shot at 18.3 frames per second and lasting a total 26 seconds, to be broadcast on national television. *Life* magazine bought the footage for \$150,000 and published 30 frames in black and white one week after Kennedy's death. It hardly seems conceivable that in today's digital era of social media, such footage would not be instantaneously uploaded for all to see. And in contrast to today's overt showcasing of amateur images, *Life* magazine appears to have gone out of its way to hide the fact that the Zapruder frames did not come from a professional photojournalist (Zelizer, 1992). The *Life* magazine caption (1963) stated:

“On these and the following two pages is a remarkable and exclusive series of pictures which show, for the first time and in tragic detail, the fate which befell our president.”

Zapruder's amateur movie frames, together with George Holliday's Sony Handycam footage in 1991 of the Los Angeles Police Department beating a black 25-year old, Rodney King<sup>192</sup>, are widely cited as two early examples of citizen journalism (Allan, 2013). They stand out as an exception to the routine news coverage of that pre-Internet era and form a bridge to today's digitally

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<sup>191</sup> The origin of the phrase is not clear but it has been used extensively by Prof Stuart Allan of Cardiff University and was the title of his 2013 book on his exploration of the varied roles of citizens in today's journalism practice.

<sup>192</sup> George Holliday, a plumbing supply store manager, was woken in the small hours of Sunday March 3, 1991 by sounds of a disturbance under his window. The eight minutes of video he shot captured a brutal beating by white policemen from LAPD. He sold the footage to a local television station, KTLA-TV and it was later broadcast on CNN and U.S. network television.

connected social media landscape in which mobile phone footage is able to capture, for example, a white police officer in North Charleston, South Carolina, apparently shooting an unarmed black man nine times in the back.<sup>193</sup>

Clearly, Zapruder and Holliday were not professional journalists, rather – as was the case in South Carolina - bystanders who captured decisive moments more by chance than design. But there many of the comparisons end. There is something very different about today’s amateur images and video footage - in the technology itself, in the social practices of our digital era in which the hand-held device is often used as a deliberate call to witness, and, not least, in journalism’s relationship with user-generated content. When I interviewed Helen Long, an intake editor at Thomson Reuters, the world’s largest television news agency, she characterised the volume of social media flooding in today as a “tsunami” (I 22). Only 10 years ago, an organisation like Thomson Reuters was constrained by highly expensive satellite feeds, which by their very cost, limited the amount of footage that was fed into the newsroom and the pushed out through a series of carefully timed feeds to customers. In the first part of the new decade FTP<sup>194</sup> technology and the Internet opened the floodgates, especially for the dissemination of propaganda. The first al-Qaeda terror videos of Osama bin Laden were handed over secretly to broadcasters in the form of a physical video cassette tape. Today’s propaganda material from ISIS comes via a Twitter feed, Facebook or a myriad of websites. At Channel 4, International Editor Lindsey Hilsum (I 20) also pointed to the sheer volume of social media content and its impact:

“The volume I think is part of the emotional impact of it. To some extent people are getting immune to it, but you're thinking, ‘Oh God this is never ending’ and I think that does lead to this, you know, this sense that the world is going to shit and things have never been worse. Actually it's not true, you know, things were probably worse during the Peloponnesian Wars or whatever or the level of violence in World War I and the

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<sup>193</sup> In April 2015, mobile phone footage by a bystander showed a white police officer, Michael T Slager shooting Walter L Scott in North Charleston, USA. The officer was fired and charged with murder.

<sup>194</sup> File Transfer Protocol.

numbers of people killed is much, much higher and all the rest of it. But I think that part of that sense that we have of the world falling apart and everything being out of control and how terrible it all is, is just to do with the volume of images that we're all looking at.”

In purely technical terms, there is also a clear difference between an analogue and a digital image. Analogue images have a one-to-one relationship with the object being recorded since they are created by light falling onto chemicals, which react to the light and form a pattern. But digital images lack that same one-to-one relationship since the images are made from *sampling* patterns of light (Rose, 2012: 5), which in turn are converted into binary digital code by a camera's software / algorithms and then back into an image on our digital screen. And we know from our consumption of everyday media that digital images can be infinitely manipulated<sup>195</sup>, whether it be replay loops of the second aircraft crashing into one of the World Trade Center towers played out over 24-hour news channels or frames willfully manipulated for propaganda purposes. It is this fundamental difference that has led to a recent theoretical focus not just on the representational properties of images but also on their affective dimension. While part of this focus is inspired by the work of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze (1968/1994), part is also driven by the sheer scale and proliferation of digital technologies that create increasingly intense *flows* of information (Rose, 2012: 7). For Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010: 21), the shift to digital media unsettles the relationship between an image and what it represents since what they call “the moment of truthfulness” may no longer lie at the point at which a photograph is taken but rather with the consumer or user who sifts multiple and sometimes competing images with varying results. Thus the impact of an image

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<sup>195</sup> I am referring here to the technical manipulation of digital images through software programmes such as Adobe Photoshop, something that was far more difficult to do with analogue material. It is necessary to recognise, however, the debate about the interpretative manipulation of images in the analogue as well as the digital era. Butler (2005: 823), for example, argues that in war the frame is crucial in interpretation of a conflict. Referring to pictures taken by embedded journalists in the 2003 Iraq war, Butler states: “The frame takes part in the interpretation of the war compelled by the state; it is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly.”

may well reside not just in what it represents but in our relationship to it<sup>196</sup>. Images therefore interact with individuals' existing understandings of the world to shape information processing and judgments (Domke et al, 2002: 136). In his analysis of the Abu Ghraib pictures, Grusin points out that their impact is a result not just of what they mean or the emotions they evoke (for example, the images represent U.S. troops torturing Iraqi prisoners; people generally considered this to be disgusting) (2010: 81). As observed in the introduction to this chapter, Grusin maintains that the affect produced should also be understood as "an unqualified bodily response independent of, and perhaps phenomenally prior to, our understanding of the emotions they evoke or the meanings they entail." This is not least because the pictures relate to many people's everyday media practices in their own use of mobile phones and social media, namely taking 'selfies' and uploading pictures to share.

"On an affective level, the shock comes not after recognising (the images) cognitively or intellectually, but in some sense prior to that recognition. We experience the shock and then afterwards recognise what it is that had shocked us" (ibid).

The pictures are shocking because they are both outside our scope of normal life but also because of their very normality, almost as if they were holiday snapshots. The way media 'texts' are interwoven into our lives means that our traditional emphasis on what an image means is complicated or even displaced because of our own affective relationship with, and uses of, the wide range of digital technologies in our daily lives (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010: 27). It is argued that the very fact that amateur images do not display the same high quality of those captured by professional photographers or cameramen with expensive cameras, and that they are often grainy and shaky, actually heightens their impact and makes them appear even more authentic (Anden-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2011: 12). Their raw nature stands in contrast to the often stereotypical and detached framing of established news organisations; such images rank as

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<sup>196</sup> It can be argued that this has always been the case with analogue images. But Hoskins and O'Loughlin contend that there is a difference and disruption stemming from the way we can easily edit digital images, forward to friends and family and continually re-contextualise them.

first hand recordings by individuals who witnessed events as they took place (ibid). As is evident from this short overview, the impact of digital images on consumers of news and the wider societal implications have been well documented and theorised. In contrast, the impact on the journalists handling such images has gone largely unnoticed. The following section will explore the stories of some of those journalists handling such material day in, day out, and of those who are grappling with the dilemma of how best to use it. In the same way that academic research has highlighted the importance of a viewer's pre-existing relationship to an image, I was keen to explore through interviews the way in which journalists as individuals related to the material they were handling and the newsroom environment. In order to do this, it was important to focus not just on them but also their environment in all its forms, physical, social and competitive.

### *7.3 The Intake Desk – No Switching Channel*

Life in the newsroom back at headquarters of a large news organisation is very different from life on the road covering a fast-moving story as a foreign correspondent in unfamiliar or hostile territory. Juliana Ruhfus (I 17), a senior reporter for al-Jazeera's English language network, knows that only too well. Ruhfus has worked in some of the world's most dangerous trouble spots, from Somalia to Nigeria, often covering stories of trafficking of women for the sex trade or going undercover to expose corruption for investigative stories. When she is on the road, she is usually with a camera team or colleagues, sometimes working with an experienced Swiss cameraman, Claudio von Planta who is a documentary filmmaker in his own right. She talked to me about operating in the field and how back home the atmosphere in al-Jazeera's London newsroom is different:

“I think if you are a journalist who goes into the field and does ‘dodgy’ stuff, you develop camaraderie with fellow journalists, you go through a shared experience and you bond – all of that can help you talk to people and get through it. But what these people do (on an intake desk) is really solitary and confined and they have no camaraderie and no bonding because that's not how their job goes. Who will they have the dark

humour with and say, hey, that was a shitty day ... that's why in newsrooms there should be more of a recognition of what they are doing and support.”

Correspondents in the field share a collective identity, especially when operating under stress, covering conflict or disaster. As Morrison and Tumber observed in relation to the Falklands conflict (1988), war correspondents may feel part of a collective heroic force, with newspaper journalists particularly prone to living in a ‘press pack’ in a particular hotel, sharing information, living the war in parallel to the militaries they are reporting on and, like many soldiers, rarely meeting up when they return to their home and family life.<sup>197</sup> Pedelty, in his ethnographic study of reporters in El Salvador, *War Stories*, designates them as a community in and of themselves. Reporters work together, play together and often live together; they share an integrated set of myths, rituals and behavioral norms (1995: 4). And as my interviews with journalists in the previous chapter illustrated, a common identity and camaraderie on a big story in the field is one important way in which journalists shield themselves, wittingly or unwittingly, from the trauma of what they are covering. Other professions have also recognised this. Following the Omagh<sup>198</sup> bombing in Northern Ireland in 1998, trauma recovery teams indicated that team spirit and camaraderie were viewed as a positive experience (Phelps et al., 2009: 319). The concept of peer support was developed after World War One by the Hungarian psychoanalyst Michael Balint and such methods (Balint groups) are still used to support general practitioners.

A newsroom back at editorial headquarters is typically a very different environment and had always been perceived as ‘safe’. This perception, I argue, is one of the reasons why graphic social media images pose such a risk for those working today on social media desks in the newsroom. Talking this through with the Dart Center’s executive director in Europe, Gavin Rees, it became clear to me that the newsroom was no longer as ‘safe’ a space as journalists had assumed:

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<sup>197</sup> cf. Chapter Four, p 160 and the experience of isolation felt by BBC correspondent Patrick Howse when he returned from assignment in Baghdad to the London newsroom.

<sup>198</sup> The car bombing by the Real Irish Republican Army killed 29 people and injured 220 others.

“One of the reasons it foxes us is that we don’t take on board the fact that that images, now with very realistic sound and in High Definition, are coming into environments that we assume to be safe. So if you are a war reporter and you are working in a conflict zone, you would expect to be a bit hyper, you would expect to have certain types of trauma responses. But if you are working in an office block somewhere in London, then it is hard to find the language for that. You may have some people who are immersed in traumatic images and other people at the water cooler talking about how Arsenal did the night before.”

