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The Primacy of Secondary Things: A Sustained Scientific Dialogue on Three *Edges* of the Journalistic Field

Benjamin Ferron [1,2], Johana Kotišová [3] and Simon Smith [4,*]

[1] Département de Communication Politique et Publique, UFR LLSH, Céditec (EA 3119), Université Paris Est Créteil, Créteil, 94010 Paris, France; benjamin.ferron@u-pec.fr
[2] Centre Nantais de Sociologie UMR 6025, Nantes Université, 44312 Nantes, France
[3] Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam, 1012 XT Amsterdam, The Netherlands; j.kotisova@uva.nl
[4] Institute of Sociological Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, 155 00 Prague, Czech Republic
* Correspondence: simon.smith@fsv.cuni.cz

Abstract: While the sociology of journalism has traditionally granted epistemic privilege to the mainstream news media, professional elites and their dominant meta-discourse, there is a recent trend to research journalism from other points of view. Researchers have investigated alternative and community media, journalists with low visibility or legitimacy in the workplace, as well as heterodox conceptions of professional excellence. These studies shed new light on little studied sub-groups and practices. How can we integrate them into a sustained scientific dialogue between researchers? This paper presents a methodologically original attempt to do so by dialogically re-interrogating material from studies of three situations where journalism absorbs precarious and politicised agents in the field (media activists), new practices and tasks that need doing (online discussion administration) and unusual kinds of professional attributes (experiencing emotionality in crisis reporting). In each case journalism's pursuit of professional autonomy is at stake, since conditions of production clash with established professional myths and practices or generate incompatibilities with institutionalised expectations. Our three-way exchange using the bridging/sensitising concept of *edge* focuses on the conversion or convertibility of external forms of capital (legitimacies, resources and experiences) into forms redeemable and tradeable in a professional field. It exhibits how forces external to the journalistic profession are (made) present in each case but refracted differently in each local configuration. We call for a more systematic and relational study of these kinds of localised refractions.

Keywords: boundary work; *edge*; emotional work; journalistic field; professionalism; role conflicts; status strain

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1. Introduction

A journalist's job epitomises trends that mark other professional spaces: the grip of economic constraints in the fields of cultural production, the blurring of the boundary between paid and unpaid work or the unequal individualisation of careers. Studying it can therefore help understand more general social mechanisms, broader trends in professional divisions of labour, boundary work and socialisation processes.

It has become commonplace to characterise the present era as unusually turbulent for the profession of journalism and the media industry. For example, the 10th edition of the Reuters Institute Digital News Report "aims to cast light on the key issues that face the industry at a time of deep uncertainty and rapid change" (Newman et al. 2021, p. 10). Similarly, the 2019 Worlds of Journalism survey sought to make sense of "the changes that are currently shaking up long-held, firmly planted, macrolevel ideas about journalism, founded in both ideology and experience" (Hanitzsch et al. 2019, p. 1). We are not arguing, however, that journalism merits scholarly attention because it is a profession in crisis.

In fact, we share Hallin et al.'s (2021, p. 13) sceptical stance towards this "widespread perception that journalism has entered a period of crisis and transition, in which established practices and institutions are disrupted, and innovation, borrowing and appropriation, and boundary crossing are common". The attraction of studying journalism is due to the fact that it is *and always has been* a very porous, permeable, weakly autonomous professional space (Abbott 1988; Bourdieu 1998; Carlson 2015). This makes it difficult to "draw the line" around the journalistic field (Eldridge 2019) and renders research on journalism as a profession both challenging and interesting. In this paper we seek to contribute to a better understanding of "the dialectic between stability and change" (Hallin et al. 2021, p. 12) within journalism by describing three different local situations in which a blurring of professional boundaries of one kind or another has generated professional status strain (Abbott 1981) and raised questions about the (dis)continuity of professional identities. We try to make sense of these situations by means of a 'sensitising' concept—a concept that lacks a clear definition but "gives the user a general sense of reference in approaching empirical instances" (Blumer 1954, p. 7)—the *edge*. This concept serves as a boundary object between our cases, our perspectives and our propositions about the mechanisms of professional change. Our claim to originality lies not just in redirecting sociological attention to the *edges* rather than the dominant regions of the journalistic field (television, mainstream media, market-leading organisations and news journalism). We wish to reimagine the notion of professional edge to include not just dominated actors in the field, but also objects, practices and attributes regarded as 'secondary' in professional worlds. It is this double refocusing of the scientific gaze—according primacy to secondary things—that renders our appeal to the sociology of professions on behalf of journalism more than just a demand for 'equal treatment'. Through the discussion of its *edges*, we aim to suggest how studying journalism can help sociologists consider professional field dynamics (Bourdieu 2015), status strain (Abbott 1981, 1988) and—through the prism of emotional processes (Hochschild 1983)—the control of professional attributes.

In the following part of the paper, we develop an argument that more debate between the sociology of professions and journalism studies is needed and review two bodies of literature that have explored journalism's *edges* (even if that term is not used). Then, convoking theoretical perspectives that are typically opposed or separated, we introduce our three case studies. The methods section explains the rationale behind the interconnection of our case studies and recounts the process of bringing the cases together. The results section summarises the main points of intersection and friction between our cases in the form of a dialogue. In the discussion, we summarise our findings, discuss their utility for researchers dealing with professional reproduction and change and reflect on the advantages and limits of our dialogical writing approach.

