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### The politics of journalistic creativity: expressiveness, authenticity and de-authorization

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# **The Politics of Journalistic Creativity: Expressiveness, authenticity and de-authorization**

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## **Abstract:**

This article begins with the assertion that creativity in journalism has moved from being a matter of guile and ingenuity to being about expressiveness, and that this reflects a broader cultural shift from professional expertise to the authenticity of personal expression as dominant modes of valorization. It then seeks to unpack the normative baggage that underpins the case for creativity in the cultural industries. First, there is a prioritization of agency, which does not stand up against the phenomenological argument that we do not own our own practices. Second, creative expression is not necessarily more free, simply alternately structured. As with Judith Butler's performativity model, contemporary discourses of creativity assume it to have a unique quality by which it eludes determination (relying on tropes of fluidity), whereas it can be countered that it is in spontaneous, intuitive practice that we are at our least agencical. Third, the article argues against the idea that by authorizing journalists (and audiences) to express themselves, creativity is democratizing, since the always-already nature of recognition means that subjects can only voice their position within an established terrain rather than engage active positioning.

**Keywords:** creativity; creative industries; expressiveness; authenticity; authorization; media democratization

# **The Politics of Journalistic Creativity: Expressiveness, authenticity and de-authorization**

## **Introduction: creativity and journalism**

While media convergence is generally regarded as a good thing for audiences, allowing us to consume content on the go, at the time of our choosing and simultaneously, for journalists it is often experienced as something closer to job creep. It is said that journalists are expected to produce three times as much copy as was required of them 25 years ago (Davies, 2008), and in line with the McDonaldization thesis (Franklin, 2005) there is a greater emphasis on rationalization of journalists' work in the form of predictability, efficiency, calculability and piece-work – doing the same technocratic tasks across a range of publications, for example. It is certainly true that journalists are often expected to blog and produce visual and audiovisual content to complement a feature, but my own interviews with journalists suggest that we should not assume that this is regarded by all as burdensome or tedious – many actively enjoy the dynamism this brings to their routines and increased interaction with their readers. One downside which appears less equivocal is the decline of specialization. Aeron Davis (2010) notes that while many journalists (and politicians) welcome the convenience of digital media for doing research, the upshot is that since anyone can become at least conversant about a discipline or phenomena in a matter of hours, less emphasis is placed on individuals having expert, specialist knowledge of a subject. Further, as Nick Davies has demonstrated, it also means that there is less face-to-face research, with the vast majority in his analysis drawing on second-hand, often PR-led sources. While plausible, both of these should be qualified somewhat: the former is underpinned by the assumption that specialization is inherently more satisfying and rigorous, while the *Flat Earth News* thesis rests on the common but not unimpeachable epistemological commitment that face-to-face communication is more authentic, and thus more reliable.

But overall it seems initially convincing that rationalization and job creep present the working journalist with a new set of constraints as well as opportunities. Such limitations are in addition to those that characterize all journalistic work: news values, house style, editorial line – as well as broader professional commonplaces such as the modernist tradition of the journalist writing themselves out of their copy, in line with the once-dominant trope of the journalist as conduit. It is this culture of professionalism which marks journalism (or the historically conventional way of doing it, at least) as existing in opposition to more creative forms of cultural production – literature in particular. And within journalism, the distinction is drawn between those cultures favoring a more literary style (Herscovitz, 2004) and those where just-the-facts or *pûr-et-dûr* reporting is valorized. But if in the latter the journalistic voice is constricted by norms, narratives and precedents, there is nonetheless space for creativity. Here it is less about creative expression and more about ingenuity, associated with the secondary journalistic characteristics of guile and adaptability, naturalized as an orientation to the world in which thinking on one's feet is key. The process of writing is supplementary to fact-gathering, and whether it is viewed as a craft or a grind (Matheson, 2003), it is a collective undertaking. If we were to talk of voice in this context, it is either that of the journalistic trade, that of a specific news outlet or that which is 'given' to those who are the subjects of news.