It is a point that was also highlighted in a 2015 survey of journalists working with user-generated content by Eyewitness Media Hub<sup>199</sup> which classified the newsroom at headquarters as ‘the new digital frontline’ (2015: 16):

“Office-bound staff who used to be somewhat shielded from viewing atrocities are now bombarded day in and day out with horrifically graphic material that explodes onto their desktops in volumes, and at a frequency that is very often far in excess of the horrors witnessed by staff who are investigating or reporting from the actual frontline.”

Based on my own first hand understanding of newsrooms in major centres, journalists will typically commute in and out of the city centre, whether it is London, Washington, New York or Frankfurt (I have worked in all of these regional editing hubs for Reuters before the take-over by the Thomson Corporation in 2008). Such journalists will normally work on shifts, giving a clear start and end to their day in contrast to journalists in the field or on assignment who tend to work until a story is finished. When a shift ends, the journalist travels home to the suburbs and often a family environment. In my experience, there *is* still a very strong shared newsroom culture, in Bourdieusian terms (1984, 1990, 1994, 1998) a series of unwritten rules of the game and

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<sup>199</sup> The online survey conducted between July and September 2015 took in 122 journalists working with user-generated content in newsrooms around the world. 23% of the respondents were based in the United Kingdom and 15% in the United States.



hierarchies that can be viewed through the lens of field, habitus and doxa. But the dynamic of commuting to the suburbs dissipates the camaraderie that Ruhfus and others so value as foreign correspondents operating outside the central newsroom. The result can often be that the big central newsroom has a much more impersonal atmosphere. Over the past few years, the major broadcasters and agencies have all set up social media desks in their main editorial centres to cope with of the large volume of incoming material. But the senior managers I spoke to conceded that these positions are typically staffed by young entry-level journalists, often social media-savvy freelancers looking for their first opportunity in the business. As I spoke with journalists handing user-generated material, I realised that some have little or no experience of working in the protective and common cultural environment occupied by more seasoned journalists. As such, they also have little perception of the unwritten rules or Bourdieusian doxa, the intuitive unquestioned beliefs shaped by shared experiences that pervade a typical newsroom. The more I spoke with those working in this environment, both at the coal face and overseeing the operations, the more it became apparent that those sitting in front of screens all day taking in a diet of Middle East conflict and, in the period between July 2014 and August 2015 a series of beheading videos, are highly vulnerable; they are not naturally part of the newsroom culture – although they want to rise within its power hierarchy and gain status as a fully-fledged journalist - and can even be intimidated by the macho, gallows humour so often present. When Wetherell speaks about affective practice, she notes how actions usually turn out to be recognisable and related to the flow of others' actions (2012: 129). But in the case of this new breed of journalist on social media hubs, the signs from my research are that they are not necessarily relating to those journalists in more established areas of practice and as a result they are starting to reformulate some of the norms. In her study of the BBC and Syrian content, Johnston also observes how journalists jobs and newsroom practices are changing (2015: 185).

I told part of Fadah Jassem's story in Chapter Four. As an assistant News Editor and Producer working for ITN at their 200 Gray's Inn Road headquarters,<sup>200</sup> she has been intimately involved in using social media to help cover the Middle East story that began with the Iraqi conflict, and rapidly evolved from the Arab Spring into the Syrian civil war and rise of ISIS. Her dual Iraqi-Syrian nationality is a key asset to ITN but by her own admission she is not senior enough to be involved in fieldwork. Her daily work is typical of this generation of young journalists, using their knowledge of social media to add to the mainstream reporting effort. The majority of Jassem's daily journalism is conducted from her newsroom desk, reaching out, as she puts it, to people across the Middle East. That work involves constant, repeated and detailed viewing of video clips because it is the detail that is important and can make a crucial difference. There is little scope to avoid or skip over the most graphic material if Jassem is to do her job. She explained to me how when first video of the chemical weapons attack on the Ghouta suburb of Damascus started being uploaded in August 2013 her job was to go through every single piece of footage, every photo and every YouTube clip to try and create a narrative for the reporters working on it. She catalogues footage from major news stories, looking for tell-tale signs – often subtle differences in Arab regional dialects - that can either help authenticate events or reveal them to be staged propaganda. Despite the high volume of images and inevitable repetition, Jassem told how she always attempts to put in personal details when footage is voiced for broadcast (I 15):

“For me, the way I think about it is I like to put as much of the actual narrative or what's going on in those clips in terms of details, in terms of, for example, a young boy's name, if we know how old he was or what he might have been saying to his grandfather. For me, those elements, those little details actually have more of an impact on the story rather than just kind of putting in the facts and saying, ‘Here are some pictures.’”

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<sup>200</sup> The building was purpose built for ITN in 1990 by Foster & Partners and for a time shared by Reuters which moved in at the same time from its 85 Fleet Street headquarters. At the time, I was the chief correspondent in what was called the Reuters ‘London bureau’.

That of course makes it all the more personal, both for the television viewer<sup>201</sup>, but also for the journalist handling the footage. While this type of detail is typical of the interviews I conducted with those working primarily in the newsroom, Jassem's specific background brought such distant suffering even closer to home for her since she has been actively making contact with sources in the conflict. She spoke openly about the impact such work began to have on her and how, as time went on, it fuelled a sense of isolation and feelings of guilt as she lost touch with those in the conflict:

“I've lost contact with all of those guys because they no longer appeared online. Some of them I knew had been killed in the shelling. Everything was eaten up in Homs. There wasn't anything left. So, that was the most difficult time for me. But because it was also the busiest time working as a journalist, I didn't really have time to stop and think about it, I think. It was a lot of things sort of building up, had a negative effect on my personal life, had a negative effect on me wanting to go out and socialise and see people. And the biggest, biggest thing for me was guilt, not having a sense of being able to do anything about it really. Because eventually, as the months progressed, the videos got more and more graphic. Situations and scenarios just became more unbearable. Up until the point, I tried to avoid looking at things that I didn't really have to look at, videos and stuff.”

She had even interviewed two of her own cousins who joined the rebel Free Syrian Army (they later escaped to Sweden), while the brothers of one of her friends left the United Kingdom for Syria and were subsequently killed in the conflict. The result was that as time went by, she became by her own admission more and more withdrawn:

“Some days, it would not affect me at all and I'll just get on and it's fine, doing stuff. And I think usually, surprise surprise towards the end of the

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<sup>201</sup> Chouliaraki (2006: 20) describes how television is able to create a new connectivity between spectators and 'distant others', a sense of being-there but one which is qualitatively distinct from face-to-face interaction.

week, I would start feeling more and more down and upset and just really more or less antisocial. I think I became a lot more withdrawn and didn't really want to speak to as many people. And I hated people asking me about what my thoughts were about it all because, you know, 'So what do you think is happening right now?' I'd say 'all right' because I didn't know where to start and what to say."

What struck me most after this interview was the affective role played by the screen in creating such an intense and intimate relationship between a journalist in ITN's newsroom and (barring her cousins) people Jassem had never met. Although the analogy may at first seem odd, it parallels a study on the relationship between foreign exchange dealers and the bonds to, and forged by, non-human objects. While foreign exchange dealers used to talk to each other on the phone, interaction is now mainly through an impersonal screen transaction. In their analysis of markets, Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger (2002) talk of "postsocial" relationships stepping into the place of more traditional human connections and how the screen becomes a social entity with which the traders have become strongly, and even excessively, engaged (*ibid*: 162). They also detect an intimacy about the traders' relationship with the screen, something also observed by Beckett and Deuze (2016: 2) when discussing in more general terms people's attachment to their smartphones and tablets – what they term a digital co-dependency.

The addictive nature was a recurring theme in my interviews, with the engagement with sources, although 'virtual' through social media, intense. The BBC's Dhruvi Shah (I 26), who works on the BBC's social media hub, echoed the feelings that the newsroom is no longer a safe space and said that the stress had clearly had an impact on her, prompting her at one stage to seek a temporary transfer into another area of the BBC. She had worked closely over social media with Luke Somers, a freelance photojournalist kidnapped and killed in Yemen by al-Qaeda in 2014. At first she had not realised he had been kidnapped and then felt guilty for not having e-mailed him before. She ended up sending on some of his emails to his next of kin. Another contact on Skype had been feeding back information from Libya, only for her to discover through a colleague a few days

later that he had been shot dead by a sniper. For Shah, the Arab spring was the game changer:

“It became this domino effect. We were speaking to people and we were building up relationships with people on, you know, through various platforms, through Skype. The way that we get our stories would be through our e-mail address that would be trailed heavily ... but you would start building up relationships with regular contacts and then things would happen to those contacts. “

Sometimes on a night shift, in a sparsely populated newsroom, she would just chat with contacts. Those conversations weren't for publication or use in any way. Both she, and they, she said, were lonely and felt isolated.

This almost seductive dynamic also came through in my investigation of the Thomson Reuters newsroom, illustrating the power of images to captivate individuals however far away and however repulsive they might be. I had experienced this almost perverse attraction at first hand in the newsroom under very different circumstances. Before the Thomson organisation's takeover of Reuters in 2008, I had spent many hours in the Gray's Inn Road newsroom off London's Chancery Lane.<sup>202</sup> One of the days I will never forget was in April, 2003, before the floodgates of social media had opened, when a U.S. tank shelled the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad. That hotel had been the headquarters for many of the journalists covering the invasion of Iraq, including Reuters. The shell that scythed through a balcony killed two journalists, including one of my then colleagues, the Reuters cameraman Taras Protsyuk. To this day, the U.S. army claims it thought it was shelling an Iraqi army position and the incident naturally caused outrage in the international press community. On the Reuters newsroom floor, we had looked on in utter horror as we saw, through an old-fashioned live satellite feed of Reuters Television, how one of our own was carried through the hotel, clearly dead. We gathered around the monitors in silence, appalled yet unable to look away. It sounds like a cliché, but I experienced that as one

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<sup>202</sup> The London editorial operation has since moved to Canary Wharf.

newsroom standing together, united by the events unfolding in front of us (yet being transmitted from a distance of 2,500 miles). Another colleague, a Lebanese foreign correspondent Samia Nakhoul, was pictured in the back of a car, her hands over her face and blood oozing through her fingers. Hours later, an Iraqi surgeon operated on her by generator as the Americans advanced on Baghdad, removing shrapnel and fragments of shattered bone from her brain and saving her life. At that time, the newsroom in London had no idea whether she would survive<sup>203</sup>. The shock inevitably gave way to anger and a fruitless search for answers from the U.S. military. None of us who witnessed that video feed will ever forget it but it is clear that today, far from being the exception as it was then, such gruesome footage has become a daily event. One of the journalists standing alongside me on that day had, in fact, been Helen Long. We only realised when I interviewed her for this thesis. But the memory of that day in 2003 had stayed with her in the same way as it had stayed with me.

Today, she is a senior intake editor at Thomson Reuters with a lot of experience in the field, not least from the Bosnian conflict. It was her task to set up the Thomson Reuters social media intake desk, switching operations from the Middle East into the main London newsroom. Talking to me 12 years after the attack on the Palestine Hotel, she feely admitted making some early mistakes (I 22). In common with other similar news organisations, she is urgently putting in place procedures to protect those working on the intake desk from the impact of graphic images. The first two freelancers on the desk were not even formally trained and there was no proper budget to take on full-time staff.

