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The Somatechnics of Journalism: Applying an Embodied Perspective to Enduring Issues in Journalism Studies

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ABSTRACT

This research applies Somatechnics to the study of journalism and contributes to an emergent epistemological "bodily turn" in the discipline of Journalism Studies. This is a turn toward the body, embodied experience, and the inevitable emotionality of journalism and the journalist as brought forth by Chantal Francoeur and Belinda Middleweek, among others. We invite journalism scholars (and practitioners) to understand journalists' bodies as sophisticated organic technologies—and to subsequently understand how those bodies are further transmogrified by, and collapsed into, the ever-changing world of news media. We deploy a process of retheorising as a qualitative method in which researchers apply new theoretical frameworks to existing studies or data to provide fresh insights and perspectives. By doing so, we offer a Somatechnics of Journalism as one of several emerging conceptual frameworks to help us turn to the body in Journalism Studies.

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In this contribution, we build an argument for applying Somatechnics to the study of journalism. Our work can be seen as contributing to an emergent epistemological intervention in the discipline of Journalism Studies that is turning toward the body, embodied experience and the corresponding emotionality of journalism and the journalist (Francoeur 2021; Jukes 2020; Middleweek 2024; Pantti & Wahl-Jorgensen 2021). The aim of this article is to invite journalism scholars (and hopefully industry) to understand journalists' bodies as sophisticated organic technologies in and of themselves—and to understand how those bodies are further transmogrified by, and collapsed into, the ever-changing world of news media. For example, the ways in which journalists use their "gut" or "intuition" can be seen as a *technology* of the bodymind—problematising outdated binaries of "objectivity versus emotion" as an appropriate way of knowing (Steiner 2018). As another example, think of the way digitisation has mapped the journalist's brain to adhere to a 24/7 news cycle—the body is always online and therefore always "on." It is not just all of us who live in media—those in the media truly embody their media life (Deuze 2012). This process implies a *collapse of boundaries* between the bodymind,

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mental models, and the digital environment (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2021). Think also of how a journalist's hand must be almost surgically attached to their smartphone to survive in a modern newsroom—or be in service to it: a kind of cyborgian news machine that embodies *enmeshment* of the device, its uses, and how being a journalist is arranged through it.

We explore these kinds of phenomena to illustrate our argument that the journalist is a *somatechnical configuration*, which we define as a critical site onto which all the techniques and technologies of journalism are materially and discursively constellated. All of these processes we describe—and so many more—require the journalist to take on emotional and physical burdens, which are part of this somatechnical configuration. Yet, much contested, yet still predominant notions of journalism in scholarly work, education handbooks, policies of news organisations, including the very paradigm of journalism as objective and the reporter as neutral observer, negate the value of the journalist as an embodied human being. The literature on journalists tends to focus on role perceptions and job performance (Mellado 2021), patterned and routinised news values, pay and job security, editorial policies and degree of professional autonomy (Weaver 1998), and national or "hybrid" cultures (Hanitzsch et al. 2019). Other than the occasional socio-demographic profile (and lamentation about homophily in journalistic networks), bodies remain absent. At the same time, scholars, educators and professionals call on the body of the journalist to become a social technology that bears the brunt of trauma (eating society's sins through its reporting on social ills), emotional labour (managing, massaging and manipulating people's emotions through compelling storytelling, "breaking" news and attention-grabbing headlines), and the very responsibility for upholding democracy (Šimunjak 2023). Society expects the journalist's bodymind to bear all this, yet we are only just now beginning to study and recognise this in all its vulnerability, significance and chimera.

Taking the journalist's bodymind seriously starts with an appreciation that bodies are not simply made up of organs, fluids, and senses—bodies are marked with all kinds of expectations, differences, and competences, all of which determine what is possible, what can be done, in any given situation. As such, we deploy the language and theoretical framework of Somatechnics to think anew the relationship between the journalist and the paradigm of journalism through the nexus of a co-constitutive site we call the "bodymind". Using a process of theoretical evaluation and reconstruction, we synthesise recent scholarship to argue for an understanding of the journalist as a *somatechnical configuration*—a bodymind that is constellated materially and discursively to emerge as a generative, interactive, and networked force that *is* a technology, and that also *draws into it* the technologies of journalism. As such, we explore how journalism is not just a set of traditions, values and crafts, it is also a thing buried deep in the bodymind of the journalist. This is an at once agentic perspective—as journalism, seen as such, is not something one simply has to socialise into—as it is a contextualised one, whereby journalism and the journalist are inseparable in praxis.