'Journalism of attachment' (Bell, 1995) is by no means a new phenomenon, with its roots in the UK in the New Journalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the tabloids this took the form of creating a sense of intimacy between a newspaper and its readers, addressing them personally and using what Martin Conboy (2006) calls vernacular ventriloquism. But the proliferation of new forms of journalistic production such as the blog have significantly heightened the role of personalization – not only on the reader's part ('What the financial crisis means for *your* family'), but also in how much more of the journalist is on offer. The notion that you cannot and should not write yourself out of your work is perhaps philosophically pragmatic, supported even by author-deconstructing thinkers such as Derrida (1967). It may also foster loyalty to a journalist or organization – no bad thing in terms of sales and advertising revenue – and it certainly seems an improvement on the fusty dogmatism of traditional broadsheet newswriting, which raises to an art form the draining of all color from a story. However, as David Hesmondhalgh (2007) has consistently observed, such shifts are always inevitably ambivalent, and we should remain alert to the positives and negatives that accompany the rise of more personalized ways of doing journalism. In this article I seek to address specifically the notion that with new generic forms and technological innovations, journalism is becoming more creative, evident in distinct practices and forms of output, and to question the claim that this is a positive development. Such claims rest on particular philosophical, normative and sometimes political commitments which for the most part go unacknowledged, and it is only by unpacking these that we can make a balanced and rational assessment of the transformations journalism practice is currently undergoing, as well as the underlying continuities, and who stands to gain as a result, whether that be journalists themselves, commercial interests, audiences or, more tentatively, publics. It will be seen in the following that contemporary discourses of journalistic creativity rest upon contingent notions of agency, freedom and democratization which in turn imply commitments to questionable ideas about authentic personal expression and 'giving voice' as a kind of cultural or professional authorization.

### **Unpacking the normative commitments of creativity**

First, creativity in contemporary discourses of journalism and the creative industries is normatively associated with a specific conception of agency, in the sense of journalistic volition or self-determination. In contrast to the admittedly romanticized notion of journalism as a craft, trade or tribe, this form of agency is demonstrably individualistic, tied up with the authentic voices or trusted authority of particular journalists. This agency takes many forms, from the increased use of head shots online and in print and the activity of journalists in comment forums to journalists' Twitter feeds and, less straightforwardly, the noticeable presence of the personal authorial voice in news writing. We might say that there is nothing wrong with this: collectivist notions of professionalism have been shown to be exclusionary and hierarchical (Markham, 2010), and whatever academics say about it, we live in an age of individualism after all. This last point is not meant to be facetious: there is a tendency in scholarly research to pathologize individualism and its effects – disengagement, for instance – but empirical evidence (Couldry et al, 2007) suggests we cannot responsibly assume that it is experienced as problematic. But nor does this mean that we should simply treat individual agency as benign. Judith Butler, in particular the Butler of *Excitable Speech* (1997), is persuasive in showing that we are never fully the agents of our own practices, drawing on the Sartrean model in which we are never really subjects but always in the process of becoming, of subjectifying. But if we are not the agents

of our own practices, then who is? The answer to this lies in the collective, and pushes us towards thinking of social and economic structures, and technology too, as having agencical aspects. I return to the significance of the argument that individuation is a collective practice below. The qualification of agency is not the same as characterizing identity in the information age as chaotic or even unliveable, as Bauman (2000) implies. Constraining, productive structures are a condition of agency, and much of the structure/agency debate has conceded the mutual constitutivity of the two (see for instance Hays, 1994; Berard, 2005), contenting itself instead debating to the question of where we should place emphasis. In our context, what remains important is that the celebration of individual agency risks appearing naïve if it remains blind to the fact that individuals as such do not exist, and the way we come to see ourselves and others as individuals is steeped in power relations and historical contingencies.

The second normative commitment follows on from the first: freedom. Arguments for creativity raised in discussions with journalists and editors are frequently couched in terms of freedom of expression, but this rests on a conflation of 'freedom from' and 'freedom to' principles. In reality, while the freedom to 'be yourself' in a blog or on a social networking site can be expressed in terms of freedom from generic structures and journalistic conventions (and also, it will be seen below, routine and newsroom culture), it is a very different proposition than freedom from, say, political interference or proprietorial pressure. And even if we were to accept that there are categorical similarities between official censorship and self-censorship, there are no means by which we can guarantee that writing which is not overburdened by the need to absent the author is not 'censored' in other ways. This is not to endorse a theory of conspiracy or, for that matter, cultural hegemony.<sup>(1)</sup> But in Foucauldian terms (Foucault, [1978] 1998, pp. 92-102) we can, without training our sights on elite or vested interests, posit that the range of what is doable, sayable and thinkable – by the layperson as much as the journalist – is delimited by much more than narrative convention. Discourse, with its roots deep in both history and the banality of everyday life, is necessarily irresistible insofar as it is productive of conceivability. As with agency, freedom is only intelligible in relation to its opposite, and as such we have to ask what theoretical or political work its proponents enlist it to do.