“Those people are identified because of their language capability ... they are not being hired as journalists and it is recognised as an alternative route into the industry and there are a couple of people who have turned out to be very good television field producers who came up through that route and learned on the job.

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<sup>203</sup> Samia Nakhoul later told the story of the attack on the Palestine Hotel, and how the Iraqi neurosurgeon operated on her, in a book about the war I edited: *Under Fire – Untold Stories from the Front Line of the Iraq War* (see bibliography).

“But we are taking these kids, who are not journalists, we can’t hire them so we are not putting them through any formal induction, don’t have the budget to train them ... it’s all on the job. Ok, you’re a dab hand at social media because you are 23 ... this is what we want you to do and away you go.”

While the original brief had been to trawl social media feeds for ‘must have’ viral material of any nature, she said it quickly became a daily diet of the Syrian conflict, complete with ISIS beheading videos and other violent images. Within a few weeks it was, she said, “90% horror.”

“Because these kids weren’t journalists, they are bright nonetheless and could see that war, disaster is the bread and butter of the news agency, they would trawl for this stuff and show it to one of the editors and say: ‘I found this video of this man being buried alive in Syria, is this something we should be running?’ You would look at it and say, ‘Oh my God, we are never going to run that, it is too gratuitous!’”

Long argued that with proper training, those freelancers would never have even opened such video material. But in the early days, they ran five-day, eight-hour shifts until, in a key moment, she became conscious of the impact on them. The editors and senior producers were all pretty battle-hardened and, she said, had become inured to such images since Sept 11. Long explained what happened:

“We didn’t think deeply enough about how these kids, fresh from college, would respond to these stories. As a result we kept ... these two boys on for weeks at a time, weeks and weeks, and then ... after James Foley<sup>204</sup> was executed and put everything onto a new level, I became aware of one of these boys, on the intake desk near to me, plugged in

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<sup>204</sup> The U.S. freelance journalist James Foley was abducted in November 2012 in Northern Syria and beheaded by ISIS in August 2014 after U.S. airstrikes in Syria. A video of his beheading was posted on YouTube.

with cans as I am, I just noticed that he was constantly (she makes a ducking motion) ... and he did it again and again and again.”<sup>205</sup>

He had been watching a video out of Syria of two young Shiite boys being tortured by ISIS before being killed. And he had been reviewing similar material all day. It had, she said, been so far outside his cultural points of reference that he started investigating such material after work to try to understand what was going on. As Long explained:

“... he was just desperate to try and understand it and that sent him back to the material again and again. Even when he was out of work and -- his own personal Twitter lines were -- at that time were not separate from work. So he was trawling this stuff after work and accessing these videos and watching them. He admitted, you know, it was -- he admitted he was afraid he'd become addicted to this stuff, but it was in an effort to understand it.”

That one experience led to a thorough review of the operation at Thomson Reuters and, as I explain later in this chapter, a series of guidelines designed to protect those handling such material.

That the affective impact of such graphic images is partly attributable to an individual's personal understandings and experience of the world is also illustrated by another example from Thomson Reuters. The sheer volume of social media material had prompted the decision to shift the monitoring desk to London from the Middle East<sup>206</sup>. In one sense, that has shielded some journalists

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<sup>205</sup> Here too there is a parallel with Knorr Cetina and Bruegge's (2002: 165) study into foreign exchange traders where they describe how the person becomes bonded to the technology:

“When traders arrive in the morning they strap themselves to their seats, figuratively speaking, they bring up their screens, and from then on their eyes will be glued to that screen, their visual regard captured by it even when they talk or shout to each other, their bodies and the screen world melting together in what appears to be a total immersion in the action in which they are taking part.”

<sup>206</sup> Johnston sets out in her analysis of the BBC's use of user-generated content to cover the Syrian conflict how it was able to 'embed' BBC Arabic service staff into its 'ugc hub', especially on Fridays when protests often followed prayers (2015: 190).



in the newsroom because they do not understand the Arabic language sound track. Before the desk move took place, one Arab journalist in the Middle East had been haunted for days after hearing on video the anguished cries of a Syrian father imploring President Bashar al-Assad to stop as he wept over the bodies of his children.

“It wasn't the bodies that got into her head, it was what he said and how he said it. She understood it,” Long said.

The Eyewitness Media Hub survey of newsrooms also highlighted the potentially traumatic impact of sound. Some journalists questioned observed that it was as bad, or even worse, than witnessing images of violence. Many in the survey said they routinely turned the sound down when reviewing material (see section 7.6)

#### *7.4 Contagion in the Newsroom*

It became apparent from the interviews I conducted that mainstream news organisations are now questioning whether the influx of graphic social media material is having a wider contagious impact on newsroom culture, and potentially even influencing journalism practice. Beckett & Deuze (2016: 5) identify what they see as a clear trend towards a more mobile, personalised and emotionally driven news media. The BBC's Stuart Hughes (I 14), one of the senior World Affairs producers, believes that the early wave of Syrian videos, often combat footage captured on a shaky i-Phone, was easy enough to use and not dissimilar to traditional coverage. But he told me he believed that the subsequent series of ISIS beheading videos is possibly having a wider impact, both on editorial decision-making and the newsroom atmosphere:

“Thinking of the recent beheading videos, I think that we've been pretty responsible and there have been a lot of discussions in this building (the BBC) about how we use that footage, both in terms of taste and decency, the wishes of the family and so on and also, are we becoming tools in the propaganda game. As to whether it's affecting the editorial decisions that

we make, I think, possibly and consciously, it is. I've heard a number of senior journalists ranting about the savagery of Isis, largely as a result of the material they're putting on YouTube and watching Alan Henning<sup>207</sup> or whoever it may be."

Specifically, the editing dynamic is different. While a field producer may have done a raw edit in a combat zone and sent material through to London, user-generated content comes with no such filter and can potentially be viewed by a large number of journalists in the newsroom. Hughes added:

"Does it trickle down into the actual on-air product? I don't know. But certainly, I think that many journalists are responding, maybe in a more emotional way to what's going on with ISIS because they're not just watching the piece that's been sent from the field, sanitising as necessary and editing it to BBC standards ... they are watching the raw material."

At Thomson Reuters, Long also believes the impact of social media is spilling over into the wider newsroom. The sheer volume of material means the intake desk is now flat out, with little time to reflect or process. Budget pressures also make it more difficult to address the issue:

"It zaps everyone's resilience individually and collectively - resilience of the newsroom, actually. And it's something that the managers and senior editors are acutely aware of, but not have the resource -- everyone wants to hire more people, but our hands are tied and we can't."

Also in a newspaper environment, it seems that social media can quickly influence editorial practice and spill contagiously over to influence the normal culture. Sandra Laville, who had worked as The Guardian's crime correspondent, was in the office in May, 2013 when news of the killing of drummer Rigby broke. She told me how in such cases news desks can become wrapped up in social media content to the extent that sometimes the "tail starts wagging the

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<sup>207</sup> Alan Henning was a British taxi driver who went to Syria on a humanitarian aid convoy and was beheaded in October 2014 after being captured by ISIS.

dog” (I 13). In this case, she came under pressure to write a story based on the breaking video and Twitter feeds, rather than standing back on the story and check the facts of what had happened.

“Social media has made everything so much faster ... there’s so much video around and it almost desensitises you in a way. So much of it,” she said. “... I think the public could get, you know, immune to the images in a way. It’s almost like you need more and more horror or more and more graphic detail to make an impact.”

As such, Laville is describing a form of contagion and suggestion in which new forms of media (in this case ‘tweets’ and mobile phone video) combine with different hierarchies in the newsroom (editors, news desks, social media desks, reporters) in a way that amplifies the affective dimension of news. This manifests itself in the fascination and addiction that I observed or was told about during the research interviews and, as Laville suggests, shows signs of spilling over into some decision making on what news to cover and how to cover it.

During my interviews with journalists, I found a broad consensus that the recent wave of ISIS beheading videos, although drawing on a long history of propaganda, had taken graphic imagery to a new level. As Christian and Kimbell note (2015: 78), nothing evokes more fear and horror than public beheadings and yet decapitation is filled with gory fascination. This war of images, with its emasculation of Western hostages, can be interpreted as a way for ISIS to express through its propaganda their supposed dominance in political and cultural terms (Spens, 2014). In a sense, this phenomenon is not new. The Wall Street Journal journalist Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and killed by his al-Qaeda captors in 2002. A videotape lasting 3 minutes and 36 seconds was handed over to an FBI agent at the Sheraton Hotel in Karachi. Entitled *The Slaughter of the Spy-Journalist, the Jew Daniel Pearl*, it showed Pearl's mutilated body but not in fact the moment of death. The killer later holds his head up for about 10 seconds. Later videos from this period actually show the moment of decapitation, in the case of the U.S. engineer Nick Berg, killed by Al-Qaeda in May 2004, and the British engineer Kenneth Bigley, killed by al-Qaeda in October of the same year.

But much as is the case with the Zapruder and Rodney King footage, these videos now appear to belong to a bygone age. Some of them were physical video cassette tapes, handed over in secret, others were indeed uploaded to web sites. But today's current wave of beheadings by ISIS, many of which have been attributed to the Jihadi John figure referred to by Will Self, appears to represent a leap in terms of volume and the impact in the newsroom. It is, as Guardian journalist Steve Rose observed (2014), as if ISIS looked at Osama bin Laden's fuzzy, monotonous camcorder sermons of a decade ago and concluded that extremist Islam needed a snappier marketing strategy. Zelizer (2015) argues that ISIS use of images is not in itself new since it draws on a long historical tradition of spectacles of suffering used for propaganda purposes – etchings, public hangings, photographs have all been used before. But, she says, ISIS has learnt from current practice to:

“take what is present in the media but kind of under the surface and use it to its own aims... I think they are very smart in terms of how they have recognised what can pass as a persuasive image and what can draw public attention... it is very clear that they have studied the media.”

At the time of the Kenneth Bigley and other videos, the BBC was engulfed in controversy as it debated, under the then Head of News Roger Mosey, whether to show such material. In the end, the BBC and other western broadcasters used very little actual footage, usually opting for one still image or 'frame grab' of the captive facing the camera (often when they were pleading to politicians in the West for their life).<sup>208</sup> That debate is still continuing and the ethical issues are arguably timeless. Just one week after images of Foley's killing in Syria were uploaded to YouTube, Phil Bigley, the brother of Kenneth Bigley, appealed to news organisations not to use the images out of respect for the families of hostages (2014). When I spoke to Kevin Marsh, former editor of BBC Radio 4's Today programme and of the BBC College of Journalism, he emphasised how

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<sup>208</sup> This became an open debate amongst British broadcasters. See The Guardian of 26 September 2004:

<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/sep/26/pressandpublishing.Iraqandthemedial>

for him the principle of human dignity transcended the technological shifts from ‘old’ to ‘new’ media (I 9):

“What is your intention in showing the victims? And what does that do to your regard for their dignity as human beings not to have their distress and suffering show? I think at the end of the day, the principle that has not been sufficiently evidenced has been this question of the human dignity of the victims and this is true with famine coverage, it’s true with coverage of war, it’s true with terrorists, coverage of terrorist acts so that I just think there’s something that makes me feel very uneasy about the idea that ‘no, we’ve got to show the victim because otherwise we are not telling the story’ ... In other words, these guys (are) just a bit part players in this drama that we call journalism and there is something very... there's something that feels very fundamental wrong to me about that.”

