The Swiss video journalist: issues of agency and autonomy in news production

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Abstract

Using the case of Swiss video journalists as an example this article examines how the structure-agency problem is reflected in the professional practice of contemporary news production. The trend in journalism and in news work in general is reportedly towards declining autonomy and increasing workplace alienation, hastened by the introduction of new production technologies. Evidence from a study of Swiss video journalists suggests that the impact of such change may not have the anticipated, wholly negative consequences for news workers. The article concludes by suggesting that while it is difficult to see video journalists as skilled strategists contesting control in the increasingly market-oriented environment, neither can they be readily characterized as victims of commercialism enjoying little workplace autonomy. These extremes may exist among journalists as a whole, but the evidence indicates that professional practice in the world of the video journalist is the product of both the structure of their employment and their individual agency.

Introduction
Hardt has argued that it is a characteristic of capitalist media systems for journalists and news workers in general to experience diminishing autonomy and rising workplace alienation (Hardt, 1991). Some scholars have argued that in the increasingly market-oriented media environment this trend is being hastened by the introduction of new news production technologies (e.g. Bromley, 1997, Macgregor, 1997; Ursell, 2003)[2]. Managerial discourse compounds this process via the 'self-disciplining' mythology of professionalism (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003) or the occupational value of objectivity (Ursell, 2000). The result is the subordination of journalist actors to the structures of workplace control.

In this paper we present evidence from a study based on a purposive sample of a type of news worker whose numbers are growing – the video journalist (VJ) – that suggests that, at least in this example, the impact of technological and organizational change on journalistic practice and the evolving sense of what it means to act professionally may not be quite as these authors suggest. Our evidence indicates that professional practice in the world of the VJ is 'co-produced' (Cant & Sharma, 1998, cited in Gleeson & Knights, 2006), the product of both the structure of their employment and their individual agency. We conclude by questioning the prevailing view of the impact of new technologies of production, suggesting instead, on the basis of our empirical evidence, that it might be helpful to think of the journalist's role as evolutionary and that in new news production contexts, working with new technologies and with new practices, journalists, while they are able to accept these pressures and show little inclination to resist them, manage, through a continued adherence to long-cherished occupational values, to find satisfaction and a sense of prestige in their work. Our findings suggest a complexity in occupational practice that has been overlooked in recent studies of journalism. This reinforces our belief that a revived sociology of journalists is urgently required (Dickinson, 2007) to help us understand the implications of these changes. Specifically, we believe that a renewed interest in the occupation of journalism and a focus on *journalists* rather than *journalism* is needed.

Theoretical background
In his account of the history of American journalism, Hardt argues that within the capitalist press system new technologies of production have gradually reduced journalists' autonomy and weakened their position as employees (Hardt, 1990). New production technologies thus threaten the nature of news output itself. As Hardt puts it:

> The drive toward technological perfection requires adjustments to the work force and increases control over journalistic "output" at the expense of diversity, human creativity, and the type of intellectual discourse that ultimately benefits society. (Hardt, 1990: 356).

In light of these arguments in recent discussions of the field of journalism studies writers from both sides of the Atlantic have made the point that we need more research to examine what news workers actually do. Writing from a US perspective Schudson notes the neglect of the 'specific social realities' of news production and the 'specific choices of what news to report and how to report it.' (Schudson, 2000: 175). Cottle's view from Britain is that the 'social contextual realities' of news production deserve attention because they lie between 'the economic determinations of the marketplace and the cultural discourses within media representations.' (Cottle, 2003:

13). One of the authors of the present paper has outlined a case for restoring sociological analysis to the heart of the study of journalists (Dickinson, 2007). Gregor Gall has written recently of the relative neglect of the social relations of production in studies of journalism, an 'important omission' he says, 'in the search for an understanding of the grounded social processes and institutions that influence and determine the nature of contemporary media and journalism.' (Gall, 2005: 422-423).