2. Journalism's *Edges* as a Site for Studying Field Dynamics, Status Strain and the Control of Professional Attributes

Journalism has always been a somewhat illegitimate object in social sciences, despite the fact that such a prestigious sociologist as Max Weber, writing in 1910, viewed the press as "the first topic" deserving scientific treatment *by sociology* (Bastin 2001, p. 175). It is often studied by researchers who themselves occupy dominated positions in the academic world (Bourdieu 1975, p. 5), yet it tends to be neglected as a site for study in general sociology (Ferron et al. 2018) and in the sociology of work and professions. Insights from the latter *are* sometimes used within media studies to apprehend journalism (Carlson and Lewis 2015; Tunstall 2001): several American scholars, for instance, have employed the sociology of professions perspective to study external jurisdictional challenges to journalism (Lewis 2012; Anderson 2014; Lowrey and Mackay 2008)—notably the threat from a 'participatory' digital culture. However, the reverse does not apply: journalism is not, with rare exceptions, used as a site to study the mechanisms of reproduction and change in professions. Moreover, given that journalism and media studies are becoming a more autonomous speciality with a tendency to disconnect themselves from broader sociological questions and develop

separately, we lack a sound exchange between sociology and media studies more generally (Pooley and Katz 2008; Waisbord 2014; Powers and Russell 2020).

The re-connection between them which we advocate here is anchored in the specific frameworks of our three case studies. Media activism, online discussion administration and crisis reporting are all examples of journalism's "expansion" (Gieryn 1983), that is, situations when journalism absorbs heterodox agents in the field (activists), new practices and tasks that require completion (online discussion administration) or ambivalent professional attributes (experiencing unusual attachments and including emotionality in reporting). In all our cases, conditions of production are likely to conflict with established professional myths, and professional activities are likely to confront incompatibilities with institutionalised expectations. Each of them challenges the traditional answers to the questions "who counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism, what is appropriate journalistic behavior, and what is deviant" (Carlson 2015, p. 2).

We employ the *edge* metaphor as a bridging/sensitising concept to denote the routines, practices, identities, ideologies and epistemologies that are the objects of (meta) journalistic performance, control, inheritance, claims-making and critique in situations where professional work, for various reasons, is unable to be taken for granted *as* professional work. In doing so we answer Lewis's call to "consider both the cultural/rhetorical and structural/material nature of this boundary work" (Lewis 2012, p. 852).

At a practical level, we are interested in professionals' sense of understanding what their job is and how to perform it well. This is a research object we share with scholars investigating the 'multiskilling' associated with media convergence. Over the last quarter of a century, organisational redesign driven by a combination of technological change and a search for economic efficiencies has obliged journalists to acquire new forms of capital in order to maintain or improve their field position (Kumar and Haneef 2018). In many organisations today they are expected to produce content for multiple media or platforms (media multiskilling), cover multiple beats (issue multiskilling) or combine creative and technical tasks (technical multiskilling) (Wallace 2013). Researchers (e.g., Cottle and Ashton 1999; Singer 2004; Nygren 2014; Bro et al. 2016) have explored whether journalists experience multiskilling as deskilling or enskilling, with mixed findings—appreciation of broader competences and creative autonomy in some cases, concerns about sacrificing the core values of particular forms of journalism (especially print) in others.

A second body of literature with which we wish to enter into debate covers the external challenge(r)s to journalism's jurisdiction from amateur or semi-professional producers of news and information (of a type that often contradicts the principles of the liberal model of journalism). Changes brought about by digitalisation, including the wider availability of professional-standard equipment, have certainly rendered it more difficult to delimit the professional field of journalism. They favour incursions by new entrants, variously labelled interlopers, strangers, in-betweeners, peripheral, emergent or non-traditional actors, who are "doing journalism but who are not (yet) considered as journalists" (Tandoc 2019, p. 138). Mancini went as far as to claim that "News providers on the Web *for the most part are not trained journalists* and do not follow conventional journalistic practice." (Mancini 2013, p. 133, emphasis added). Even when outsiders position themselves as "working collaboratively with news organizations to achieve common goals" (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018, p. 498), the routinisation of their presence in newsrooms or their integration into news processes can alter the repertoire of acceptable journalistic genres (Eldridge 2017) and thus further blur the boundaries of professional journalism—between information and communication for instance (Ghorbanzadeh 2020).

But to use actor-qualifying terms such as outsider and interloper is to adopt a journalism-centric worldview that risks "reifying standards that [journalism studies] scholarship has designated to be dominant" (Tandoc 2019, p. 140). The same is true if we investigate multiskilling only as deskilling or enskilling, i.e., by reference to a notional core of journalism skills. To avoid assuming that journalism is reducible to its more legitimate segments, agents and practices, we need to look afresh upon both incursion and other sources of

change (such as task innovation or the reclassification of certain attributes as professional) as processes through which journalism's boundaries remain constantly evolving in struggles that do not necessarily involve identifiable camps of actors. We observe glimpses of this in studies which have investigated alternative and community media (Atton 2015), 'old' peripheral news workers such as camera reporters (Waschková Cisařová and Metykova 2020), as well as heterodox conceptions of professional excellence in the craft of writing (Boynton 2005). These studies exemplify a recent trend not to grant epistemic privilege to the mainstream news media, professional elites and their dominant meta-discourse and instead to investigate overlooked sub-groups and practices, old or new. Our study builds on these foundations. But how can we integrate them into, if not a unified model, at least a sustained scientific dialogue between researchers?

3. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

3.1. Presentation of Original Study Methodologies and Theoretical Frameworks

This article is based on a dialogue we staged between research programmes of which each of us has conducted independently over several years. We employ both different theoretical frameworks and slightly different methodologies, although they share some common aspects, such as ethnographic approaches (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995) and qualitative interviewing, ranging from semi-structured to narrative (see Arksey and Knight 1999). We also work with different types of empirical material. In this section, we briefly introduce our theoretical perspectives, exhibiting how they (differently) thematise the notion of professional *edge*, our methodologies and the data we were each able to draw on about the actors we studied (for more details see the published original studies: Smith 2017; Kotišová 2019; Ferron 2021).

