

When Facts, Truth, and Reality Are God-Terms: On Journalism's Uneasy Place in Cultural Studies

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This article tracks the uneasy coexistence of journalism and cultural studies, arguing that the tensions between the two fields have worked to mutual disadvantage. The article suggests that rethinking the ways in which journalism and its inquiry might be made a more integral part of cultural studies could constitute a litmus test of sorts for cultural studies. Figuring out how to embrace journalism's god-terms of facts, truth, and reality alongside its own regard for subjectivity and construction could help move cultural studies into further degrees of maturation as a field.

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Journalism prides itself on a respect for the facts, truth, and reality. Yet, what happens when these god-terms for the practice of most kinds of journalism become the focus of inquiry that insists on their relativity and subjectivity? This article considers the odd twinning of cultural studies inquiry with the study of journalism, showing how originary premises in both arenas have rendered the two uneasy bedfellows, despite the fact that each has much to profit from a more solid and fruitful convergence.¹

Three separate but related questions, derived from different historical moments in the evolution of journalism's inquiry, motivate the question posed above:

1. What does it mean to study journalism from a cultural perspective?
2. How and why has cultural studies both enriched and neglected the cultural analysis of journalism?
3. What can we expect from the future of cultural studies and journalism?

On Journalism from a Cultural Perspective

Although it has not always been termed as such, the cultural analysis of journalism has flourished for as long as journalism has been a target of intellectual endeavor.² Given a wide range of epithets—including the collective knowledge journalists need to function as journalists, the "culturological" dimensions of the news, and the examination of "journalism as popular culture"—this type of inquiry has produced a fruitful line of scholarship that links the untidy and textured *materiel* of journalism—its symbols, ideologies, rituals, conventions, and stories—with the larger world in which journalism takes shape.³ Approached as more than just reporters' professional codes of action or the social arrangements of reporters and editors, the cultural analysis of journalism sees the world of news as offering up a complex and multi-dimensional lattice of meanings for all those involved in journalism, "a tool kit of symbols, stories, rituals and world views, which people use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems."⁴

Pronouncedly interdisciplinary and self-reflexive, cultural inquiry addresses journalism by

traversing an analytical track with two somewhat incompatible edges. It both sees journalism through journalists' own eyes, tracking how being part of the community comes to have meaning for them, and queries the self-presentations that journalists provide. Emphasizing "the constraining force of broad cultural symbol systems regardless of the details of organizational and occupational routines," the cultural analysis of journalism moves decidedly in tandem with, but in opposition to, the pronounced and conventional understandings of how journalism works.⁵ Undercutting the pronounced sense of self that journalism professionals have long set forth regarding their practices and position in the world, cultural inquiry assumes that journalists employ collective knowledge to become members of the group and maintain their membership over time, yet presumes that what is explicit and articulated as that knowledge may not reflect the whole picture of what journalism is and tries to be.⁶ Cultural inquiry thus travels the uneven road of reading journalism against its own grain while giving that grain extended attention.

Analysis here considers the meanings, symbols and symbolic systems, ideologies, rituals, and conventions by which journalists maintain their cultural authority as spokespeople for events in the public domain. Such work has been impacted by developments elsewhere in the academy, including research on the sociology of culture, an interest in constructivism in philosophy, a turn in anthropology and folklore toward the analysis of symbols and symbolic forms, a move toward ethnography in linguistics, and growing scholarship in cultural history and cultural criticism, all of which have heightened interest over the past two decades in thinking about culture as an analytical locus, broadening the template by which the cultural dimensions of journalism could be examined.

The two main strains of cultural studies—British and US—have been particularly instrumental in coaxing scholars to consider these alternate focal points in journalism's study. In Britain, a blend of neo-Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminist studies, critical theory, literary theory, semiotics, and ethnography that constituted early British cultural studies complemented a US interest in pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, cultural anthropology, and cultural sociology. While the broad analytical template they together provided for studying journalism's cultural dimensions was certainly targeted in part by other disciplinary approaches to journalism, specific issues about journalism became necessary and constitutive from the perspective of cultural studies—its subjectivity of expression, the constructed nature of its meanings for events, the politics of its identity-building, and the grounding of each of these premises in practice.

These tenets offer a wide-ranging analytical perspective that presumes that journalism works differently than the understanding favored by many of its more traditional academic approaches. First, cultural givens are thought to unite journalists in patterned ways with non-journalists, all similarly involved in diverse modes of cultural argumentation, expression, representation, and production, suggesting as a starting point commonalities rather than differences between journalists and others like filmmakers, novelists, and politicians. Second, variables used elsewhere in the academy to keep the centers of journalism distinct from its margins—rendering, for instance, journalism distinct from fiction, mainstream journalism

distinct from tabloid journalism, journalists' verbal reports distinct from the visual images they use—are here repositioned as bridges connecting differences, consequently positioning journalism as a whole of disparate, often contradictory, impulses. The different tools of journalism, different kinds of journalisms, and similarities between journalism and the world outside are brought together to illuminate the nuanced and textured character of journalism in all of its possibilities. And third, the cultural analysis of journalism views journalists not only as conveyors of information but as producers of culture, who impart preference statements about what is good and bad, moral and amoral, and appropriate and inappropriate in the world. Their positioning as the creators and conveyors of world views about how the world works is linked with those of their audiences, who make sense of the news in ways that reflect their own identity politics.