Gall's interests are in the social relations of media employment and trade unionism, but his point holds good for our understanding of the social relations of media production more generally. In the present paper we report on a modest attempt to begin this search for greater understanding, for, to follow Gall, not only has there been a neglect of the collective and institutional social processes of news production, but also an apparent reluctance to examine in detail the social processes of production that involve the interactions and interrelations of individual journalists in the contemporary media workplace. We thus lack a sense of the work of news producers as experienced by today's news workers themselves. As Manning (2000) points out, critiques of 'production line' news abound in the literature on news production, but surprisingly rarely has the focus been on the way journalists go about their work. Instead attention is more commonly paid towards the constraints placed upon them and the regulatory, corporate and organizational contexts in which these are rooted.

The changes in news organizations over the past 20 years have long been thought to have had a deleterious effect on the quality of news output, contributing to a gradual edging out of 'serious' news from the news agenda in favour of lighter, and, for audiences, less demanding content. This is viewed as an inevitable consequence of the proliferation of news channels, increasing competition and mounting commercial pressure to capture and hold the attention of a fragmenting audience, whose members show less and less interest in conventional news forms. In this view, journalists are generally powerless in the face of such changes, the occupation, like its product, irresistibly 'dumbing down' in the slavish pursuit of the sensational and the popular. But we know surprisingly little about how journalists are responding to changes in workplace organization and production technologies. Are they resistant to these changes? To what extent is their autonomy and professional integrity compromised? These questions are important because they are linked to some of the most contested features of the journalist's role in commercial enterprises.

We explore these questions by examining some of the working practices of video journalists and their attitudes to work. VJs are a category of news worker whose role would appear to illustrate rather vividly the contradictions of the contemporary news production environment. The technologies that VJs use appear to render them free agents, unencumbered by the burdens of team working and the need to conform to conventional production routines, yet as employees they are at the same time constrained by the structure of management and their employers' commercial expectations.

Before we describe the context for the empirical study discussed here, it will be helpful to consider, briefly, the theoretical background to the debate about contemporary journalism, the changing nature of what Cottle calls the 'news ecology' (Cottle, 1999) and its implications for journalistic practice and occupational values.

Journalists and the changing news ecology: the need for research
In the discussion referred to earlier, Cottle (2003) goes on to argue that the variety of the 'news ecology' demands attention because of the complexity and contradiction that have been arising with the introduction of new technologies of production. Cottle describes how digital technologies have facilitated convergence in news production so that single news reports can be produced in multiple formats and presented on multiple platforms. This has led to multi-skilling in the news workforce. Journalists, compelled by their weakened position as employees on short-term, sometimes casual, contracts with uncertain career prospects, have at the same time been forced to adopt more flexible working practices. The result, argues Cottle, is format-driven, 'packaged' news, tailored to specific market segments, broadly 'serious' or broadly 'popular'.

In this way news forms are becoming more differentiated. The kind of news produced and the ways it is produced are mutually reinforcing (Cottle, 2003: 20-21). In Cottle's words, news 'texts' interact with news 'contexts'. Journalists consciously and purposively construct and reproduce news products but they do this in particular contexts and under changing circumstances (i.e. in new production environments, working with new technologies, under new working conditions). Some systematic exploration of this will help us better understand the variety of production contexts and news texts and the ways market forces, employment practices, and news outputs on the one hand and journalistic practices on the other interact in the news production process.

The changed working environment in news production is thought by some to be at least partly responsible for a decline in journalistic standards, a 'dumbing down' in newsroom practice and a corresponding degradation of news output. Franklin (1997), MacGregor (1997) and Bromley (1997) all take this view. Ursell's (2001) empirical study found that, in British regional television news at least, accuracy, factualness and 'completeness' (to use Ursell's term) seem to have been compromised by the demands placed on journalists in the altered working environment.

The evidence of change in the news industry on a global scale is hard to ignore and there is growing evidence too about the ways journalists and other news workers are responding to it. However, it is also already clear that it is difficult to generalise about the impact of new production technologies in news. We have little detailed understanding as yet about the lived experiences of journalists who work with these technologies and how they differ according to context or medium. Nor do we know much about how and to what extent new technologies affect journalists' attitudes to their work and their commitment to occupational values. These are clearly important factors to examine if we want to find out how new technologies are influencing the practice of journalism.