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The impact on journalists, rather than audiences, has been heightened by the fact that the recent victims of beheadings have also been journalists – freelancers James Foley and Steven Sotloff. Jackie Spinner, a former staff writer for the Washington Post who covered Iraq and Afghanistan for 14 years and is now an assistant professor at Columbia College Chicago, wrote in the *American Journalism Review* (2014) how hard the news of Foley’s execution hit her. She had narrowly escaped capture, then by al-Qaeda, outside the Abu Ghraib jail in 2004 and had been in Twitter contact with Foley just before his kidnap. It was, she wrote, personal and uncomfortable. She herself had looked at social media coverage on her mobile phone, knowing that any image she did see would be smaller than on her computer. But in a journalism class she had been scrolling through Yahoo’s Flickr site when a thumbnail of Sotloff’s severed head was shown.

“With the website projected on a large TV screen in the classroom, I gasped at the discovery and quickly logged off the site, my hands slightly

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<sup>209</sup> Marsh’s comments echoes the deep concern among many journalists about intrusion into grief that was at the heart of the Leveson inquiry cited in Chapter One.

shaking. I went back later, and alone, to find out who had posted it, and the picture had been removed” (ibid).

In the meantime, journalists I spoke to are formulating their own coping strategies. The BBC’s Hughes is clear that he keeps viewing of such videos to a minimum:

“Personally, when the beheading videos started coming out, I asked myself the question, ‘Do I need to watch this?’ Not because I can’t deal with it, but do you want that stuff in your head unless you need to? So, I kind of ... do my own self-censoring. And I’ve watched some of them because I’ve needed to transcribe them or to check that the person is who we think they are, but other times, if I’m not working on the news desk, I won’t. It’s a sort of a little bit of mental health, self-care that I’ve chosen to implement.”

In a similar vein, Long at Thomson Reuters, now makes it a matter of principle to limit her viewing to what is absolutely necessary:

“I actually for my own part have announced that I’m not watching any more beheadings. Yes, I have to if I’m the senior editor on the desk on the day and one of these things comes in I have to go through a rigorous verification process with the global editor who’s normally off somewhere else and you can’t necessarily see the pictures. So we have to go through the whole thing and then discuss how we’re going to edit it, what we’re seeing, all of that stuff, but when it comes to the actual beheading, I just won’t watch anymore, I can’t, but I have vocalised that because I think it’s important to the younger ones and I suppose my other colleagues, actually. Somebody has to make a stand.”

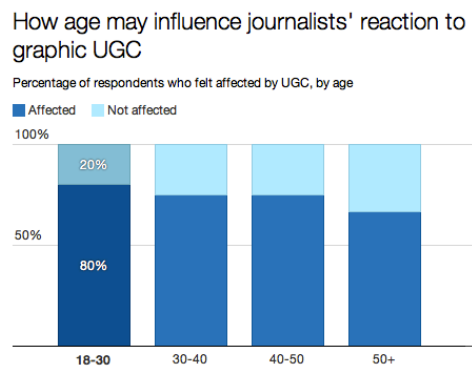
It is through such examples that major newsrooms have now started to introduce codes of practice to shield both the experienced and inexperienced. The next section of this chapter explores the emergence of these codes – much of which is

based on the normative practice of detachment - and the lessons being learnt from other disciplines.

### *7.5 Lessons to be learnt from outside Journalism*

From the interviews I conducted, it is clear that journalists, either handling graphic images from social media or overseeing their potential use in a news file, are exposed to trauma in a way that only those correspondents covering conflict or disaster in the field would have been in the past. While this appears relatively new to journalism, police teams, firefighters, ambulance crews and other emergency workers, 'first responders' in U.S. parlance, have in fact long focused on strategies to cope with the emotional impact of their work. Police agencies, for example, began to realise as long ago as the mid-1990s that the availability of child pornography online needed to be tackled and set up specialist units to fight child exploitation. An investigation into the emotional impact on those who work on such units (Burns et al, 2008) found that they are at higher risk of experiencing secondary traumatic stress because of the graphic images and sounds to which they are exposed as part of their investigations. The study, which focused on 14 members of a child Internet exploitation team in Canada, catalogued the impact of their work as they viewed graphic images and videos. Many found the sheer volume of investigations overwhelming; many experienced physical and emotional reactions that often prevented them from engaging in normal activities at home or with the family; some experienced nightmares, flashbacks and other intrusive thoughts; several felt isolated and unable to speak to other members of the team. For me, reading this study, the parallels with some of the journalists I had been speaking to were striking and at times uncanny. One of the police officers quoted in the paper described hearing a child having a temper tantrum in a shopping mall when he was off duty and thinking, "this is what it sounds like when a child is being raped." I recalled the story of the former BBC Baghdad correspondent Patrick Howse for whom the condensation on a London Underground train window turned into a map of the Iraqi capital and evoked the smell of burning flesh and the screams of wounded bomb attack victims.

The first real investigation into secondary traumatic stress or vicarious trauma related to journalists handling graphic images in the newsroom was not conducted until 2014 by the Canadian-based South African psychiatrist Dr Anthony Feinstein (Feinstein et al, 2014)<sup>210</sup>. In a study of 116 English-speaking journalists in three newsrooms working with user-generated content, Feinstein and his team of researchers found that frequent, repetitive viewing of traumatic images raises journalists' vulnerability to range of psychological injuries, including anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He noted that much of the material such journalists are exposed to is "deemed too shocking to be shown to audiences" (ibid: 1) and that many on the specialist desks he studied had little experience. Some 40.9% had daily exposure to such images.<sup>211</sup> The UK website and online media magazine *Journalism.co.uk* carried out its own research into journalists working with traumatic images in the summer of 2014 after publication of the Feinstein study. Out of a total of 62 journalists taking part in a self-selecting online survey<sup>212</sup>, 47 said they felt they had been affected in some way. The most common effects were anxiety (20% of respondents), sleeplessness (15%) and irritability (12%). Some 28% of those who responded reported no effects or minimal effects from viewing graphic images. Consistent with Feinstein's observations, and with the observations of those I interviewed, younger journalists appeared to show greater vulnerability:



Journalism.co.uk survey result

<sup>210</sup> See Chapter Four, p 160 for Feinstein's earlier studies on journalists covering conflict and the incidence of PTSD.

<sup>211</sup> Questions pertaining to user-generated content-based work included the following: (a) how often do you view violent images (daily, weekly, monthly); (b) how many hours per shift do you view violent images (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and >6 h) and (c) do you find this work traumatic (rated on a simple analogue scale of 0–10, the higher numbers indicating greater emotional upset).

<sup>212</sup> The journalism website, founded in 1999, asked its viewers to fill in an online survey.



The 2015 Eyewitness Media Hub survey found that 37% of the 122 journalists working in newsrooms who were questioned had experienced adverse effects from handling user-generated content in their job. This ranged from formal diagnosis of them suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and taking long-term sick leave to a disruptive and disturbing effect on their personal and home lives.

Frank Ochberg<sup>213</sup>, whose interest in the links between journalism and trauma and introduction of a ‘Victims and the Media’ programme at Michigan State University in 1991 led to the creation of the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma, is clear that journalists are prime candidates for secondary traumatic stress. He has been instrumental in calling for greater acceptance and discussion of the issues, arguing that there should be no stigma attached to typical reactions of intrusive recollections, emotional numbing, and physiological arousal affecting sleep, concentration and sense of security.<sup>214</sup>

“To be dazed at first, then haunted by horrible memories and made anxious and avoidant is to be part of the human family,” he says.

With hindsight, the Feinstein study was a watershed. His research concluded with a call to action (2014: 6):

“Given that good journalism depends on healthy journalists, news organisations will need to look anew at what can be done to offset the risks inherent in viewing UGC material. Our data.... suggest reducing the frequency of exposure may be one way to go.”

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<sup>213</sup> See also Chapter Four, p 161.

<sup>214</sup> Writing on the Dart website: [http://dartcenter.org/content/ptsd-101-0#.VTFQpWZxj\\_4](http://dartcenter.org/content/ptsd-101-0#.VTFQpWZxj_4) and <http://dartcenter.org/content/ptsd-101-4#.VTFNYyjrPe4> (see bibliography).

In the same month, the Dart Center in August 2014 issued comprehensive guidelines, which have since informed work at major news organisations.

### *7.6 Working with Traumatic Imagery – First Guidelines Emerge*

The Dart Center guidelines, headed *Working with Traumatic Imagery* (2014), take as a starting point Ochberg’s observation that it is normal for journalists to experience reactions of disgust, anxiety and helplessness when faced with the slow drip effect of traumatic imagery. In addition, they state that the risks rise when a journalist has a personal connection to events depicted. As a result, it puts forward a six-point plan to reduce the dangers. The Dart Center advises that journalists should:

- *Understand what they are dealing with* and think of traumatic imagery as having a “dose-dependent” effect. Journalists should therefore take steps to minimise exposure.
- *Eliminate needless repeat exposure* by organising files to reduce unnecessary viewing, cross referencing through written notes to avoid having to return continually to the original image. Never send a file to another worker without a warning about its content.
- *Experiment with ways of building distance into how images are viewed*. This can involve applying a temporary mask or matte to part of the screen, avoiding the loop play function when editing video and developing workarounds.
- *Try adjusting the viewing environment*. This can involve reducing the size of the screen and turning the sound off.
- *Take frequent screen breaks*, including walking in the open. Journalists should particularly avoid viewing traumatic images just before going to sleep.

- *Draw up a self-care plan*, including exercising regularly, maintaining outside interests and investing time in their social life.

Based on my interviews with journalists, it is evident that these are indeed the tactics that are now being employed. But they also point out the pressures that young freelancers on social media desks face in their attempt to be accepted into what is often a macho newsroom culture and to advance their career. As Channel 4's Hilsum observed, it is far easier for one of journalism's top names to step back from social media images than it is for someone just starting out:

“They are young and ambitious and so, you know, they don't want to say ... ‘I can't deal with this, I really need a day not looking at this stuff,’ because they don't want to lose their position or be seen as too weak. They have a lot more pressure in that way than older people like me. If I sort of get to the point where I can't stand it, I'll just say, ‘look I can't stand it I really -- or whatever.’ It's easy for me isn't it not for them.”

A similar view was echoed by al-Jazeera's Rufhus, who said:

“When you're starting out, you feel like you can't say things about feeling scared, feeling depressed and so on.... you're not in a position to do that when you're starting out.”