It is no surprise, then, that this orientation facilitates the examination of facets of journalism that have not been examined readily in other scholarly perspectives. These include a world view that underpins making sense of the world in certain ways, the inherent connections and disconnects between form and content, the often strategic but always changing relation between "facts" and symbols, the ways in which journalists work themselves into the news they provide, and the uneven and often unpredictable function of images, collective memories, and journalistic stereotypes. Even journalists' "vague" renderings of how they know news when they see it take on a decidedly nuanced flavor when seen as part of the larger constraints of meanings and symbols available in the world. At the same time, those larger constraints do not figure into journalists' own presentations of self as much as do many analytical categories employed by other disciplinary perspectives. This is because the insistence here on meaning-making as a primary activity explicitly challenges two aspects of journalism's inquiry: the normative biases of much of existing journalism research and the professional notions of journalists themselves. By definition, then, a cultural consideration of journalism negates the world view that underpins much of traditional journalism research, journalists' professional ideology, and the claim to exclusive status on which both are based.

The cultural inquiry of journalism thereby creates and proceeds from its own strategic dissonance. Conventional givens about journalism are intentionally suspended, so as to address the practices, values and attitudes that go beyond those deemed relevant by either much of existing journalism research or professional reporters. Cultural inquiry forces an examination of the tensions between how journalism likes to see itself and how it looks in the eyes of others, while adopting a view of journalistic conventions, routines, and practices as dynamic and contingent on situational and historical circumstance.

All of this suggests that the cultural study of journalism strategically and pronouncedly interrogates the articulated foundations for studying journalism and journalistic practice that seem to have been taken for granted elsewhere in the academy, offsetting the near-sightedness of journalism's inquiry. In Stuart Allan's words, cultural analysis moves beyond the presumption that journalism plays a "role everyone knows" of "afflicting the powerful ... while comforting the afflicted" because it "severely limits ... what sorts of questions can be asked about the news media in our society."⁷ It cuts through a false unity about journalism,

regarding "what it is, what it ideally should be and the purposes it has in society."⁸

Dissipating the information bias that has taken entertainment and pleasure as information's opposite and broadening journalism beyond the particular loci in which it has traditionally been examined, in much of this research scholars work against a narrow, "metonymic" conception of journalism that, in Peter Dahlgren's view, has long accounted "for only a small portion of that which in a practical, empirical sense constitutes contemporary journalism."⁹ In this regard, the cultural inquiry of journalism has done much to keep journalism's study in step with some of the more contemporary developments in the news, which have expanded without regard to the slower pace of change in journalism's study. Thus, thinking about news and journalism through the lens of culture has been particularly valuable because it displays a pronounced interest in the more recent transmutations by which journalists act as journalists, including the Internet, cybersalons, newsgroups, and newzines.

And yet, journalism remains fundamentally different from other sites of cultural analysis due to the fundamentals of its own self-presentation—its predilection for facts, truth, and reality. Journalism's presumed legitimacy depends on its declared ability to provide an indexical and referential presentation of the world at hand. Insisting on the centrality of reality, and on facts as its carrier, for maintaining a clear distinction between itself and other domains of public discourse, journalists claim a capacity to narrativize the events in the real world that distinguishes them from other cultural voices, retaining an attentiveness to how things "really" happened as the premise by which journalism makes its name. Moreover, against this template rests a preoccupation with something called "truth." Although the journalists' recognition of their capacity to reproduce a semblance of truth has diminished in the contemporary era, the predilection for making truth claims certainly perseveres. All of this means that journalism's practices, conventions, breaches, and standards—indeed, the very gauges by which its growth and stultification are measured—rest on the originary status of facts, truth, and reality.

This reliance creates problems for journalism's cultural analysis, which by definition subjects these very phenomena—facts, truth, and reality—to the measurements of relativity and subjectivity. The complications surrounding journalism's reverence for facts, truth, and reality extend too to germane aspects of its internal mindset. Journalists' professional ideology is offset by an insistence, common in cultural analysis, that the production of knowledge is always accomplished in the interests of either those who hold power or those who contest that hold. The growing trend to look toward audiences to locate journalism's workable dimensions, now prevalent in cultural studies, conflicts with a firm assumption among journalists that journalism takes shape in the newsroom, not amongst the public. Furthermore, in that much of cultural analysis privileges that which came before or that which rests outside a phenomenon as the explanatory impulse for examining the phenomenon itself, the indifference to contextual factors among most journalists and many journalism scholars undermines much of its cultural study. "Nothing disables journalism more than thinking that current practice is somehow in the nature of things," and there remains a reluctance about drawing on contexts—historical, economic, political—to explain journalism's internal trappings.¹⁰ As Glasser and Ettema contended long ago, "among journalists... news is not a

theoretical construct but a practical accomplishment."¹¹ Or, as James Carey put it more recently,

journalists do not live in a world of disembodied ideals; they live in a world of practices. These practices not only make the world, they make the journalist. Journalists are constituted in practice. So, the appropriate question is not only what kind of world journalists make but also what kinds of journalists are made in the process.¹²

