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### What journalism becomes

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## Chapter 12 What Journalism Becomes – Mark Deuze & Tamara Witschge

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### 1. Introduction

Journalism worldwide is in a process of becoming a different kind of profession. Once organized in formal institutions, where contracted laborers would produce content under informal yet highly structured working conditions, today the lived experience of professional journalists is much more precarious, fragmented, and networked. At the heart of the project of understanding contemporary journalism as a profession and the way it functions in society must be a conceptualization of journalism beyond its formerly distinct and boundaried organization of newswork.

The post-industrialisation of journalism (Anderson, Bell and Shirky, 2013) is part of a trend benchmarked by the creative industries more generally: a gradual shift from centralized and hierarchical modes of industrial production to what Castells (2010) labels a network enterprise form of production. The networked form of enterprise is also at work in journalism, as the International Federation of Journalists and the International Labour Organization already noted in a 2006 survey among journalism unions and associations in 38 countries from all continents. The report signaled the rapid rise of so-called ‘atypical’ work in the media, documenting that close to one-third of journalists worldwide work in anything but secure, permanent or otherwise contracted conditions. Since then, freelance journalism, independent news entrepreneurship, and casualization of labor have become even more paramount, particularly among younger reporters and newcomers in the field (as well as for more senior journalists affected by lay-offs and downsizing so common across the news industry; see Mosco, 2009; Deuze, 2014).

Today’s post-industrial journalism can be seen as constituting and resulting from what is called ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000) where individual practices are

part of a profoundly precarious context governed by a *permanently impermanent* industry (where continuous reorganizations, managerial reshuffling, buyouts, layoffs, and innovations are the norm), working environment (where the place you work and the people you work with are constantly changing), and career (where one's job-hopping trajectory is unpredictable to say the least). In order for journalism to adapt, its practitioners have been pushed to develop new tactics, a new self-conception, and new organizational structures – while older structures, routines and definitions (of news values) persist.

In this chapter, we consider how the post-industrial mode of journalism asks for new ways of conceptualizing and researching the lived experience of journalists. We argue that we need their particularly personal perspective to rethink journalism as an ensemble of people 'committing acts of journalism' (Stearns, 2013) beyond processes of 'routinizing the unexpected' (Tuchman, 1973) in news institutions large and small. In this contribution, we chart the permanent state of flux of journalism, and the developments that fundamentally challenge journalism theory and research. Though much has been done already to move away from the rather stable and solid notions of what journalism is, as a field we still struggle to do justice to and capture the complexity and processes of continuous change experienced by working journalists and the organizations that use their labor. Ultimately, we propose a distinct perspective on journalism that views it as a moving object, something that *becomes*, rather than *is*.

## **2. Enter the journalist**

Our central argument in this chapter is that we need to theorize contemporary journalism as a rather complex and evolving ensemble of attitudes and practices of (groups or teams of) individuals involving both professional journalists as well as practitioners from related fields such as coders, programmers, designers, and marketers (Deuze, 2008; Lewis & Usher, 2014). By way of context, we first discuss four trends transpiring in journalism signaling a shift away from the

conceptualization of journalism as a more or less stable and consensual field. We highlight the following trends: a concurrent reorganization of working environments; the fragmentation of newswork the emergence of a redactional society; and the ubiquity of media-making technologies. These trends, each in their own way, point to a more individual, rather than institutional, perspective of the journalist and a need to re-conceptualize the field.

First, what Sennett (2006) calls the 'culture of the new capitalism' draws our attention to emphasis on individualized responsibilities placed in the reorganization of working and being at work. Whether contracted or independent, media workers are increasingly supposed to embrace and embody an 'enterprising' mindset, where every individual becomes a self-directed and self-disciplining brand or company (Storey, Salaman and Platman, 2005). The journalist as an enterprising self reconstitutes "workers as more adaptable, flexible, and willing to move between activities and assignments and to take responsibility for their own actions and their successes and failures" (Storey, Salaman and Platman, 2005: 1036). Journalism has been no exception to the trend of labor individualization (Lowrey and Anderson, 2005). However, shifting the notion of enterprise – with its connotations of efficiency, productivity, empowerment and autonomy – from the company to the individual, uproots the professional identity of workers. Gall (2000) for example has noted how the introduction of personalized contracts, though allowing individual journalists some freedom to negotiate their own terms and conditions of employment, in fact resulted in a deterioration of the working conditions of journalists: lower wages, less job security, and more contingent labor relationships (variable hours, job rotation, and flextime).