The process of retheorising is a qualitative research method, also called a qualitative restudy, where researchers apply new theoretical frameworks to existing studies or data to provide fresh insights and perspectives (Köhler, Rumyantseva, and Welch 2023). With this approach in mind, we use the language of Somatechnics to bring together work from scholars such as Belinda Middleweek, Chantal Francoeur, Bonita Mason, and

others. By doing so, we offer the field a "somatechnics of journalism." We argue that the journalist's bodymind is the congregating site onto which all the *technics* of journalism (news craft such as interview skills or structuring a story), the hard and soft *technologies* (mechanising tools like recording devices or editing software), and *capital* (like newsroom power dynamics, political economy, access to networks, and prevailing definitions of journalism itself) coalesce and become meaningful. We are mindful of Pierre Bourdieu's influential consideration of *habitus*, as applied to journalism, as a bodily experience of the way reporters and editors incorporate the unwritten rules and expectations of the field (Willig 2013, 378). However, applications of field theory in journalism tend to ignore the journalists' body in favour of documenting and observing practitioners' routines in the newsroom. The journalist's bodymind is the "ground zero" for journalism, and in being so, *always-already* transcends arguments about displacement and obsoletion of the journalist, which is a pertinent point in the context of contemporary debates about the implications of (generative) artificial intelligence for the work of journalists. As we hope to show in this paper, everything begins and ends with the journalist's body.

Somatechnics offers us an epistemological, theoretical, and politically-charged framework through which to understand "the body as irretrievable and indistinguishable from that which produces that body in the world" (Glitsos 2019, 17). That is to reveal how the journalist's body is, in fact, indistinguishable from its enmeshment in the production of news both discursively as well as materially, physically, and psycho-affectively. To exemplify this argument, we reflect on three key phenomena. The first is the way journalists rely on subjective (that is intimate, embodied) processes as instruments of newsgathering that simultaneously are supposed to present an objective, verifiable "reality" of the story. The second is the way in which the demands of journalism practice "play out" on and in the body of the journalist. Finally, we look at how journalists must call upon their own sense of embodiment to navigate the ethical boundaries and representational implications of "Othered" bodies. In conclusion, we offer Somatechnics as one of several emerging conceptual frameworks to help us turn to the body in journalism studies—along with other recent work on carnal empiricism (Braidotti 2019, 34), sensory ethnography and geography (Francoeur 2021), affective epistemology (Kotišová and van der Velden 2023) and touch (Middleweek 2024), all of which explicitly include the human body as a primary sensemaking device.

Why Somatechnics for Journalism?

The primary goal of Somatechnics is to call for a recognition of the body in the world as an artifact wrapped up, entangled, and produced by the materialities of that world (Glitsos 2019; Sullivan and Murray 2009). As such, a Somatechnics perspective "sees" the journalist bodymind as a complex assemblage that is taken-for-granted in the world. A concrete example of how Somatechnics can be applied is from the "body up." Take the remarkable technology that is the human eyeball, which becomes further adapted and transmogrified by the application of the technology of glasses or contact lenses. A contact lens *becomes part of the eyeball*, the two technologies becoming constitutive of excellent vision—a techné (or technique that one can use in the world). The eyeball and contact lens, however, cannot make meaning without traversing the complexity of other bodies and language (as a collective technology of communication) that mediate the

bodymind. We can take this further and apply it to journalism to reveal that the journalist's bodymind—in addition to this complex interplay of body, mind, and technology already at work—organises what they feel, observe, and interact with by using specific news crafts, devices, and embodied knowledges to produce meaning, and therefore meaningful news for specific audiences. This is what we mean when we say that the body, the mind, people, and the world around the journalist are all part of one singular somatechnical configuration. In the language of Somatechnics, in fact in its very etymology, this is what is meant by "the inextricability of sôma and techné" (Sullivan 2012, 3). That is, the term emphasises that sôma, or "the body," cannot be thought about other than in its production by and through technical skills (for example, news craft) and the technologies pressing up against bodies (including smartphones, computers, language, and other bodies).

The field of Somatechnics is relatively new, emerging from a series of research initiatives in the early 2000s (Sullivan and Murray 2009). Somatechnics came out of critical theory and was largely in pursuit of resisting forms of hegemony and domination using the language of biopolitics, especially regarding race, gender, and sexuality. As such, Somatechnics is already politically charged and dedicated to undoing intersectional expectations of the body as a servant of patriarchy, industry and capitalism. Somatechnics has been applied to critique subjects and issues as diverse state-sanctioned violence (Perera and Pugliese 2011), biomedical tourism (McCormack and Riggs 2015), organisational theory (Shimon 2022), academic work culture (Sullivan and Simon 2014), and many others, to bring fresh insights to these sites of contestation, as we wish to do with the journalist's body and the prospect of bodying journalism studies.