All of this suggests that journalism poses a special challenge for cultural analysis. Unlike the modes of cultural argumentation favored by poets and clergy, unlike the patterns of cultural production displayed on reality television and action films, and unlike the cultural similarities that bring together so-called "chick flicks" and romance novels, journalism remains constrained by its somewhat reified but nonetheless instrumental respect for facts, truth, and reality. Criticized for remaining a bastion of positivism when relativity and subjectivity have become in many quarters the more endearing tropes for understanding public expression, journalism's adherence to the facts, both real and strategic, and related reverence for the truth and some version of reality render it sorely outdated and out of step with academic inquiry of a cultural bent. And yet, were it to loosen its adherence to these foundational tenets, journalism would lose its distinctiveness from the other modes of cultural expression, argumentation, representation, and production which frequently comprise the targets of cultural analysis.

How, then, is it possible to yoke the encouraging and fertile move toward the cultural study of journalism with a pronounced and explicit insistence on facts, truth, and reality as part of journalism's own *raison d'être*? Is journalism simply an antiquated position of how to think about the world, or does it reflect the limitations of cultural inquiry? More importantly, is there something that can be done within cultural studies so as to accommodate journalism's study more fully, in all of its dimensions?

Cultural Studies and Journalism

The uneasiness with which cultural analysis encounters journalism's predilection for facts, truth, and reality has been reflected in an ambivalence displayed toward journalism in cultural studies. That unevenness has been differently exhibited by the two main strains—US and British—of cultural studies scholarship, that have been loosely connected to the US and British experiences.¹³

The long revolution by which cultural studies turned from an idiosyncratic, uneven study of culture in various academic disciplines into a recognizable and identifiable program with its own journals, departments, and key figures has long been heralded as the birth narrative of cultural studies in both the US and UK. Though not always articulated as such, within that birth narrative British cultural studies took over the helm of much of what came to be recognized as the default setting for cultural studies as it spread more globally.¹⁴ Within the

drive to legitimate cultural studies across time and space, stress points emerged and took hold, while emphases that were initially secondary or adjunct by nature blossomed gradually into semi-autonomous sub-fields. Almost overnight, complaints about the absence of recognition became a concern over recognition being shared with others.¹⁵ Yet, alongside its formidable growth, lingering points of neglect, misunderstanding, and omission became embedded within the newly broadened default setting.

On the US side, journalism remained a fairly consistent area of inquiry. The invocation of early visionaries—John Dewey, Robert Park, and Thorsten Veblen, among others—led the way to the development of a strand of cultural studies concerned with problems of meaning, group identity, and social change.¹⁶ Largely fashioned as what came to be called the "Illinois strand of cultural studies" and led by James W. Carey at the University of Illinois, this school saw a resident evil in social science's positioning as the preferred mode of knowledge in the American academy, and it identified the critique of positivism as the charge for American cultural studies. Eschewing Marxism as the central problematic through which society was to be examined, the scholarship that developed here positioned the news media as conveyors of experience and shapers of broadly defined cultural systems. Within this arena of cultural studies, journalism emerged as a key strain of resonance for thinking about how culture worked.

The work of Carey was central to weaving discussions of journalism into the larger social and cultural fabric, including concerns about politics, technology, and the public. Carey's argument for the recovery of journalism as a cultural form rather than as a profession was mounted in numerous contexts, each of which demonstrated the complex nature of journalism's cultural world.¹⁷ In Carey's view, there was a dialogic and normative side to journalism's cultural life that

required a mode of understanding actions and motives, not in terms of psychological dispositions or sociological conditions but as a manifestation of a basic cultural disposition to cast up experience in symbolic forms that are at once immediately pleasing and conceptually plausible, thus supplying the basis for felt identities and meaningfully apprehended realities.¹⁸

Others at Illinois followed in Carey's path. Albert Kreiling's work, parts of which were published years later but an important doctoral dissertation already in the early 1970s, used the African American press to address the shaping of middle class identities.¹⁹ Following their lead, a second generation of scholars largely comprising Carey's students—Tom Connery, Joli Jensen, Mary Mander, Carolyn Marvin, and Norman Sims, among others—produced a substantial body of material emphasizing journalism's meaning-making capacities.²⁰ The work of John Pauly and Linda Steiner extended Carey's sensitivity to the internal view of journalistic practice to show how phenomena as varied as journalistic handbooks and discourse about key journalistic personalities served as boundary markers for the group.²¹