At the crossroads of Bourdieu's (2015) field theory and the sociology of journalism, social movements and public problems, Benjamin analyses the logics of collective action of a French militant group, the Permanent Coordination of Free Media (CPML), characterised by a structurally dominated position *vis-à-vis* an established professional space: the journalistic field. The notion of *edge* here refers to the unequal distribution of professional capital in journalism: dominated agents are predisposed to engage in struggles over the redefinition of the instituted rules of the game. The claims-making activities carried out by the CPML representatives (in defence of 'free and independent' media) rest classically on a universalist injustice framework: the struggle for freedom of expression and information. However, this tends to lock them into a role of 'specific revolutionaries' capable of using the control they possess of this space's rules of the game against those who dominate it. Their semi-corporatist 'scissiparity strategy', which consists of "dividing a field to completely master a small sector because you cannot be master of an entire empire" (Bourdieu 2015, pp. 483–84), provides an advantage to the most well-endowed in professional capital, to the detriment of lay members. But without the support of the latter—inclined to de-specify the group's claims—the subversive claims of the former tend to lose legitimacy both within and outside the professional field. Investments into group-centred meta-journalistic discourses are likely, on the one hand, to strengthen public identity and cohesion and, on the other, to weaken it by crystallising internal tensions between professionals and laypersons while providing critical points of support to dominant agents of the field of power or non-professionals of journalism.

Fieldwork with the CPML was carried out between June 2014 and October 2018. Created in 1999 and relaunched in 2014, this body for the liaison and representation of 'free media' was composed in April 2020 of 73 organisations with various legal statutes, publication platforms, periodicity, geographical or thematic coverage and editorial lines. The field survey includes 31 semi-structured interviews with active members and external actors, related to their socialisation and their activities in media organisations and the CPML, as well as participant observation sequences (preparatory meeting at the World Free Media Forum, Paris, 11/2014; International Journalism Assizes, Tours, 3/2016; meetings of Free Media and Resistance Journalism, Meymac, 5/2016 and Clermont-Ferrand, 10/2018),

an online ethnography (messages from the national email list) and a corpus analysis (CMPL website; websites and/or publications of member organisations; coverage of the network's activities by the national and regional press).

Simon draws on both Andrew Abbott's sociology of professions and—since it offers a more performative and material understanding of work routines than Abbott's theory—the theory of routine dynamics (Pentland and Feldman 2008), in order to analyse how young Slovak journalists cope with the 'dirty work' of online discussion administration by inventing or altering routines in ways that recover some 'professional purity'. One goal of the study was to test empirically if and to what extent today's online newspaper commenting sections carry any of the original ideals for a more participatory journalism. For present purposes, the most relevant of these ideals is the blurring of the boundary between journalist and audience. Observing admins' interactions within and beyond the newsroom allowed the research to assess what, if any intra- and extra-professional credit it was possible to accumulate from a task that is intrinsically impure in Abbott's (1981) sense.

The Slovak fieldwork was carried out in the newspaper SME between 2013 and 2016. Data were obtained from three rounds of interviews. Firstly, interviews with six former 'admins' (who worked at SME between 2004 and 2013) yielded accounts of how ex-admins remember the task being performed in the past and biographical narratives that help understand how administrative work fitted into journalistic trajectories and professional identities. Then, in 2013–2014, all five people who were employed in the job at that time were observed at work using a think-aloud protocol (Ericsson and Simon 1993) to understand both how they interacted with the technology and how they justified their decisions to approve or delete comments. Finally, this exercise was repeated with three new administrators in 2016, following a major staff turnover and an interface redesign, to test the influence of technological factors, managerial policies and workplace organisation on routine configuration and task performance.

Johana's study analysed crisis reporters' emotional culture; in particular, it explored the technological shaping of journalists' emotional experience in crisis situations, seeking to remedy the low interest in journalists' emotions by exploring crisis reporters' emotional labour or emotion management, driven by professional ideals and other criteria of success which turn "our capacity for managing feeling into an instrument" (Hochschild 1983, p. 186). This framework assumes that crisis reporters' 'mental-health problems' are social and systemic, but also, more importantly, delves into the paradox of the traditional journalistic commitment to objectivity/detachment and witnessing other people's suffering (Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti 2013; Boltanski 1999). The research explored the professional status strain inherent in the crisis reporters' constant boundary position between an involved actor and detached observer, entailing the dichotomies of active/passive, engaged/non-participating, empathic/dispassionate, or close/distant.

Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted between June 2015 and January 2019 and consisted of five months' observation (with varied extent of participation) in three different newsrooms at Czech Television and The People's Newspaper (a Czech national daily), and 47 in-depth and narrative interviews with European 'crisis reporters', i.e., "journalists involved in crisis reporting" (Neumann and Fahmy 2016, p. 227): often foreign news reporters, including flying or parachute reporters, who possess extensive direct experience with reporting wars, conflicts, terror attacks, natural disasters, refugees and other situations marked by suffering and uncertainty. The interview guide included questions related to the interrelations between crises, media technologies and the reporters' emotional experiences. As such, emotions were approached both through interviews, i.e., as narratives and retrospective sense-making accounts, and via observations, i.e., as bodily practices (see Flam and Kleres 2015).