The BBC has attempted to meet this point head on from the very outset. In a note to all BBC news staff in September 2014, Managing Editor Keith Blackmore wrote:

“In recent weeks we have seen some exceptionally distressing examples of graphic imagery of people's violent deaths distributed by means of agencies, Twitter, Facebook and other social media. This trend is likely to continue and that means BBC staff will have to go on confronting such material in order to report it accurately to our audiences. We are aware that this work puts a great deal of strain on some members of staff.... *No one should feel they have to watch any of this content, at any time, and*

*may indicate this to their manager without fear of consequence.*<sup>215</sup>

That pledge to respect a journalist's right not to watch content echoes moves in recent years by al Jazeera, the BBC, ITN and Thomson Reuters to acknowledge that journalists may not want to cover war zones or particularly harrowing stories and that this should not be labeled a sign of weakness or harm their career.<sup>216</sup> The BBC guidelines also echo the principles set out by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma by stressing that no one should be asked to view graphic imagery repeatedly; links to such material should not be widely distributed within a newsroom; and that the Director of News, or a senior news executive, should be responsible for deciding just what content is used for public dissemination. The BBC's action is, said senior producer Hughes, recognition that some very young journalists had been watching some very difficult video footage (I. 14):

“If you're 24 and you're watching somebody being beheaded or a row of Kurds being shot in the back, that potentially will have an impact on you. I think it's something that BBC is starting to look at and starting to address. Work like Feinstein's is drawing attention to the fact and that seems to be gaining some momentum. So, the basic advice is, 'Do you need to watch this video?' There were quite a number of occasions, really, where, in the heat of the moment on an important news story, somebody would send out a link to a ... distribution list saying, 'This video's appeared on YouTube ... wherever it may be.' And somebody would click on a link in the middle of a night shift and suddenly, they're exposed to this. So, a lot of the advice is simple things like, if you're going to circulate something like that, you put a graphic warning on it.”

Similar codes are being brought in at other major news organisations. ITN's Jassem sends a warning around the editorial if graphic material is on the central server. At Thomson Reuters, Long explained how junior staff on the intake desk

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<sup>215</sup> My italics, the note was given to me with the BBC's permission by Stuart Hughes (I 14).

<sup>216</sup> The Canadian broadcast journalist Richard Gizbert was sacked by ABC News in the United States in 2004 for having refused to travel to Iraq to cover the war there. He later took ABC News to court and won damages for wrongful dismissal.

are now rostered for no more than two weeks at a time and how there is no obligation to take on such a role. Thomson Reuters has brought in outside trauma experts to brief the newsroom on dangers and spot warning signs but Long points to the cultural change that is occurring:

“But more than that, the message that is coming from the top now is it's okay not to watch this stuff. It's okay to be affected by it, and currently we are grappling with how we can mitigate some of the worst parts of the social media beat. You know, how do we make the unpalatable, palatable number one. Secondly, how do you take kids who have no life experience yet... how do we begin to inoculate them against this? You know, we're finding it -- seasoned journalists are struggling with this kind of material as well, and yet we are coming from a far greater, you know, maturity and experience and emotional detachment.”

One of Long's colleagues at Thomson Reuters, Social Media Producer George Sargent, (I 25) echoes how the main tactic appears to be based on the old-fashioned principle of distancing and detachment:

“Initially nobody was really ready for it, firstly we were all struck by how well produced the videos were and how they knew exactly what the news wanted to see... We now try to restrict it as much as possible, so only a few people see it, there will be a graphic warning on an e-mail saying, ‘here are the graphic (material) time codes, between this time and this time’, I will look it, and probably not at those moments, someone will have to actually play it into the server, but only play in the certain time codes so you limit the amount of people who actually see it.

“What you don't want to do, when someone sends you an email saying ‘this is a graphic video of a beheading’, go full screen, put your headphones on, play it High Definition and you sit there studying it. It is better to reduce the screen size, put it on mute and just look at the edge of the picture. That's what I do now ... when you study it and take it in, it sort of imprints itself on your memory.”

### *7.7 Conclusion*

In the wake of the Asian tsunami and the July 7 London bombings, newsroom executives quickly grasped the need to embrace social media and user-generated content. At the outset a decade ago it was an exciting new source of material, a way of connecting with audiences and the edgy, shaky mobile phone pictures injected novel elements of additional reality and emotion into mainstream news reports otherwise constrained by the normative practices of objectivity. It still can yield access to news stories that are otherwise almost impossible to cover. But in the meantime, however, what was a the trickle of graphic and distressing images has turned into a veritable torrent, causing a series of dilemmas. Some of those dilemmas are ones of editorial policy and taste. Arguably they are age old and have simply become more difficult to tackle because of the volume of material and speed of modern communications. While I have necessarily touched on these issues in passing in this chapter, my main focus has been on trying to identify the affective impact on journalists handling today's social media images and on the culture of the newsroom.

A new generation of journalists, young, inexperienced and sometimes hired as much for their innate social media skills as for their journalism, is being subjected to gruesome imagery. Some of it is the product of conflict and disaster, a classic case of citizen witnessing or citizen journalism which can help the public understand events which are difficult to cover with traditional journalistic resources; some of it pushes violence to the limit for the purposes of propaganda and terror. The interviews conducted for this research reveal the far reaching affective impact of user-generated content on news practice and highlight two main concerns: firstly, journalists handling such content are exposed to a high risk of secondary traumatic stress not unlike that experienced by the police and other emergency workers; and secondly, they lack defence mechanisms that more experienced journalists can often bring to bear on their daily work. The signs of stress were clearly evident and corresponded to the classic symptoms captured by Feinstein's ground-breaking study and observed by the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma in its work around the mental health of journalists. Those symptoms included feelings of guilt, withdrawal from normal social

activity and anxiety. Any personal relationship to the circumstances of images appeared to heighten the affective impact, as did prolonged periods of uninterrupted viewing. Because of their inexperience, those working on social media intake desks appeared to find it difficult to relate to the dominant and deeply entrenched culture in the newsroom while at the same time wanting to be accepted and taken into the mainstream workforce (sometimes, if freelance, aiming to be hired as full-time staff). It was apparent that the sense of isolation was heightened by the lack of a shared culture and that some of the defence mechanisms available to more experienced journalists were not available. The camaraderie and mutual support of foreign correspondents covering a breaking news story in the field is not always evident in a more impersonal, shift-driven central newsroom. And the images being handled, by their very nature of bypassing the usual channels of journalistic production, are not sanitised and are not bounded by the normative rules of objectivity that emphasise the cool, detached stance discussed in Chapter Four. It has been argued that it is the very fact that these images do not conform to the traditional framing of mainstream media that makes them so attractive to the public and, by extension, indispensable to today's business of news (Myrik & Wojdyski, 2015).

Despite the central role now played by user-generated content, news organisations such as the BBC, Thomson Reuters, al-Jazeera and ITN have struggled to handle the implications for their workforces. I found my interviewees were quite willing to discuss their early failings with social media content and were equally keen to show how they are now taking measures to tackle the issues. While the most obvious steps put in place limit the exposure to graphic images and are aimed at preventing their unnecessary distribution, the more senior journalists interviewed believed that a traditionally macho newsroom culture, and competitive pressures to advance within the news hierarchy, could be damaging in preventing inexperienced workers from shielding themselves.

The research interviews showed that user-generated images has clearly disrupted the news culture and spilled over into the general atmosphere of the newsrooms discussed in this chapter. Certainly, practice has changed to the extent that

mechanisms and dedicated social media desks have been set up to monitor and incorporate user-generated content. These ‘hubs’ now play a central role in newsgathering. But beyond that there are clear tensions and contradictory forces at play. I found little evidence in my interviews to suggest that the overarching narrative around objectivity had been weakened. In fact, guidelines now being put in place for handling social media images are tending to reinforce the status quo, effectively codifying ways of incorporating material into existing norms of journalism - the cooptation strategy set out by Wahl-Jorgensen (2015: 169) - and highlighting the mental health benefits of detachment. But at the same time, some of the journalists I spoke with did think the high volume of social media imagery was increasing the pressure to integrate such content into reporting and that it was spilling over into their practice.



## CONCLUSION

### THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF JOURNALISM AND TRAUMATIC NEWS

*I put myself on autopilot when I was in Angola for a particularly rough six months in the early 1990s. I was nervous about a death threat, but distracted myself by working 18-hour days. When caught in sniper fire, I assumed a Zen-like state of denial. Landing at an airport that was being shelled, I busied myself with helping the wounded and collecting testimonies. Months later, after leaving the country, I had disturbing dreams about the limbless people whom I couldn't save.”- Judith Matloff<sup>217</sup>*

#### *1. Introduction*

As a foreign correspondent I was raised, so to speak, in a news organisation that prized above all the hallowed concepts of detachment and objectivity. Reuters correspondents across the world, across diverse languages and cultures, shared a common faith. By the end of my 20 plus years with the company, as the Global Head of News, I had, according to one of my colleagues, become its ‘high priest’. And yet in the final years I had come to question that religion and my own faith. It had been shaken to the core by criticism in the United States of the way I had handled Reuters coverage of the Sept 11 attacks on New York and Washington. And overseeing sensitive stories from the Middle East, not least the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I had become increasingly concerned that we were slavishly following a doctrine that at least needed questioning. But in a news agency environment, where success or failure is measured in seconds, there was no time to doubt the rules or for nuanced arguments. Indeed, I often caught myself, as my former colleague from those days Judith Matloff observed, going onto autopilot. However, since then, from the distance of the academic world, I have been able to reflect on my own practice and question other journalists about

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<sup>217</sup> Judith Matloff worked in the 1990s as a foreign correspondent for Reuters in Europe and Southern Africa, including Mozambique and Angola. She now teaches at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism in New York. Cited in: Masse, M., 2011. *Trauma Journalism – on deadline in harm’s way*. New York: Continuum Books.

theirs. This has therefore for me been an intensely personal journey and one which has allowed me a fresh perspective on the years I spent as a working journalist.

But I have also tried to go beyond the level of personal reflection and to make a unique contribution to the field of academic research into the practice of journalism. My aim as reflected in my overarching research question has been to tease out, identify and characterise the affective dimension of journalism, recognising the intangible gut instinct that comes to the fore in the work of covering traumatic news stories and the embodied nature of such practice. That has also taken in my other more detailed research questions, exploring journalists' relationship with objectivity and detachment, the ways in which they tackle the strains of covering traumatic news and the pack instinct that accompanies so many such stories. The research has also teased out the affective practices used when interviewing vulnerable people, the new risks associated with gruesome images that make up so much of today's user-generated content and the ways in which such content is having a contagious impact on practice.

By including the affective in my exploration of practice, I have been able to add an extra dimension to the understanding of how journalists handle traumatic subject matter. My research has shown how affective news practice is situated in individual journalists but also flows between them and cannot be separated from influences stemming from professional ideology, technological innovation, competition from those around them and back in the head office, socio-economic and cultural factors.

## *2. Point of Departure*

My starting point for this thesis was the apparent contradiction between what I had perceived in my days at Reuters to be objective news reporting and the realisation that news so often needs an injection of emotion to make it interesting to readers or viewers. How often had I covered wars, disasters, suffering and grief? How often had I rewritten a story to bring the emotional angle up to the top, to make it a 'better story'; or chastised a colleague for writing a dull story?

