

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF **NEWS** & JOURNALISM

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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1 News Production, Ethnography, and Power

On the Challenges of Newsroom-Centricity

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Since the 1970s, ethnographic research has contributed tremendously to knowledge about news production processes and newsroom cultures, providing a rich description of journalists' ways of life and work. Ethnographers of news production have charted the cultures of newsrooms and the production processes unfolding within them, and shed light on the routines, values, and professional practices of journalists.

As Born (2005: 15) observed, in studies of media and beyond, ethnographic fieldwork has been "a sharp tool for discerning not just the unifying features but the divisions, boundaries, and conflicts of the society being studied." On the one hand, it has highlighted the ways in which journalists can constitute "interpretive communities" (Zelizer 1993) central to the creation of a form of news culture (Allan 2004). Ethnographers of news production have suggested that journalists of all stripes share certain cultural orientations and experiences. Harrison (2000: 108–37), in her work on television newsrooms, found similarities across news organizations in a set of "formulas, practices, normative values, and journalistic methodology." Others have pointed to the ideal of objectivity (Soloski 1999), the thrill of the deadline, a disregard for authority, and a genuine desire to serve the public as unifying features (e.g., Cottle 2003: 15). On the other hand, news organizations are shaped by complex professional hierarchies, structures, and power relations that challenge any claims of unity (cf. Tunstall 2001), and these diversities and cleavages have been thoroughly mapped by news production ethnographers. As Cottle (2007) pointed out, the ethnography of news production has provided an invaluable corrective to a slew of generalizations that have circulated in media and journalism studies, including

- (1) *instrumental* arguments about elite control over news media and output,
- (2) *media conspiracy* claims involving media complicity,
- (3) *social compositional* accounts of media performance based on the demographic

characteristics of journalist recruitment, (3) political economy arguments about how the news is shaped and limited by market forces, (4) cultural studies theorization of the discourses and identities embedded into news texts, as well as (5) postmodernist speculation about the implosion of meaning via mediated spectacle. (Cottle 2007: 1)

By offering scholars more nuanced descriptions of the forces that shape journalism, the ethnography of news production has thus complicated our accounts and cautioned against easy generalizations, contributing to a more rigorous field of scholarship. Indeed, it remains one of the most fruitful avenues for obtaining a nuanced understanding of both journalism and journalists.

However, the news production ethnography tradition has evolved under a specific set of constraints and circumstances, which means that it has emphasized particular production practices and environments over others. This chapter looks at the consequences of a key methodological feature in the ethnography of news production: its reliance on the locality of the newsroom, or its “newsroom-centrality.” Put slightly differently, most anthropological work on news production has revolved around the material space of the newsroom, the “factory floor” of journalism. This chapter demonstrates some of the consequences of newsroom-centrality. In particular, the concrete trajectory of this research tradition has resulted in an emphasis on certain types and categories of news work, coinciding with convenient and prestigious locations for ethnographic observations. The chapter ultimately suggests that we ought to be reflexive about the power relations that shape our approaches and paradigms as newsroom ethnographers.

A Brief History of Newsroom-Centrality

The ethnography of news production has always been an interdisciplinary endeavor, situated at the intersection of media and journalism studies, anthropology, and the sociology of work. In common with the disciplines of anthropology and sociology from which it has taken both inspiration and key figures, it draws heavily on ethnographic methods (Abbott 1993; Lounsbury and Kaghan 2001), but it also departs from ethnographic preoccupations in significant ways. Here, I would like to chart some of these affinities and departures and their consequences for the production of knowledge about the work of journalists.