Second, the production of news increasingly takes place both within and outside of professional news organizations, as well as within and across multiple media forms and formats. This fragmentation of newswork is furthermore facilitated by practices of outsourcing, subcontracting, and offshoring, paramount in broadcasting (Ryan, 2009) as well as print media – such as documented by the World Association of

Newspapers in its ongoing series of 'Shaping the Future' reports.<sup>1</sup> The practice of such functional flexibility in the workforce is common throughout the news industry. Functional flexibility relates to the division of the workforce in a multi-skilled core and a large periphery of semi-affiliated professionals. The multi-skilled core consists of a few professionals enjoying greater job security and career development who perform many different tasks throughout the organization. The peripheral group – consisting of the majority of newswriters today - tend to be temporarily employed in subcontracted or outsourced arrangements, and consists mainly of independent individual contractors working within a dynamic and often informally governed 'project ecology' (Grabher, 2002) of people both inside and outside news institutions.

Third, on a more abstract level, in today's advanced communicational democracies, society can be conceptualized as 'redactional' (Hartley, 2000). A redactional society is one where editorial practices are required for anyone's survival in the digital age, and therefore cannot be considered to be exclusive to a particular professional group such as journalists employed at news organizations. Traditionally, survival in the information age was seen as dependent on being an 'informational' as well as informed citizen (Schudson 1995): next to being saturated in information, citizens needed to have "a point of view and preferences with which to make sense of it" (ibid: 27). In redactional societies, simply having access to and making sense of information is not enough and what was originally deemed as journalistic skills and competences are required for all citizens: they need to know how to gather and process vast amounts of information, weigh and sift the information at hand, and be able to do something effectively and creatively with that information (Gauntlett 2011). As such, in this digital era everyone, at some point, commits acts of 'journalism' (Stearns 2013: 2), using what are deemed journalistic techniques and bearing the responsibility for its consequences.

The last trend that frames newswork in terms of the individual is the pervasive and ubiquitous role that (ever-developing) technologies play in the changing nature of

journalistic work and organization. Today's printing press is the desktop or laptop personal computer equipped with broadband internet access and standard outfitted with easy-to-use publishing tools, open source software applications, and converged hardware (camera, microphone, keyboard). These technologies have resulted in converged journalism within newsrooms as well as facilitating the production of all aspects of journalism outside of newsrooms. This features centrally the multi-skilled journalist who performs a greater variety of tasks –including those that were traditionally performed by others (whether designers, marketers, publishers or editors) (Lee-Wright and Phillips, 2012).

## **2. Structures beyond the individual**

In the precarious individualized context of contemporary journalism it is not stretching too far to signal a gradual de-professionalization process (Witschge & Nygren 2009) taking place, as the profession is under tremendous pressures due to a variety of factors, such as: market demands and financial expectations; a precarious and atypical division of labor which fragments the profession; an ongoing erosion of its values and practices through the intervention of technology (including the advent of algorithms, drones, robotics and software to select, organize, report and publish the news); an altogether unstable and fluctuating trust in the public sector generally (Van de Walle, Van Roosbroek and Bouckaert, 2008), and a concomitant decline of trust in journalism specifically (McNair, 2003).

At the same time traditional professional standards and norms can still be found throughout the industry, and we see among most journalists regardless of contractual arrangement an inherent drive to do the job well - a commitment to quality which suggest a dedication to the profession and the 'craft' that is journalism (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Willnat, Weaver & Choi, 2013; Witschge, 2013). This furthermore suggests how intrinsic values continue to drive practices in the field, both within and outside of the newsroom. The drive to do the job well is not exclusively connected to the organizational arrangement of newswork, but rather lies at the individual, personal level that indicates a commitment beyond the

institution (Russo, 1998). To gain insight into the interaction between professional norms and self-understanding of journalists in an age of de-professionalization and precarity, journalism needs to be understood beyond its traditional institutional and organizational boundaries. What journalism is and what being a journalist means in both ideological and praxeological terms, are not dependent anymore on work done inside institutions.