Conceived at its broadest, I therefore set myself the task of investigating the relationship between news, the practice of journalism and emotion. I wanted to explore the human dimension and whether the ‘turn to affect’ in media and cultural studies could offer new insights. The first step was to establish a baseline with the investigation of objectivity, tracing its origins in the United Kingdom and the United States through the social history set out in Chapter One. Certainly, there is no shortage of academic reflection on the subject and it didn’t take long to establish that the concept, however deeply embedded across the Anglo-American history of journalism since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, hardly stands up to theoretical scrutiny. My argument in this thesis is that it is, however, powerful shorthand for a wide-ranging professional code and ideology that encapsulates many commonly accepted traits of journalism in the Anglo-American news culture (albeit with certain variations). It is also a key concept in the study of journalism and in journalism practice (Maras 2013: 2) as is clear from UK industry accreditation bodies. But any attempt to define objectivity as a philosophical construct quickly runs into problems. It is an inherently ambiguous term, often confused with ideas of truth (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2003: 215). It is, in short, a flawed concept but almost impossible to avoid. However imperfect, it is ever present in the discourse of journalism and bound up with the false binary assumptions explored in Chapter One that pit objective against subjective, fact against emotion, rationality against irrationality.

In pursuing my broad research question I was keen to break the mould of more traditional means of investigation and methodology. This interdisciplinary approach means that I have not dismissed out of hand considerations of technology, the political economy and representational interpretations of news. On the contrary, my research illustrated how *all* of these factors can play an important role in shaping current practice and our understanding of traumatic news. They are addressed particularly in Chapter Five. But I was determined to approach the world of journalism principally from the perspective of the lived experience of the journalist, from the inside out rather than looking in from the outside. My research has shown that the ‘turn to affect, reviewed in detail in Chapter Two, can add a new perspective to study of the practice of journalism by focusing on the individual journalist and allowing a reappraisal of the normative

concepts of the profession. My approach has been shaped by those affect scholars whose work has been influenced by, or emerged from, a psychosocial perspective. Wetherell's pragmatic, interdisciplinary concept of 'affective practice' (2012) and Venn's ideas around contagion and 'collective ensembles' (2010) proved to be well suited to investigating the practice of journalism by helping shed light on what journalists often refer to as their 'gut feeling' or instinctive responses to stories. I found no precedent for its use in this way. In the relatively few cases in which theories of affect have been brought to bear on the academic study of journalism, it has been as a means of analysing the impact of news in its various forms – text, broadcast, image – on the public as consumers (e.g. the Abu Ghraib 'selfie' pictures of U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners). Equally, the psychosocial approach has allowed me to recognise my own self and experiences as a researcher and the importance of interpretation of interviews (Holloway & Jefferson 2013: 3). My goal was to tease out the connections between journalists' feelings and behaviours and the external background in all its shapes and guises, from the traumatic stories covered to the people they were interviewing, to the competitive environment and even their own upbringing.

And so my aim in this conclusion is to pull together the main affective behaviours, processes and practices discussed in Chapters Four to Seven and reinforce how they are deeply linked to – and not necessarily at odds with – professional ideologies. In fact, they sometimes reinforce the status quo and militate against change in practice.

### *3. Identifying the affective practices of journalism when covering traumatic stories*

Coverage of traumatic news stories is laden with well-documented normative practices, deeply embedded in the culture of the profession, with its boundaries reinforced, as noted previously, by training bodies such as the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC). These practices are displayed in the (still) macho culture of journalism that makes it difficult for reporters to admit to anything that might be

construed as weakness, whether physical or mental, and have led to the image of the cool, dispassionate correspondent unaffected by what he or she is reporting on (Allan, 2013: 26). It is a symbol of professional pride. The normative practices are rooted in words and concepts such as accuracy, impartiality and freedom from bias. And they are informed by an underlying desire to uncover the truth, support democracy and hold power to account. But my main argument throughout this thesis is that there is more to these practices than meets the eye. The interviews I conducted showed that they are not just the result of history, training manuals or even just 'learning on the job'. They are also deeply rooted affective practices, which, *when combined* with other factors such as the nature of a story and the competitive environment, allow us to understand better the every-day lived experience, disposition and behaviour of an individual journalist covering such traumatic stories. My interviews illustrated that these are affective behaviours that journalists are able to shift in and out of and interchange almost seamlessly, sometimes to help tease out a better story, sometimes to protect themselves from emotional distress, sometimes to demonstrate or prove their standing to their peers. They are therefore highly malleable and can operate without conscious decision making by the journalist, unfolding, as Wetherell says, relatively automatically without conscious monitoring (2012: 129).

The most prevalent affective behaviour I encountered was that of detachment, what I called in its most active form in Chapter Four the attitude of '*cool-detached*.' This conjures up images of the authoritative BBC stiff upper lip, public school-educated foreign correspondent and, certainly in my interviews, still has currency - it was by no means limited to those journalists who worked for the BBC. But it is not a one-dimensional concept; rather it has many diverse functions, as I will discuss below. Allied to this is the less actively managed almost passive behaviour of detachment that I have labeled '*autopilot*'. In this case, when the story becomes tough and the pressure mounts, a journalist falls back on habits, training and learned knowledge to shut out intrusions, whether that is distressing material being handled or the pressure of deadlines and competition. But there is also something intangible and unconscious about this as well, based on what Wetherell describes as a semiotic hinterland (2012: 153), with journalists moving in and out of 'knowing' during this flow (ibid: 129). A

third affective disposition I identified is ‘*avoidance*’, in which a journalist actively shrinks back from a story, echoing the classic ‘fight-or-flight’ response and hyper-arousal reaction to a perceived threat. In addition to these affective dispositions, I also encountered clear instances of what I have called ‘*affective contagion*’ (Sampson, 2012; Venn, 2010) operating at various levels of practice. Sometimes this manifests itself from journalist to journalist in the herd instinct when reporters converge on a large news story such as was the case in Dunblane 20 years ago or the 2015 ISIS-inspired terror attacks in Paris; at other times it can be seen in the transferral of emotion or trauma from an interview subject to the journalist across the affective space that is the interview; it can also be the contagion of user-generated images in a newsroom that can cause distress and vicarious trauma to a large number of journalists, spilling over into normative practice.

#### *4. The many faces of affective detachment*

Some of the journalists I sat down with had thought long and hard about the concept of detachment. They were able to articulate what it meant to them and they cultivated it almost as a badge of honour, validating their profession to themselves, to the outside world and to their journalist colleagues. Others found themselves simply *being* detached, through experience adopting a behaviour that would enable them to ‘get’ the story ahead of the competition. Reflecting these differences, detachment emerged as a highly malleable and highly adaptive concept that is clearly withstanding the test of time (and moving with it). In fact, it turned out to be a term that encompasses many of the diverse yet interrelated psychosocial practices that a journalist engages in. In addition, journalists were able to shift seamlessly from one mode of affective detachment to another to suit their needs and that of the story.

One of the characteristics of detachment that emerged consistently was its capacity to instill a sense of profession, validating a journalist’s credentials (and differentiating himself/herself) on several different planes - in relation to the public, in relation to other journalists and to the increasing numbers of those now

engaging with the media as citizen journalists<sup>218</sup>. In this guise, ‘cool-detached’ becomes a professional mode distinct from a private life, whether as a mother tucking in her children at night in the middle of a breaking story (Kate Fawcett I 5) or as a father hurriedly ditching weekend plans for the family to dash to the scene of the Paris terror attacks (Jake Wallis Simons I 27). The BBC’s Dhruti Shah (I 26) has two Facebook accounts, one as a journalist and another for her private persona. If anything, my interviews showed that this mode of detachment is becoming *more* pronounced in today’s rapidly changing media environment as established ‘staff’ journalists attempt to create a distance between themselves as ‘professionals’ and citizen journalists. The Guardian’s Sandra Laville (I 13) spoke of how social media was prompting her to become more detached in an attempt not to be sucked into the flurry of user-generated content now flowing across the newsroom. The affective behaviour of detachment is also important in terms of career. Various competitive factors conspire to reinforce this - the prize system of journalism, epitomised by the Pulitzers, often celebrates normative values of detachment; young journalists working on social media hubs cited in Chapter Seven voiced their concern that their career might be harmed by overt signs of emotion or ‘weakness’ in the face of traumatic material; and journalists seeking advancement are keen to impress by their ability to remain cool and detached in the face of disturbing news stories. The latter resembles an updated version of the ‘death-knock’ story on newspapers.

A second, related perspective on detachment was offered by its function as a tool to help ‘get’ the story. Here the concept of detachment is deeply ingrained in journalists such as the Mail Online’s Simons, the BBC’s Fran Unsworth (I 12) or Magnus Linklater (I 1) when he was working for The Times. In the heat of the story, and under competitive pressure, they told how they simply didn’t have time to worry about their own feelings. In these cases, competition and the need to get the job done drove the detachment which can become a form of affective ‘autopilot’ when the training and learned experience kicks in and shuts out elements of the story that could lead to a delay or put a news organisation at a competitive disadvantage. In today’s online environment, with intense

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<sup>218</sup> cf. Fenton & Witschge, 2011.

competition among journalists to secure (and often buy) user-generated mobile phone footage of major events such as the Paris shootings or drummer Rigby killing, there would appear to be little time for reflection. Those big stories often result in large press packs in which it might be assumed that every journalist comes back with the same story. But the heightened nature of competition among news organisations, with newcomers such as BuzzFeed and Vice News snapping at the heels of established players, means that journalists are under intense pressure to land the exclusive story or exclusive pictures. In short, this type of detachment has become deeply ingrained in the affective practice of journalists handing traumatic news in order to meet the financial requirements of the news business. The affective and political economic dimensions can only be understood in combination with each other.

Through my interviews, I identified a third, intensely practical and personal use of detachment, that as a defence mechanism against the trauma and distress of some of the news stories journalists are called on to cover. Here my doctoral research led me back full circle to one of the starting points of my investigation. My work with the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma had already brought me into contact with many journalists who had suffered traumatic stress, and in some cases full-blow PTSD as a result of the highly distressing news stories they had been through. During my days at Reuters I had also been instrumental in setting up a counseling mechanism for journalists covering disaster and conflict. Through my research it became clear to me that journalists often create a distance between themselves and their subject, whether that be a person or the broader story they are covering. Partly, as noted above, that serves to uphold expectations of the professional detached journalist to the outside world and those caught up in a story. But aside from that, there is another function, that of protection for the journalist's mental wellbeing. The interviews illustrated that this can be a highly flexible tool and something that can be switched on and off at a moment's notice (it is not a question of 'either-or'). In exploring the practice of interviewing, it was clear that there are times when a journalist feels it prudent to establish a clear distance with the subject and wants to avoid becoming emotionally involved. Equally, there are times when the journalist realises that such a distance can be counterproductive and an element of empathy is needed to



elicit a better story. As I set out in Chapter Six, detached doesn't always work. The Guardian's Laville and the Scottish Daily Mail's Emma Cowing (I 16) both explained how they caught themselves sometimes during interviews using both practices, at times creating a distance and at times showing empathy, coming closer and trying to build rapport and trust with a subject (to get a better story). Both of these affective behaviours were constantly in action when conducting an interview and epitomised how affective practice can often unfold too fast for any kind of strategic thought (Wetherell, 2012: 129).

