Journalism, Sociology

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Abstract

The study questions some of the attitudes towards framing journalism as a field of study. It suggests that a strong vein of sociological method and apparatus informs the scholarship and that one effect has been concept proliferation. Another is the removal of the element of time and history from much of the study. Moreover the centrality of sociological tends to reduce the scope of humanities, as opposed to science, in the approach, which is odd considering journalism is steeped in opinion that and a variety of contexts and cultures. These enshrine freedom of expression, ethical concerns on the nature of humanity, proper government, and citizens' lifestyles. Starting with Popper's reflections on social science method, the argument concludes with some suggestions to bring narrative into stronger focus, suggesting Ricoeur as a way in to find new arguments. The proposals are tentative and inevitably simplify an extremely complex issue in the weave of critical thought as the study of journalism evolves.

Introduction

The following observations may or may not apply to studies of Arab media and scholarship on the region. It is worth questioning whether the quantitative 'number crunching' approach to the study of Arab media is prevalent as it is in the west. At the International Conference in Cairo covering 50 years of international research (2011) the review of Pakistani scholarship, for example, highlighted many themes and distribution of methods typical elsewhere. Effects studies, and content analysis were dominant, and the most popular theories were agenda setting and frame theory. "Scientific ' method were reported as the only reliable method for research.

Furthermore at the conference, the missing factor of history in studies of global news stressed by Thussu were targeted at all scholarship. At any rate the following remarks, which are a plea for more qualitative, descriptive and historical work, apply anywhere – and perhaps there are signs that the straightjacket of sociology is not so tight outside Europe. The descriptive qualitative work telling the story of citizen journalism in the region (Hamdy 2010) is one example – and doubtless there are many more.Peggy

05/12/2011

Whatever text you look at in journalism research, you are likely to find either direct reference to a sociologist, or to a theory derived in some respect from a fragment of the discipline founded by Comte, Spencer, Durkheim and Weber. It is a supposition that the concepts and approaches of this discipline have infiltrated many analytical procedures by which writers unravel the impacts and identity of the large body of communicators called journalists. Many of the luminary names in journalism studies include the word in the titles of essays and books, for example those of Philip Schlesinger, Jeremy Tunstall, Michael Schudson, and key Herbert Gans. Very few voices can be heard of dissent from the theoretical areas enclosed by the discipline. Social science is part of the unconscious undertow of western critical study. Journalism studies as a university discipline goes back

about 50 years perhaps, taken globally, and of course it would have been struggling at first to establish its credentials as a field with proper procedures, findings and general integrity. The wish to differentiate itself from journalism proper and its own arm of commentary, probably fuelled this desire to find a respectable academic distance from the object of study itself. Sociology, it appears simply by observation, to have crept to the centre of the field. It occupies it by default. It has the dignity of the word 'science' and apparently offers a means systematically to unravel journalism. Should we be suspicious? Were there options? What are the effects of this partnership?

I shall suggest there are questionable results. The sociological terrain is itself confused, controversial and multidimensional. Its methods may not be suited to the communication of a form of expression that sometimes lends itself to literary, imaginative and persuasive devices. Social science is dismissive of intangible communication qualities. Sociology may well be a barbed choice. It has little sense of history. It often extracts 'situations' to analyse from tiny segments of time, partly estranged from context, (or at best highly selective as to which elements of context it will acknowledge), and it often aims towards a schematic, a-historical knowledge. It seeks to uncover articulated systems, finding mechanistic cause relations in social processes, whatever those processes may mean. It isolates artificial existence of points of action that interrelate with other selected and subjectively defined points of action, which it will seek to declare as providing evidence for objective principles inscribed with invariability and transcendence. As Islam (2002) points out, sociology is a generalizing discipline. When applied to journalism, it is extremely questionable how effective these generalizations are, how applicable to situations across contexts such as nations, or across time. Time is often the missing factor.

What is at stake here is the nature of a discipline, which Robert Post (2009) defines not just as a body of knowledge, but also as "a set of practices by which that knowledge is

acquired, confirmed implemented, preserved and reproduced." Disciplines are the point at which these practices are institutionalized and of course that happens almost exclusively in universities and the disciplinary publications arising from them. They guard and disseminate disciplinary norms. There is considerable uniformity across universities. As a newcomer, journalism has been concerned with finding a normative structure for its discipline, nudging and nestling as it does beside other branches of media and communication studies. It could and perhaps should, have held more closely to the humanities agenda, which, as Post (2009) observes must "gratify needs for human meaning, understanding and cooperation that are perennially diffuse and unsettled" (p176). Humanities research in the words of Terry Eagleton (1984) should maintain a "general humanistic responsibility for the culture as a whole."