To help explore these issues we present data from empirical research conducted by one of us into the working practices and attitudes to work of Swiss video journalists. This data shows how news work is experienced in a contemporary production setting, one which entails the deployment of multiple production skills by individual news workers. Our intention, taking the lead from Schudson and Cottle, is to present a view of the use of new production technology that focuses much more tightly than has been

evident so far on the working practice of news workers in this changed environment and the ways they perceive it. Our conclusions will draw us back to the debates about media change and its consequences for news output, but we hope that by presenting an account of a highly specialized group of news workers we are able to point to and examine the implications of a greater complexity in the changes that are taking place in news production than has so far been acknowledged in the research literature.

The research context: Swiss broadcasting, TeleZüri and video journalism
Both Cottle (1999) and Ursell (2001) make the point that technology will have different impacts depending on the organization they are introduced into and that organization's culture, traditions and aims. In describing the research context here we give a sense of the commercial environment in which the work of the VJs interviewed for the study reported on here is conducted. This is important for an understanding of the role of the VJ and the expectations of the VJs' employing organization. However, to repeat, our aim is not so much to examine how commercial pressures affect the quality of news output itself, but to examine how VJs respond to and interpret this situation in the course of their work.

The Swiss broadcasting scene
Swiss broadcasting is dominated at the national level by the public Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR idée Suisse) which runs seven television networks and 18 radio channels and produces programmes in the country's four official languages. The majority of SRG's funding comes from licence fee revenue, the remainder from television advertising. Deregulation of the Swiss media system at the beginning of the 1990s allowed private local and regional radio and television channels to come into existence[3] but the national broadcaster continues to operate with a quasi-monopoly (Schawinski, 2002). The local and regional channels compete for audiences not only with SRG but also with television stations based in France, Germany and Italy. These broadcasters' programmes are widely available because of the very high take-up of multi-channel cable, digital and satellite services[4] Some German commercial broadcasters (e.g. RTL, SAT1, Pro7) also provide specially tailored programme and/or advertising versions of their channels for the Swiss market.

Legislation enacted in early 2007 extended opportunities for advertising for the indigenous local and regional broadcasters (e.g. for the first time allowing advertising for beer and wine) and introducing fee splitting arrangements allowing them a roughly 5% share of SRG's licence fee revenue. Both these measures are expected to increase revenues for the smaller, regional broadcasters significantly and ensure that, although SRG remains the major force nationally, private Swiss broadcasting companies will be able to compete locally and regionally and thus be commercially viable. Swiss broadcast media companies therefore now operate in a highly competitive, multi-channel environment.

TeleZüri, owned by the Swiss media conglomerate Tamedia, is widely regarded as the most commercially successful of the local and regional services[5]. It broadcasts news and topical programming to the greater Zurich area (approximate population: 1.5 million). Launched in October 1994 TeleZüri was the first private Swiss regional news channel to go on air. When TeleZüri was taken over by Tamedia in 2001 the

station was running at a loss. After some organizational restructuring and re-focusing of its editorial policy audiences and advertising revenues have increased to the extent that, at the time of writing (mid-2007), TeleZüri had begun to operate at a profit. The station's output is positioned at the popular end of the market with an emphasis on local news, personalities and human interest coverage. In the first quarter of 2006 TeleZüri claimed a reach of almost 50% of the potential local viewing audience during primetime (Tamedia, 2006).

Video journalists
The video journalist appears on the surface, for reasons outlined below, to be the embodiment of the deterioration in news production practices about which writers such as Bromley (1997) have expressed concern. VJs have been a feature of most contemporary news organizations since the mid-1990s, although they may be used in different ways in different contexts[6]. Ursell (2001), for example, notes that the British regional commercial television company, Yorkshire Television,[7] employed their VJs to produce video only; audio – presumably in the form of voiced commentary - was added by other journalists in the newsroom.