I had anticipated that the idea of detachment might be challenged by the advent of social media but this was not borne out. The news business has clearly undergone a profound transformation over the past decade as the Internet and social media disrupt the established business model and practices change. New terms have become firmly embedded in the vocabulary of news, not least '*social media hub*', '*user-generated content*' and '*citizen journalist*.' I had anticipated that the concept of detachment might be disrupted or at least diminished by these sweeping changes. But my interviews led me to conclude that this is far from the case. If anything, the advent of the citizen journalist and user-generated content has strengthened the idea of detachment, supporting the work of those who have highlighted the contentious and sometimes antagonistic relationship between those who see themselves as 'proper' journalists and citizens who witness and contribute to the news (Allan, 2013; Fenton & Witschge, 2011). I already observed above how journalists see the concept as a means of distinguishing themselves from those they would label as 'amateur' or not 'professional.' In addition, those journalists working on social media hubs handling user-generated content have found detachment to be an important tool to protect themselves from the graphic, traumatic images now flooding into the newsroom from organisations such as ISIS. What had been a trickle of user-generated content received by news outlets turned over the past three to four years into a veritable torrent. The BBC had set up its social media hub in the wake of the July 7 London bombings in 2005 but such images of terror had, at the beginning, been the exception. In the meantime, the flow of what have been termed 'perpetrator images' from terror organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS have created what I referred to in Chapter 7 as the affective frontline, exposing journalists working in

the once safe news headquarters to a daily diet of distressing, graphic images of violence. As news organisations try to protect the often vulnerable and inexperienced young journalists staffing such social media hubs, best practice guidelines now emerging are actually reinforcing the concept of detachment. Journalists are being advised to break up shifts, turn off sound, make images smaller on their screens and employ a host of other methods designed to create a distance between them and the distressing material.

Affective detachment therefore serves many purposes, often at the same time, and presents itself as a flexible toolkit of everyday practices for journalists going about their job of gathering or editing traumatic news. Its affective, embodied, instinctive nature has allowed it to evolve with the times to support an increasingly competitive market-driven model of news and user-generated content, together with the technological changes that have led to the introduction of social media desks. As financial pressures mean fewer journalists are employed on the ground, so too the pressure to supplement traditional news cover with that of user-generated content has increased. This and journalists' desire to distinguish their 'professional' news from that of citizen journalists have combined to entrench the practice of detachment still further.

##### *5. The many faces of affective contagion*

A second theme running through this thesis consists of numerous examples of not just how affect flows between the news world and the public (one of the starting points for the investigation was a journalist's need to capture attention) but also from journalist to journalist. Whether for Gabriel Tarde in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, whose historical influence I have highlighted, or today's academic scholars of affect such as Blackman, Sampson, Venn and Wetherell, there is more to this process of transmission than technology, the development of mass printing or social media. In my investigation, I focused on what Wetherell calls the flow of affective activity (2012: 159) in seeking to better understand why it is journalists so often act as a 'pack'. As mentioned above, there are today intense competitive pressures on journalists, both at a personal and business level, that drive them together when a big story breaks. Jake Wallis Simons, covering the

Paris terror attacks, was able to buy up exclusive footage from a mobile phone, giving the Mail Online a competitive advantage and earning professional kudos for himself. In a similar fashion, the ITN producer who rushed with other journalists from central London to Woolwich and scooped up mobile phone footage of the deadly attack on drummer Rigby was driven by competition and hunger for the story. But I also encountered cases where waves or flows of affective contagion had pervaded a major story and did not seem to be driven by competition or the business. In Dunblane, the pack of reporters who flew in from across the United Kingdom and abroad collectively refrained from approaching the bereaved parents on the day of the shooting. No general instruction went out to ban interviews; no meeting of reporters took place to make sure no-one broke ranks and secured a scoop. Rather, it was an example of the moment Sampson refers to when “flows of contaminating influence and persuasive mood settings are transmitted through mostly unconscious topologies of social relation” (2012: 6). The affective and contagious mood on the ground at Dunblane had also been key to a conscious decision by broadcasters the BBC, Sky and ITN to pull out of the town after a few days and not cover the funerals of the 16 murdered primary school children. The broadcasters had of course discussed their decision in detail and weighed the competitive advantages and disadvantages. But as Gill Moreton (I 3), one of the social workers there at the time, observed, it was a collective decision that emerged from the mood of the day and the journalists on hand attuned themselves to that prevailing mood and atmosphere. In this case, the journalists relayed their actions affectively to each other, reflexively relating to the flow of others’ actions.

That journalists can suffer vicariously from the emotional stress and trauma of those they are interviewing or the difficult stories they are covering is now well documented, from the early work of Feinstein and his colleagues concentrating on war correspondents (2002, 2005) to more recent studies involving those handling user-generated content (2014). The Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma has spent the last decade trying to increase awareness of the threats and to promote more responsible reporting of victims and survivors of trauma. However, the danger to journalists of secondary trauma appears to be on the rise thanks to the torrent of graphic social media images now flooding into

newsrooms. Many of the journalists I interviewed had been through traumatic experiences in the field, from the shooting of young children in Dunblane, to the car bombs of Baghdad. Some of those had experienced classic symptoms of stress and, in a few cases, full-blown PTSD. This was a graphic illustration of the vulnerability of those covering at first hand war and natural disaster. But some of the journalists had also witnessed deeply distressing material at second hand on the digital frontline in their offices in central London, an environment previously thought of as safe. Here it was the lack of the camaraderie and joint purpose afforded by the press pack when on assignment that increased the sense of vulnerability and isolation. As illustrated in Chapter Seven, best practice guidelines now emerging reinforce the need for journalists to distance themselves from explicit user-generated material but this in itself does not necessarily prevent its affective contagion of other parts of the newsroom. The recent spate of beheading videos from ISIS has taken ‘perpetrator images’ to new levels of volume and brutality. The affective impact on journalists has been heightened by the fact that their own kind - freelancers such as James Foley and Steven Sotloff - has been targeted. In such cases, the contagion is driven by technology, with images mediated through the computer screen. Often there is no personal connection but those working on social media hubs told of the deeply disturbing impact that watching such content could have. Arabic speakers who could understand video emanating from the Middle East said it was the sound that was sometimes most disturbing, as those in captivity pleaded for their life or others grieved for the dead. At other times, those working on these hubs reached out to contacts in Iraq and Syria, building up a virtual relationship online through Skype or Twitter. Sometimes the contacts would suddenly disappear without trace, leaving the journalist to ponder whether they had become another victim of Middle East war. As defence mechanisms to shield against the impact of user-generated content are devised, so too in this area the normative practice of detachment is in the process of becoming more firmly embedded in practice.

#### *6. Interdisciplinary framework*

In adopting a framework which draws from the field of affect studies for the understanding of journalism practice I am advocating a different emphasis from

more traditional methodology. My approach starts with a well-trodden path of examining the phenomenology of the individual journalist but then adds a focus on the affective processes and practices that play such a vital role in the work of covering traumatic news events. This requires a detailed analysis of the experience and behaviour of journalists as they perform their tasks, whether that be conducting interviews in the field or handling user-generated content in the head office. I have maintained that these affective practices cannot be viewed in isolation but have to be seen in a complex interplay with the shifting cultural, sociological, political economic and technological landscape. By adopting this approach, I have been able to build up a comprehensive and granular picture of what journalists experience as they respond to distressing news stories, how they cope with the pressures, how they behave in relation to their peers and competition in search of the best story and how they are reacting to the disruption to the news industry caused by social media and technological change. Equally, it is important to build a picture of how journalists work and interact with each other and shed light on the instinctive practices that are so characteristic of journalism. My research has shown how at times journalists come together in a spirit of camaraderie in the face of danger in the field, while at other times they can feel isolated and vulnerable even in the heart of a large newsroom. In both cases, the environment or milieu is a crucial part of the analysis – a war zone is a dangerous place and correspondents come together for comradeship and, sometimes, security in numbers; a large newsroom will often have a culture of shift working and separate desk operations which can prove to be isolating. The research has also illustrated how there are other times when journalists adopt through a process of affective contagion the prevailing mood of a city such as Dunblane, acting in concert with each other without entering into any formal decision-making process.

### *7. Policy implications*

My research has also uncovered significant implications for the news industry where issues of stress and trauma are beginning to emerge as an important area for editorial decision makers. These considerations operate at several different levels as my empirical chapters demonstrate. Firstly, news organisations have a

moral obligation to maintain the mental well-being of their journalists, whether they are covering war and disaster in the field on assignment or whether they are working on the affective digital frontline in the newsroom. After a period in which news organisations concentrated on the physical safety of journalists, studies since the early 2000s have clearly illustrated how vulnerable journalists are when confronted with traumatic news or graphic imagery. Some guidelines have started to emerge, as set out in Chapter Seven, but there is clearly more to be done and the stigma attached to issues of mental health is still present. The young journalists I interviewed were very aware of the need to build a career and show resilience in the face of distressing stories to gain the confidence of their superiors. Secondly, news organisations have a vested interest in understanding the issues of stress and trauma since they are also key to a journalist performing his or her job well, bringing back the story on deadline. A news editor cannot afford to have his team off sick or unable to compete in the cut and thrust of a breaking story. In short, it is crucial to the business. In addition, many of those I spoke with argued that a more developed understanding of trauma, and how to interview victims or survivors of trauma, added an important new perspective to the news file and resulted in ‘better’ stories. Thirdly, the affective contagion of social media content in the newsroom poses a new challenge in ushering in what is potentially a shift in the nature of the news output to include more emotionally laden imagery. On the one hand, user-generated content is seen as commercially valuable, being used to engage – and re-engage – disaffected audiences. But on the other hand, those I interviewed gave clear examples of how social media content was beginning to change subtly the nature of the news product. My research showed that this is being compounded by the recent creation of social media hubs, with a new breed of young journalists sometimes operating in a different environment not fully integrated into the mainstream newsroom. Affectively powerful user-generated images and smartphone footage are becoming more prominent, echoing the observations of Beckett and Deuze (2016: 1) that we are now witnessing the emergence of an affective media ecosystem. That in turn brings challenges to journalistic norms and ethical implications for editorial policy which news organisations are only just starting to address.

These considerations point to the need for greater awareness in the news industry to issues of the affective dimension of practice and, in terms of mental health, stress and trauma. Typically, journalism had tended to ignore the subject of trauma and fall back on the macho image of a hard drinking bar culture (Duncan & Newton, 2010; Masse, 2011). The interviews I conducted showed that although journalists can be highly skilled at reporting on trauma, practice is often based on trial and error. This is in marked contrast to the military and emergency services which in the United Kingdom have invested considerably in training and professional development. There are some signs that the news industry is changing for the better. My thesis has made frequent reference to the Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma which has run numerous workshops for journalists across the world and worked with some major news organisations to help build awareness, both at ‘working’ journalist and at news executive level. The BBC’s guidelines on how to handle social media imagery were based partly on work done by the Dart Center and Dart staff contributed to the analysis and dissemination of research by Eyewitness Media Hub discussed in Chapter Seven. News accreditation bodies such as the BJTC are beginning to show a greater realisation of the need to address such issues. In May 2016, I made a presentation on trauma awareness to the BJTC, which is now considering whether it should be paying more attention to the issue.