Taking up the call to move beyond newsroom-centricity (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2009) or to 'blow up' the newsroom (Anderson, 2011), we do not suggest that the profession and its attendant organizations do not play a role any longer. We do argue that one does not necessarily have to be a salaried employee of a news organization in order to be part of the journalism system (in fact, most working journalists today do not enjoy such employment anymore). It rather depends on one's participation in communicating the foundational elements (the building blocks) of that system. Understanding journalism in this way, Scholl and Weischenberg propose a model for the systematic identification of factors that constitute a journalism system (1998: 21-2). They identify different levels of analysis through which we can access what journalism is, ranging from macro to micro levels: systems, institutions, messages and actors. Adding social and belief systems as a fifth factor to Weischenberg's 'onion-model' (1992), Shoemaker and Reese (2014) summarize this approach as a hierarchy-of-influences model of media work and include the following dimensions:

- Social systems: in which content is influenced by the social systems or ideologies of societies, generally assumed to be more or less coherent belief systems particular to dominant groups. Within journalism as a profession, this relates to its occupational ideology consensually shared by journalists which allows them to self-organize and maintain their discipline as a profession;
- Social institutional influences on newswork: where content is influenced by such factors as markets, audiences, advertisers, and interest groups, referring to the power exerted on (and, in some instances, over) journalists by a variety of institutions and actors in society, including the government, sources, clients,

interest groups, audiences, employers, and other media organizations (such as advertising, public relations, and marketing communications).

- The organizational level: The goals and policies of individuals as part of one or more larger social structures (such as news organizations, client companies and networks) and how power is exercised within such structures.
- Everyday routines in newswork: The constraining and enabling influences of work practices in the particular context of what Ulrich Beck (2000) called the 'brave new world' of work. Routines are patterned practices that organize how media professionals perceive and function within the social world of (competitor-) colleagues and their professional group as a whole.
- The individual level of newsworkers: The attitudes, training, and background of the journalist impact the various ways in which she or he participates (and shapes) the process of journalism.

We below explore how, on each of the above levels, developments are at work that significantly disrupt the way we can conceptualize journalism.

### **3. Understanding Journalism as Individuals and Institutions in their Context**

In the current media environment, we need an understanding of not only how disruption functions at each level of influence on the work journalists do, but also – and perhaps most importantly - how journalists as individuals and groups enact agency within this system. Where the institution was once dominant in organizing journalistic work and facilitating (and constraining) communication about journalism, this is no longer sufficient to understand journalism as it is practiced in so many new places by so many more actors under such widely differing circumstances. We set the investigation of journalism in the context of what Susan Keith (2011) calls the 'media milieu' within which journalists work, which, if anything, has to be understood as an industry in transition – a post-industry indeed.



Journalism theory has to be benchmarked by a critical assessment of the role, work and milieu of individual journalists, while recognizing the object of study – journalism – as dynamic: requiring an ontology of ‘becoming’ rather than of ‘being’ (Chia, 1995). With Robert Chia, we propose a perspective on journalism that privileges ‘reality as a processual, heterogeneous and emergent configuration of relations’ (ibid, 594). We discuss below how on each of the above identified levels of analysis –social systems; social institutions; organizations; routines; and individual journalists– the changes and challenges in the field of journalism asks for specific considerations in our methodology and theory.

### 5.1 *Social system*

At the level of the social system, we need to critically examine journalists’ occupational ideology, that is the conceptualization of their profession and role that is consensually shared by journalists, allowing them to self-organize and maintain their discipline as a profession without formal boundaries. In journalism’s self-understanding as well as societies’ conceptualization of the profession, journalism’s function in society is very much connected to its importance to democracy, which has led to a highly consensual understanding of journalism (Hallin 1992). Scholars and journalists alike often use a normative notion of journalism as providing the ‘social cement’ of democracies as a point of departure in their work (Joseph, 2013).