3.2. The Dialogical Method of Defamiliarisation

Drawing on our individual studies, each of us generated a set of questions concerning professional status strain based on what we had observed at our particular *edge* of (our

particular) journalistic field. These questions were taken up by the other two before being distilled into three general questions, which we use to structure the next three sections: How do (dis)positional strains and forces external to the journalistic field get refracted in journalists' definition of professionalism and daily interactions? Are incoherence of task bundles a driver of professional status strain through the generation of mandate–licence incongruence? What kinds of emotional labour are employed at the boundaries of the profession?

Our dialogue took place in several stages by means of email, conference calls and collaborative writing, including a workshop at the 2018 Work, Employment and Society conference in Belfast on the theme of journalism's *edges*. At each stage of our dialogue, each of us had to reassess the capacity of their own data to give up meanings which had been secondary to the original line of inquiry. This process led us to step away from our theoretical habits and reinterpret our data through lenses that *initially* had not been conspicuous, relevant or important to our own research programmes[1]. Thus, the process resembled the defamiliarisation strategy described by Marcus and Fischer (1999)—blocking the familiarity we possessed with our own context and using knowledge from another to critique or qualify it and enabling us to test the relevance of our research questions for other professional sub-segments. Each of us produced a report summarising what our data could 'say' in response to the three research questions, together with a frank account of our data's limits and silences. The originator of each research question then acted as a *rapporteur* for their problem area—collating and redacting the individual summaries. Each co-author then had the opportunity to further revise their own words in the integrated accounts. Further group discussion at this stage generated an overarching research question which provides the framework for this paper: What can the analysis of *edges* bring to sociology in general and sociology of professions in particular?

In the three chapters of our results section, we present the dialogue we undertook around our three research questions. The chapter *Difference-making processes and (dis)positional strains* sets out from Benjamin's questions and concerns, shown in plain text. Our responses are shown in italics. The chapter *Journalists' tasks and skills: mandate* vs. *licence* starts from Simon's questions and concerns, while the chapter *Emotions in journalistic work* starts from Johana's. They employ the same text-formatting conventions just indicated.

4. Results

4.1. Difference-Making Processes and (dis)Positional Strains

The theoretical anchorage of my research in field theory led me to introduce the dialogue with a question about the structural strains that weigh on agents' collective practices and representations at the *edges* of the journalistic field. The question deals with the articulation between (social and professional) positions, dispositions and positioning of the journalists studied by my colleagues and myself. Given the location and dynamics of the journalistic field—a weakly autonomous professional field of cultural production of large-scale diffusion increasingly dominated by economic constraints (Bourdieu 1998; Benson and Neveu 2005; Ferron and Comby 2018)—journalists, even when they occupy dominated positions, adjust their strategies (for conserving or transforming its structure) to (dis)positional strains. How do these strains—journalists' incorporated dispositions, social and professional positions, the relative positioning of media organisations in the information market, and the "structural location" (Benson 1999) of journalism within global society—weigh on the difference-making processes inside and outside the profession?

Benjamin: My fieldwork showed me that the French 'free media' network presents itself as an informal and voluntary interest group, in which media issues (criticism of the dominant media and promotion of 'free media') occupy a central place in the order of internal legitimacy. It is dominated by "parent fields" (Medvetz 2013), including the journalistic and political fields. Because of the multi-positioning of its representatives, I discovered that their heretical legitimation strategies are always dual. It is a question of accumulating a kind of militant capital, incorporated in the form of techniques, of dispositions to act or to intervene on, between or within free and mainstream media,

and convertible within other spaces. It is also about gaining professional capital in the journalistic field. The media activists stress their weakness in the face of traditional media but highlight the symbolic added value they intend to offer in the struggles for media recognition of certain social problems: "we, the free media, are here to talk about what the traditional media do not talk about, to give another vision of society"[2]*. Thus, the network constitutes a space in which certified or uncertified forms of journalistic capital, understood as a specific capital attached to the interests of the world of information professionals, are valued. After relaunching in 2014, however, CPML was characterised by a growing investment in the internal issues of the journalistic field: freedom of information, independence of journalists, professional ethics and labour law as it affects press companies (especially for freelancers). The network therefore functions as a small symbolic bank responsible for controlling, strengthening, redistributing or even converting the reputational capital of its members.*

Simon: (Dis)positional strains are also visible in the case of a task which is new to journalism: online discussion management. Moderation or administration of readers' comments can be viewed as front-line professional knowledge work. Admins' technologically-inscribed role is that of adjudicator, but the role they often actually performed was that of readers' advocate. To do this, they adapted or prolonged their work routines and left the admin interface to obtain extra information necessary to contextualise readers' comments (e.g., by following links in the discussion), which sometimes meant trying to overcome a social distance they perceived between themselves and the contributors whose comments they had to adjudicate. When front-line professionals' contact with 'human complexity' is so insistent that inferential reasoning becomes an everyday necessity (Abbott 1981), social class position is something the professional has to be able to treat reflexively—and to routinise this reflexivity.