The decision not to use conventional television news crews of two or three people and use multi-skilled VJs instead was important to the early success of TeleZüri following its launch in 1994; its 14 journalists at the time were trained in Zurich prior to the station's launch (Bigi, 2004). These journalists became the first professional Swiss VJs but other private broadcasters quickly followed their lead and at the time of the research reported here there were around 80 VJs working in Swiss television. Swiss local and regional television is thus very largely produced by video journalists and they are integral to the commercial strategies of their companies. In comparison to the cost of conventional news crews VJs are cheap and their ability to deliver a sense of immediacy and intimacy, and the emphasis on human interest in their reporting has helped to capture large audiences. The typical VJ news report is composed of four elements: quotes from people directly concerned by the news occurrence; quotes from 'official sources' (e.g. the police, public employees); quotes from 'independent experts'; and a to-camera commentary/summary by the VJ (the 'stand up'). A total of around 20 to 30 minutes of video footage is gathered for a typical TeleZüri news story. This footage is compressed by the VJ into a piece for broadcast of about two to two-and-a-half minutes. VJs will spend around 20 to 45 minutes logging and scripting the final story and another 30 to 45 minutes recording the voice-over and working with a video editor to produce the final package.

The VJ phenomenon has attracted some research attention (e.g. Studer, 2004) but none, before the present study, has attempted to examine the routine working practices of Swiss VJs and their attitudes to their work.

Research methods and sample
TeleZüri employed 20 VJs in 2005. Questionnaires were sent to all of these via email in January of that year asking questions about training, length of experience, job satisfaction, attitudes to the technology used at work, autonomy, external pressures, self-image and the image of VJs in general; and attitudes to their role. Half the sample was also subject to individual one-day observations, beginning at daily newsroom meetings, where the previous day's broadcasts - and VJ reports - are evaluated, story

proposals discussed and assignments allocated. The aim was to observe VJs on a variety of assignments from story allocation through initial story research in the newsroom to final editing and post-production activities (scripting and recording voice-overs). Semi-structured interviews were carried out to gather data to supplement the email survey and to follow up issues arising from the observations. Finally, email interviews were conducted with 10 former TeleZüri VJs now working in more conventional two- or three-person news crews for SRG. Here, questions were asked about multi- and de-skilling, job satisfaction, advantages and disadvantages of the VJ approach, working conditions, and their experience of VJs' occupational status relative to more conventional news work roles. All interviews were conducted in Swiss-German. Audio recordings were transcribed and, along with email interview and questionnaire responses, translated into English.

Video journalism in Switzerland tends to be the preserve of the lone male: of the 20 VJs surveyed, only two were married and 15 were male. Three of the ex-VJs were female. This corresponds with findings from other studies of Swiss journalists (Marr et al. 2001; Studer, 2004). TeleZüri VJs tended, however, to be older and more experienced than their colleagues in other VJ-driven newsrooms: more than half were between 30 and 40 years old (Studer's survey found that the average age of Swiss VJs was 29 (Studer, 2004)); three quarters of the TeleZüri VJs (15) had been working as journalists for more than six years; four of these had more than 10 years experience.

We present a selection of our research findings below. For reasons of space we will confine ourselves to a discussion of just two issues that are relevant to the theoretical concerns we have just introduced: the question of job satisfaction and multi-skilling, its impact on occupational practices and professional norms and its actual and potential role as perceived by VJs as a tool of management in the drive for higher audience ratings.