That strain of cultural studies persists today. One early attempt to adopt a wide-ranging notion of journalism as culture, though it did not make the claim explicitly, was Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson's edited volume, *Reading the News*. Marketed as a "Pantheon Guide to Popular Culture," the volume made clear that the professional prism of most journalists required tweaking, and it organized its discussion of culture's intrusion into news by adapting the fundamentals of "doing a news story"—the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of public events—into categories for analyzing journalism's performance.²² Elsewhere, Michael Schudson prodded open many givens of journalism scholarship by insisting on the cultural nuances of journalistic work, in one instance using journalistic autobiographies to expose professional mindsets from different temporal eras.²³ David Eason elaborated the ways in which journalists shaped public events by focusing on the internal breaches within the journalistic community.²⁴ Scholars like G. Stuart Adam, Kevin Barnhurst, S. Elizabeth Bird, Bonnie Brennen, Richard Campbell, James Ettema, Theodore Glasser, Hanno Hardt, John Nerone, and Barbie Zelizer all concentrated on the contingencies involved in news-making and on the fact that news was relative to the givens of those who engaged in its production.²⁵ As time moved on, the list of scholars doing work with an eye turned to journalism's cultural dimensions continued to grow.²⁶

At the same time, this strain of cultural studies was not always recognized as such, particularly when compared with the spread of British cultural studies. Although the adoption of British cultural studies elsewhere was uneven, its potential recognition as a global field of inquiry was far more assured than that of its US counterpart, which at times was shunted from the conversation altogether.²⁷ To wit: one recent discussion characterized US cultural scholars, James W. Carey, Elihu Katz, and Carolyn Marvin, as distanced from the field, noting that "few would have identified themselves as practitioners of cultural studies."²⁸ Similarly, one recent mapping of the various geographic trajectories of cultural studies scholarship mentioned Carey and his progeny not at all.²⁹ The lack of recognition, despite the consistently vocal role that Carey and others took to identify cultural studies as a field at least partially consonant with their own interests, marks a dissonance between the two strains of cultural studies.³⁰ Its persistence, discussed independently by Hanno Hardt, Larry Grossberg, and John Erni, exacerbated journalism's precarious positioning in the larger domain of cultural study.³¹

From the British side, the interest in journalism was not as steadfast. In the early days of British cultural studies, journalism and the workings of news were a key focus for work in the early 1970s from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, UK, and much of the groundbreaking work from the CCCS at that time explicitly involved journalism, usually in its hard news form. As British cultural studies emerged as a response to the formalism of Marxism and its resonance in literary theory, British scholars took as their mandate the elucidation of the conditions of the British working class.

Within this rubric, many of the early classic British texts on cultural studies based their groundwork on the news. CCCS director, Stuart Hall, himself was an early editor of the *New Left Review* and a frequent contributor to *New Times*, making it no surprise that his seminal

essay "Encoding/Decoding" dealt with news as a stand-in for other modes of cultural production.³² Heralded as "a turning point in British cultural studies," the essay came to be regarded as the classic cultural studies formulation of the production-audience intersection, and its offering of audience decoding positions set the bar for considering different audiences for different content.³³ A similar generalizability greeted Hall's equally celebrated extrapolation of Roland Barthes' work on the rhetoric of the image in his "The Determination of News Photographs."³⁴ Both works, firmly situated in the analysis of journalism, were extrapolated to refer to a whole range of non-news texts; for example, Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley's classic study of *Nationwide* news audiences extended Hall's scholarship to become the primary text for thinking about a range of audience responses to different kinds of mediated messages.³⁵

Other early work followed in this vein.³⁶ Cohen and Young's *The Manufacture of News*,³⁷ labeled the "earliest 'standard' critical work on the media's construction of reality,"³⁸ drew attention to symbolic construction by considering the patterns underlying journalism's treatment of crime and deviance and developing an understanding of the media's role in moral panics. *Policing the Crisis* and Dick Hebdige's work on subcultural style all used the news as a background arrangement for thinking about more generalized modes of cultural production and the distribution of social and cultural power.³⁹ It is no surprise, then, that one key initial text on the evolution of British cultural studies, Graeme Turner's *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, used press photographs of Oliver North and Ferdinand Marcos to illustrate culture's broad workings.⁴⁰ In one view, much of this scholarship was in effect "a defense of the importance of journalism" because, for one of the first times in British academe, it took the news media seriously.⁴¹