One of the first things the sociological method of study which has been borrowed by journalism overlooks is the internal flaws within the discipline of sociology itself. How valid is it to rely on the tenets of a body of academics already unsure of the fate or future of their discipline? The vogue for functionalism, which has left a residue in several aspects of journalism studies including some of the market models, is now derided by sociologists on many counts, including its false analogies with Darwinian biology, its circularity, and so on. Sociology always had an aura of a fringe discipline, concerned with matters that others ignored (Islam, 2002). Core concerns must be its restriction in time and space, its shortage of means to grapple with narratives and history, or with sensibilities outside a mechanistic purview based on systems. By contrast, history and narrative are intrinsic to journalism in the way it presents its knowledge to the world at large. It struggles, of course, and these problems are proper objects of study, and we need to know why public communication is subject to skew, spin and other limitations. How to approach those limitations, how to inscribe them

into forms of words, and how to integrate those gaps with knowledge gained from other disciplines – philosophy, psychology, linguistics and literature, for example - is the problem.

Criticisms

Now to look at some criticisms of sociology more closely. A trenchant analyst was Karl Popper who in 1957 examined the security of sociological knowledge. His unswerving presentation of a point of a certain point of view reflects a body of opinion and examine premises that might make uncomfortable reading for those writing on journalism.

His critique cites many analogies of social science with physical sciences, and proposes they are fallacies: Whereas in physics, situations can be isolated, and experiments repeated without distortion of a wider reality, "in social life, the same old factors in new arrangements are never the same old factors." If nothing can repeat itself precisely in social life, the actually of every situation is new, he says.

Secondly, social structures are entirely different from physical structures. "In science, the history of a structure contributes nothing to its behavior." (p19) The former are holistic, more than the sum of their parts so that "social structures cannot be explained as combinations of their parts." In effect, no situation repeats itself in life so to seek the objective existence of structures is to work on a false premise. Any generalizing process is false. Perhaps Popper betrays his time in a further anti objectivity argument where he suggests there will always be an influence of the predictions on the predicted event in the social sphere. He says the fact of the influence of a social science finding on subsequent social development is an exact proof of its non objectivity. Sixty years on, this argument is now increasingly applied to science too but is no less valid for that.

In Popper's argument, everything studied sociologically is contingent to local place, local era (modern or feudal etc) and, unlike science, there is no conformity over time of any one rule or principle. He does admit the possibility of cause and effect in social affairs but crucially these do not transfer across eras and have no claim to universality or therefore to science. In terms of method, he is no less scathing. The essence of sociology is qualitative, he asserts. It is debatable how many current researchers would properly accept this limitation. His argument is simple – you cannot formulate social change relationships in quantitative terms in the same way as you can chart quantitative change in physics – rates of change in technology and innovation, for example, which are a branch of journalism studies, would fail on these grounds and the same kind of arguments would apply to 'tabloidisation' or indeed the whole moral panics thesis. Popper's examples are rates of 'industrialization' and 'imperialism'. aMuch current work on journalism is presented as quantitative, measuring just these things such as rates of change in statistical ways. Sociology is at heart qualitative, Popper's case runs, and can only operate by the use of 'sympathetic imagination.' (p20). I cannot conceive of many studies of journalism content in current journals that would admit sympathetic imagination into their list of methods.

He continues with several arguments in this vein on method failures and the problem of generalisation: "The most careful observation of one developing caterpillar will not help us predict its transformation into another." (p109), and "We have no valid reason to expect of any apparent repetition of a historical development that it will continue to run parallel to its prototype."

And finally: " The hope more especially that we may one day find the laws of motion of societies, just like Newton found the laws of motion in physical bodies, is nothing but the

result of these misunderstandings. Since there is no motion in society similar or analogous to to the motion of physical bodies there can be no such laws."