Here again Butler is relevant. In the concept of performativity, Butler painstakingly strips away vestiges of volitionalism and instrumentalism in working towards a vision of practice distinct from that which she identifies in our quotidian experience of the world: over-determined, with all expressive acts effectively incited enactments of coercive norms whose universalization we are unwittingly complicit in enforcing. This distinct notion of practice is not encumbered by commitments to individualism, idealism or rationalism, and she raises the prospect of 'subjectless' performance to address Foucault's contention that subjectification necessarily entails subjection. But there are two problems with this model. The first is that while ownership of subjectivity is bracketed out, we still have to respond to the reality that subjectivity, as we experience it, matters. Here, Butler falls back on a normative commitment to multiplicity or diversity: that when it comes to subjectivities, more is better, and it is the narrowness of subjective determination rather than determination itself which is the problem. This, however, rests on a conflation of freedom and choice, a common enough political philosophy in the age of consumer democracy, but not one which is unassailable or even teleologically stable.

I return to the question of journalistic spontaneity and intuition below, but for present purposes what is relevant is the way that performativity is given to elude determination by iterating the chaotic and counter-intuitive. But while Butler is at great pains to flag up the dangers of positing conceptual interiors and exteriors, the model relies on there being something 'about' subjectless performative practice that is, in its idealized

form, free. As with any theoretical framework grounded as in that philosophical tradition which seeks to reconcile structuralism and phenomenology, the performativity model ultimately rests on a deontological claim. While careful to avoid spatial and other metaphors, performativity still points to a beyond of determination the normative character of which cannot be assumed. (I have argued elsewhere (2011) that in Pierre Bourdieu's work there is ultimately something 'about' practice that is coercive or violent, in a way that can only be defended on normative grounds and not derived from first principles.) Thus, whether it is located in the impulsive or the ludic, there is an intangible, indefinable quality which makes performative practice different, and better.

I would argue that the same argument applies to journalistic creativity. Whether it is conceived in terms of authentic expression, individual talent or simply being open to the productive possibilities of randomness, it has at base a deontological quality – that is, something that cannot be conceptually unpacked any further, and must be regarded as 'just is'. As with all such claims, we can question the normative baggage they entail: in short, there's no a priori reason to accept that creativity is a good thing. We are then able to ask what functions it serves, either conceptually or rhetorically, and what kind of worldview or ethos underpins these. At the risk of being slightly facile, we can question the political capital entailed in creativity, in the sense that 'creative industry' somehow doesn't carry the same negative connotations in some political constituencies as 'industry'. Facile or not, however, this leads us towards potentially productive ground in our normative unpacking of creativity. Notwithstanding the more pessimistic accounts of Virilio (2005), Bauman (2000) and Beck (1992), the discourse around creativity is characterized by its opposition to symbols associated with material production: new, dynamic, light versus old, fixed, heavy – equally applicable to labor practices, communication technologies and ways of seeing the world.

And yet why is it in analyses of immaterial labor that a lack of solidity, stability and materiality is associated with freedom? Following on from the discussion of agency above, there is no reason to believe that practices marked by spatial and temporal fluidity – tweeting on a mobile device, for instance, or temporally interweaving professional and other communication – are any less constrained, but rather alternately constrained. The materiality metaphor is particularly interesting, insofar as it suggests that by removing weight or fixedness from the equation a more authentic self may emerge. But authenticity is not a given; it is enacted in practices that are both structured and structuring, and there are many (Kundera, 1984) who believe that subjective weightlessness would be unbearable. Further, and as has been written about extensively elsewhere, fluidity and dynamism as creative ideals have an economic equivalent in the form of job insecurity. In this respect, the 'dynamism' of the creative industries may be seen as rhetorical cover for exploitation of creative workers, feeding into the valorization of adaptability and flexibility in job criteria, and creativity as a normatively positive response to developing a sustainable career as a freelance journalist.