Somatechnics is therefore a mobilising force, and we assert that Journalism Studies can borrow the political energy and feminist rhetoric of Somatechnics to call upon scholars and industry to start taking the body far more seriously as a primary point of experience and knowledge for journalists and their unique craft. Importantly, Somatechnics forces us to move beyond focusing on the supposedly rational, deliberately acting individual—instead carefully considering how embodied knowledge and practices are produced through relations between bodies. Taking its cue from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of *intercorporeality*—of how people always make sense of themselves through quite literally "touching" others—this could be a building block of phenomenological approaches to newswork. However, a somatechnical approach goes a step further, taking its cue from Sara Ahmed's (2000, 46–47) notion of *inter-embodiment*, "whereby the lived experience of embodiment is always already *the social experience of dwelling with other bodies*" (2000, 46; italics in original). Instead of simply assuming that people, through embodied and shared ways of doing and understanding things, come to more or less seamlessly understand and adapt to their surroundings, here we are forced to also appreciate how intercorporeality produces significant differences between bodies, as bodies are technologies that are in a constant process of (un-)becoming.

Following from its status as a political mode, Somatechnics also works in this research project for challenging Journalism Studies to move out of a limiting masculine-coded and individualist paradigm that constructs the journalist as a discrete element of an industrial machine (Witschge et al. 2019), and technology as a separate artefact in an essentially instrumentalist relation to journalism. Instead, a Somatechnics of journalism adds a more inclusive and layered perspective to the research, bringing the body back in

without resorting solely to the senses and matters of the flesh, nor privileging culture and social construction to accounts of the technological.

While we operationalise Somatechnics for the purposes of advancing the field of Journalism Studies, it is critical to acknowledge the genealogy of scholarship in which this work can be seated. Importantly, Judy Wajcman's work on the feminist politics of technology reminds us that underlying embodiment studies is the "the role of technology in reproducing the patriarchy," and that definitions of technology over time have long been "cast in terms of male activities" (2010, 143–144). The relevance of Wajcman's critique for a Somatechnics of journalism delineates that news work—and its adjacent cultural activities in relation a variety of technologies—is (and always has been) gendered.

Such a critical and genealogical appreciation for the roots of our inquiry additionally questions—following thinkers such as Mel Y. Chen and Rosi Braidotti—the taken-for-grantedness of much of the grounding assumptions of journalism as technological praxis. Chen's work can be used to denaturalise the way we invest value in certain bodies (and not others) as a reconsideration of the "working ontologies and hierarchicalized bodies of interest" (2012, 1). This is especially pertinent when we consider the erasure of certain bodies—queer bodies, differently-abled bodies, or neurodivergent persons—in the legacy media landscape. Journalists, both as a collective and as individuals, in the formation of a professional identity tend conform to constructions of embodiment through processes of organisational socialisation. In doing so, their "biological characteristics, their psychological needs, interests and defenses" (Raemy 2021, 846) come to be moulded to strictures of normative representations that mould and change "even talents, skills, and personalities" (Raemy 2021, 855).

While Braidotti's earlier work on the posthuman condition is a key reference for us—in turn following seminal publications by Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway—we take our cue from her recent signalling, along with Daan Oostveen, of the urgency to move on from critiques that merely form part of the "traditional toolbox of the humanities" to consider the convergence of factors such as "computational systems, security issues and warfare, new biomedical advances and drastic ecological damage" (2024, 23). This approach is especially pertinent in a news media world in which all these forces shape bodies in insidious ways. Consider, for example, the surveillance and pathologization of transgender or non-heteronormative bodies in the news to appreciate how the production of embodiment is connected to a profound system of control with roots deeper than the newsroom, a point made more than a decade ago by Toby Beauchamp (2014). In all of this, we acknowledge that Somatechnics is just one way to excavate and address the intersections between bodies, technologies, and the human condition, and we are inspired by this genealogy in applying this framework to the particulars of journalism (studies, education and practice).

Situating the Body in the Literature

First, we acknowledge recent interventions in various scholarly fields that explicitly bring the body into analyses of people, knowledge, culture and society. Arguably, this work got its impetus through longstanding work in feminist and queer theory—as notably in Elisabeth Grosz' (1987) notion of "corporeal feminism" as a way out of unhelpful dualisms such

as mind and body, nature and culture, private and public, self and Other, subject and object that so often still determine thinking and talking about the body. As Grosz writes, such binary pairs serve specific interests and a particular way of observing the world:

> These [binary pairs] help to provide the mind–body dualism with positive contents. The mind becomes associated with culture, reason, subject and self; while the body is correlated with nature, the passions, object and other. Not unexpectedly, the positive side of the opposition, mind/culture etc. is also associated with masculinity, and their opposites, with femininity. (1987, 4)

Conceiving of people's bodies, attitudes, behaviours and subsequent place in the world as co-determined by (and therefore irreducible to) neat dualisms is a key element of one's conceptual toolkit when researching the body. Subsequent developments in various fields include calls for an embodied sociology (Bendelow and Williams 1998), somatic psychology (Hartley 2004), and the cognitive sciences' embrace of embodied cognition (Wilson and Golonka 2013). While outlining a rich variety of applications, all of these interventions reject deterministic explanations in favour of including measurements of bodily processes and people's own understanding, feelings and making sense of their bodies into explanations of the social. This in turn allows for tremendous diversity and person-specificity of results, interpretations and explanations (Valkenburg et al. 2021).