This encapsulates the problem of sociology that connects it to systems, underlying articulated structures conceived often rather statically, or, if dynamically, as producing laws or stereotypes of typical development. Brian Winston's (1997) analysis of technology adoption posits just such a law, 'the law of the suppression of radical technology', proposing that emerging technologies are always implemented conservatively. In the field of online journalism, David Domingo (2008) captures similar ideas in the notion of technological 'inertia' (note the pseudo scientific word taken from mechanics and motion in science) that describe professional journalistic mindsets as they negotiate changes in their technology. The revered sociologist Bourdieu reflects another version of the notion of the same residualism – 'habitus' in his field theory (field, another borrowed scientific term), used by Kunelius and Ruusunoksa (2008) in their online journalism study of technological adoption in newsrooms.

Thus sociology seems to lure analysts of online media to attempt to find laws and principles of adoption of technology – looking for precisely this quality of parallel development, prediction for new situations yet to arise, and a sense of order. They strive to find the persistence of essence within mutation, or an explanation of a repeating 'cause' of mutations across time and space.

Comparative journalism is subject to similar criticism – seeking regularities across space and time. It is the nature of the regularities too that one needs to question. Their 'nature' is extremely controversial. Esser (2008)again, in his study of 'soundbite' journalism suggests the American-style short soundbite is gradually infiltrating German journalism practices. Sociology dignifies these investigations, whereas in my view finding real and consistent entities (such as a 'soundbite') across even quite small cultural differences,such as

between Germany and England, leaves a sense of the arbitrary and contingent and poses real questions as to whether these can realistically be isolated from one news context to another. Hanitzsch (2007) points out quite fairly that journalism studies of professionalism are riddled with perspectives that don't overlap. He acknowledges that the object of study is multidimensional, that therefore selectivity is inevitable in doing research. That said, his own work to build a meta map of journalism cultures is also paying homage to the God of systems.

I would elaborate one of these elements particularly. Sociological concepts seem to be endlessly divisible. By that I mean that they are infinite in number and nearly always further reducible. McQuail (1997) describes an audience type for example as being both 'conversational' and 'consultative'. There is no limit to the potential descriptors of an audience type when approached this way. A 'fickle' audience might well give 'moody feedback' as opposed to a 'restrained' or 'silent' feedback (I am inventing). How are these terms grounded? Researchers and research is bedeviled by concept proliferation and this is a problem for research partly induced by sociology and its current dissasociative practices.

 Bourdieu's field theory picked out already, provides another illustration. In the last few years, journalism studies have started to employ it as a conceptual mould (e.g Couldry 2003, Benson 1998). Why was it picked up suddenly? Such a choice immediately detaches those studies of online technological adoptions from any others not using that theory. Endlessly re-slicing elements of theoretical positions leads to fragmentation and a profusion of arguments based on different premises. It is preventing coherent disciplinary profiles.

It is fanciful to put too much emphasis on any one of the profusion of sociological perspectives on the acquisition of knowledge. One can however note some interesting

parallels with the approach of Robert Merton, whose 'middle range theory' is generally acknowledged to carry much weight in U.S. sociological circles. Echoing my point above on theory proliferation, this approach abandons grand social systems, substituting the use of small grafts of hypothesis gleaned from everyday empirical experience or bits of hypotheses segregated from larger theories. It thus allows segmentation of any wider theory. Meantime, abandoning of any notion of essences, it undermines the expectation of consistency between times and places. It enfranchises the parochial approach. Its downside is that it validates the disconnect between one study and the next, and, in a sense, out with the baby goes the bathwater – history, continuity and mutual connection between studies.

This perspective is a wing of the wider and contested notion of positivism, that empirical approach that emphasizes scientific expectations that research should be replicable, valid, and reliable. Undoubtedly positivism is a dominant approach for many modern studies of journalism, commendable enough from its empirical standpoint, but problematic when it is sewn rather randomly into whatever theory seems to meet the needs of a particular researcher. Studies of online journalism seem beset by the problems of theory (e.g Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009, Hanitzsch, 2007). Adoption of the internet into newsrooms, as mentioned above, has many scholars' attention. (e.g. Bockzowski 2004, Deuze 2004. Chung 2007 Karlsson 2011, Steensen, 2008, Fortunati et al, 2008 O'Sullivan Heinonen 2007). Positivist case studies and questionnaire surveys often form the method. The theories seem troubled. The idea of adoption, its philosophical being, if you like, rarely takes the foreground. On which side of the nominalist or realist divide does it lie? Very often, also, the concepts used to define change stem from isolating 'participatory features' (Karlsson 2011), such as 'interactivity' (e.g Chung, 2007) or 'multimedia' as definers of the novelty of the so-called online medium. As Karlsson (2011) notes there is 'no common ground' between the definitions of interactivity (Kiousis, 2002, McMillan, 2002 cited in Karlsson 2011). These