The editor of the *Guardian's* Comment is Free discussion site has said that one of his aims is to encourage more 'spontaneous' interaction between journalists and audience members. The *Guardian's* new building behind King's Cross in London has like many creative organizations been designed so as to encourage spontaneous thinking – in practical terms this means providing areas for break-out meetings and impromptu conversations. However, if we take seriously the phenomenological philosophies of Merleau-Ponty or Bourdieu, it is precisely when we are acting spontaneously that we are at our least agencical. This is a matter of reflexivity: while Mauss demonstrated that wherever there is a temporal gap in an interactional context there is room for negotiation and strategy, when being spontaneous we tend to unreflexively enact behavior patterned according to

anticipation. These anticipatory matrices are not ours but learned (Goffman, 1972: 293) and are experienced not as conscious guides but non-conscious or corporeal reflexes. The hard-wired acting-out of these practices is not neutral, but over time has the effect of making that which is conditional and contingent increasingly instinctive. This may not be a bad thing, and indeed in many circumstances it will not matter at all, but there is nothing to suggest that acting instinctively constitutes creative practice. This is corroborated by research into journalistic professionalism. In my own research I have heard countless reporters explain that being a good journalist boils down to gut instinct and having a nose for news. Ida Schultz (2007) concluded from similar evidence that acting on 'gut instinct' collectively enshrines a particular set of news values. My analysis concluded that the valorization of instinct performs a mystifying function that enshrines the boundaries and hierarchies of the journalistic trade, institutionalizing dispositional and other criteria that have little directly to do with the 'stuff' of journalism.

I began by characterizing media convergence as the rationalization of journalism, and it makes sense that with new technologies as well as a competitive economic climate there will be scope for increasing the productivity of journalists. I have suggested that it is dynamic, fluid production which is valued above all else in contemporary discourses of creativity, but the twin developments of the heightened expectations for journalistic output as well as the mass entry by audiences into spaces of media production raise a broader question: the valorization of cultural production itself. It would be possible to build a critique of this romanticization of cultural production in neo-Marxist terms, arguing that the prioritization of objectification is either materially deterministic or itself a form of idealism. It is also arguable in Foucauldian terms, in that the apparently free acts of expression can be better understood as mandatory recitals of discourse, serving as a kind of disciplinary regime by inviting professionals and non-professionals alike to share their thoughts on morality, the value of cultural goods, and what counts as normal.

It may be going too far to suggest that mass creative expression is a form of social control. Others have interpreted this relatively new culture of self-expression as a form of narcissism (Rosen, 2007), in the sense that it is the act of expression which performs a subjectifying function, rather than a reflecting back of oneself as objectified by others. It could also be characterized as a kind of therapy culture; Chris Dent (2008) has argued that journalists play the role of public confessor, and the extension of this role – reflecting society's values and morals – into more personal matters is a potentially interesting juncture. But more useful for our purposes here is to look at the phenomena of journalists and their audiences 'getting creative' in terms of symbolic economy. It is not simply that creative expression has established itself as a cultural norm both professionally and amongst publics; as with any cultural form it has rules which govern how producers and their output is assessed, rules which may develop their own internal coherence over time, but which will also inevitably reflect cultural mores more broadly. Here, the most significant shift (albeit one which is not universal or unequivocal) is from the dominance of professional, expert, institutional knowledge as a valorized form, to the authenticity of personal experience (Markham, 2011). In journalism, evidence of such a shift ranges from the forms of value judgments made in blogging discourse (based on eye-witnessing or the views of one's social circle, for instance) to the selection and use of news sources (Berkowitz, 2009).