Like other ethnographic research endeavors, the anthropology of news production has been structured by a particular methodological presumption: that we can capture the object of study by focusing on particular discrete sites or “fields.” Like other field sciences, anthropology engages in the “detailed study

of limited areas” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 6), on the basis that such an approach can give us meaningful information about the practices of particular “tribes” living and working in these limited areas. Such an approach is clearly not without its problems, associated with the assumption that “different cultures inhere in discrete and separate places” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 35). Ever since the reflexive turn of the 1970s, ethnographers have debated, and reflected upon, such problematic aspects of their approach. Despite this reflexivity, it remains an inescapable methodological fact that ethnographers cannot do their work without material “anthropological locations.” Ethnographies require the construction of a “field” that is defined as exotic and strange when juxtaposed with the comfort and familiarity of “home.” As Gupta and Ferguson (1997a: 5) observe, the field is an overdetermined setting for the discovery of difference, involving a conceptual segmentation of the world into particular cultures, areas, and sites. In the case of the ethnography of news production, 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 spaces, places, practices, and people at the margins of this spatially delimited news production universe.

There are sound reasons for the focus on the newsroom, which I here refer to as “newsroom-centrality.” The newsroom is the most obvious place to seek out cultures of journalism because news production, as a professional practice, has been centralized and concentrated there. As Nerone and Barnhurst (2003: 435) observed:

Communication scholars understand the press as an institution that originates its most significant activity in the space of the newsroom. Ethnographic studies of newspapers begin there, of course, but content studies also focus on newsroom output, and even audience studies track responses to what emerges from the newsroom. The newsroom thus receives scrutiny as a work zone that leaves its tracks in the form and content of newspapers and in the conditions of reception for the audience.

Indeed, the history of the newsroom is closely tied to the history of journalism itself. The invention of the newsroom coincided with the emergence of a professionalized and commercially viable press that was fiercely competitive and reliant on advertising (Tuchman 1978: 19). As such, the newsroom was born alongside the idea of a professional culture with distinct work practices. In North American and European contexts, this development occurred over a relatively short period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fløyer’s study of the emergence of newsrooms in Scandinavia provides a compelling description of the news production routines at *Morgenbladet*, the most

influential early Norwegian newspaper, at the end of the 1850s. *Morgenbladet* had one newsroom, which was primarily occupied by subscriptions and printing personnel. The editor had a desk in a small back room, but “conducted most of his business walking about the town, wearing his top hat, between the library, government office, the university, the parliament, and the offices of lawyers and doctors, or he received visitors at home. He stored all the collected manuscripts in his top hat and unloaded them in the composing room” (Høyer 2003: 457). Although many of the sites and individuals that were then deemed newsworthy remain part of today’s “news net” (Tuchman 1978), the formalization of physical location for the organization of news gathering did not occur until later in the nineteenth century.

By this time, European and American newspapers had begun to organize their production processes within the physical space of the newsroom, in arrangements that were fairly similar to those prevailing in today’s media organizations. Wilke’s study of the development of the German newsroom demonstrates that while, in the early 1800s, the printing houses that owned newspapers started to dedicate space to editorial activities, it took until the end of the century before a more extensive, functionally specialized area had been introduced. Here, the term *newsroom* is shown to be profoundly misleading, insofar as it is usually not taken to mean just *one* room devoted to news production but several distinct spaces — usually (both historically and in the contemporary context) in the form of open-plan offices. For example, by 1906, the newsroom of the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* had rooms dedicated to the editorial staff specializing in trade, local news, Bavaria, politics, the military, and art and culture (Wilke 2003: 470).

The development of the newsroom occurred at similar times elsewhere in Europe and the United States, with the amount of space and degree of specialization increasing over the course of the twentieth century (e.g., Høyer 2003; Nerone and Barnhurst 2003; Sanchez-Aranda and Barrera 2003). However, to some extent the newsroom, while a dominant fixture in European and North American media organizations, depends upon the availability of generous financial resources, and in many corners of the world, from Russia to Sierra Leone, even relatively prominent newspapers operate entirely without centralized spaces of news production (Wahl-Jørgensen and Cole 2006). Nevertheless, within the national contexts — particularly the United States and the UK — that have dominated journalism ethnography, there are practical reasons for the prevailing definition of the newsroom as “the field.”