Johana: A (dis)positional factor that plays a strong role in crisis reporting is gender. Previous research says that female crisis reporters face increased and specific risks—sexual harassment, verbal threats, abduction, rape, kidnapping and forced marriage (Høiby and Ottosen 2015, p. 66)—especially when covering local conflicts. Another structural strain in crisis reporting was the unemployment rate in the crisis reporters' country of origin, which could result in extreme forms of precarity, because freelance crisis reporters often cannot afford proper equipment, a fixer or insurance (which is vital in some areas). For example, some Spanish journalists (Spain has the second highest unemployment rate in the EU—officially 15.2 percent in Summer 2018) faced different forms of precarity than, say, their Danish colleagues. Young Spanish reporters often had little choice but to start as freelancers. Later, if they did well, they could get a regular salaried job. However, doing well while facing the risks of freelancing is much more difficult than doing well in a media company:

> *because to cover news in a conflict is very expensive, insurance and everything. And when I was a freelancer, I couldn't . . . I have to say I didn't cover things in a proper way, sometimes. Because . . . for example, I didn't have the vest. Or I didn't have the helmet. (Ines, a Spanish Middle East reporter)*

4.2. Journalists' Tasks and Skills: Mandate vs. Licence

Most professions, most of the time, experience a discrepancy between mandate and licence, that is between their autonomous definitional power and their external legitimacy (Hughes 1958, pp. 78–87). In the case of journalism, we typically consider this phenomenon in relation to public and political acceptance of journalism's historically evolved jurisdiction—consent for the democratic 'services' journalism claims to fulfil on behalf of society such as its agenda-setting and watchdog roles. But tensions arising *in the workplace itself* between professional ideals and organisational or material conditions of production can also provide a source of status strain, made manifest in the incoherence of tasks journalists are asked to perform. I asked my colleagues and myself to describe the 'task bundles' observed in our case studies (what tasks go together, how compatible are the skills they demand, how much or little dignity they are accorded), and comment on the extent to which incoherence gives rise to tensions between the voicing of jurisdictional claims (journalistic mandate) and what journalists are expected to do according to the legal, organisational or other normative scripts that constrain their autonomy (journalistic

licence). The notion of *edge* here adopts a practical as well as a symbolic meaning, denoting a measure of compatibility and a threshold of acceptability regarding the integration of different components of the labour process.

Simon: Online discussion administration in the mainstream Slovak medium I studied was inserted within several different task bundles between 2004 and 2015: initially tagged onto a technical worker's remit because he knew the website and it fitted with his pattern of shift-work, subsequently out-sourced to a trusted segment of the 'community' (recruiting admins among the newspaper's bloggers), it was only incorporated into a journalistic portfolio around 2010 (and only formally added to job descriptions in 2015). Then it was bundled with a new web-editor role—adjusting articles by other journalists for the website, headline-writing, regular revision of the hierarchy of stories on the front-page, and monitoring audience figures. Even if there are synergies between the two sets of tasks (web-editors have a bird's eye view of the newspaper website and therefore may have a good feel for where problematic discussions will occur), this solution also corresponds to what Abbott (1988, p. 126) calls career-based task degradation—assigning 'dirty work' to novices before they graduated to more 'dignified' work (or left the organisation and in some cases the profession). This is a common way for professions to keep control of undignified tasks on their margins but which they still regard as important because they affect the inputs to core professional work and the public image of the profession. Yet they are not areas in which journalists can professionally excel and be seen to excel[3].

Benjamin: The media activist role (given its position on the edge of the journalistic field) has a tendency to produce heterogeneous, shifting task bundles that combine journalistic activities with activities that would usually be regarded as non-journalistic, such as media education in schools, participation in political protests and activist events, financial and organisational management, or direct negotiation with representatives of national and local public authorities for the legal recognition of free media and the distribution of state subsidies. The degree of heterogeneity and instability varies according to the organisation's size, its position toward the journalistic field and the social properties of its practitioners—the extreme case being the smallest, most 'amateurish' enterprises: with little scope for any meaningful division of labour in media produced by one or two individuals with no specialised or certified training in journalism, writing, editing, production, marketing and other tasks are performed by the same people. Even in larger organisations, however, 'non-journalistic' tasks were not necessarily regarded as less important than 'journalistic' ones by my respondents.

Johana: Crisis reporters' task bundle was more consolidated than in the other two cases (there are well-known manuals for crisis reporting), but one of its most essential aspects—the practice of emotional management—is absent from these rulebooks, and it is this that defines their position 'on the edge' (of something). My respondents' points of view diverged when it came to the legitimacy of emotion in news:

"We are trying to be very neutral, like water." (Carl)

"With the right dose of emotion, you add to your credibility." (Sven)

"Emotion is one of the facts." (Lotte)

These discrepancies show how moderating and mitigating emotional experience face to face with others' suffering is a constant test of compatibility with legitimate journalistic standards, against which only some journalists, in some circumstances, were prepared to advance alternative mandate claims. However, they also show that the standards (of emotional management) are far from stabilised and highly individual: Carl and Lotte who expressed opposite ideas about emotions in journalism were colleagues at VRT, a Belgian public service broadcaster.

4.3. Emotions in Journalistic Work

The third *edge* of the journalistic field where professional practice challenges the mainstream institutionalised expectations, is journalists' emotions. Leaving aside the various new journalisms (such as literary journalism, journalism of attachment or narrative journalism), emotions were traditionally viewed as a factor compromising professional journalism and having little room within the traditional positivist/objectivist professional ideology

(Deuze 2005). While emotional expressions are present even in the most recognised journalistic pieces, they highlight journalists' sources' emotional states (see Wahl-Jorgensen 2013). Journalists' own emotions are the Other of journalistic professional ideology and their suppression, denial or management (Hochschild 1983) constitute not only the *edge* of professional journalism, but also inner boundaries of the profession. The *edge* here describes a line between so-called serious—objective, detached, impersonal—journalism and things outside the realm of the journalistic professional ideology such as yellow journalism, activism or personal life. Importantly, this *edge* co-defines professional journalism, acting as its constitutive Other.