Even though the professional context of contemporary journalism and the state of the news industry are profoundly precarious, the consensual definition and understanding of journalism prevails, affecting our scholarly capacity to analyze and critique journalism (Zelizer, 2013). In this state of flux, it is important to consider the way in which journalism studies views journalism’s role in society and democracy, and particularly whether this is still apt. A key to reorienting journalism studies to the rapidly changing human condition may be found in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century (and onwards) project of re-theorizing modernity itself, benchmarked by the suggestion that modernity has entered a new phase, phrased as a second, reflexive, network, or liquid modernity. Bauman’s work on all aspects of life in liquid

modern times warrants specific attention. Bauman defines a liquid modern society as “a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines. Liquidity of life, and that of society, feed and reinvigorate each other” (2005: 1).

If we consider Bauman’s understanding of modernity, it is important to note that journalism is not only taking place in, but also helps constitute this ‘liquid modern society’, where uncertainty, flux, change, conflict, and revolution are the permanent conditions of everyday life. In this view, newswork does not only contribute to, but also is susceptible to the qualities of liquid life. In this context, work has a generally temporary character, experienced as a distinct break from the routine of traditional work-life (premised on long-term, open-ended contracts with a single employer who shares responsibilities such as social benefits and healthcare). The atypical nature of newswork directly feeds into the lived experience of liquid modernity in terms of its structural condition of temporariness.

Media, and news media play an important role in exposing and amplifying this liquid state of modernity. The speed and multitudes of this social system gains form in such phenomena such as 24/7 news, online happening anywhere at anytime, covered by millions of social media users, live blogging news organizations, and a host of freelance roaming correspondents. At the same time, we can identify counter movements, such as the emergence of ‘slow’ news (Le Masurier, 2015), new genres of long-form journalism (such as longreads on tablet PCs) and transmedia journalism (Moloney, 2012), and numerous news startups around the world advocating a type of journalism that is based on quality and depth rather than speed or breaking news (such as *De Correspondent* in The Netherlands, *The Conversation* in Australia and elsewhere, and *Mediapart* in France). In this sense we see that journalism is both part of and constituting the social context: both the acceleration and slowing down of news production are symptoms of and response to a profession in liquid modern times.

Such developments do not take place in a vacuum, and we need to understand journalism as product of as well as response to its environment. Given its central role in society many actors try to exert influence on journalistic reporting (McQuail, 2013) and given the economic and market forces at hand, journalism is always under pressure. As self-proclaimed gatekeepers, journalists rely on their occupational ideology and news culture as a defense against such actors and forces. At the same time, elements of this ideology are used to usher in disruptive innovation and transformation in the field. Through definitional debates, which happen not just at the level of the profession, but also, very much so, at the level of public discourse on journalism, and through the processes of legitimizing or excluding particular participants in these discussions, journalists have established (largely informal) barriers of entry to the profession.

In interaction with the actors surrounding journalism, whether it is the public, sources or political and economic powers, five ideal-typical values give legitimacy and credibility to what journalists do: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics (Deuze, 2005). In this discourse, journalists provide a public service as watchdogs or newshounds, active collectors and disseminators of information. They argue that what sets them apart is their strive to be impartial, neutral, objective, fair, and (thus) credible. They report the need to be autonomous, free, and independent to do their work effectively. Inherent to their concept of news is a sense of immediacy, actuality, and speed. And last, they argue that another identifying feature is that they have a sense of ethics, validity, and legitimacy.

Viewing these, what we can consider 'high modern', values against the accelerated 'liquid modern' context society at large, we can view a clear contrast. This tension comes even more to the fore in current debates about the nature of such age-old values like objectivity, truth, and autonomy. The amplification and acceleration of more or less new news genres, forms, products and services today point toward the fact that the occupational ideology of journalism allows for many different 'journalisms' to flourish.