But the newsroom is at the same time a historically specific and dynamic construction, the ever-shifting meaning of which newsroom ethnographers have sought to describe and interpret. Here, I argue that the ways in which

the practices of journalists have rubbed up against the cultures of journalism ethnographers in the context of newsroom-centricity have contributed to an emphasis on routinized and controlled forms and aspects of news work, rather than on the spontaneous and unpredictable elements favored by the professional mythology of journalists.

The Ethnography of News Production

As Cottle (2000b) has suggested, a “first wave” of classical newsroom ethnographies, including the work of scholars such as Epstein (1973), Fishman (1980), Tuchman (1978), Golding and Elliott (1979), and Gans (1979), charted the cultural milieu and professional domains of journalists. Early ethnographic studies of news production were frequently conducted by sociologists informed by anthropological approaches rather than by journalism scholars (cf. Wahl-Jørgensen and Franklin 2008). These researchers were drawing on paradigms emerging within their disciplines and have been highly influential in shaping later work, including the preoccupations of today’s news ethnographers. In particular, sociologists of work have traditionally operated on the assumption that a fixed physical workplace is the locus for professional cultures and practices (e.g., V. Smith 2001), and the ethnography of news production is no exception. Through studies of workplaces or “factory floors,” this approach has been particularly interested in delineating the relationship between routines and creativity in work contexts — whether it be in the case of doctors, factory workers, or restaurant waiters. It has sought to understand “the daily negotiations through which structure is produced and reproduced in everyday workplace settings” (Lounsbury and Kaghan 2001: 28). From this perspective, the resonance of the metaphor of the news factory (e.g. Bantz, McCorkle, and Baade 1980) is perhaps not surprising, because its language describing the assembly line of news production fits into the framework set up by sociologists of work. Likewise, Golding and Elliott’s (1979) conclusion that the news production process is a “highly regulated and routine process of manufacturing a cultural product on an electronic production line” (cited in Golding and Elliott 1999:119) and Fishman’s (1980) interest in “manufacturing the news” have reverberated throughout both early and contemporary work on news production. So, for example, another classical study, Philip Schlesinger’s 1978 ethnography of BBC News, uncovered a “stop-watch culture” at the public service broadcaster, focusing on “how the production of news is controlled day-to-day and minute-to-minute” (Schlesinger 1978: 48–49). Similarly, Gaye Tuchman’s long-term study of news production across four sites in print and broadcast formats in major metropolitan areas took an interest in how news work “transforms occurrences

into news events" (Tuchman 1978: 12) through the creation of rhythms of work, including the structured dispersion of reporters and editors in time and space. These work processes help to "routinize the unexpected" and "tame the news environment" (Tuchman 1973). Indeed, an ethnographic approach to news production has made a tremendous contribution to understanding that although journalists often see their work as creative, exciting, and unpredictable, based on the adrenaline rush of uncovering spontaneously breaking news stories, the everyday realities of news work are often based on the hard graft of routine labor (Golding and Elliott 1979; Brennen 1995). In this sense, the preoccupation of ethnographic methods with the routine, ordinary, and everyday (cf. Malkki 1997) rubs up against the idea of news as the extraordinary, unpredictable, singular, and unexpected.

Overall, the ethnography of news production has uncovered how the newsroom structure itself allows for careful planning, rather than primarily facilitating the unleashing of creativity. Such observations are embodied in the metaphor of the "news factory" and captured in the ample writings about journalistic routines (cf. Golding and Elliott 1999). It is therefore not surprising that newsroom-centric ethnographies, in their preoccupation with charting patterns in journalists' ways of life and the rules governing their professional activities, have rubbed up against the discourses and self-understandings of journalists. At the same time, as Cottle (2000b) stressed, the emphasis on routine and patterned ways of life has often meant that newsroom ethnographers have been more likely to "see" homogenization over differentiation. As I shall argue, this structural blind spot in the ethnography of news production is further reinforced by the privileging of particular "ethnographic locations" over others.