In Journalism Studies, the relatively rare documentation of what it feels like to be a journalist (Deuze and Glitsos 2024; Tandoc and Takahashi 2018) or to experience the news (Goyanes and Demeter 2022) tends to take a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological analyses consider journalism as "structured, ritualized and progressively embodied: that is, experienced as personal character rather than something requiring conscious calculation or effortful enactment" (Markham 2011, 571). Crucially, this embodied nature of interpreting and doing journalism evolves out of embodied interactions between the self and the other that produce intersubjective meanings and social understanding, adding an inter-embodied dimension to cognitive approaches to phenomenology (Tanaka 2015). Bengtsson and Johansson (2022) additionally note how phenomenological research necessarily involves a sense of wonder and openness with specific reference to how people make sense of the news.

With the rapid pace of technological transformations and the emergence of a worldwide digital environment within which people live, the twenty-first century opened up further embodied explorations of the dissolving boundaries between the human world, the green world (i.e., animals and nature), and technological world (Cubitt 2005). Karen Barad's work on the "agential intra-action" (2003, 814) of matter and culture, together with Bruno Latour's (2005) understanding of the world as a human-material entanglement can be read in this vein. While arguing for boundaryless perspectives on the human and non-human as much as between bodies, this work maintained distinctions between matter and culture, materialism and idealism as their point of analytic departure, to some extent sustaining straw-man arguments against earlier interventions that questioned the separation of humans, bodies, minds, and machines. The search was on for a way of epistemologically investigating the social without getting stuck in either/or dualisms, while acknowledging an ontology of becoming rather than of being that would consider "reality as a processual, heterogeneous and emergent configuration of relations"

(Chia 1995, 594). Our chosen theoretical mode emerges around this phase in the early 2000s serving to highlight "a chiasmatic interdependence of soma and techné: of bodily being (or corporealities) as always already technologized and technologies (which are never simply 'machinic') as always already enfleshed" (Sullivan 2014, 188). Seen as such, Somatechnics brings together various strands of thinking and research emerging in the feminist, phenomenological, postmodern and materialist traditions, showing how bodies—of journalists or otherwise—are always in a permanent state of (un-)becoming, always in embodied interaction with (as much as an expression of) specific contexts and environments, and always understood with reference to the technological beyond a human-machine binary.

Noted above, this paper aligns with an emergent trend in Journalism Studies in which scholars—and very slowly industry—are beginning to turn toward the body. On a surface level, such an inter-embodied perspective is immediately relevant given the significant degree of institutional and professional homophily in the news industry and among news actors, and the professions' intersectional struggle with diversity in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and ability (Borchardt et al. 2019; Douglas 2022; Johnston and Flamiano 2007). A bit more digging finds the body involved with everything journalists do, from having a "nose" for the news, being "in touch" with audiences, reporters putting their bodies on the line in the context of war and conflict (Feinstein 2006), and so many practitioners struggling with their health and well-being as a consequence of unsafe, exploitative and altogether precarious working circumstances (Deuze 2023; MacDonald et al. 2023).

In terms of newswork and the *dispositifs* of journalism—its craft and creativity, techniques, formulas and conventions—we stand on Francoeur's assertion that the journalist's body is "an instrument that simultaneously senses, transforms, and stores information" (2021, 202). The body of a journalist is also the site where a profound paradox intrinsic to all newswork plays out every single day: between the disembodied, rational and masculine organisational subject benchmarked by adherence to the "affect-sanitized ideal" of objectivity (Rosas 2018, 2117), and the engaged reporter, deeply committed to serving the public, passionate about the noble profession of journalism as well as being able to strategically deploy emotionality in order to produce compelling stories that inspire and inform (Wahl-Jorgensen 2012). In other words, our embodied focus on the journalist is not without paradox and contestation, and comes with a respect for the complex nature of newswork navigating the various layers that make up what journalism is.

