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Chris Nash (2016) *What is Journalism? The Art and Politics of a Rupture*. Palgrave Macmillan: London. pp. 247

Journalism is in crisis, particularly in its Anglophone heartlands. This crisis is certainly epistemological and may very well turn out to be existential. Let's consider three major aspects of the current situation. First, in his MacTaggart lecture at the Edinburgh International Festival in August 2017, British broadcaster Jon Snow said that reporting on the deadly Grenfell Tower fire made him feel "on the wrong side" of Britain's social divide and warned that he and others in the media had become too far removed from ordinary people's lives. Contrary to the time-treasured metaphor of telling truth to power, the news media were too close to the powerful to notice the lives and tragedies of the little people.

In the United States, Sarah Smarsh can observe the consequences of this process within journalism when the working classes left behind by neo-liberalism are blamed by the very news media that ignore their situation for the rise of Trump:

> A journalism that embodies the plutocracy it is supposed to critique (Smarsh 2016)

Second, the watchdog function has failed on a global scale. The most vivid consequence of this is the lack of scrutiny of the excesses that left all major economies wrecked in 2008. Financial journalists who should have been the first to expose the dangerous and reckless practices of casino capitalism were imposing a regime of silence upon themselves as they had become incorporated into an undemocratic power elite.

Third, Emily Bell stresses the commercial and technological reasons why journalism is out of touch with the concerns of the mass of ordinary people and highlights the fact that pressure to produce either quality journalism or quick journalism often militates against the sort of low-key, everyday journalism that was often at the core of important structural observations, following the surface of events rather than probing the causes of things.

The book is based on the gestation of ideas and impressions that have formed in the author's experience of journalism over many years and its interrelationships with other forms of informational dissemination. It amounts to a sustained polemic appeal that takes the reader in two very distinct directions. One direction calls for a reconsideration of the social importance of journalism. The other is a plea for journalism to be taken more seriously as a distinct form of knowledge production with its own set of research procedures. The account starts with the possibly unlikely figure of a German-American

artist, Hans Haacke. His work was scheduled to be exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in April 1971. However, shortly before the exhibition was due to open, the museum's director, Thomas Messer cancelled on the grounds that three of the proposed works were not art but journalism. Journalism was clearly considered such an abject practice that even post Duchamp's urinal and Lichtenstein's paint rage, journalism was not fit for consideration.

His second exemplar is I. F. Stone. One of the more biting criticisms of Stone's historical analysis of the Korean War was that is was mere 'journalism' which is of course grist to Nash's argument. The work was later recognised for the rigorous source-based journalism that came to substantiate Stone's reputation. According to the case studies he provides, journalism needs iconoclasts even when they can only be considered journalists by third parties (Haacke) or are ostracised by the mainstream of their fellow practitioners (as was Stone's case) but does iconoclasm sell? That is often a fundamental within traditional journalism.

Both of Nash's exemplars are shaped in a way to lead into the theoretical discussions of how work can elevate journalism to disciplinary status. It would be relatively straightforward to find examples, often not as far-fetched as these, to act as indicators of where journalism, even contemporary practice, could be considered as demonstration of a disciplinary activity that fits all of his prerequisites. He places the lack of progress of journalism's acceptance as an area of enquiry with as much legitimacy as any of the social sciences or humanities on journalism scholars and their 'unsatisfactory conceptualisations of journalism'. He makes the case for journalism possessing its 'own singular research practice'.

The book misses the point that scholarly investigations have moved a long way from interpreting journalism merely as an empirical reconstruction of facts as many of the theoretical authorities he mentions have illustrated. These include ex-journalist Zelizer who is one of many prominent champions of promoting journalism as both an autonomous activity and a source of reflected knowledge about how society accesses information.

There is more evidence among certain, rather conservative journalists of the views expressed about journalism's limitations in terms of its narrow empiricism, focus on claims of 'news sense' and over proximity to structures of authority, than among scholars working

within journalism studies and journalists engaged in their own scholarly research. In addition, there are certainly many new and some transformative processes within digital and socially mediated forms of news dissemination that are underpinned with methods as rigorous and reflective as any social science.

Universities may teach practical skills but students and the industry they wish to work within, in all its shifting complexities, do not, in the main wish to engage in much specific experimentation across disciplinary boundaries; certainly not within the journalism school tradition. Universities may provide space for wider reflection in areas that art colleges might call complementary studies, but the skill-base, valuable as it is, does not tend to get the experimental, media-lab treatment. The literal nature of the skills base is perhaps the fundamental problem as journalism undergoes its long epistemological night of the soul. An epistemological approach would constitute theoretical kryptonite to the traditional self-perceptions of a Clark Kent.

The subsequent chapters gather theoretical support for his project. Nash identifies five theoretical issues out of the overlapping critical practice of Haacke and Stone; spatio-temporality; temporality; news sense and field theory; journalism and art; journalism and democratic practice; a path through geography, history, philosophy, sociology and aesthetics. Each of these approaches to journalism is summarized, giving an endorsement of how journalism can be treated with seriousness by academics but for me there is a problem here. There has been, particularly over the past twenty years, an expansion of well-respected research into journalism as a practice with the success at least five global journals of serious scholarly standing on four continents. All major conferences on communication now have a Journalism Studies section. There are even signs that journalism is beginning to attract the sort of funding that a serious scholarly discipline aspires to. So in terms of taking journalism seriously as a form of knowledge, the boat has sailed. Could we do better? Certainly. Are we trying collectively to make the current success even more resonant with contemporary disciplinary concerns? Of course. But to say it is 'nowhere' is really missing this global trend.

Perhaps the point being made here is how to register and respect the work of individual journalists and this may be worthy of comment. Some of the best work in journalism is certainly of global significance but this work does not need to pass through the narrower

portals of the academy to make its mark and the practitioners who are fortunate enough and talented enough see their rewards in the success and impact of their journalism. The more humdrum journalism that Emily Bell mourns cannot, despite its rigour and importance, be considered innovative on any level simply because much journalism no matter how rigorous may only be restricted to repeating familiar patterns and often coming up with unsurprising results. It is only certain privileged journalists who will ever have their work considered as worthy of deeper reflection, rightly or wrongly. Just like some medicine and some legal practice, routine is rarely worthy of wider consideration. (Phillips et al, 2014: 113-114)

At the same time we have very real crises in journalism that are not reducible to the deficiencies of the scholarly community's engagement with journalism practice: the incorporation of journalism into the social/economic elite; the distortions of algorithmic tendencies in journalism's tracking of audience; the demise of routine and low-key journalism. The latter is arguably the sort of work that can incrementally add greatest value to our public understanding and is in stark contrast to the sort of high-level, deep investigations written by experts or by journalists whose organisations can afford to keep them on high-profile and expensive projects for months at a time.

The author promises an epistemological reconsideration but perhaps only cautiously peers into this space rather than throwing it open and embracing the fresh and disruptive air of innovative thinking. Although keying into questions of practice there is a lot more discussion here on the mechanisms of research funding and peer-review in universities as proxies for debate on the epistemological challenges for journalism. By the end Nash is conflating the problems of journalism scholars with that of journalism - all journalism - not just his outliers, as belonging within an academic discipline.

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