Power and "Studying Up"

If newsroom ethnographers have followed the lead of their home discipline in terms of (a) the reliance on ethnographic location of "the field" as the site for the production of scientific knowledge and, within that, (b) an emphasis on patterns, routines, and structure, they have also departed from conventional ethnographic approaches in one significant way: the classics of anthropology, which have shaped dominant research traditions in the discipline, are based on the principle of relatively powerful Western academics studying relatively powerless and culturally and geographically distant "tribes" (Hannerz 2001). Indeed, as Hannerz (1986) suggested, anthropologists have tended to direct their scholarly gaze at "the most other of others." Or, in Nader's (1972) terminology, they have "studied down." However, the macho ritual of studying the exotic

"other" and gaining power and prestige from the distance, discomfort, and foreignness of the field (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) is entirely at odds with the tradition of newsroom ethnographers. If anything, the paradigm here is one of cultural proximity over distance; of "making the familiar strange." Indeed, researchers have noted the similarities between the endeavors of anthropologists and journalists, suggesting that they "use similar methods and . . . produce a similar kind of knowledge" (Awad 2006: 922; see also Hannerz 2004a; Malkki 1997). Using language that describes journalists as collaborators and equals, they have sought to understand what ethnographers can learn from the professionals they study. Indeed, many anthropologists or sociologists of journalism are "lapsed journalists" with a lasting sympathy for the profession. There are clear advantages to studying one's own society, in terms of access to sites and languages, cultural capital and understanding, familiarity and empathy, even if it also makes it more difficult to attain the analytical distance that remains central to some conceptions of the anthropological encounter (Palriwala 2005: 155–58).

If anything, the cultural distance between researchers and researched in newsroom ethnography derives from the practice of "studying up" or engaging in "elite research" (Conti and O'Neil 2007), by paying a disproportionate amount of attention to elite individuals, news organizations and journalistic practices within them. The practice of studying up has profoundly shaped which types of professional practice are best documented within the ethnography of journalism and which are neglected. Studies have tended to focus on work in large, often national, television and newspaper newsrooms. The pioneering UK and U.S. studies all took place at national or metropolitan broadcasters and newspapers. This tradition has continued up to this day. For example, in Britain, there have been several high-profile recent studies of the BBC, which have charted the changing organizational culture of the renowned public service broadcaster. Georgina Born's long-term study, published in her magnum opus, *Uncertain Vision* (2005), is a case in point. Through fieldwork conducted over almost a decade, starting in the mid-1990s, she meticulously charts key trends that have shaped the world-famous public service broadcaster. Among other things, she studies the emergence of a managerial culture focused on rationalizing news production and content, and increasingly relying on a casual and multiskilled workforce. These trends, however, are not unique to the BBC. They reverberate across the landscape of news production, but have been most extensively documented within prestige newspaper or broadcast national media organizations.

As such, the emphasis on the routines, cultures, practices, and processes of elite, national newsrooms might serve to ignore those of less glamorous jour-

nalistic workplaces, which are nevertheless dominant in terms of both the number of employees, the quantity of output, and audience sizes. The scholarly neglect of a majority of the occupation it proclaims to study is particularly problematic because the working conditions of journalists vary hugely depending on economic, political, technological, and social conditions. The emphasis on particular forms of journalistic production means that we have gathered an impressive body of evidence about particular journalistic tribes, while almost completely ignoring others. In the absence of competing accounts, the tribes whose lived experience has been amply documented by ethnographers come to stand in as the universal(izing) and authoritative descriptions of what journalism is all about.