A default regard for journalism was further echoed as British cultural studies extended to institutions other than Birmingham. A split in the English department at Cardiff University in Wales, UK (then University College Cardiff) created a new alliance that was tellingly titled the new school of "Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies." Under the auspices of its first head—former journalist Tom Hopkinson, also former editor of the *Picture Post* and the first journalism professor in the UK—the school produced celebrated cultural work on journalism by the mid-1970s. Coming from the Polytechnic of Wales, John Fiske and John Hartley were particularly renowned for advancing semiology as a way to read television and the news, invoking journalism as the default case for understanding cultural power, cultural production, and the impact of culture and the media on audiences.⁴² The opening of the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester, established in 1966, facilitated a groundbreaking study of the media's coverage of political demonstrations, which set the analytical parameters for thinking about journalism's role in shaping public events.⁴³ Even Philip Schlesinger's *Putting Reality Together*, though not strictly aligned with cultural studies, followed the field's tenets in detailing the ideological constraints of news production.⁴⁴ In one view, alliances of this sort constituted a "migration away from the imaginative system of modernity (literature) towards its realist textual system (journalism)," establishing what seemed to some as the obvious natural connection between cultural studies and journalism.⁴⁵

The recognition of journalism as a way of thinking about culture continued along a trajectory of culturally oriented scholarship. The early interest in journalism's cultural nuances, displayed in the work of Fiske and Hartley, later became for both scholars an ongoing address to the more populist dimensions of the news.⁴⁶ Peter Dahlgren launched his own investigation of the cultural dimensions of the news and citizenship.⁴⁷ The Glasgow University Media Group tackled news head-on in a way that simultaneously accommodated image and text.⁴⁸ A long list of scholars—Stuart Allan, Gill Branston, Michael Bromley, Cynthia Carter, Simon Cottle, Philip Schlesinger, and Howard Tumber—investigated the intersection between journalist and so-called external inequities regarding class, gender, and other indices of cultural identity.⁴⁹ Others, such as Colin Sparks, concentrated on how popular forms of journalism filled functions left unaddressed by the mainstream or traditional domain of journalistic practice.⁵⁰ In each case, journalism was offered as a default case for understanding cultural power, cultural production, and impact on audiences. Seen as "definite, if unlikely, bedfellows," the two remained inextricably aligned.⁵¹

This early linkage between journalism and cultural studies made sense. It evolved from a certain shared commitment to the real world. While cultural studies tended to be fueled by political commitment, journalism's commitment tried to account for real-life events in a way that enhanced public understanding of the key institutional processes at work in everyday life—government, economics, education. Born of a lingering dissatisfaction with existing explanations for culture as it impacted on the real world, cultural studies tried to simultaneously mark life in and beyond the academy, and journalism offered a valuable terrain on which to gauge the shape of such a life. The emphasis on power and discourse made journalism a natural setting for probing many of the issues relevant to cultural studies. In John Hartley's view, the disciplinary gaze of journalism and cultural studies was similar, licensing both to

explore the full range of the social, describe other people's lives, generalize specialist knowledge for general readers, interrogate decisions and actions on behalf of 'governmental' discourses of appropriate behavior (legal and ethical) and manageability (decision-making, policy), textualize the world in order to know it, and communicate by appropriate idiom to target demographics.⁵²

Furthermore, the interest in citizenship and the rights and responsibilities of an informed citizenry rested at the foundation of both fields. As Graeme Turner argued, both pursued "a common ethical project aimed at reinforcing the principles of citizenship and the development of the skills of critical literacy which underpin the ideals of a democratic press and a democratic readership."⁵³ Hartley pushed the point even further, arguing that "journalism and cultural studies were in fact competitors in the social production of knowledge about everyday life," sharing an attraction to "the negatives of human life, the human cost of progress."⁵⁴

Yet as British cultural studies grew to embrace broader and more varied forms of cultural production in and out of the UK, journalism's attractiveness as an analytical venue of choice

waned. In fact, journalism all but disappeared from much of the work in British cultural studies published from the 1980s onward. A brief overview of some of the key lexicons and central texts published during this period bears this out.

While a number of lexicons denoting the "key words" of cultural analysis were published from the 1980s onward, the terms "journalism" and "news" rarely appeared in their indices.⁵⁵ Some of the fattest cultural studies anthologies—such as those put together by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Simon During, Houston Baker, and Morag Shiach—did not mention news or journalism anywhere prominently.⁵⁶ One anthology thoughtfully tracked the disciplinary intersections relevant to cultural studies, but its long list of connections with what it called "an array of knowledges"—including sociology, anthropology, law, philosophy, and archaeology—neglected to include journalism as a site of relevance.⁵⁷ The reader put forth by Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler offered sixteen thematic headings for the study of culture, none of which mentioned journalism, while Peter Golding and Marjorie Ferguson's *Cultural Studies in Question*, heralded as the "most aggressive attack" on the field, also excluded journalism from its discussion.⁵⁸ Even introductory texts attempting to lay the groundwork for entry to the field discussed journalism nowhere at length.⁵⁹ In one case, a book whose index stretched to ten pages and was appended by a fourteen-page glossary of key terms in cultural studies barely made reference to journalism.⁶⁰

The uneven attention paid journalism had its effect on journalism's cultural inquiry. On the one hand, scholarship migrated to those dimensions of journalism that were most distant from its pronounced sense of self—the tabloid, the alternative newspaper, the online relay. While scholars in this regard produced a wealth of scholarship on these aspects of the news, they nonetheless provided a vision of journalism that was differently narrowed, drawn on alternative lines that tended to eschew the mainstream dimensions of news most closely aligned with journalism's sense of self.⁶¹ In other words, while offering a valuable addition to journalism scholarship, this research furthered the separation between mainstream news and news of a different order—alternative, tabloid, oppositional. Lost were the nuances that legitimated both as part of one world.