Following on from Francoeur and Middleweek, we acknowledge that the "sensing body" is largely "invisible in sociological and epistemological studies of journalism" (Middleweek 2024, 3). Francoeur addresses this through her work on "bodying the journalist" (2021) and Middleweek follows through in her work on sex journalists (2022), as well as in her argument for touch and harnessing tactile awareness in journalism (2024). Their projects, as does Johana Kotišová's (2019) research on how journalists make sense of their role and what news is in the context of conflict reporting, tend to focus on the body in the *production* of news, offering vital insights from which we take influence. Using Somatechnics, we shift perspective beyond the bodymind as locus of production, instead looking closely at the way journalism plays out *on* the body of the journalist and becomes an expression *of* the body—how it marks, shapes, and reconfigures. As Francoeur remarks, the processes of journalism may "take their toll" on the body of the

journalist (2021, 212). In turn, we want to know how journalism can be seen as a process and set of relations marked by the bodies of its practitioners.

The Journalist as Somatechnical Configuration

To argue for the journalist as a somatechnical configuration, we show how the demands of journalism practice "play out" on the body of the journalist as a matter of techné. In the first instance, we look at the way the journalist's body must confront and carry trauma as a matter of professional process, and how it is thusly transformed by it. Research on work-related mental health issues among journalists is relatively well-established, with anecdotal references to work-related stress dating back to the nineteenth century (Fedler 2004). The empirical literature, emerging in the early twenty-first century, primarily considers the psychological well-being of war reporters and photographers, suggesting that those embedded in war and conflict have significantly more psychiatric difficulties than journalists who do not, while depression and the prevalence of PTSD among such reporters is similar to rates reported for combat veterans (Feinstein, Owen, and Blair 2002). Subsequent reports on the traumatisation of journalists in various parts of the world also focuses on the way journalists are affected by reporting on conflict, having to process the trauma of colleagues, or by doing their work in countries where the profession comes under significant threat (such as in Mexico, Iran, Nigeria, and Russia).

However, what is less considered are the ways in which the journalist's body is required as technology (a somatechnical configuration) in order to effectively carry out newswork of this nature because, as borne out by research on traumatic stress, "Intense emotions involve not only the mind but also the gut and the heart" (van der Kolk 2014, 71). Van der Kolk points to Darwin's explication of the symbiotic nature of trauma/mind/body by quoting the assertion that:

> Heart, guts, and brain communicate intimately via the 'pneumogastric' nerve, the critical nerve involved in the expression and management of emotions in both humans and animals. When the mind is strongly excited, it instantly affects the state of the viscera; so that under excitement there will be much mutual action and reaction between these, the two most important organs of the body. (Darwin, as cited in van der Kolk, 71)

A journalist's whole bodymind is at work and is "put on the line" in this kind of reporting. For example, in her work with journalists who covered suicide bombings in Brussels (on 22 March 2016), Johana Kotišová concludes that the bodily experience of the event and its aftermath blurred the boundaries between personal identification and professional identity, as the reporters "found it incredibly difficult to separate the human, emotional experience from the rational, analytical perspective required by their professional identity" (2020, 1722). She notes how they worked hard to reconcile these aspects, "blocking out one's preunderstandings or by combining subjectivity and objectivity according to the reporters' moral sense and clear conscience" (1723). This kind of reconciling is not finished when the story ends—it becomes an on-going process of lived experience, embodied memory, and trauma response that can get triggered by subsequent events.

It is not enough to label this as an abstract affective or mental process. As Sara Ahmed would assert, affect is not some conceptual or simple "mental" phenomenon. Affect is in fact what "sticks" to us (2004, 194). It is the very mechanism (techné) of the body (sôma) to

stick to things that matter, mentally as much as physically. It is not enough to say that journalists are "affected" by trauma, or that witnessing and handling trauma is merely a part of the work. While covering terrorist attacks counts as instances of primary traumatisation, other examples include any kind of coverage of war, conflict and disasters, having to do "death-knocks" (visiting the homes of victims' families to ask for interviews), or being involved in "sin-eating" (telling and selling stories about other people's crimes and transgressions). Secondary traumatisation occurs when journalists absorb some of the pain or grief of others they encounter in the course of their reporting or editing (Beam and Spratt 2009, 423). In other words: being a journalist almost inevitably means handling trauma, and such direct and indirect experience of trauma *implies a technology of newswork* because journalists absorb that trauma, then they process it for us (in both body and mind), turn it into stories (in a variety of formats and modes), then carry it around forever. Trauma sticks to the bodymind, specifically the heart and the gut, in a way that is enduring, often injurious, but nonetheless a processual phenomenon that configures the journalist and makes journalism.