There is a further normative commitment in the promotion of creativity as the expression of personal experience: democratization. The deprioritization of professional expertise is a shift from what could be regarded as exclusive and elitist to something which everyone has. Creativity thus carries with it the ethos that the fact of self-expression is more important than its content, so long as it is genuine. But what counts as genuine depends

upon how authenticity is perceived: you have to learn the rules in order to appear to others as authentic, and these rules come more naturally to some than others. There is nothing to suggest that the symbolic economy of authenticity is any less hierarchical or constraining than that of the professional world, and it certainly isn't a given that individuals have significant influence over how their self-expression is processed by others. Whether it's a senior journalist showing a more personal side through a blog, a freelancer encouraged (or encouraging themselves) to be creative, or an audience member given voice, what in normative terms would be understood in creativity discourse as a form of authorization – the right to speak for oneself – could alternately be interpreted as a kind of de-authorization. This again draws on Foucault, who argued that the delegation to speak is more important than the words we produce. However creatively we do it, the act of expressing ourselves merely reveals our position rather than representing an act of positioning. In practical terms, speaking freely in a blog might involve including details about the particular suburb where a journalist lives or what are her preferred leisure activities – revelations made in the spirit of openness or in a bid to humanize the writer and forge a bond with readers, but which nonetheless offer neat encapsulations of social status, educational history and so on.

### **Journalism and the creative industries**

If the increasing relevance of creativity in journalistic practice is to be seen in the context of a broader cultural shift in dominant forms of authority from expertise to authenticity, it is important to avoid the kind of cultural determinism which would construct this relationship as a simple manifestation of wider structures – journalism after all exerts its own qualified influence on the field of cultural production in which it subsists. Further, this is not an abstract relation between journalism and 'culture', but one that can be concretely assessed in the context of the creative industries. This term itself comes with normative baggage (Deuze, 2007: 53-6). John Hartley (2005) is representative of the more sanguine camp, acknowledging the tension that inevitably exists between creativity and commercialization, while emphasizing the potential for substantial cultural generation in the age of ICTs and interactivity. Hartley, however, is outweighed in academic circles by the pessimists whose position is best summarized by Neilson and Rossiter's (2005: 8) characterization of the term 'creative industries' as:

...an oxymoronic disingenuousness that wants to suggest that innovation can coexist with or become subordinated to the status quo. In this context, innovation becomes nothing more than a code word for more of the same – the reduction of creativity to the formal indifference of the market.

This article takes a deliberately ambivalent stance on whether the creative industries are a good thing in general, focusing instead on their impact on journalism. This means looking at how the *logics* of these subfields of cultural production interact. Journalism can be said to occupy a doubly-dominated position in the cultural field overall, with its status markedly lower than that of the arts, while its commercial clout cannot compete with mass popular cultural forms. Bourdieu adds that journalism is only weakly autonomous, meaning that the internal logic which governs valorization (or what he terms cultural consecration) – what counts as news, good journalism, good journalists, good taste and so on – is susceptible to colonization by external principles, most notably marketization. But despite this dominatedness, journalism has a special status insofar as it

acts as gatekeeper to public knowledge, and that it claims the authority to hold power to account (Bourdieu, 1997). The result is that it can often punch above its weight, though the consequences are as often negative as positive – writing about the French context, Bourdieu (1993) was particularly concerned about the extension of commercial journalistic principles to fields such as philosophy and science.

I have suggested here that the main impact the creative industries have had on journalism is the importing of principles of dynamism, fluidity and expressiveness, all associated with the fuzzier notion of creativity. While leading to new and innovative professional practices, this move also brings with it unintended consequences, such as a culture of professional insecurity embedded both in different attitudes to work (in which flexibility is key, and where you are only as good as your last piece; see Bauman & Haugaard, 2008) and distinct employment policies. Everitt & Mills (2009) use the phrase ‘permanent beta’ to encapsulate the constant uncertainty cultural workers face about where technology is heading, and ‘cultural anxiety 2.0’ to describe the uneasiness media (and educational) professionals experience in trying to keep up with the high rate of technical innovation. The result is that we too often remain uninformed about the social and political contexts in which new technologies have emerged. It is understandable that journalists will rush to adopt new practices – launching a website in the last decade, starting a Twitter feed in the present one – for the sake of maintaining their market value and perhaps in a genuine enthusiasm to try out new things and interact with audiences. But they will do so without understanding the politics of social media, for instance, characterized by an epistemology (in which the highest truth is that produced by the greatest number) quite different than that of traditional, modernist journalism. They are also unlikely to grasp the normative impetus of different programming cultures (Everitt & Mills, 2009), some of which are explicitly politically motivated. Given that the ‘rules’ governing any subfield tend to be misrecognized by its own members, it is reasonable that journalists aren’t fully cognizant of them. But it does mean that the influence of the creative industries is complex, irreducible to simple themes such as fluidity and commercialism.