Findings

Job satisfaction
In the email questionnaire VJs were asked about job satisfaction, prestige and motivation. The majority reported high levels of job satisfaction: 19 out of 20 said this was 'high' (10) or 'very high' (9). Eleven stated that they felt they had higher prestige since they began working as VJs. The majority of the ex-VJs interviewed felt that working as a VJ tends to be more satisfying than working within a two- or three-person news crew:

> The VJ concept basically is more creative since I am able to convert my ideas immediately into picture and sound. Therefore working as a VJ is more satisfying because I rule. (LL) [8]

Job satisfaction is clearly linked to motivation; nineteen out of 20 VJs reported that they were 'highly' (10) or 'very highly' (9) motivated. Motivation came from being 'where the action is' and 'being in touch with people'; these two factors were most frequently chosen as 'most important' sources of satisfaction by the survey sample. The more action there is and the more people he or she can get in touch with, the greater the job satisfaction a news VJ seems to enjoy; satisfaction levels are evidently much reduced when there is less action. One of the VJs being observed was constructing a follow-up to the headline story of the previous day which had reported

on the contested imprisonment of a young female immigrant. The follow-up story focussed on statements made by a fellow inmate. The making of this report involved little fieldwork and relied heavily on archive material:

> Today was not a typical VJ day. I only recorded one interview which even took place in the backyard of our studio. Then I taped a telephone conversation because the person was not able to give an on-camera interview and I had to include in my report another person's statement, which had been collected by a VJ colleague. That's not what I call a good VJ day. (O)

Other VJs reported deriving satisfaction from their identification with their audience – reporting on what was of interest to the audience and being recognised and acknowledged for their association with local daily life and familiar local issues. This helped to win them a sort of celebrity. TeleZüri VJs felt that their public image was 'good' (11) or 'very good' (7) and field observation confirmed this: members of the public (passers-by as well as contributors to their reports) more often than not reacted positively to them. The VJs' evident attempts to be 'of the people' seemed to be recognised and highly valued.

Describing their 'lone wolf' image, VJs tended to mythologize their work, invoking the romantic ideal of the journalist as free, autonomous seeker after truth, released from the normal routines and constraints of the newsroom. Pedelty's observations of lone foreign correspondents covering the conflict in El Salvador in 1992 found a similar tendency (Pedelty, 1995). Despite the routinized nature of their work, these journalists regarded themselves as heroes, their self-mythologizing compensating for their professionally alienated existence. For the VJs in the present study the 'myth' of the dashing reporter, always at the people's (or viewers') service, each acting like a 21st century Robin Hood armed with a DV cam was useful to their self-conception and helped them to distinguish themselves from other journalists. Their personal popularity and public recognisability helped them further to develop a self-image of themselves as objective reporters, local celebrities (thanks to their daily TV exposure) and even as 'local heroes' (Bigi, 2004).

Another source of satisfaction came from meeting the goal of producing marketable outputs. The VJs' orientation to the market is driven in part by self-interest ('if the company does well my job will be safe') and partly by the opportunity that VJ work helps journalists to display their skills to potential future employers. Finally, satisfaction is also derived from being first – this is the payload that the VJ idea delivers and it becomes an important value in itself, 18 out of 20 reporting that this was the most important factor in story selection.

Multi-skilling
As previous research has shown (Bromley, 1997; Cottle, 1999; Ursell, 2001, 2003; Studer, 2004), multi-skilling has the effect of flattening production hierarchies. The result is that there are fewer checks and balances than in conventional television production set-ups. The VJ assumes responsibility for almost all his/her work, there are few opportunities for others to monitor what goes on, and there is less mentoring of junior members of staff. Ex-VJs recognised the problems this can cause:

> As a VJ I am more susceptible to being 'captured' by clever interview partners. If I act as a team the impact in terms of credibility, competence and seriousness is greater. This, of course, is subject to a good mutual understanding among the team players. (KK)

> The VJ being a one-man-band acts imperatively in a more subjective way, which can lead to bias. Because he is on his own when doing two or three jobs at the same time he automatically is the focus of interest and attraction to his interview partners. In other words the VJ is unprotected against their influence. (LL)

The advantage of multi-skilling obviously lies in its efficiency and economy. The VJ, a single field reporter who writes, shoots, presents and edits stories alone[9], represents a significant saving in production costs. At the centre of the system is the DV cam. At the time of research TeleZüri VJs used a Sony DSR 250. Each was equipped additionally with a tripod, microphone, camera light and batteries.