The professional practices of local journalists have been particularly neglected. In the UK and the United States, most journalists work in local or regional media (Franklin 2006). For example, the most recent UK figures suggest that only 11 percent are employed in national media (Journalism Training Forum 2002). In the British context, even ethnographic studies that ostensibly focus on local and regional media have often actually been focused on regional production sites of national news organizations with a heavy emphasis on the BBC (Cottle and Ashton 1998; see also Aldridge 2007). However, this is not to suggest that local news practices have been completely ignored by researchers with ethnographic affinities. For example, Ursula Rao's chapter in this volume takes an ethnographic look at local newspapers in India, examining how urban citizens enter the news. She argues that "the expansion of local news making and the open-door policy of editorial teams has opened up the press as a resource to a wide range of people, who invest in press relations as a ray of hope, a desire for communication, a road for populist politics, or a strategy for the manipulation of leadership issues." My own ethnographic work on how local newspapers in the San Francisco Bay Area deal with letters to the editor (e.g., Wahl-Jørgensen 2007) similarly demonstrates how local editors valorize the voices of "ordinary people" in their communities and highlight the significance of good relationships with their readers. If anything, then, such work suggests that local media are characterized by distinctive newsroom cultures, shaped by closer relationships to their audiences. However, most studies of local news making have been based on interviews with news workers, rather than on sustained ethnographic observation (e.g. Kaniss 1991; Franklin 2006).

The focus on elite, national, or metropolitan media organizations can, to some extent, be explained by the political economy of publishing and the academy. Researchers may be more likely to gain institutional approval and prestige, grant money, publications, and promotions by studying well-known national and elite news organizations than by examining more marginalized media practices.

Also, while the relatively small number of elite national news organizations may serve as a more comfortable basis for generalizations and statements suggesting a "shared culture" (Harrison 2000), such claims are much more difficult to make for the vast diversity of local, alternative, or specialist media practices. As Kaniss (1991: 9) complained:

The problem with trying to understand local news coverage . . . is that it is a far more difficult task than looking at the role of the national news media. Where many studies have conveniently selected a network television news program, or a weekly newsmagazine, or a national newspaper . . . in order to analyze the media's impact on national elections or policy, the local news media embrace thousands of newspapers, television, and radio stations, city magazines, and other forms of localized media in markets throughout the country.

Yet such complication might be exactly what is necessary "given the differentiated nature of the journalist 'tribe(s)' nomadically wandering through today's news ecology . . . [which means that] it no longer seems plausible to presume a generalized view of 'journalism' as an undifferentiated culture or shared professional canon" (Cottle 2000b: 24). Certainly, studying the lived experience of journalists in under-researched media, occupational roles, and regions could add hugely to the study of journalism and anthropology. This is all the more important as a pedagogical intervention: many scholars teach present and future journalists from areas where journalistic work is so different that they find little to recognize in the existing literature. It is also important because while some of the trends that newsroom ethnographers have identified are probably shared by journalists across the board, others are unique to their contexts and deserve recognition as such.

In this respect, the neglect of journalistic practices marginalized within the newsroom is particularly alarming. That is to say, newsroom-centric research tends to overlook particular categories of news workers. It predominantly charts the professional cultures of privileged full-time reporters over stringers and freelance journalists. This is the case despite the fact that the journalistic workforce is increasingly based on short-term employment and a reliance on freelancers. For example, the UK's National Union of Journalists has reported an explosion in the number of accredited freelance journalists (Bew 2006: 201). This trend reflects both the increasing use of occasional employees at established news organizations, the growth of specialist magazines, and the ease of setting up one's own website or blog in a time of citizen journalism. Nevertheless, if freelance journalism has always strongly contributed to journalistic cultures and content, there is little ethnographic research reflecting those realities. If, as one journal-

ist reflected in an interview with Stephen Hess (2001: 163), freelance "correspondents, even the most professional and relied upon, are treated terribly by news organizations, both financially and editorially," this power relationship is once again inscribed in the (lack of) attention of researchers. Freelance journalists are, by definition, structurally excluded from the "field" of the newsroom, and their tenuous connection with the centralized and routinized forms of news production means that they are often invisible as members of the journalistic tribes.