#### *8. Limitations*

Throughout my empirical research I was very aware of the potential pitfalls of one ex-journalist talking to another journalist. As I observed in Chapter Three, it would have been easy to lapse into a coded shorthand of journalese, reflecting a shared culture, understanding and unwritten rules. Although it is now more than a decade since I was on the payroll of Reuters, old habits die hard and journalists tend to ask closed questions to obtain a hard answer, or at least that was certainly the case in the agency business. I continually had to force myself to formulate open questions and avoid the temptation to talk into the spaces or pauses in a conversation. A journalist doesn’t generally like silence but my experience showed that this was when much of the reflection actually emerged. I also had to force myself out of the normative framework that had marked the previous 25

years of my working life, questioning what I had for so long taken for granted. I had worked with a few of those I interviewed but I steered clear of friends to maintain a level playing field. I was also conscious of how social media has disrupted the news business and was very aware of the need to include in my interviews some of the new generation of young journalists, particularly those working on social media hubs. This opened up a new perspective in my research with the investigation of the experience of those working with graphic user-generated content. To my surprise I found the normative values of journalism deeply embedded in these journalists as well, a sign of the enduring power of the journalistic culture and the influence of the industry accreditation bodies. Of course, it is all too easy to generalise from a series of 25 interviews but they were in depth, detailed and all the journalists had a common practice of handling traumatic news. When analysed by theme the results were remarkably consistent. This allowed me to trace and tease out the main affective dispositions as the patterns began to emerge and to draw conclusions. There were also times when it was difficult to ensure that I upheld the principles of the interdisciplinary framework that I am advocating. It would have been relatively simple to conduct the interviews through the single lens of the political economy, or to focus on the rapid technological change that has had such a disruptive impact on the practice of journalism.

While I chose to conduct in-depth interviews with individual journalists, it would have been possible to consider a series of ethnographic studies in newsrooms, seeking to identify and track the affective processes of those working on traumatic news in today's digital environment. The newly constituted social media hubs in major newsrooms would have provided a good opportunity for this methodology, allowing me to observe at first hand journalists working with user-generated content, their behaviours and reactions. This would also have helped me to tease out and test the differences in environment when comparing such hubs with more traditional areas of the newsroom. I was less inclined to use surveys as a research tool given the ability afforded by interviews to explore in-depth issues which often did not lend themselves to 'yes/no' answers and where my focus was often on the intangible, intuitive and gut feeling of practice. In fact, the Eyewitness Media Hub work on journalists handling user-generated



content (2015) depended to a large extent on survey data and while there was a broad reach, the study lacked in my view the rich phenomenological detail that can be obtained through interviews or ethnographic study.

I focused on what has traditionally been categorised as ‘hard news’, limiting my focus specifically to what are known as traumatic news events. A wider investigation could have taken into account different categories of news, which indeed is a potential focal point for future research. I also concentrated on an Anglo-American model of journalism and the vast majority of my interview subjects came from the United Kingdom and North America. As Hachten and Scotton observe (2016: xi), the world’s media look very different from Rio de Janeiro, New Delhi, Moscow and Cairo than they do from New York or London. While IPA as a methodology is suited to a smaller number of in depth interviews (Pietkiewitz & Smith (2014), a more geographically and culturally diverse selection of journalists might have afforded different perspectives despite the globalisation of communications and news media.

#### *9. Perspectives for future research*

Initially, as part of my planned future research activity, I intend to conduct a comprehensive audit of just what training and education is available to journalists in respect of trauma awareness. The 2011 research paper written by Richards and Rees set the de facto benchmark in terms of the United Kingdom and captured the paucity of awareness and training available. That study was, however, conducted in the years before the explosion of social media which has clearly added a new urgency to the issue. Most recent studies have concentrated on surveying the numbers of journalists suffering from symptoms of stress and categorising their symptoms. But large swathes of the journalistic population have been left out in what has been a focus on two main groups – those working on disaster and conflict reporting and, most recently, those working on social media hubs. Crime reporters, who have been covering undoubtedly distressing trials of sexual abuse, have been largely ignored. It is time then to take a more inclusive look at the different areas of journalism that are routinely exposed to traumatic news and to conduct a new survey to establish the extent of training

provision, both in the profession and in Higher Education courses. As stated above, ethnographic studies of newsrooms would offer the opportunity to study further the affective dimension of journalism and would be particularly beneficial in trying to track the contagious impact of user-generated content across the wider reaches of a news organisation.

My academic focus has also been concentrating recently on analysing the affective impact of imagery and the way in which contemporary propaganda material emerging from the Middle East conflicts is adopting the western look and feel of Hollywood film and first person video games such as *Call of Duty*. I have long experience of covering this type of extremism, from the ‘old media’ propaganda communication of the Red Army Faction when I was a correspondent in what was then West Germany to the IRA’s coded bomb warnings and the video cassettes of al-Qaeda. To this tradition has been added the freeze frame and looped technology of today’s 24-hour news broadcasting and the numerous platforms of social media. This is a crowded field of academic research but I have yet to read detailed analysis of the affective impact of this material and its appeal to Western norms of mass communication.

#### *10. Final reflections*

The journalists I spoke to told me their stories quite openly and sometimes seemed genuinely surprised at what emerged as the affective processes that made up their practice of journalism. The journalists ranged widely in experience, some were just starting out on their career, others are household names with international reputations. I deliberately sought out a mix, with some of them broadcasters while others were more print oriented. But they shared one thing in common – a history of covering difficult, challenging distressing stories or handling difficult material. The task of reconstructing the strands of their practice was made easier by my ability to refer back to my own experience. Indeed, much of what they said reminded me of my days at Reuters and many of them had not reflected on their practice to any great extent. Several of those I interviewed did not consciously decide to adopt a detached attitude to protect themselves or to go onto ‘autopilot’ to ensure they delivered a story on deadline. These were often

unconscious dispositions or behaviours that enabled them to get the job done. By piecing together the interlocking strands and layers of their experience, taking in the social, economic and technological perspectives, my aim has been to uncover an affective dimension of journalism practice that has not been widely recognised or discussed in the past.

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## Appendix 1 – Summary of interviews<sup>219</sup>

No	Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Medium	Role
1	Magnus Linklater	Male	70s	Scottish	Print	Former Times reporter and former editor of The Scotsman newspaper
2	Keith Yates	Male	60s	Scottish	N/A	Head of Stirling council at time of Dunblane shooting
3	Gill Moreton	Female	50s	Scottish	N/A	Social worker, psychotherapist
4	Helen Branswell	Female	50s	Canadian	Agency	Canadian Press reporter
5	Kate Fawcett	Female	50s	English	Broadcast	Former BBC Scotland reporter
6	Richard Tait	Male	60s	English	Broadcast	Former editor-in-chief ITN
7	Maggie Fox	Female	50s	American	Agency	Thomson Reuters reporter
8	Anthony Borden	Male	50s	American	Online/print	Editor-in-chief Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR)
9	Kevin Marsh	Male	60s	English	Broadcast	Former editor of BBC Radio 4 Today programme, former editor-in-chief BBC College of Journalism
10	Thomas Evans	Male	40s	American	Broadcast	CNN correspondent and field producer
11	Sian Williams	Female	50s	Welsh	Broadcast	BBC presenter and foreign correspondent
12	Fran Unsworth	Female	50s	English	Broadcast	BBC journalist and editorial executive
13	Sandra Laville	Female	40s	English	Print	Guardian crime correspondent
14	Stuart Hughes	Male	40s	English	Broadcast	BBC producer
15	Faddah Jassem	Female	20s	Syrian/ Iraqi	Broadcast	Assistant news editor & producer ITN, now freelance
16	Emma Cowing	Female	40s	Scottish	Print/ freelance	Scottish Daily Mail features editor
17	Juliana Ruhfus	Female	40s	German	Broadcast/ news documentary film maker	Al Jazeera reporter
18	Alex Hannaford	Male	30s	English/ American	Print/ freelance	Freelance journalist
19	Patrick Howse	Male	50s	English	Broadcast	Former BBC Baghdad bureau chief
20	Lindsey Hilsum	Female	50s	English	Broadcast	International Editor Channel 4 News

<sup>219</sup> In order of interview conducted.



21	Bruce Shapiro	Male	50s	American	Print/ freelance	Executive Director Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma
22	Helen Long	Female	40s	English	Agency	Thomson Reuters senior producer
23	Gavin Rees	Male	40s	English	Freelance documentary film maker	Executive Director Dart Europe
24	Mark Brayne	Male	60s	English	Broadcast	Former BBC foreign correspondent
25	George Sargent	Male	20s	English	Agency	Thomson Reuters social media producer
26	Dhruti Shah	Female	20s	English	Broadcast	Social media producer at BBC's UGC hub
27	Jake Wallis Simons	Male	30s	English	Online	Mail Online reporter

## Appendix 2 - Consent Form

Full title of project: The relationship between news and emotion

Name, position and contact details of researcher: SA Jukes

**Please Initial Here**

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question(s), I am free to decline.	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my responses. I understand that if I wish my remarks to be off the record, my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

*Once this has been signed by all parties, the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.*

### **Appendix 3 - Participant Information Sheet**

#### The relationship between news and emotion

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish.

Do ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The research is part of a PhD thesis which investigates the relationship between news and emotion.

On the one hand, the normative values of fact-based reporting, impartiality and objectivity have become deeply ingrained and codified as a mark of professional standing over the past 150 years. Although sometimes questioned, both by journalists and academics, these values still exert a powerful influence today.

On the other hand, the practice of journalism relies on emotion to engage the public and generate feeling. Arguably this contradiction is becoming more apparent in an age of social media with its emphasis on live, unedited and raw material.

The research will investigate how emotion is mediated and works affectively in news, what it might mean for the practice of journalism and for the way the profession validates 'good' journalism. Methodology will include traditional approaches to news analysis combined with theories of affect focusing on suggestion, contagion and imitation and privileging a psychosocial approach.

One of the news events which I am investigating as part of this thesis is the 1996 shooting at Dunblane Primary School. I have selected for interview journalists who either were involved in covering the event or were responsible for overseeing the coverage. My intention is to use open questions and to explore in depth issues relating to journalism and emotion in the context of coverage of the shooting. It is my intention to make an audio recording of the interview. The recording will be used only for analysis in the thesis. No other use will be made of it without your written permission and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time. It is anticipated that the project may require up to another two years to complete, during which time I may want to follow up on an interview for any clarification.

While journalists are very aware of this, it is important to point out in this summary of the project that such traumatic news events can be difficult for those who covered them. My intention is that the research project will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between news and emotion and that it can

subsequently help inform best practice to ensure responsible and sensitive news coverage.

All the information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. If you wish to be 'off the record', the results will be used in an anonymous form as part of the thesis which will, in due course, be published. I will be very pleased to make that available to you.

The PhD is being supervised by the Department of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London. The two named supervisors are Prof Natalie Fenton and Dr Lisa Blackman.

You can contact me at any time as follows:

Stephen Jukes

Email: [sjukes@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:sjukes@bournemouth.ac.uk)

Telephone: 07990 560230