Half the VJs found the technology challenging to use but saw this positively, eight regarding it as giving them a decisive advantage in their journalistic work.

> Working as a VJ I am not dependent on the talent, the intuition and flexibility of a cameraman. When I discover the most compelling picture I can immediately shoot and start constructing the appropriate off-text in my mind. (L)

The advantage of working as a lone reporter was evident during the observational study. For example, VJ N was assigned to produce a portrait of the young ex-prison inmate (referred to in the previous section). After he recorded establishing shots of the house where the young woman was living and had talked to neighbours, N knocked on the door and the young woman's parents invited him in. After a brief discussion he was given permission to shoot inside the house and record an interview on camera with their daughter on the understanding that he took no shots of her face. He complied with their wishes and, videoing only the young woman's hands, feet, and hair, conducted the interview as planned. N then recorded short quotes from the woman's parents. It is unlikely that a conventional news crew would have been able to get this close to their subject. The ex-VJs in the study shared this view:

> VJs are quicker and more flexible and they shoot the pictures they really need and want. It is an advantage to work as a VJ when dealing with intimate situations, when trying to get an interview with victims of sexual abuse or generally with people who are afraid of television. I think in this case a VJ can act in a more discreet way than a crew can. (MM)

However, former VJs – particularly those working exclusively in two-person teams – tended to stress the drawbacks of multi-skilled working claiming that while shooting and interviewing at the same time the VJ risks being distracted by technical factors (e.g. operating the camera and checking sound quality). Successful multi-skilled working depended on long experience.

> If you really want to master the multi-skilling system you need to find a balance. How much effort do I invest in research, how much in shooting video, how much footage do I actually need? At the end of the day you will probably have achieved around 70 percent of what is possible. (GG)

When asked about aspects of the working process that for them were most important, the majority of VJs rated *conducting research* - i.e. drawing on different news sources such as other journalists, officials, politicians, experts, and so on - (rated most important by 11 out of 20) and *recording video* (7 out of 20) most highly. Least important were *administrative work* (rated as least important by 13 out of 20) and *gaining story approval by the editor* (7 out of 20). Despite its importance, almost all those interviewed pointed out that there was not enough time for research:

> Research often suffers from a time shortage. Once you are on your story assignment there won't be much time left for research because you are busy shooting – and you're alone. (E)

> There is definitely not enough time for substantial research and your attempts often end up in a Sisyphean task. You make 10 to 15 phone calls, walk from door to door and the best you can get often is a lucky punch. (K)

The research/time problem also emerged in the interviews with former VJs:

> As a VJ you are forced to cope with too many additional things that prevent you from sticking to your journalistic work. You often continue your research while driving your car and having the road map on your knees and the mobile phone in one of your hands. This is stressful! I really think the VJ occupation is exploitative. (NN)

These pressures can make the work of the VJ stressful. Eight of those questioned in the email survey were concerned about psychological strain and classified it as the work pressure bothering them most frequently.

> Psychological strain can result from the producer and editor-in-chief's expectations because they always want you to deliver the right story with the right subjects at the right time. As a VJ you are always directly competing with other journalists because you are visually identified with your work due to your on-camera stand-up. (O)

Others reported feeling themselves under physiological stress - six out of 20 regarded this as a major problem.[10] While the multi-skilled nature of the role clearly provides some of its appeal, the pressures it brings are also a constraint. It seems that for these VJs the satisfactions that being a VJ offers – the 'enabling' features of the role, as Giddens might put it (Giddens, 1984), have to be balanced against these constraining features.