On the other hand, articles on generalized or mainstream news, when they did appear, were couched as if journalism were but one choice of many background settings. Discussions of "the media" included the "news media," and yet, "to confuse journalism with the media or communications is to confuse the fish story with the fish."⁶² Thus positioned, journalism lost its singular features, hidden as the uneven and often unarticulated target of discussions of gender representation, government censorship, or democracy and the public sphere. Accordingly, this view of journalism rendered it more similar to than different from other cultural settings. While this premise had initially motivated journalism's cultural inquiry, it may have been too much of a good thing, for left relatively unexamined were the peculiarities connected to cultural authority that pertained exclusively or primarily to journalism, particularly its reverence for facts, truth, and reality. Moreover, as other kinds of cultural texts—like soap operas or James Bond films—became available for analysis on the hitherto-regarded margins of cultural production, journalistic settings began to look less interesting.

All of this is not to say that journalism professionals themselves welcomed the attention of cultural studies, as uneven as it has been. Problems between the two fields persevered. When cultural studies targeted journalism as a viable analytical venue, it did so with the express aim of contextualizing its power and recognizing that journalism played an instrumental role in circulating powerful ideas about how the world worked. Thus, the scholarship that developed here often had more to say about culture and cultural power, in general, than offer valuable insights by which journalists could continue to work as journalists. Particularly in areas where journalism's inquiry promoted turf wars over insufficient resources, the antipathy between the two camps was strident, as witnessed by the very public dispute in Australia between journalism educators and cultural studies scholars.⁶³ The disaffection between the two areas became pronounced, with Keyan Tomaselli saying in a critical paraphrasing of Keith Windshuttle that cultural studies constituted "the central disorganizing principle in journalism education."⁶⁴

The uneven interest in journalism among cultural studies scholars seems to have come from numerous sources. In part, it derived from a critique of enlightenment and the lack of confidence in the emancipatory power of reason that increasingly underpinned much of cultural studies' mandate for looking at the real world. Journalism's persistent loyalty to modernism and to what Toby Miller called "technologies of truth" kept it at odds with that world view, with cultural studies scholars increasingly regarding journalism as unthinkingly supporting the underside and problematic dimensions of facts, truth, and reality.⁶⁵ In other words, journalism's god-terms were themselves seen by cultural studies scholars as troubling evidence of a somewhat blind devotion to a deity gone rotten.

The uneven interest also derived from journalism's powerful institutional status, which encouraged the examination of certain aspects important for critique—its establishment bias, its collusion with political and economic powers, its failure to provide ongoing independent investigation. Once these aspects were attended to and seemingly depleted, however, journalism as a whole tended to be abandoned by much of cultural studies as a worthwhile target of analysis. The less obvious—and less fruitful—routes for studying journalism's power and authority, such as the profoundly conflicted performances that emerge when power and authority begin to break down while a belief in facts and truth perseveres, drew less energized interest from many cultural scholars. Their reluctance to break apart the institutional presence of journalism persisted both because the power associated with that presence offered a rich target of analysis and because the picture that emerged when institutional presence dissipated was not as compelling for cultural studies. While some notable exceptions offered a picture of journalism that was both internally and externally divisive and contradictory, they were not frequent enough to constitute a substantial body of scholarship.⁶⁶

Finally, the uneven interest in journalism also reflected fundamental differences over what counted as evidence. The positivism of journalism's inquiry and the concomitant attention to notions of facts, truth, and reality all seemed to be at odds with cultural studies' examination of culture via its contingencies—historical, social, political, and economic. Cultural studies'

insistence on constructivism, subjectivity, and relativity was ill matched to journalists' proclaimed invocations of accuracy, balance, and objectivity. Some of this may have derived from the problems associated with applying British cultural studies to the US context. As Hanno Hardt warned in the mid-1980s, the appropriation and professionalization of British cultural studies into the US scene facilitated the loss of its original political commitments.⁶⁷ Perhaps nowhere was this seen more clearly than in journalism's subsequent reduction to a world of marginal practices, popular auras, and generalized otherness.