Is it fair to hold technology and the professional cultures of the creative industries accountable for the destabilization of life in the journalistic field? I would suggest that influence runs both ways, as can be illustrated by considering two specific themes: obsolescence and risk. Liquid modernity is clearly a larger phenomenon than either the creative industries or journalism, but it is plausible that the journalistic way of representing the world, often with a dearth of contextualization and a fixation on novelty, is replicated in other areas of the field of cultural production. The fact that this worldview is also tied to commercialization, with an assumption of short attention spans and a reliance on cultural amnesia, suggests a good fit with professionalized creative industries. Beyond these generalizations, it also seems that the way in which journalism produces novelty is mirrored in the creative industries. This is the reliable shock of the new, the drive to grab the attention of publics by presenting them with something that is simultaneously unprecedented and familiar. Without subscribing to Neilson and Rossiter’s thoroughly debased view of the creative industries, it is reasonable to say that creativity in more commercial sectors such as popular music and advertising is similarly constrained by the demand for both novelty and familiarity.

In terms of risk, this is not the place to rehearse arguments about risk culture – arguments which revolve around perceptions of fear rather than riskiness itself, often exploring the motivations of state and media actors in propagating risk discourse and extending its domain (Altheide, 2002; Furedi, 1997). Instead, one of the defining features of the creative industries is that they are subject to high levels of economic risk, with large failure rates across the sector. This is arguably less so in journalism: while it is surely risky

to launch a new newspaper or website, there is not the same degree of risk in publishing subsequent editions as there is in repeatedly releasing new films or albums. But perhaps the way that risk is conceived in the journalistic field can tell us something about how it is dealt with in the creative industries, and increasingly in journalism itself. Journalists routinely face the task of convincing their readers and viewers that they should be worried about some or other phenomena or folk devil, aware that audiences (or at least some of them) are quick to detect and dismiss attempts at manipulation. One technique used especially in the mid-market newspapers in the UK is personalization: risks are not things which face the nation or the planet, but you and your family. This is not simply flattering the audience by appearing to pay attention to them. It works because it transfers responsibility (often moral) to them as individuals: they are called upon to monitor their own behavior (if it is a health risk linked to lifestyle, for instance) and account for the decisions they take. I would suggest that the creativity agenda contains a similar shift. By encouraging workers to create and innovate employers are essentially outsourcing risk, leaving it to individuals to take creative leaps and to deal with the consequences of failure, and only intervening once risks are shown to have been minimized. This argument offers an effective counterpoint to the idea that the self-startup phenomenon in popular music is democratizing cultural production. It may be less pervasive in journalism, though in the UK at least it is common practice when newspapers hire new columnists to wait until they've established the viability of their unique, edgy voice online.

### **The implications of creativity for journalism**

It has been seen that if creativity is valued because it represents a form of agency, which we could also understand in classical terms as self-mastery, then it is undermined by the fact that it is focused on the individual, while in reality creativity is nothing of the sort. And if it is a matter of giving voice and empowering individuals, then it underestimates the extent to which others – and ourselves – know our place. Its distinction against (presumably staid, stifling) material work rests on notions of immateriality and fluidity which are not neutral but linked to economic and cultural structures (see especially Gill & Pratt, 2008) as well as a conception of freedom that is at least questionable. We could add that immaterial labor is associated more than any other kind with the need for perpetual novelty, and this would certainly complement existing theories of the creative industries in which innovation is regarded as a response to the need in a capitalist society for ever-expanding markets. This needs to be tempered by inserting a caveat about how easy it really is to create new nodes of demand, with recent audience research (Schrøder & Phillips, 2006; Philo, 2008; Madianou, 2009) calling into question the suggestibility of media audiences. But in any case the rise of the creative industries in general and the increasing importance of expressive creativity in professions such as journalism are not the simple expression of economic determinism, nor are they the straightforward manifestation of cultural phenomena such as the valorization of anti-establishment and un-institutional authority.