Conclusions

A long standing view is that the developments that the phenomenon of the VJ seems to exemplify are ultimately negative for the occupation of journalism because they lead to exploitation and, in turn, workers' alienation. Complementing this is an argument influenced by Michel Foucault and his followers implicating workers themselves in the process of change to the extent that they embrace new working conditions and are willing to become more flexible in their work roles or become multi-skilled (see Fournier, 1999). Workers do this, it is claimed, because they come to see that there is something for them – prestige, freedom, creativity – in the changes that are affecting them. Foucault described how a 'discourse' – in this context a system of and an approach to work and its organization – may produce a way of thinking about and, in turn, a means of exercising power over those working within it. The discourse of 'enterprise', for example, is a discourse of work organization often cited in this literature. Control over members of a workplace or a workplace organization thus stems from the power located in a particular discourse. In the context of news production the discourse of 'objectivity' could be thought of as a powerful discourse of work organization.

Ursell (2000) has explored these ideas in her analysis of television workers and Aldridge and Evetts (2003) have done the same in their discussion of the professional

ideal in journalism. These authors suggest that although journalists may not experience them as such, the freedoms that they have been forced to bargain for in the contemporary newsroom are in fact illusory.

Does our evidence support this view? Are journalists being bought by the apparent freedoms that video journalism offers so as to remain, none the less, in the service of commercial media goals? We have little empirical evidence as yet of the lived experiences of journalists in the wider news production ecology to confidently support or refute such a claim, but the modest findings we have presented here hint at something rather more complex. This complexity, we believe, has something to do with the core values of journalism.

VJs clearly attach certain values to their role: a sense of freedom from, and resistance to, conventional practices (the 'newness' of the role is also an attraction), and the potential to report on the overlooked or hidden news 'behind the headlines', sometimes 'giving voice to the voiceless'. These values are clearly bound up with VJs' sense of job satisfaction. In their accounts of their work VJs evoke something akin to Cottle's idea of 'thick journalism' (Cottle, 2005) and a sense of 'worthiness' about the enterprise of video journalism. The negative aspects of being a VJ, those associated particularly with multi-skilling - source 'capture', lack of supervision, reduced time for research, psychological and physiological stress, and so on - tended to be voiced by ex-VJs. For VJs on the job at the time our data were collected the appeal to professional values and the claim that they are upholding them seemed to protect them from a sense that they are merely tools (and fairly low status tools) in the service of commercialism. The value of autonomy appears to serve VJs just as other journalistic values have served journalists in the past[11, 12].

Industrial sociologists have criticized the Foucauldian view of work because it seems to assume that owners or managers have a monopoly of control. Thompson and Ackroyd (1995), for example, argue that studies in the Foucauldian tradition rather too readily overlook workers' resistance to or manipulation of workplace discourses. There is certainly scant evidence of the mechanisms and practices that Ursell and Aldridge and Evetts assert are in place to secure media workers' compliance with new working practices. Our data suggest that it would be a mistake to apply Foucault's theories uncritically in the search for an understanding of the changing nature of news work, although much more empirical research in this vein exploring different contexts and the introduction of different technologies is needed. Further exploration of the working practices of journalists in the performance of their occupational roles may provide the more complete picture that Thompson and Ackroyd argue for in relation to other occupations.

As Deuze has argued (Deuze, 2005), the values of objectivity and autonomy are important for journalists for they are among the universal elements of an occupational ideology and are often used by practitioners to defend their profession. These universals seem to be affected by cultural and technological change. Deuze makes the point that journalists tend to be cautious about innovations in news work if they suspect that they will have an impact on their autonomy. Yet our evidence shows that multi-skilling allows journalists to behave more individualistically than they might otherwise. This may be one reason why the VJs in this study like their work. This particular technological development may thus have effects that contrast with those

resulting from other technological changes that Deuze and others (e.g. Garcia Alviles, 2004) have described. This suggests that we should be aware that some technological innovations may be more in keeping with journalists' values than others. In fact, in the case of the VJ one impact of technological change may not be to increase the chances of greater control and surveillance of practice but to reduce it.

Research on other occupations is helpful here in finding parallel processes in professionalism. Cant and Sharma's study of complementary medical practitioners showed how professional practices are the outcome of – are jointly produced by – the occupational structure that they operate within and their own, relatively autonomous, actions. (Cant & Sharma, 1998, cited in Gleeson & Knights, 2006). VJs may be similarly 'co-produced', being neither completely free agents nor victims of corporate control in the evolving news ecology.