controversial facets like interactivity are then connected to social values of our time like
equality and participation. But where did these 'social facts' being studied come from – are
they inherent in the technologies, waiting to be exploited? What is the nature of their
existence? Are they just socially defined characteristics, no more than convenient categories
'obvious' to the researcher or participants? How does anyone derive these categories? How
do we know they are the right ones to privilege. And 'adoption' itself: is it a descriptive
word, an evolution that happens piecemeal, or a process that flows along certain inherent pre-
ordained channels. Sometimes adoption is rationalized as teleological, as Marc Deuze
implies with his talk of 'ideal types'. Is it just a word or is the adoption of technology
something ordained, out there but nascent, a Platonic idea incarnated at particular historical
moments, a sort of philosophical universal?the of its defining entities I should perhaps
elaborate a little more too on the entrapment within contemporary mindsets that these a
historical perspectives can take. Democracy – often the western neo liberal versions –
participation, and equality of access to information form an idealistic pivot to much study.
Being of our time, such normative concepts are almost inevitably convenient to give critical
purchase to the field. But it matters if these constructs become too universal. There are other
forms of government, other ways of doing things and other values and arguments that can be
lost unless we retain a method of recourse to the historical referent as a source of terms and
cultures of understanding. Even if they are at odds with 21st century sensibilities.

        Whatever the answer, theory building, renewal and extension are highly valued and
are pivotal to gaining academic publication. In researchers' hands this becomes a means to
obfuscate and drown meanings in a sea of specialist concepts. Sociology is a wonderful arena
to multiply theories and extensions in this academic game. Nobody can declare its limits, and

no imagined cause and effect relation is out of bounds, often based on concepts defined in a particular research paper.

Pierre Sorlin (1994) puts another slant on the minimalist approach – claiming that the latter-day vogue for desconstructionism – is linked to the end of grand narratives. In this view, any topic is considered too large to think about as a whole and 'piecemeal' study is the way forward. Discontinuity and fragmentation have become worthy objects of attention built into the fabric of postmodern territory (p11).

Popper's summaries of arguments, on which these discussions are based so far, were supplemented a few years later by Richard Feynman, in three public lectures of 1963. Feynman is a pure scientist and mathematician. His polemical criticisms seem still pertinent, especially as social science wishes to emulate exactitude of science. In The Meaning of it All, Feynman takes to task the fallacies of 'This Scientific Age'. Under special scrutiny are method and proof. Following a fairly standard section on the temptation to equate correlation and cause, he goes on to discuss how tempting it is to calculate the probability of an event occurring *after it has occurred*. If we keep in mind those types of journalism research that collect 'data', analyse it, and conclude with patterns and regularities from evidence, some cautionary tales emerge. He points out that it is entirely wrong to discern a pattern (as any form of law) from a single body of data *unless that precise patterning possibility was inscribed in the research design*.(My italics) His example was from experiments with rats, a cliché he would be unlikely to repeat today. What he cited was the example of these animals that a fellow researcher made to go left or right at a 'T' junction included in the experimental apparatus. What his colleague was investigating was immaterial, but at the end , he noticed that the rats seemed to alternate: first one left, second right, third left, fourth right, and so on.

The researcher wanted one in twenty odds of this, so he did a large number of cases. It seemed to work, it was true….the rats behavior displayed this regularity. The researcher rushed to Feynman and said: "Calculate the odds of that." "It probably is less than one in twenty but it doesn't count", replied Feynman. It didn't make *any* sense to calculate after the event. "You see you found the peculiarity, so you selected the peculiar case." The only scientific way to prove a regularity was to isolate this possibility of either left, or right as the specific intention of the experiment. Only then would it be substantiated.