For journalism studies it is important to understand the challenge posed by the gap between the consistency of the profession's ideology and the proliferation of a diverse range of journalisms, often valorized by ideological claims. Questions of what journalism is are paramount, boundary work is rife throughout the profession and the academe, but who is in and outside of the definition of journalism is by no means uncontested. Each of the definitions is legitimized through ideological stances, furthering what journalism should be, or should do. With such divergent practices grounded in a consensual ideological stance on journalism, journalism seems to encapsulate possibly opposing practices.

The challenge for journalism studies is to understand the ontology of *becoming* in the context of an ideology of *being*: understanding that journalism is not something that 'is', but rather 'becomes' through a diversification of practices and subsequent boundary work. As such it is important to let go of the desire to make claims about 'the' profession, what it is (or what it should be), and what it means to a working journalist, and rather develop a heightened sensitivity toward mapping and articulating divergent practices, definitions as well as ideological interpretations that in turn produce many different *journalisms* on a social systemic level.

## 5.2 *Social institution*

Viewing how journalism is constituted or shaped by institutional factors and actors, we need to consider how the professionalization of journalism to some extent contributed to the difficulties it currently faces when looking for new business models (as an industry as well as to support individual careers). The professional understanding of autonomy shapes its interaction with and resistance to a fundamental reimagining of practice, and particularly of the institutional framework(s) in which such practice takes place. Currently, faced with disruptive challenges on many fronts, the news business requires its workers to increasingly shoulder the responsibility of the company (or companies, in the case of those with

patchwork careers, carrying a portfolio of multiple clients), altering the role of journalists in their institutions. In this context, Witschge and Nygren ask the question whether the development in journalism on an institutional level is indeed “going towards a de-professionalization where journalists become ‘media workers’ or ‘content producers’ in the media companies” (2009: 42).

The traditional conceptualization of journalism as an institution that is beset at all sides by forces trying to exert influence over it, we argue, does not help us understand the current practices of journalism which includes crossmedia and transmedia storytelling, projectized workstyles and portfolio careers, business and editorial convergence, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism, and what Henry Jenkins calls ‘convergence culture’ (2004), where the cultures of production and consumption increasingly converge in new creative processes (in journalism exemplified by trends toward more user-centered design, audience interactivity, and citizen reporting).

Considering the variety of institutions and societal actors that impact journalism production, content and use, we need to acknowledge the broad range of actors involved, disrupting the once considered more or less coherent and contained practice of professional journalism. In the current digital and networked media ecosystem the roles played by different professional disciplines in the making of news – media makers, financial executives, advertising creatives, communication managers, including marketing and sales practitioners – are increasingly intertwined.

In journalism, the roles of content, sales and marketing are converging. Emblematic of this is the emergence of the ‘enterprising professional’ in journalism – from the editors whose job descriptions increasingly include human resource management and policymaking (rather than strictly editorial work) to the budding reporters trying to make a living as ‘entrepreneurial’ journalists (Briggs, 2010).

Entrepreneurialism is a relatively recent phenomenon, and in journalism coincides

with a gradual breakdown of the wall between the commercial and editorial sides of the news organization. The breakdown of the wall separating these two sides is important in understanding what journalism becomes, as it was once deemed fundamental. As Robert Picard (2010) suggests, the building of the wall was core in the process of professionalization of journalism. It was a process that simultaneously separated journalists from business decisions and removed them from any responsibility for the organization's actions and sustainability, and led to journalists generally enjoying editorial autonomy in their work. With the growing prominence of entrepreneurialism as a value for working journalists both within and outside of legacy news organizations, it is safe to assume that on an institutional level, journalism is much more interwoven with a host of other actors, values and priorities than it is generally made out to be (both in terms of its self-perception and in academic conceptualizations of the field). This in turn broadens the conversation about journalism – what it is and what it should be.