The discussion on trauma and war reporting should not be considered as "the most important" or "only important" techné. We aim to avoid venerating a masculine-coded hierarchisation of field reporting. As suggested earlier: trauma is not a competition. To wit, in Middleweek's practitioner study of sex journalists she quotes interviewees who describe reporting on sex as a "psychological warzone" in which one's "mental state and body [is] on the line in the pursuit of a story" (2022, 1126). Beyond the specifics of particular topics and working with traumatised colleagues, the nature of the profession is embodied in the shared stressful experience of "the constant pressure to meet deadlines, long hours, the battle for audiences, the daily competition among the different media types, low pay, implementing new technology, the exposure to news about traumatic events" (Monteiro, Marques-Pinto, and Roberto 2016, 766). At the core of this condition is that journalists are required to do more than ever, to develop more skills and coping mechanisms than ever, to be more available than ever—while operating within in a global political and public context that is extremely hard to report on given the outright hostility of leaders and distrust among publics.

If we frame these conditions within the language of Somatechnics, we find that the journalist's bodymind is in fact mutated and configured by what is functionally a "mix of neoliberal governmentality and late extractive capitalism" (Geerts, Gray, and Carstens 2024, 2). This is to say that this social condition—the crushing pressure to keep up with advancing news media landscapes while pay and conditions stall or even deteriorate—are altogether materialised in the body of the journalist. We do not mean this as a metaphor. Take for example the somatechnics of the smartphone as deployed by the journalist and its attendant demands of constant availability to managers, sources and colleagues, the inability to "switch off," experiencing bullying and harassment on online platforms that can often be internalised (especially in the case of women or non-binary journalists who have bodies that are subjected to scrutiny in these contexts), the imperative to keep the device *with* the body at all times. Taking this further, for some journalists in more oppressive regimes, being digitally connected in this way poses even further pressures with relation to privacy and surveillance. This is the "paradox of connection" (Bossio et al. 2024), as the reporter is more "in touch" with everything and everyone that

makes the work worthwhile, yet at the same time vulnerably exposed to all kinds of expectations and intense pressures to perform.

The journalist cannot escape this condition, manifested in technologies such as the smartphone and device-specific coping techniques like temporarily muting alerts or losing oneself in a YouTube playlist before sleep. The smartphone thus becomes part of the journalist's bodymind, in the language of Somatechnics scholars Dahl and Sundén, an "intimate part of what we have come to think of as our bodies" (2013, 227). The smartphone exposes all the vulnerabilities of the journalist while opening up a constant flood inward from the violence of the world. A somatechnical configuration is one in which, in the words of Dahl and Sundén, there are "border crossings" and "boundary confusions" (228), which encapsulates the smartphone as an ingratiation into the very substrate of the journalist's bodymind. It is worth mentioning that, for a range of reasons, not all journalists use the same technology, have access to the same technology, or engage with technology in the same way—especially in reference to those with differently-abled or non-normative bodies as typified by a Western-centric view. A project unpacking the complex strands of this qualification would be a useful contribution to the canon, particularly by way of displacing the normative body as the central figure of Western logos (see Shildrick 2015).

There are further implications of the near-cyborgian relationship between reporter and smartphone. Journalists have reported on the relentlessness of this relationship (Dean 2019), which implies a collapsing of virtual, social, professional and personal worlds. Such a collapse is not necessarily caused by the device, but it plays out in and through the smartphone, as much as in the precarity of newswork (Chadha and Steiner 2019). There is a well-documented link in journalism between work-related mental health problems (Aoki et al. 2013; MacDonald et al. 2023) and maladaptive bodily coping mechanisms such as "running on adrenaline assisted with caffeine" (Šimunjak 2023, 22), alcohol and substance abuse. As Hannah Storm documents her anything but unique working experience as a reporter in her practical guide for mental health in the newsroom:

> I drank too much alcohol, exercised to excess, ate too much sugar, skimped on healthier foods. I struggled to sleep, often scared to close my eyes because of nightmares. My body was inevitably affected. I had gastro-intestinal issues, which repeated visits to nutritionists failed to diagnose. Some nights I itched all over. My hair grew thin. I was always cold, apart from when I relived certain experiences, when my body would break into intense sweating. (Storm 2021, x)

What we know about the human body in these situations is that

> its energies are focused on fighting off unseen enemies, which leaves no room for nurture, care, and love. For us humans, it means that as long as the mind is defending itself against invisible assaults, our closest bonds are threatened, along with our ability to imagine, plan, play, learn, and pay attention to other people's needs. (van der Kolk 2014, 88)

This is the mechanism through which exhaustion and burnout injure the journalist at the level of bodymind, and manifest in the ways in with techniques and technologies develop and get used.