When journalists (seek to) take an active role in shaping politics and society, when they perform 'impure' professional work (Abbott 1981) at the journalistic equivalent of the front line, or when they go through emotionally demanding situations that include witnessing others' suffering and facing threats, the still dominant notion of detachment, neutrality, and impartiality becomes more sensitive: either seemingly more irrelevant, counterproductive and unfeasible, or conversely, more pressing. Therefore, I asked my colleagues and myself to describe the emotional labour that our studied actors performed.

Johana: My study made me realise the importance of emotional labour in newswork, focused on crisis reporters. Crisis reporters perform very complex emotional management. The often unexpected and surprising negative events that, on one hand, enliven reporters' everyday work routine and resolve the problem of what to write about, on the other hand also trigger strong emotions or even shock. Exposure to graphic violence, be it direct or vicarious, to suffering of the unfortunate and to depressing stories typically brings about feelings of sadness, indignation, pity, anger, fear, stress, tension, compassion, horror and existential tiredness. These emotional states make the paradox of acting and observing that stems from the professional ideal of positivist objectivity more pressing. Crisis reporters deal with this paradox by postponing or suppressing (controlling) one's emotions and memories (see below); by weighing the extent to which they include/exclude emotions from reports and news; and by developing specific individual coping mechanisms such as writing fiction, running or another physical exercise, substance (alcohol) abuse, avoidance of potentially distressing tasks, use of black humour, cynicism, focusing on the technical/practical/mechanical aspects of work, or 'doing the job' (Kotišová 2019; Pedelty 1995). As Hopper and Huxford (2015, p. 37) observed, "there was a lot of truth 'in the old stereotype of the reporter who heads straight to the bar at the end of the day'".

Simon: Similarly—but for slightly different reasons—online discussion admins are expected to minimise their emotional engagement. When I asked the deputy editor-in-chief at SME what qualities made for a good administrator, the journalist said that they should not enjoy reading the discussions, because enjoyment tends to provoke involvement, which he firmly believed was out of keeping with dispassionate judgment and effective arbitration. The norm not to engage in discussion—to be an observer and not a protagonist—established itself only progressively, however. The first generation of discussion admins acted more like moderators than admins, frequently engaging in the discussion to justify decisions and stimulate conversation, but as a result often getting into extended and sometimes emotional exchanges with contributors:

> *. . . as soon as you start to discuss with 'them', you give them an easy target: I became the lightning rod for their attacks. (SME admin from the mid-2000s)*

The norm to only observe then became naturalised among the discussion admins, both protecting them from discussants' attacks and (ostensibly) lending impartiality to their judgements. Thus, their emotions were, somewhat paradoxically, triggered by ruptures of their predominantly classificatory professional routines and felt when their professional 'practical sense' let them down. In these moments, the admins embodied or enacted their emotions rather than explicitly mentioning them: during ethnographic observation I perceived "tangible disorientation" and watched admins "visibly unsettled" (observation diary). Their emotional engagement became physically detectable. Consequently, the more experienced admins' professional competences included knowing how to switch between moments of strong and weak detachment, the knack being to know when to turn detachment on or off, up or down.

Benjamin: Media activists do not need to police their emotions as much. In their meta-journalistic discourses, they are not implicitly or explicitly expected to keep their emotions to themselves, stay 'neutral' or 'objective'. Their emotional 'auto-licence' is shaped by their close contact with activists, who generally express an ethos of engagement (subjectivity, ideology, opinion). However, media activists must pay a price for their heretical strategy of reappropriation of betrayed professional values by maintaining institutional rites that reinforce the professional myth of journalistic distance. For example, the daily online ecologist newspaper Reporterre is presented as "impartial and non-partisan" even as it "empathises with the ecologist, alterglobalisation, and alternative movements"[4]. Reporterre wants to be recognised as both consisting of good professionals and engaged in environmental issues, through the editorial line. Importantly, the commitment of media activists to the media is not reducible to a job. Their professional engagement can be a total, existential experience, "a way of life" (interview with a member of Sideways team). Their private and professional lives become indistinguishable: on the one hand, their private lives are entirely dedicated to their projects, on the other hand, the peer community gives birth to emotionally strong relationships: "the meetings, explains one of them, were marked with frank laughter which cemented the group"[5].

5. Discussion

We begin our discussion by responding to the three research questions presented in Section 3.2, which organised our dialogue and the presentation of results in Section 4. On the question of how (dis)positional strains and forces external to the journalistic field become refracted in journalists' definition of professionalism and daily interactions, the three case studies show the heuristic interest of analysing status strains in a field by focusing on dominated positions, new practices and unusual experiences. Benjamin's study describes a process of field scissiparity. It examines, on the one hand, strategies for redeeming militant capital within the journalistic field and journalistic capital within the militant field. The 'free media' being at the 'bottom left' of the journalistic field (Benson 1999, p. 466), close to its professional and politicised poles, journalistic and militant capital are highly valued. It highlights, on the other hand, a strategy of field division through which media activists confront the dominant agents with the journalistic values in the name of which they dominate but which, in their view, they dishonour. Simon's study underlines how professional strategies are often adapted to compensate for structural constraints (here a class-based disconnect between journalists and their audience) by inventing work routines that extend one's contact with unfamiliar regions of social fields in order to accrue external legitimacy face-to-face with a clientèle. Yet it would be difficult to speak of discussion administration as a sub-field of journalism striving for internal legitimacy, nor even as the object of competition from other fields (although non-journalists have in the past been employed by SME to carry it out): an *edge* in the sense of an in-between zone, it is hardly a trading zone for capital reconversion in either direction[6]. Johana's case illustrates that the gender and national relations of domination in crisis reporting reflect themselves in the variety and intensity of risks, dangers and precarity that crisis reporters face.