When combined, all of this made journalism, particularly its mainstream dimensions, uninteresting for much of British cultural studies in its global spread. And yet, there is a need to ask whether cultural studies took its subject of inquiry too much at face value. In defining journalism and its study on its own terms— that is, in adopting journalism's own self-presentation as indicative of what journalism is or could be—the nuances of journalism's own workings were simply left out of analysis. Rather than tackle the unpronounced, illogical, and dissonant sides of journalism the contingencies and contradictions involved in the constant, often tiresome, and frequently fruitless negotiations to yoke popular and official, private and public, lay and professional, dishonest and truthful, biased and balanced impulses—cultural studies scholars closed their eyes. They catered to official journalism's pronounced sense of itself, which articulated an adherence to each of the latter choices and disavowal of each of the former, and thereby consolidated a reason for largely dismissing the study of journalism as a whole. The uneven response in cultural studies toward journalism played to the modernist bias of its official self-presentation, a presentation that promoted the informative, civic, and rational sides of its practices over its pleasure-inducing, entertaining, or simply affective ones. Playing to this side of journalism, however, recognized only part of what it was.

For much of cultural studies, then, mainstream journalism was examined through the near-sighted eyes adopted by much of the academy. In many of its forms, journalism became codified as an extension of the sciences and the scientific model of knowledge production, oppositionally positioned to cultural studies' dominant scholarly stance of criticism and sometimes parody. Cultural studies reduced the impact of positivistic knowledge about journalism to a whisper and missed the nuances of the journalistic world, failing to realize that in so doing, it neglected to examine much of what contradicted journalists' own parameters of professional practice. Yet, these nuances were worth addressing precisely because they rested underneath the articulated core of how much of journalism saw itself. It is not surprising that this tendency generated divergent interpretations, which echoed the differences between British and US cultural studies: some saw it as representative of a mode of knowledge that sought "nothing less than to rethink received truths and remake inherited frameworks of explanation," becoming a "symptom of widespread doubt and disillusion about the contriving ability of inherited truths to command assent."⁶⁸ Others saw it as buying into "a moral and political vocabulary that [was], if not anti-democratic, at least insufficiently sensitive to the ways in which valued political practices intertwine with certain intellectual habits."⁶⁹

Thus, the originary premises of journalism and much of cultural studies positioned them at odds with each other. One believed in truth, reality, and facts, the other in construction, subjectivity, and relativity. A fundamental difference about what counted in the compilation and interpretation of evidence, even if both arenas provided strategies for shaping that compilation, concretized a broader dissonance in journalism's cultural study that underscored the difficulty, if not impossibility, of figuring out *how* to study the cultural dimensions of a phenomenon that made claim to an indexical and referential presentation of the world at hand.

What has been the effect of such unevenness? The erratic interest of cultural studies in journalism de facto encouraged its gradual transformation into material that looked more like the stuff of contemporary journalism education and journalistic professionalism, resembling less a set of practices of symbolic expression in the public domain and more a narrowly conceived intersection of the political and the economic. The insects of positivism—reality, truth, facts—were exterminated from analysis with a kind of self-righteous zeal. For a time and in considerable scholarship, journalism retreated to the territory from which it had originally come—the atheoretical world of journalism education, training, and professionalization, and a valorization of its capacity to account for the true, the real, and the factual. The centrality of "facts" and a migration toward positivistic knowledge as a way of tamping a fundamental self-doubt about the profession became obstructions to cultural studies' interest in the journalistic world, and journalism's claims to the real—invoking objectivity, balance, accuracy—muted the capacity of many cultural scholars to consider the nuances of journalistic practice. Largely unrecognized as a cultural form in itself, it became positioned as "the other," codified by much of British cultural studies as uninteresting territory and resembling in growing degree what had been claimed originally of it by journalism educators. This meant that despite auspicious beginnings, scholarship on journalism in much of cultural studies came to look less like other kinds of cultural phenomena and more like the material in which cultural analysis had no interest. In other words, many cultural studies scholars led the way of those who took journalism professionals and educators too much at their word, reducing the cultural inquiry of journalism to a marginal interest, a sideshow.

It is important to note, though, that as of very late, this trend may be dissipating in certain quarters. John Hartley's latest key concept reader, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies*, included terms relevant to news such as "bias," "news values," "objectivity," and "gatekeeper," as did the updated version of O'Sullivan et al.⁷⁰ Lacey used a text from the British program *News At Ten* to illustrate what he meant by institutional analysis in his key concept reader on media studies and visual culture.⁷¹ Pearson and Hartley offset journalism's neglect by both opening their volume, *American Cultural Studies: A Reader*, with a section of reprints of politically progressive journalistic articles as well as an academic article, included in a section titled Media, that specifically addressed journalism.⁷² Lewis not only wove a discussion of journalism and news throughout his examination of cultural studies, but even tackled certain journalism forms, like paparazzi.⁷³ Storey devoted a chapter to the press and magazines in his overview of the field, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture*, and, in *Inventing Popular Culture*, he began his discussion of globalization with a

consideration of television news.⁷⁴ Durham and Kellner addressed the status of newspapers in different cultural contexts in their cultural studies reader, and Brants, Hermes, and van Zoonen dedicated an entire section to "the ethics of popular journalism."⁷⁵ Hartley's recent *A Short History of Cultural Studies* tracked a consistent regard for journalism alongside an interest in larger questions of cultural power.⁷⁶