These developments force us to rethink journalism as a stable institution amidst other discrete institutions, wherein journalists were either seen as 'cogs in the machine' or, adversely, as active agents resisting change. Instead, it makes more sense to focus on journalism and the work of journalists as praxis, at once conditioned by existing social arrangements and facilitating transformation and emergence. Such a perspective on institutional change "emphasizes agents' ability to artfully mobilize different institutional logics and resources, appropriated from their contradictory institutional environments, to frame and serve their interests" (Seo and Creed, 2002: 240). Through praxis, inside-outside distinctions in newswork become less relevant, as we would be looking at what journalists do and where (and how) journalistic work gets done, and how practitioners give meaning to what they do individually and collectively.

### *5.3 News Organization*

The scholarly understanding of journalism as a bounded institutional practice can be traced to the understanding of journalism as squarely located in the newsroom. The relative stability of the ideal-typical values of journalism's ideology and the consensus about their validity has legitimized the dominant structure of the news industry, which consolidated journalists (and therefore debates on what journalism is) in newsrooms. But today's newsroom is an excellent example of a liquid modern concept: in many ways, it looks exactly like the newsrooms of newspapers and broadcast news organizations looked like mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with the important difference that most newsrooms today are either largely empty (because of mass lay-offs and outsourcing practices), or are transforming into integrated operations where content, sales, marketing and a host of other functions converge.

Besides the newsroom becoming an increasingly fluid object, it is important to note that most of the actual reportorial work gets done elsewhere. With the rise of 'post-industrial' journalism (as embodied in an increasingly distributed workforce consisting of individual entrepreneurial journalists, freelance editorial collectives, and a worldwide emergence of news startups) the 'new' newsroom is fragmented, dispersed, networked and therefore anything but stable. For journalism scholars this means that they need to reconsider their object of study: from an easily located and neatly organized space, to a dispersed, fragmented network of workers, undocumented laborers, citizen volunteers, and anything in between. That this can prove to be a challenge becomes clear when we think of how, throughout history, scholars of journalism and the news have supported the dominance of certain interpretations of (the role of) journalism by focusing on specific organizational arrangements within particular privileged settings. As Karin Wahl-Jorgensen puts it, the 'newsroom-centricity' in journalism studies has meant that:

“Scholars have tended to focus on journalists' culture as it emerges within the limited areas of newsrooms and other centralized sites for news production, usually paying scant attention to places, spaces, practices and people at the margins of this spatially delimited news production universe” (2009: 23).

What determines the outcomes of newswork in its contemporary arrangement must be grounded in a critical realist understanding of the constantly shifting and changing members and memberships of news organizations. Membership, in journalism, is not just determined by being 'in' the newsroom, or standing at the outside (with hopes of getting in). When considering the disruptions and developments in the field at the level of the news organization, it becomes apparent, that this, in the digital age, is not so much a *place* but a *process* that involves networks of people, technologies and spaces. There is a high degree of flux, blurring the in/out boundary of the newsroom and its environment. In fact, the new ways in which newswork is organized asks us to move beyond the binary opposition of inside and outside the newsroom, as this notion become ever more obsolete, and as a concept, may obfuscate rather than illuminate.

#### *5.4 Routines*

Another mechanism of organizing newswork is through everyday routines: patterned practices that organize how media professionals see and operate. These, too, are increasingly challenged and disrupted, impacting on the way in which journalism is practiced. And here, too, do we see an important challenge for journalism studies to come to terms with and get a grip on the nature and impact of the changes. This is far from straightforward, as the scholarly understanding on the professional routines that make up newswork in newsrooms has been consolidated in journalism education where such routines are fixed elements in the coursework for print, broadcast and online sequences.

As such scholarly understanding of the profession feeds straight into the practice of journalism. Cottle (2007: 10) notes how the emphasis on 'organizational functionalism' that still dominates journalism education privileges routines and patterned ways of doing newswork over differentiation and divergence. Though studying the patterned practices that organize how media professionals do their work made sense given the generally prescheduled nature of much of the news



(consider conferences and press releases, set dates in a parliamentary cycle, fixtures in sports, opening and closing of markets, and so on), this is no longer sufficient. Much of the reporting today is not necessarily done in this way (nor at such places), and in many cases reporting takes place virtually (using data as source) or completely online – for example by net-native social news organizations such as *Reported.ly* in the US and *Bellingcat* in the UK. Focusing on the routines that long stabilized journalistic production, does no longer suffice in mapping and explaining the diversity of journalistic work.