Our second research question explored how the incoherence of task bundles can produce professional status strain through the generation of mandate–licence incongruence. One commonality stood out: the licence for any profession is partly codified in scripts, from job descriptions to organisational codes of practice to legal codices. Yet crisis reporters, media activists and online discussion administrators all perform work that is to a large extent unscripted, or which bears a tendency to defeat the scripts available to them. Weak codification could indicate a dynamic situation in which the ecology of a professional subdomain is undergoing reconfiguration. Moreover, it makes it difficult for actors to reflect critically on professional task incoherence, since without a definition of what they are licensed to do—what 'should be', institutionally speaking—it is difficult to criticise what 'is' (Boltanski 2011, pp. 85–86).

When we look closer, however, each case involves a *specific* type of mandate–licence incongruence. French media activists face a restrictive licence in the legal arena (alterna-

tive media are *de jure* 'unlicensed' and their employees or members are rarely officially regarded as journalists). Some actors respond to this by campaigning for admission to the profession and recognition as journalists; others claim a distinction and effectively embrace amateurism as a status from which it is possible, maybe even desirable, to carry out the engaged journalism they want to do. Crisis reporters also face a restrictive licence, but the restrictions are reproduced in the workplace rather than the legal arena (emotional reporting is *de facto* 'unlicensed', since crisis reporting is not distinguished from general news reporting in organisational training, instruction and divisions of labour). Some actors strive to conform to the journalistic objectivity norm, whereas others, by using emotions in their reports, advance a practical claim to distinct professional status and the conditions of work that would support this distinction. Discussion admins represent the one group facing not a restrictive but an expansive licence, in both the legal and workplace arenas (discussion administration is legally licensed, as media organisations bear a legal duty to police their discussion spaces, and organisationally licensed since the organisation was committed to providing a safe space for reader participation). Yet journalists who perform the job, seeking above all to demonstrate categorial incumbency, tend to exclude it—as 'impure' work—from their remit *as journalists*. Where (some) media activists and crisis reporters attempt to resolve task incoherence by claiming distinction, discussion administrators claim sameness.

Turning to the third research question—the kinds of emotional labour employed at the boundaries of the profession—the emotional labour of crisis reporters and online discussion administrators was based on strong reduction or control of emotional engagement. Both crisis reporters and online discussion administrators tended to be observers and not protagonists—partly since they believed that being a protagonist would transgress proper journalistic behaviour, partly because "switching off" their emotions worked as a coping mechanism and helped them to maintain their emotional wellbeing or sanity. In this sense, Johana's and Simon's respondents were very different from the population studied by Benjamin who could more easily be openly emotionally engaged. Media activists are closer to the recent trend towards the acknowledgement of the role and valid place of emotions in journalistic work (Kotišová 2019) that had been until recently specific to particular journalistic beats such as cultural or lifestyle journalists (Kotišová 2020).

The emotional labour that all sub-groups of journalists perform—and, importantly, that all the *edgy* situations require—allows diverse kinds of journalists to be detached or engage *precisely to the extent* which is productive or helpful in their subfield. The variety of emotional labour shows that new entrants to the field, journalists performing new tasks firmly linked to the digital environment, and journalists experiencing unusual attachments do not cope by using the traditional *norm* of objectivity and detachment, but redefine objectivity as context-sensitive *practice* (Carpentier and Trioen 2010) to be adjusted to the particular situation.

Studying journalism's *edges* can advance knowledge in both the sociology of journalism and the sociology of professions. Studying what professionals are not *expected* to carry out and yet sometimes carry out (either by transgressing or exceeding their socially sanctioned licence to operate), situations where boundaries between journalists and other professionals, journalists and their audiences, and journalists and their sources becomes paper thin and at times blurred, provide examples of situations where a changing, increasingly networked (Deuze and Witschge 2018) field absorbs or refuses entry to non-traditional participants, practices, and forms of professionalism (Carlson and Lewis 2015). Moreover, it also illustrates the dynamics of specific capitals—the accumulation, conversion and reinvestment of originally extra-professional capital within the professional field and vice versa. From another perspective, investigating points of friction, exchanges zones, transversal and transitory spaces shows the *process* by which professional capital becomes diffused and settles in professionals' political awareness and empathy, their ability to handle emotionally difficult situations, to manage awkward task bundles, to cultivate relations and mitigate conflicts.

The example of multiskilling provides a useful point of comparison and distinction. According to the research reviewed above, journalists experience multiskilling ambiguously as deskilling (in certain contexts or aspects of their professional lives) and as enskilling (in others). This is a manifestation of professional status strain (Abbott 1981) at the level of competence, linked to task innovation. Our second research question addressed these dimensions of professional life. The notion of *edge*, however, extends beyond questions of competence to questions of authority and duty, shedding light on situations where being a journalist as defined by dominant and legitimate occupational norms is not always self-evident and status strain might be manifest not only in the (mis)match between skills and tasks, but as a sense of being unable, ill-equipped or uncertain how to carry out a *devoir professionnel*—the justified and justifiable social obligations imposed on (and by) members of a professional group.