No less important, the cultural work that has addressed journalism has helped to broaden its inquiry in ways that now impact upon the very core of journalism's study. Recent work on aspects of journalism that, from a traditional perspective, continue to be seen as beyond its usual analytical parameters (this includes work on alternative forms of news, such as talk shows, reality television, certain Internet forms like weblogs and listservs, video activism, and new forms of guerrilla television⁷⁷); work on the intersection of journalism and various indices of identity, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity;⁷⁸ and work on the variegated practices that emerge from the intersection between journalism and different institutional settings⁷⁹ has broadened the parameters of what is now thought of as journalism. So, even if the attention has been uneven, it has still made its presence felt.

On the Future of Journalism and Cultural Studies

Attending to the epistemological uneasiness at the core of journalism and cultural studies' coexistence may be long overdue. The question remains how to engage that uneasiness in a way that maintains the integrity of both journalism and cultural studies.

There have been numerous calls of late to reinvigorate the charter of cultural studies, particularly in its British form.⁸⁰ There have also been calls to better address the merger of cultural studies and journalism.⁸¹ While this article by and large has not addressed the lingering problems in journalism education and resistance among journalism professionals regarding the value of a cultural perspective on the news, the trajectory traced here suggests that journalism offers a litmus test of sorts regarding the future of cultural studies. Repositioning journalism at the forefront of cultural studies inquiry could help cultural studies on its own road to academic maturation, by which cultural studies might become more of a full-fledged discipline of knowledge rather than one positioned in opposition to the surrounding fields of study.

It has now been over fifteen years since Meaghan Morris first voiced her concerns about the banality of cultural studies.⁸² Her prediction, that cultural studies would find it hard to resist making similar pronouncements about dissimilar cultural objects simply because the existing analytical template worked so well, seems to have been borne out when thinking about journalism's neglect. Journalism is one area of study that could help cultural studies enter its own middle age with grace and generosity. A re-examination of the tenets of cultural studies might not only accommodate journalism more fully but serve the mission of cultural studies more effectively.

More than just a difference of perspective keeps journalism and cultural studies at an uncomfortable distance from each other. Cultural studies' capacity to instantiate itself as a field of knowledge secure in its own claims and in what counts as evidence is key here. Its maturation into a field with enough self-knowledge to grow depends on its capacity to expand and include a phenomenon like journalism rather than shrink to keep it outside. There is enough evidence to suggest that it can do so, even if journalism partly challenges some of cultural studies' own claims.

It is possible that cultural studies has neglected incorporating journalism at their core because doing so would necessitate a close look at the limitations of cultural inquiry. It may be time, then, for cultural studies to confront the problems embodied by journalism and the limitations such problems suggest for the study of any longstanding inquiry into the real. Recognizing that there is a reality out there and that, in certain quarters, truth and facts have currency does not mean letting go of relativity, subjectivity, and construction. It merely suggests yoking a regard for them with some cognizance of the outside world. And surely cultural studies is strong enough these days to do that.

Notes

- [1] An extended version of this article appears in Barbie Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy* (London: Sage, in press). Parts of the argument developed here were presented at the 3rd Crossroads Conference on Cultural Studies, Birmingham, UK, June 2000 and at the Festschrift in honor of Hanno Hardt, Iowa City, Iowa, October 2003. Thanks to Stuart Allan, Michael Bromley, James Carey, Larry Gross, Toby Miller, Michael Schudson, Linda Steiner, Keyan Tomaselli, and Howard Tumber for reading different drafts of this manuscript, and to Sharon Black for providing her usual assiduous library assistance.
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- [4] Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* (1986): 273-86.
- [5] Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production, Revisited," 143.
- [6] See, for instance, Ward Goodenough, *Culture, Language, and Society* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981).
- [7] Stuart Allan, *News Culture* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1999), 2-3.
- [8] Dahlgren, "Introduction," 1.
- [9] Dahlgren, "Introduction," 7.
- [10] James W. Carey, "Afterword: The Culture in Question," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Munson and Catherine Warren (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 331.

- [11] Theodore Glasser and James Ettema, "Common Sense and the Education of Young Journalists," *Journalism Educator* 44 (Summer 1989): 20-21.
- [12] Carey, "Afterword: The Culture in Question," 331.
- [13] Although there has been extensive work challenging the so-called unitary character of British cultural studies—see, in particular, Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, "On the Impossibility of A Global Cultural Studies: 'British' Cultural Studies in an 'International' Frame," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996) and Toby Miller, *A Companion to Cultural Studies* (London: Blackwell, 2001) —I maintain the distinction here as a heuristic device to differentiate the treatment accorded journalism by both the US and British schools.
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