One firm conclusion from the research reported here is that it is probably unhelpful to group 'new production technologies' together when considering change in news production practices. In their comparative study García Avilés et al (2004) concluded that some effects of digitization in Spanish and British newsrooms were welcomed by journalists and some less so. If we add our own modest findings to these conclusions then it seems reasonable to suggest that new technologies of production will have varied impacts when they are introduced, for these technologies are diverse and they are likely to be adopted in diverse ways. As Cottle (1999) argues in his discussion of the interactions between media structures, new technologies and journalist practices, there are likely to be varying consequences from the adoption of new technologies for the nature of news output and this is likely to depend on the specific contexts in which they are deployed. Again it is clear that further research on these issues is needed.

These conclusions support the view that there are advantages in adopting an occupational perspective on the work of journalists (Dickinson, 2007). Reviving such a perspective means that we re-consider the practice of journalism as an occupational accomplishment, something achieved through social interaction and collective behaviour in the workplace, involving social actors adjusting to their changing social situation. We believe that further empirical research to explore the situational adjustment that is now part and parcel of journalistic practice in the evolving news ecology is essential for a more fully rounded understanding of the practices of contemporary journalism. We hope that the research reported here represents a small step in that direction.

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[1] A version of this article was presented at the 4th International Conference on Communication and Reality *Communication crossroads: limits and transgressions*, Facultat de Comunicació Blanquerna, Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona, Spain, 25-26 May 2007.

[2] The processes are complex and some (notably Cottle, 1999; see also García Avilés et al, 2004) argue against a technologically determinist tendency in some of this literature, contending that technologies, production contexts (medium; format), newsroom practices, and outputs, are in subtle interplay and that the observable technological and organizational changes have varied and varying consequences.

[3] At the time of our empirical research there were 19 of these broadcasting on a daily basis (Bakom, 2006).

[4] In the greater Zurich area alone around 20 services from Germany can be watched on cable. More German services can be accessed on the digital TV platforms provided by Bluewin and Cablecom.

[5] See Bigi (2004) for an account of TeleZüri's history.

[6] The idea of the VJ first emerged in the late 1980s. Its rise in popularity is commonly associated with Michael Rosenblum, a former producer at CBS network television in the US. Rosenblum has predicted that VJs will 'revolutionize' and 'democratize' television and that 'television as we know it will be dead in five years at the latest' (Zalbertus & Rosenblum, 2004, p.164). His company has been training journalists in the use of digital video (DV) camera technology since the early 1990s, claiming for broadcasters and television production companies who employ VJs such benefits as increased speed and efficiency and significantly reduced costs. Rosenblum's typical training package is the 'videojournalist boot camp', an intensive period of training in which journalists learn to record, write, script, edit, produce and direct news reports using small, handheld DV cameras and editing software that can run on a laptop computer. TeleZüri's VJs were trained in a two-month Rosenblum boot camp.

[7] Yorkshire Television plc (more accurately, 'Yorkshire Tyne Tees Television plc') was acquired by the Granada Group plc (now ITV plc) in 1997.

[8] Each VJ in the study has been uniquely referenced using letters E to Y; ex-VJs are referenced using letters EE to PP.

[9] At TeleZüri VJs work with an editing technician to finally edit their reports prior to transmission.

[10] The digital camera weighs around 4 kilos, but together with the tripod, microphone, headphones, batteries and camera backpack the total weight of the VJ gear easily amounts to 6 to 8 kilos. All the women VJs interviewed complained about frequent backache and tension.

[11] Cf. Tuchman's claim that objectivity can be seen as a 'strategic ritual' – a way of doing work that protects the journalist from criticism – a way of showing that s/he is doing the job correctly/acceptably (Tuchman, 1972).

[12] Wintour (1989) notes how technologies that afford journalists greater control over their work tend to be regarded positively by them.