Other forms of journalistic production that operate at the peripheries of the newsroom — even though they may be an integral part of the content put out by news organizations — are equally neglected by ethnographic researchers. This is particularly true of specialisms which are removed from the excitement of the news-gathering process and frequently occupy the lower rungs of the newsroom hierarchy. As a result, the work of arts journalists, music critics, and features reporters has received little attention (Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen 2007). Similarly, scholars have failed to pay attention to the large numbers of news workers occupied in business journalism, a specialty area that is growing ever more expansively (Journalism Training Forum 2002) and whose success is linked to larger social trends, including the globalization of capital. Popular forms of journalism, despite their broader appeal, have also received scant attention. Here, an exception is Elizabeth Bird's study of supermarket tabloids. She shows that tabloid writers, whose stories are often denounced as sensationalist fabrication, claim allegiance to ideals of objectivity (Bird 1992: 92), since they, like other journalists, are simply reporting the words of their sources.

When specialists have been studied from a sociological-anthropological paradigm that has taken an interest in professional cultures, this research has often used interview and survey research methods, rather than ethnographic fieldwork, and focused on the prestigious end of the professional spectrum by looking at the work of groups such as specialist correspondents for national news organizations (Tunstall 1971) and foreign correspondents (Hess 2001). Reflecting the power hierarchies of news production, the best-studied specialist professional subcategory is that of political journalists (e.g., Seymour-Ure 1968; Tracey 1977). Michael Tracey's 1977 book, *The Production of Political Television*, is one of a few such studies to draw on ethnographic fieldwork. Tracey studied political journalists at UK national broadcasters ITV and BBC to understand the making of programs involved in the policy-making process, focusing on how government and commercial organizations attempt to influence coverage. In keeping with the newsroom-centric approach, those forms of specialist reporting that have been well studied by newsroom ethnographers are usually ones that have dedicated spaces within functionally specialized newsroom environments.

Nevertheless, more recent ethnographic studies conducted by journalism and media scholars are beginning to redress this lack of attention to journalistic subcultures by focusing on more specialized and hitherto under-researched forms of news production. Examples include Julian Matthews's 2003 ethnographic work on children's television, Simon Cottle's examination of natural history programming (2004a), and Eamonn Forde's 2003 studies of music journalism. Such studies often combine interviews with relatively brief newsroom observation periods, which manage to capture the workings of well-defined specialist areas. However, in their prevailing focus on prestige media outlets, they do not challenge the power relations reinforced by the newsroom-centric tradition, and they continue to revolve around the newsroom as the "field" that defines journalistic cultures.

Journalistic work that takes place entirely outside the newsroom environment is particularly difficult to trace. For this reason, alternative journalism practices have only recently started to attract the attention of journalism scholars. Alternative media are often produced in informal spaces that are more challenging to learn about and access, including private homes, community centers, schools, and pubs. And the individuals who produce alternative journalism rarely see themselves — and are rarely seen by others — as journalists (e.g., Atton 2008).

The methodological problems of relying on evidence gathered at nodal points within the newsrooms of elite media organizations might, to some extent, be addressed by conducting comparative, multisited ethnographies in different types of media, as well as in different geographical and cultural contexts (Cottle 2007; Marcus 1995). However, the practice of conducting multisited ethnographies is both more resource-intensive and time-consuming than traditional single-sited research and is therefore even less likely to receive institutional support, particularly in media, communication, and journalism studies departments, which have conventionally had less of a tradition of the long-term fieldwork engagement practiced by anthropologists. The resource-intensive nature of ethnographic fieldwork has also meant that it has conventionally been easier to undertake for academics in resource-rich contexts and countries. As already mentioned, this has meant that the majority of locations for ethnography have been large cities in the Western world, especially in the United States and the UK, while we know relatively little about journalism cultures outside this axis, reflecting a more general need to de-Westernize media research in a context where global resource and power inequalities are reflected in the academy (cf. Curran and Park 2000).