How many journalism studies really make one specific cause/effect relation the only object of their work – and one moreover one that has been previously detected as a possibility. I'd suggest that very many of them work the exact opposite way, and suggest the causal links as the conclusion to their wider initial study. Domingo, in his study of online journalism in four Catalan newsrooms, concluded that the publisher that did not have an offline enterprise (such as a newspaper or broadcasting station) was freer to innovate in the direction of time lapsed news. One case study, no prior suspicion or hypothesis: was that really a conclusion in any scientific sense. Yet the appeal to science litters journalism studies. Esser is typical: "Any serious scientific discussion of tabloidization must therefore begin with definitions, analytical indicators and conceptualisations." (Esser, 1999)

Statistically, on Feynman's basis, Journalism studies do pretty badly too. Statistics is not social science as such, but a branch of maths, so this point is just made in passing. It is simply the sheer number of cases needed to reach tolerable accuracy. It is so inconvenient to interview thousands of journalists, or question them, that most studies based on numbers work with unsupportably large margins of error.

The risk of disconnect

So far I've glanced at some critiques of social science, with some asides about the conceptualizations of recent attempts in the study of journalism to gain credibility in emulating associations and techniques of science. There are many assertions of the influence of science. My main point is not really the quality of the research but the assumption about the discipline that derives from its grounding in social sciences. A discipline's aim is to rise above opinion, and to assert a distinct zone of expertise outside of politics and persuasion found elsewhere, (Post 2009) but journalism studies may thereby have disconnected itself from the nourishment of qualitative humanistic approaches that might actually allow it to talk more directly to matters of public concern and less to those of abstract system building.

One way to gain continuity could be derived from awareness of ways of knowing left to us from history. It is the longitudinal approach that facilitates meaningful cultural understandings and critique of public communications. History can provide terms of reference more general than sociological tenets that fall victim to a charge of disconnect, and which thereby proscribes recourse to other evolutionary issues and questions. If humanities are about maintaining "a general humanistic responsibility for the culture as a whole" (Eagleton 1984, Cited in Post 2009) these duties and responsibilities are impoverished if too far deprived of the critical perspectives over time.
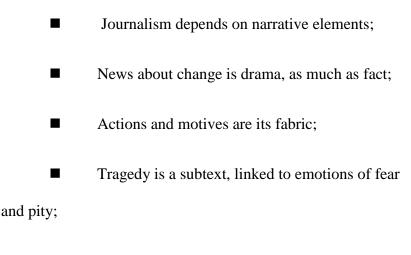
 Similarly engaging with the issues of disciplinarity and method, Judith Butler (2009) asks:

"Can we think about how, under certain conditions, certain kinds of questions cannot be posed, or rather, can only be framed and posed by breaking through a certain prohibition that functions to condition and circumscribe the domain of the speakable." (p777)

In this argument, these prohibitions stem at least in part from absence of the dimension of the past, and even rejection of the past that grips research. Not all journalism scholars fall for this and the political economists are especially deferent to a sense of the past, and to them much work in the history of journalism is owed.

One should always consider what journalism texts purport to be. At their best, and it is a multi-genre discipline – they encapsulate criticism, comment, persuasion, and literary style, all of them communicative arts that belong firmly in the realm of the humanistic. If sociological and social scientific approaches that privilege neutral schematic knowledge and methods, and stress quantitative methods of research, where should stresses be changed? One option is to raid or reflect other disciplines for examples and styles from more humanities based disciplines.

Finally for theore**tical renewal,** many avenues might be proposed but I want to that emphasise the importance of time and narrative. Complex though Ricoeur's his writings are, perhaps they justify how we might allow more freedom into the critique of journalism. In the first place, Ricoeur (1987) discusses the absolute intertwining of human understanding and narrative, all depending on the sequential nature of stories, their delivery of meaning though subordination to a sequence. You could not understand time without narrative, and vice versa. The human being functions with the time dimension inscribed into all texts. This I can see as a way to formulate a polemic against the sociological power. As explained, sociology is far from diachronic and sequential: it segments and isolates analyses in frozen moments, it is non-evolutionary in temperament, capturing segments of the present in its hypotheses. This is graphically stated by Islam (2002):

"American sociology modeled itself on Compte who divided the

subject matter into the study of social static, meaning the structure and

function, and the study of "social dynamics", meaning the study of change

, development and the comparative study of societies over time and space.

Sociology got bogged down with its numerous studies of the structure and

function but it never bothered to study change or social dynamics.