Beyond the online, mobile and virtual character of much of today's reporting and storytelling the nature of the contemporary news organization is changing so fast, that it seems safe to assume that routines are anything but stable in these environments. Whereas legacy media newsrooms are converging and integrating people, units and departments, a host of new organizational forms emerge around the world, consisting of (online and offline) editorial collectives, news startups, and pop-up newsrooms, including managerial innovations. A specific example of an emerging organizational form in journalism is the introduction of agile development sequences in renowned news companies such as the Washington Post, NPR, Politiken, and the BBC. 'Agile' refers to a set of management principles commonly used in software development, and in the context of news production stipulates fast-paced projects with short design cycles, working in temporary teams based on the integration of people from different parts of the company – reporters, assignment editors, designers, developers, market research, management.

These new forms of news organization challenge not only the output, but also demand new routines to develop. Beyond the fact that a focus on routines belies an everyday practice that is perhaps not as stable or solid than it has been made out to be, contemporary changes brought about by disruption and innovation force us to re-evaluate conceptualizations of 'routine' as an organizational function. This is then an ultimate challenge for journalism scholars: without throwing the baby out with

the bath water, how to conceptualize newswork doing justice to both routinized and fluxional work practices, and the convergence between such practices?

### *5.5 Individual Journalists*

Our discussion of contemporary newsrooms indicated that at the level of individual journalists working in journalism, an important observation must be made: the amount of salaried and contracted journalists working in the setting of the newsroom is getting fewer. The number of layoffs in journalism has been nothing but astounding in the last decade. Figures reported by journalism unions and trade associations in developed countries around the world in recent years suggest their members see their colleagues being fired (and not replaced), understaffing is on the rise, and more and more journalists work on contingent bases (ILO, 2006).

Professionals today increasingly have contracts, not careers in journalism, and stress and burnout are on the rise (Reinardy, 2011; O'Donnell, Zion and Sherwood, 2015). As is clear at all the different levels of analysis, precarity has come to be part of the lived experience in journalism.

Of the people that are left in the profession, some still enjoy a permanent contract (including benefits and protections) with a formal news organization. These, generally senior, staffers work side-by-side with a host of competitor-colleagues in roles that are anything but stable or structural: (unpaid or underpaid) interns, temp workers, part-timers, and independent contractors. In a development similar to other professions – particularly those across the creative industries - permanent jobs are disappearing from journalism, and generally unpaid internships and other forms of free labor now determine access to what one day may be some kind of formal working arrangement.

All this is accompanied by rising cost of entry into journalism: a trade school diploma is a bare minimum - for jobs in the national quality news media, in practice a high-level university education is required. Student grants in most of the

developed world have been cut, their duration has been shortened, and they have been converted into loans. The majority of newcomers in the profession start as a freelancer or otherwise independent journalist (and the majority of journalists keep working that way). For freelance journalists, tariffs have declined structurally over the past decade. In fact, a growing number of parttimers, freelancers and other free agents in the news business do not earn the majority of their living wage with journalistic work, instead opting for a hybrid, cross-subsidized practice (Weischenberg, Malik and Scholl, 2006: 350; Vincken and IJdens, 2013: 4).

For journalism studies this brings the challenge of capturing the diversity of work practices and the range of workers in this industry: the atypical journalists mentioned above tend to be ignored by scholarly surveys of journalist populations around the globe. The same goes for the work they do, how they go about doing it, and what being a journalist means to them. The journalism population is changing. With the accelerating dynamic of reorganizations and reshuffling, buyouts and layoffs, new owners and managers, new work arrangements and budget cuts, journalism has become less accessible to everyone. In fact, journalism increasingly seems to be the playing field of a wealthy class consisting only of those who can afford to work for years or even for the majority of their careers below or around the minimum wage in the largest and therefore most expensive cities, where the main news media organizations are mostly located. It is thus more important than ever to capture who is working in journalism, under which circumstances the work gets done, what kind of work is produced, and ultimately with what impact on society and citizens' self-governance.