As Schwenkel points out in her chapter for this volume, there has been a particular emphasis on the workings of journalism in capitalist societies, to the virtual exclusion of scholarship on socialist journalism cultures. Her work on photojournalism during the Vietnam War provides an important exception

in this regard, demonstrating that socialist photographers operated in similar ways to ethnographers, hence providing the “viewer with deeper ethnographic insights into how war and revolution shaped daily life practices, capturing the multifacetedness of society under constant threat of violence.” She contrasts this approach to that of Western correspondents, whose adherence to the ideal of objectivity ultimately resulted in a “dehumanizing and objectifying” focus on the spectacle of dead bodies and violence.

International and comparative studies of news production, using an ethnographic framework, have certainly contributed to complicating nation-centered approaches to news production and recognizing the increasingly globalized nature of news (e.g. Volkmer 1999). For example, Hannerz’s study of foreign correspondents for major news organizations in key cities (2004a) was part of a deliberate political project to seek out the roots of a cosmopolitan imagination, by identifying how the stories of gifted journalists can engender a sense of human compassion and responsibility for the lives of others. Yet this was clearly — and explicitly marked as — a study of global elites, which implied that we have something to learn from journalistic practices of excellence. As such, it underscored the elitist impulse underlying the tradition of studying up. Similarly, when Cohen, Levy, Roeh, and Gurevitch set out to study “global newsrooms, local audiences” (1996), they focused on the Eurovision news exchange, a pan-European news service based on the coming together of national broadcasters. They wished to understand the “gatekeeping” function performed by a relatively small number of journalists — men and women who day in and day out coordinate the dissemination of a large volume of television news, exchanged among the world’s broadcast organizations by satellite” (1996: vii). As such, they were implicitly heeding Nader’s (1972: 284) call for elite research, on the grounds that “never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many members of the species.” Pedelty’s (1995) painstaking ethnography of war correspondents in El Salvador compellingly documented the professional rituals and practices of a corps of journalists for elite European and North American news organizations.

Jennifer Hasty’s (2005) ethnography of the foremost private and state-owned newspapers in Ghana shows that although the journalists she studied considered themselves cosmopolitan professionals who drew on the Western rhetoric of objectivity, both types of newspapers were, discursively and in practice, distinctively Ghanaian. To her, these newspapers are ultimately “the products of specific historical conditions and are responsive to particular cultural notions of political authority and legitimacy as well as sociality and exchange” (Hasty 2005: 164).

Overall, these studies helpfully move away from an overwhelming focus on

Anglo-American journalism cultures, and reflect an increased interest in the global operations and cultures of news production, but they have not challenged the dominant power relations reflected in the prevailing nation-centered newsroom-centric tradition.

On the Disappearance of the Newsroom

However, the days of the newsroom as a central ethnographic location may be numbered. One of the most fundamental challenges for today’s newsroom ethnographers lies in the disappearance of the material space of journalistic labor in a time when ‘liquid media’ are the order of the day (Deuze 2007). We need to come to terms with the fact that (a) news production is increasingly taking place in and through virtual spaces, (b) news work is becoming increasingly decentralized, and (c) journalism is increasingly reliant on casual labor that is not tied to particular locations. As Cottle (2007) has observed:

In this interpenetrating communications environment news production no longer takes place within any one organizational centre of production but has become increasingly dispersed across multiple sites, different platforms and can be contributed to by journalists based in different locations around the world or on the move. With journalists and editors based in different locations but all working on the same story and able to access, transmit and edit the same news materials clearly this poses considerable challenges to today’s ethnographer.

New technologies are challenging the centralization of news work in the physical site of the newsroom, and enabling “electronically based forms of editorial organization” (Wilke 2003: 474). Newspapers around the world are experimenting with virtual environments for news production. Wilke (2003) gives the example of the German paper *Regioblick*, which is

the first regional daily newspaper published only on the internet. *Regioblick* does not have a central newsroom. The editorial offices are located wherever the editor works. “We read each other’s work every day,” members of the staff announced in an interview; “we talk to each other once a week [online], and we meet in person once a month.”