Although some have claimed that the study of change is built into the

functionalist theory, which dominated sociology for over thirty years, there

is very little evidence of that." (Talk to the Bangladesh Sociological

Society)

This applies at two levels. One, that the historical side of elements of journalism are

more privileged, being essentially close to narrative, and second, that the narrative element of

journalistic texts themselves are given more attention. and space For example:

- Journalism depends on narrative elements;

- News about change is drama, as much as fact;

- Actions and motives are its fabric;

- Tragedy is a subtext, linked to emotions of fear

and pity;

- Journalism is perhaps a form of rhetoric;

m from formalist schematization such as in the work of Propp (   ). He is on the right

lines though, looking at plot functions and so on, heroes and villains, things central to tabloid

journalism.

At least it enables confidence to approach topics like media effects with far less inhibition than in regular communication studies. So this article is in one sense a call to jettison some of the verbiage of sociology, such as hypotheses and laws. That might in the first place allow more inter-comparability of journalism research, and allow families of articles to talk more directly to each other if the limitations of pseudo-proofs and pseudo structure were relaxed. If we let such descriptors as 'habitus' and 'inertia' to enter the language, (and who knows what is next on the horizon?) they actually disguise a perfectly respectable and uncontroversial idea of the persistence of the past in the present.

Turbulence and evolution

Now some of this approach may arouse considerable suspicion. Rejection of strict 'scientific' method and belief might correlate with Post's 'charismatic' idea of disciplinary actions, which he opposes to disciplinary authority (Post 2009). As he says: "At the heart of this ongoing debate about the status of the humanities is the question of whether the authority of humanities scholarship is to be regarded as disciplinary or instead as charismatic, like artistic authority." (p261)

He bases this discussion on W. T. J. Mitchell's (1995) idea of 'turbulence' at the fringes of a discipline, incoherence that allows evolution and creativity. The significant point here is that charismatic authority permits art and artistry into the discursive environment. This is difficult ground for journalism, factual and organized as the product is supposed to be, and even more, by inference, its study as a discipline. For academics, as Post asserts, artistic success is suspect "since does not appear to depend on either reproducible methodological competence or the approval of established organizations like universities." (P760). Another unwelcome consequence of this non-disciplinary authority, he believes, is that it allows polemics to enter the field unchallenged, being freed of strict methodology.

All that aside, the notion of placing journalism studies in the debate about the place and value of humanities at least allows the possibility of connection with imaginative dimensions that Popper believes is intrinsic to social study. It legitimates grounding research less emphatically within scientific traditions and methods thereby putting unnecessary strains on writers.

Perhaps an example of the need to widen the frame of discussion of journalism, at least in some quarters, can be taken with the issue of professionalism. The aim of the quest is to find and describe a conditioned creature as a type, whose activity is prescribed by rules of procedure and routine, and who has a behavior conditioned by a learned role. Norms and role theories are a facet of 'middle range' sociological theory. These role attributes encompass newsgathering, interpretation and formulation of products and the defence of journalism in a wider social setting. The object of the research is usually to establish the degree of professionalisation according to certain criteria and often to discover how widespread certain understandings are. They are associated often with concepts of 'culture' (Hanitzsch 2007). The founding studies of Wilhoit and Weaver set a trend in identifying professional roles and descriptors. Again, standardization across space is the finding to be refuted or agreed by theirs and subsequent studies. (Hanitzsch, 2007). So far so good. We are in the territory of enlightenment, bureaucratic organization and assertions of instrumental rationalism – the controversial field of modernity.

What is deleted from many of these studies and approaches, it might be said, is the role of emotion (in the journalist), the roles of sympathy/empathy (for the interviewees), imagination (for social consequences) and individuality (of style and treatment) that may lie alongside or within these depersonalized role descriptors. In other words, the humanity and social vision of the journalist, and the concomitant freedom to make unexpected choices and sacrifices, is overlooked - all in the greater mission to deploy sociological concepts to

describe journalism as a system or within systems. True, sociology sets agency up as a tension between individual and system, but this approach can be depersonalizing. Perhaps it is necessary to seek a different reference framework, closer to the perceived world and terminology of the journalists themselves. Considerable distance in this direction is travelled by Hallin and Mancini (2004), who restore history and cultural factors to the analysis of abstract journalism types. Indeed they overtly attack the talk of dependent and independent variables and the imitation of natural science methods in communication research (Downey and Stainer, 2010). They assert that it has little explanatory value and its localization makes it fallible. Equally, one might draw further on cultural theorists in the tradition of Raymond Williams, whose work captures soft edged concepts such as 'structures of feeling' that belong to different eras or writers. Role studies underestimate psychology, or the motivations for resistance to social pressures. Paradoxically this notion of resistance, which I think is hugely important in humanities studies, is very aptly put by Georg Simmel, one of the founders of sociology:

> Neitzsche may have seen the relentless struggle of the individual as the prerequisite for his full development, while socialism found the same thing in the suppression of all competition – but in each of these the same fundamental motive was at work, namely the resistance of the individual to being leveled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism."
> (Simmel, 1903 cited in Wikipedia)

It is ironical, in terms of this argument, that such an emotive statement should come from a sociological source. His last phrase seems close to capturing the numbing effects of study by measurement. Other writers we might turn to more readily for a style of expression are those of the Frankfurt School, whose work is suffused by humanistic critical judgment of a qualitative kind. Even if their hostility to media needs modification, this does not make the

technique less acceptable, given its motive as a lament for mental and moral erosion of human existence. Adorno is concerned to reassert possibilities of reconnecting with psychological inspiration and health. This essentially literary and philosophical approach to the study of media restores meaning to centre stage, and provides a terminology that reconnects with feeling, at the same time provoking a stream of prescient insights.

This question of meaning is at issue. In history, according to Ricoeur (1986), the temptation to look for causal laws or explanations in history is offset by another important need – to establish interpretation. Could this also be applied to social science, that often tries to isolate components that relate to each other in a causal and sequential way, but which have little meaning outside their own terms of reference. Such approaches open the door to Post's (2009) more charismatic form of the disciplinary study. Now in some ways, it could be argued that the proliferation of theory and hypothesis in journalism studies is a sign of turbulence, close to charismatic authority in itself. The field is already turbulent enough. On the other hand, Journalism is a creative social form: its proponents work in creative relation with their conventions and technologies, none more so than in social media and the communication of momentous events such as we see around us now.

One under-acknowledged quality of journalism that could be emphasised is that of aesthetics, affecting languages of text, sound and film. Aesthetics is among the first qualities photographers and still picture editors seek in picture selection – aesthetics of drama, pose, style mood and so on. For writers, the sonority of language as well as soundness of thought distinguishes the best from the average. As to their content, despite the controversy of subject matter and the dominant weight of criticism that journalism comes up against, the yardstick behind much of the output is the notion of what it means to be human (Eagleton Cited in Post

2009). Nearly every section of a newspaper, barring perhaps the business sections, fits the description of saying something about being human – sport, politics, entertainment. And this includes modes of address and devices of communication. In consequence it can surely be argued that the humanistic and literary virtues should be privileged in the study and explanations of journalistic texts. Surely this humanistic endevour should be reflected more in its scholarship. Qualitative and interpretative dimensions allow insight without measurement, comment without scientific proof, patterns and affinities that are not born of hypotheses and laws. That way the richness and the coherence of the field might be improved, with closer connections to the past, with simpler language, and with a more aesthetic and less sociological product.

In conclusion, this paper probably represents more of the negative sides of sociology (and its effect on journalism) than the positive. Its early proponents like Weber avoided claims to be working with a branch of science and stressed the importance of individuals, agency and the chaos of reality. It all has a modern ring In it, there is plenty of room for organic connections and relationships other than those of mechanism and cause. Those dominant areas of sociology like institutionalism, commodification, cultural capital, and so on, not to mention the residual persistence of functionalism, hold considerable sway in journalism studies – and we should perhaps acknowledge this more readily, to avoid further evacuation of meaning from the critical field that so many no:

> There is no "objective" scientific analysis of culture… all
> knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from particular
> points of view …. An objective analysis of cultural events which
> proceeds according to the thesis that the ideal of science is the
> reduction of empirical reality to laws is meaningless…because ….the
> knowledge of social laws is not knowledge of social reality, but is
> rather one of the various aids used by our minds for attaining this

end. (1897) Objectivity in Social Science... DOI:
10.1080/14616700902975087 ""