A particular mechanism at play in journalism is how the occupational norm of objectivity and professional detachment—embodied in the journalistic role of society's "neutral observer"—complicates the ways in which reporter and editors can handle

their emotions—their bodies—while doing their job (Dadouch and Lilly 2021). Journalists engage in emotional labour by suppressing impulses of sympathy, pity and guilt to achieve "objectivity" and to avoid being overwhelmed by their feelings (Hopper and Huxford 2015). Objectivity additionally protects journalism from critique and shields reporters from feelings about their work. A related issue somewhat unique to the work of journalists is their susceptibility to moral and assignment injury. Moral injury occurs when reporters bear witness to or learn about events that challenge or transgress deeply held moral beliefs, forcing them to make decisions—for example to report rather than prevent—that can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, and anger (Osmann et al. 2024). In a way, the social construction of news media in democracy places journalists in an impossible double bind: the first bind is to the ideal of a removed, neutral "non-biased" witness and the second (contradicting) bind is to acting as a near-perfect weather gauge of news values that require a sensitivity to compassion and "human interest."

These contradictory demands play out on the body, especially as the body attempts to process the shame of failing to meet either (impossible) ideal. A human response to shame, brought about by impossible double-binds, is to "go numb" or "numb the body" as a way to mitigate what is an unsustainable position. This explains the higher-than-average rates of substance and unsafe alcohol use in the profession—a clear attempt to numb the bodymind (Dadouch and Lilly 2021). However, there is a "cost of losing your body" (van der Kolk 2014, 63), in addition to the damage of drugs and alcohol themselves, feeling numb can make people "feel like monsters" (108) which further alienates the individual. Above, we discuss exhaustion and burnout, but there are also far graver and documented ways that journalists numb or, more extreme, "erase" the body. Although data on self-harm and suicidality is scarce, numerous reports suggest that the persistence of precarity contributes to professionals contemplating taking their own life (Wang and Jiang 2016). Fred Fedler for example documents references to the consequences of newsrooms stress as far back as to the nineteenth century, based on the available evidence suggesting that "journalism destroyed some of its best people … Some journalists collapsed while others became alcoholics or drug addicts. Still others died young, sometimes of suicide" (2004, 81). The body is therefore directly implicated in the way journalism evolves, and the occupational demands of newswork have cascading effects that mark not only physical sites of contact, but can erase the body entirely.

Finally, the way that journalists must call upon their own sense of embodiment to navigate ethical boundaries and representational implications of Other bodies is also a techné—and, critically, one not replicable by non-human technologies such as generative artificial intelligence. An example of this phenomenon can be traced in Bonita Mason's critical reflection on her processes as a journalist in the challenging story of "The Girl in Cell 4" (1997). The story is a piece of investigative journalism published in 1997 exposing the treatment of Australian Indigenous woman Janet Beetson, who died of infective heart disease in 1994—an avoidable death—in New South Wales's Mulawa Correctional Centre, located in Sydney's outer Western suburbs. Both the case itself and the reporting of the story are complex and involved, but the critical *background* we wish to emphasise here is the position of Aboriginal bodies in relation to (White)/Other settler power binaries. In a pertinent study on inquests into Aboriginal deaths in custody (in the Canadian context, but applicable to the Australian), Sherene Razack unpacks:

> How Aboriginal bodies are inscribed in the present colonial order. Marked as different, a difference that is in essence a lower level of humanity, a species at an earlier, pre-modern stage of development, Aboriginal bodies become violable as damaged bodies that can only be managed through force. It is possible to kick, punch, and drag Aboriginal bodies with impunity, depositing them in cells with cold concrete floors; these are bodies to whom the normal rules do not apply, a distinction so built into everyday routines that it often goes unremarked upon. Violence is not visible when it is meted out to bodies whose difference means that they can and in fact must be violated (if order is to be preserved). (2011, 93)

As such, perhaps one of the most skilled crafts is how a journalist might use their own body to do justice to the body of the dispossessed and vulnerable. This is exemplified in Mason's investigative piece, "The Girl in Cell 4," for which she won an Australian Walkley award. Mason's use of bodily awareness, her understanding of historical bodies, and the subtleties of how bodies are produced both *in situ* and via representations in the media is of crucial importance here. Her first-person reflection on the reporting experience is worth reprinting here in full. She writes that:

> Because of the nature of the story's subject matter and its consequences for [the victim's mother] and the family, I was anxious to take a particularly careful approach. By careful I mean watchful and gradual; doing my best to read nuances in mood and body language; checking that it is okay to raise certain issues as a prelude to raise in them, or not, if permission is denied or reluctance detected. This watchful and gradual approach is a familiar one—a disposition developed from growing up with inter-generational mental illness (primary socialisation) and homed in ministerial offices (secondary socialisation). In these environments, it was essential to be alert to the state of every aspect of another person, position, relationship, set of relationships or situation, in order to navigate that situation with any success or, sometimes, to avert unspecified disaster. (Mason 2023, 68)

This phenomenological description captures, in detail, how inter-embodied experience with and through vulnerable bodies (namely the reporter's experience with family mental illness) provide a Self/Other proprioceptive relationship—the reporter *moves with the interviewee* by feeling the most subtle changes in bodily language, physical movement, tonal inflection, disposition and so forth. This could be compared to a physical dance; one complexified with socio-political implications and racial hierarchies that must be acknowledged and understood if both the story and the interviewee are to retain integrity and prevent moral injury. This is the journalist's somatechné; the political stratum becomes an organising principle for the bodily stratum. Mason gives us a first-hand account of Aboriginal bodies are inscribed by a colonial news media ideology and represented in Australian journalism, and with her methodology of critical reflexivity, she exposes the dynamics of the body and Self/Other.