Among other things, such practices physically decentralize and desocialize news work, making it a much more diffuse and slippery object of ethnographic study. Of course, the methodological challenges of an emerging virtual world are not unique to journalism scholars, even if our endeavors, because of their technology-intensive subject matter, have been at the forefront of the encounter

with this new reality (cf. Wittel 2000). But just as anthropologists have begun to think through methodological issues associated with “virtual ethnographies,” these challenges will be central for ethnographers of media production. To get beyond newsroom-centricity, ethnographers must look toward “socio-political locations, networks, and multi-sited approaches” (Wittel 2000: 8). The classical ethnographic methods of observing activity in a fixed locality will have to be supplemented by approaches that take these changes into account.

Newsroom-Centricity and the Need for a Reflexive Turn in Journalism Studies

This chapter has sought to understand some of the consequences of journalism ethnographers’ reliance on the newsroom as a “field” and to trace some of the consequences of the particular forms of newsroom-centricity that have prevailed in ethnographies of news production. In particular, I have argued that while conventional anthropological practice relies on “studying down” by focusing on less powerful and privileged “others,” newsroom ethnography is predominantly a discipline that studies up, often focusing on privileged journalistic practices to the exclusion of more marginalized ones. While there are good reasons for this intellectual trajectory, it has had real consequences for the production of knowledge in the field, insofar as the power relations prevailing in the world of news work have been reproduced in the attentions of the academy.

The elite-focused approach that has been the result of the “studying up” practices of newsroom ethnography has, to some extent, meant that up until recently we have known much about the producers of news but little about its consumers. However, more recent ethnographic work on news audiences, building on approaches developed within audience research traditions, provides a promising opening in this direction and demonstrates that the anthropology of journalism can go beyond an exclusive focus on the “factory floors” of news organizations (see Bird 2003; Madianou 2005).

Nevertheless, the prevailing power relations that have shaped newsroom-centric research remain woefully underexamined. While anthropology has undergone a “reflexive turn” a generation ago, the anthropology of *journalism* has only recently gained the maturity to even begin the process of reflecting upon its practices. This chapter has represented one small step in this direction. But clearly, to do justice to the diversity of journalistic cultures and practice, we need to place questions of the hierarchies of power in journalism and the academy, as they intersect in our research, at the center of such a reflexive turn.

2

U.S. *Newsworld*

The Rule of Text and Everyday Practices of Editing the World

ZEYNEP DEVRİM GÜRSEL

The Battle for Real Estate

On a cold January morning in 2004 in the daily 10 AM meeting, a usually even-tempered senior editor at an American news magazine, *U.S. Newsworld*, exclaimed, “We’re turning into a picture book! There’s no room for my stories anymore. It’s a news magazine — or at least it’s *supposed* to be a news magazine. We hardly have any stories. We don’t have any *space* for news.”

“There are a lot of sacrifices made on the visual side, too,” replied the senior photo editor. “All we do is one-picture stories. We all have to give blood equally!”

The trigger for this unexpectedly heated exchange was an image that was going to take up more than a page — the implication being that the news for which there was no space was in the text, not the image. The issue was not the specific image but rather a much larger philosophical difference about the role that visuals play in journalism, one that I observed often during my fieldwork on photojournalism. In fact, arguments over concrete space in the magazine’s layout often revealed disagreements over how much abstract value any single element of the story — photograph, illustration, or text — was perceived to have. Many word people saw visual elements as illustrative of the story conveyed in the writer’s text, necessary gimmicks to break up blocks of text and keep the reader’s attention, whereas visual people saw visuals as journalistic contributions in their own right.

Another day a magazine photo editor I was shadowing explained: “It’s about real estate. Trying to get space.” Later she added, “The ideal situation is a marriage of words and images, *not* a battle for real estate.” But during my fieldwork in 2003 and 2004, I observed very little marital bliss and many battles for real estate. In this chapter I detail the particulars of this battle over physical space on the page in order to underline power relations that shape the production and circulation of visuals that are part of knowledge production about the world