One of our abiding concerns was not to take for granted—and thus not to contribute unwittingly to the reproduction of—the *principles of division* of the professional field, nor its 'embedding' in a range of other social worlds in which individuals are dispositionally constituted (Pichonnaz and Toffel 2018). We therefore focused on the conversion or convertibility of external forms of capital (legitimacies, resources and experience) into forms redeemable and tradeable in a professional field or space at points of friction or exchange zones, in transitory and transversal spaces, or during non-linear career trajectories (Smith 2015). Forces external to the journalistic field are (made) present in each case but are refracted differently in each specific local configuration, and these refractions are instructive. In the case of Slovak discussion administrators, they are all but blocked by defensive 'professionalisation'; among French media-activists they are used to structure an alternative, heteronomous space for engaged journalism; while they are commodified when the crisis reporters' emotional labour is subordinated to professional detachment norms. Studying the dynamics of these reconversion processes helps reimagine professional jurisdictions not just as the institutional expression of what Sarfatti Larson baptised *'professional projects'*—the ongoing projects in which social actors "attempt to translate one order of scarce resources (special knowledge and skills) into another ("social and economic rewards" (Sarfatti Larson 1977, p. xvii))—but also as spaces for counter-projects that resemble *'project ecologies'*: forms of knowing that distribute knowledge, responsibility and accountability "across professional domains and across organizational boundaries" (Grabher 2002, p. 1921).

The result is often a disparity between internal and external legitimacy, as when the public accords front-line professionals greater prestige than it accords their backroom colleagues, often carrying out 'purer' but less visible forms of work (Abbott 1981, p. 830). Such is the case for investigative journalists, for example—the epitome of good journalism in the eyes of many readers and viewers but a very small occupational subgroup sometimes viewed with suspicion by their peers (Marchetti 2000)—as well as for sports journalists, for whom a 'sporting habitus' is an asset 'externally' but can be a barrier to recognition as a good journalist (Dargelos and Marchetti 2000). This tension, however, creates opportunities for "new entrants [. . . who] may destabilise the definition of the legitimate form of capital" (Schoch and Ohl 2021, p. 267) by claiming possession of a purer version of journalistic capital than the hybrid form that is traditionally tradeable in certain sub-fields[7]. Disparity between internal and external legitimacy was notably present in Benjamin's study of media activists, but it also haunts the situations experienced by crisis reporters and discussion administrators. The latter, for example, made *anticipatory* internal legitimacy claims in order to resist long-term delegation of undesirable tasks by claiming a right to progress to more desirable tasks perceived as appropriate to their journalistic training and self-identity. Disparity between internal and external legitimacy is thus linked to field position in a recursive fashion, since position-takings are the product of complex alignments between positions for or against the doxa at sub-field level, positions for or against the doxa at field level and actors' performed or presupposed dispositions. Hence 'multi-positioning' and the strategies of professional legitimisation to which it gives rise are not limited to overtly 'alternative' sectors of the media where *external* forms of capital

are recognised, nor to situations where multiskilling has been promoted or enforced as an organisational policy, generating new *endemic* forms of capital; they constitute the general condition of a profession characterised by weak field autonomy but relatively strong sub-field distinctions. Under these conditions, actors can make claims for recognition either in the name of the authority of norms that prevail in a sub-field or in the name of contrasting norms that prevail in a parent field *or* in the name of those belonging to an adjacent (non-journalistic) field. The evolution of professional norms and values depends on the dynamic interplay of these position-takings. In other words, while the idea of closure (social, symbolic and legal) retains an important place in the ethos of most professions (Harrits 2014), contemporary journalism shows the limits of this neo-Weberian approach to professionalism, without forcing us to abandon a conception grounded in an understanding of how status is attributed, and status differences are reproduced via the circulation of different forms of capital (Svensson 2015). Studying current trends in journalists' work thus enriches the sociological analysis of professions understood as systems of overlapping jurisdictions relating to the legitimate control of specific positions and particular kinds of socially-valued work.

Finally, we wish to say a few words regarding the defamiliarising dialogical method used to retrospectively integrate our three studies and their datasets. The integration was hardly spontaneous owing to our different approaches, but the rounds of questioning–answering we absolved were helpful precisely because they revealed theoretical and methodological blind spots. Some questions, central in one study, drew blanks from one or both of the others and had to be excluded from the comparative analysis presented here. The process had its frustrations—sometimes resembling the old joke about a traveller who asks a local for directions and gets the response: "well, if you're trying to get there, I wouldn't start from here". It acted as a rigorous test of the strength and limitations of specific research designs and a reminder that datasets come pre-formatted. A limitation of our method is that we did not re-interrogate *each other's* datasets. This would have been more time-consuming, and while it would have doubtlessly prompted fresh interpretations, it would not have overcome the (more significant) blind spots that become locked into a research project once basic theoretical and methodological choices have been established, interviews and observation conducted, etc. It nonetheless demonstrated the primacy of secondary things in a second sense: that datasets can offer insights which their authors had not anticipated when re-interrogated from the perspective of a critical friend in a collaborative dialogue around a shared 'boundary object' (Star and Griesemer 1989)—in this case the boundary or *edge* of the journalistic field.

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Notes

1 Naturally, reinterpretation had its limits: since our research programmes had been directed by our different theoretical biases, we sometimes found that we lacked the necessary data (quantitative or qualitative, situational or historical) to properly address questions posed from alternative perspectives.

2 Avalable online: http://medias-libres.org/, accessed on 1 March 2022.

3 The most highly-valued task was writing, even though web-editors do very little original writing.

4 Avalable online: https://reporterre.net/Qui-sommes-nous-8, accessed on 1 March 2022.

5 Interview, 13 November 2014, an activist from *A contre-courant syndical et politique*.

6 This was apparent from an examination of the CVs of current and former admins: without exception they omitted to mention this area of work experience, judging that it was not a competence that future employers would accord any value to.

7 In a Swiss ethnographic study Schoch and Ohl (2021) show how the absorption of more women into sports journalism, often trained in general news journalism, has led to a situation where they mobilise field-internal forms of capital in struggles for recognition with male journalists who look to the world of sport for external legitimisation.

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