Her reflection is an acknowledgement that that the contentious paradigms of objectivity and "truth-telling" collapse upon each other when journalists understand their role in protecting the vulnerable body of the Other. This is a most apt expression of the journalist as somatechné. Further, it helps us recognise that embodiment is never "one way only" and that, while events effect embodiment, the journalist's embodiment shapes the emergence of events themselves. Using this case illustratively, we remark that Mason's reflection shows how deeply bodies "speak" to each other outside of verbal language and how much that might provoke or inhibit the object or event that is being investigated.

Mason has drawn on her own experience with vulnerable bodies (from her own family history) and expertise as a "body-in-politics" (from her time in ministerial offices) to navigate the Self/Other dynamic in a sophisticated and masterful way that exemplifies the journalist as the most advanced technology in the practice of journalism. This resonates with Middleweek's assertion that "intercorporeal dimensions of newswork" are deployed in "how journalists determine whether something is newsworthy and truthful" and she points to the work of Godler, Reich and Miller (2020) who offer "social epistemology as a helpful tool for journalists, next to more traditional, Western, rational notions of individualised truth-seeking practices" (2024, 6).

Conclusion

The core of journalism practice is seated *in* the body of the journalist. Journalism can be abstracted and theorised, but the practice of journalism itself begins and ends in the living, organic technology that is the bodymind of the reporter. In addition to this assertion, as we have shown, hard technologies like smartphones and exogenous forces such as the newsroom, war reporting, and vulnerable subjects ingratiate themselves into the bio-psycho-social substrate of the journalist as a bodymind forming hybridities in constant states of flux and influence. In many ways, we contend that the highly theoretical approach outlined in this research can be construed and translated into serviceable conversations with the news workers we discuss here by way of integration with the emergent research on the embodied impacts of media careers that has already had high uptake among journalism organisations (Deuze 2025). This research also serves to align with more practical arguments we put forward elsewhere about the disconnect between role expectation and the reality of the every day for journalists (Deuze and Glitsos 2024).

Many revolutions have advanced, changed, and threated "journalism" as a craft and an ostensibly "human" form of labour. The latest trend being the conversation about the impact of artificial intelligence on the news media. Our contention, based on the preceding arguments, is that even if roles and skills change, no technology can replace the somatechnical configuration that is the "bodymind of the journalist;" it is the epicentre of newswork. This is evident in the response by journalists and audience alike to the (at this time still largely unregulated) use of generative artificial intelligence in the newsroom as a source of genuine concern about its impact on human labour, ability, and social structures (Thomson et al. 2025). The practice and discourse regarding the consequences of AI effectively reaffirms the centrality of the body as a somatechnical configuration that encompasses a whole universe of somatechné. As will become clearer in our discussion of Bonita Mason's case study reflection, the journalist's body functions as a way to comfort, cue, shape, and provoke the bodies of others (either interview subjects or otherwise).

And this, in a nutshell, is what we argue a Somatechnics of Journalism helps us to do: re-reading the literature of journalism studies (considering for example the work of Maya Šimunjak, Johana Kotišová, and Hannah Storm on the mental and physical health and well-being of reporters) and revisiting concrete cases of journalism (such as Bonita Mason's reporting) in terms of the role bodies, inter-embodiment, techniques and technologies play in "making" journalism in specific situations and contexts. It opens up so

many more ways of "being" (or rather: "becoming") a journalist and "doing" journalism than represented in the handbooks and canon of the field's literature, it allows for much more fine-grained analyses of how reporters and editors go about their work and how they integrate and make sense of their ideals of journalism and the everyday performance of their work (as materialised in news reports and stories), and it helps to articulate more nuanced perspectives on the role and impact of all kinds of (social, cultural, technological, financial) transformations on journalism. All of this is accomplished by coming back to the journalists' body as the primary site of excavation. This is not an argument to celebrate the human in the face of non-human threats or constraints neither are we advocating a return to the body as an instance of "new" materialist critique of the humanities. Somatechnics is a deliberate and explicit attempt to move beyond those discussions.

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