Clearly, the make-up of the profession is changing: on the one hand the profession is graying, as those contracted with legacy media organizations have often had the benefit of a long career. Younger journalists enter the profession in large numbers (as journalism programs are still very popular among students at the undergraduate as well as graduate levels), but they leave the profession relatively quickly as well, as a comparison of surveys conducted between 1996 and 2011 among journalists in

31 countries shows (Willnat, Weaver & Choi, 2013: 4). This process is a mirror of the revolving door effect long plaguing careers of women (and ethnic minorities) in professions dominated by white/male workers (Jacobs, 1989). It begs the question what kind of people – in terms of demographics, socioeconomic class, and personality type – can survive and thrive beyond the revolving door. To understand journalism, it is important to capture who populates it (and also who is *not*), to gain insight into the conditions they work under, and ultimately how this informs the type of journalism that is produced.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In this chapter we have considered, through highlighting how the post-industrial modes of journalism has faced disruptions at different dimensions and have argued that these disruptions fundamentally challenge the dominant ways of conceptualizing, theorizing and analyzing journalism practices. Journalism theory has treated journalism predominantly as a stable object, which means it is unable to deal with the complexity and the continuous change and state of becoming in the field. Ultimately, our exploration of the disruptive developments suggests that we need to view journalism as a moving object. In other words: we need to ask what journalism becomes, rather than what journalism is (Deuze, 2005). We have considered how the becoming of journalism is currently evolving at the levels of the social system, social institutions, news organizations, and individual journalist. Viewing the developments in journalism through these access points, it becomes clear how the context, institutions, practices and population of journalism are significantly changing.

For scholars in this field, it is of critical importance to not just capture a snapshot of journalism at a particular time, freezing certain phenomena as if they are stable, but rather focus on the ‘becoming’ of journalism: to show the process through which journalism is constituted within its social context, to acknowledge the variety of actors involved in this process, and to trace the changing definitions of who is and who is not considered a journalists, as well as the precarious and shifting nature of

newswork. The ultimate aim of such research and the resulting theories is not to 'pin down' journalism and its role in society, but rather to reflect on and make space for the multitude of ever shifting practices and their varying impact in society. Such research has to rely not only on a variety of vantage points, as we have argued here, but also on a variety of methods and theoretical perspectives to consider the becoming of journalism. Moreover, to do justice its complexity, such triangulation needs to allow for varying definitions to co-exist, to allow various insights, even (or especially) when they contradict each other. It is in this space of doubt and insecurity that a deeper, and more complex understanding of journalism in the digital age can come into being (see also Costera-Meijer, 2016).

Such explorations, as we have here aimed to inspire, will show that what happens at the level of the individual, organization, institution, and social system, does not always paint a coherent and neat picture of a stable and clearly bounded profession. One of the tensions that such research will bring up, and that we would like to highlight in our concluding paragraph, is that to be a professional, working journalist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means, to most, having to go and perform beyond journalism. When focusing, as we have suggested here, on the becoming of journalism, tracing the lived experience of individual journalists in its organizational, institutional and social context, we see that many (if not most) journalists today are engaged well beyond what any profession could ask for. Normally the profession asks for a certain type of commitment, but journalists in the digital age have to be committed beyond any of this, as their work is insecure, their pay limited, the people's trust precarious, and their working time stretches beyond the boundaries of a print deadline or broadcast schedule. With the institutional protections and privileges of the profession limited, this means that their drive become increasingly personal. This personal, affective and emotional engagement with newswork that in the period of 'high modernism' (Hallin, 1992) could be related back to journalists 'living and breathing the news', needs to be reconsidered with the changing institutional, organizational and social definitions of what journalism is. One of the main questions that journalism scholars need to consider, is what journalism

becomes in the profoundly precarious industry, working environment and career context in which individual journalists currently operate.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: <http://www.wan-ifra.org/reports/2009/03/12/outourcing-revisited>; overview: <http://www.wan-ifra.org/microsites/research-shaping-the-future-of-news-publishing>.