It is clear that the norms underpinning the creativity discourse, while they might obscure economic realities which are arguably exploitative, are not in themselves negative – there is no suggestion that a creativity agenda has been foisted upon media professionals simply in order to raise productivity. It's certainly not a radical exercise in deconstructing journalistic practice: it's not the equivalent of free jazz, and in narrative terms the trend towards more personalized content in journalists' blogs and on social networking sites is hardly on the scale of the provocations of Wolfe and Thomsson. But there are two orthodoxies of the creative moment in journalism that need to be challenged. The first

comes from management research, in particular the school of thought that believes that innovation and efficiency can be effectively guaranteed – or at least become predictable, after Ritzer (1993) – by institutionalizing creative practice (a good parallel to this is the implementation of hacking practices such as extreme and agile programming by Microsoft and Google; see Everitt & Mills, 2009). The second is the belief, apparently genuinely held, that everyone benefits from creativity – it's good for the journalist, the organization and the audience. Let us look at each in turn.

Central to Jürgen Habermas's work is the belief that public spheres are not abstract ideals: we can and indeed have a duty to design institutions that will provide a viable context for rational communication and deliberation about issues of shared concern (Habermas, [1979] 1991, pp. 178-205). The ideal speech act then does not begin conceptually with an authentic thought or belief which is then warped and corrupted by politics: it is the job of politics to build the framework which makes the ideal speech act possible. The upshot is that institutionalizing communicative structures is not only defensible but mandated. It is unsurprising that this has been translated into those areas of business studies that emphasize rationalization,<sup>(2)</sup> but here it is not just rationality which needs to be planned and codified, but idea generation as well. The results in general are beyond our concern here, but it is worth dwelling a little on what the impact could be for journalism. It was noted above that both the physical layout of the *Guardian* building and newsroom, and the temporal structuring of work, has been designed first of all to enhance efficiency through flexibility, but also to provide a working environment maximally conducive to creative and collaborative thinking. The effectiveness of such policies is as yet unclear, but it is of course unlikely in such difficult economic times that the *Guardian* and other media outlets would uncritically import the latest techniques from management research without auditing their value fairly closely.

But however they are regarded by senior management at the *Guardian*, there are two criticisms of such policies that warrant consideration. The first is that while any ideas or innovations generated as a result of their implementation may be called creative, the extent to which they would be considered so beyond the professional discourse of creativity is moot. This is not to hold up an idealized version of pure creativity against a degraded corporate other, but simply to point out that creativity means nothing more or less than what those working or with a stake in the creative industries say it means. It is likely that different groups of actors would benefit from the universalization of different definitions of the term, and as such its deployment should be thought of as necessarily, if unconsciously, strategic.

The second point about formalizing policies for creativity derives from criticisms of Habermas' communication theory. Giddens (1976) notably argued that however well a communication structure is designed and monitored, its framework cannot compensate for the fact that different actors come to it with different communicative (and other) resources. The upshot is that we could encourage all journalists (and citizens) to be more creative, but this does not alter the fact that it will come more easily to some than others, and, crucially, that some will be better placed to use their creativity to their advantage in terms of the hierarchies of their field. The argument can be taken further. For Bourdieu, it is not only the case that the structures in which we operate affect our ability to communicate. Communication itself is implicated in power relations, and the result is that to institutionalize specific communicative structures is to institutionalize coercive power, or in his words, symbolic violence. While it is defensible to categorize creative production as a form of public communication, Bourdieu's characterization of *all* communication as suspect (because it is grounded in an inherently contestable – that is, political, ontology) is at heart a matter of conviction rather than deduction. But it remains salient that we cannot assume

that by formalizing ways of producing creativity on demand we devolve power to individuals or redistribute it in an equalizing manner. It is as likely that this will simply reproduce extant structures of power, or set in train new cultures of practice that are differently but no less politically implicated.

This leads neatly to the question of who is assumed to benefit from creativity. It's clear that a media organization wouldn't emphasize it as policy unless it stood to gain, whether through a more productive workforce on the identification of new areas for development. But there is also an implication that it is mutually beneficial, which raises the question of what, say, junior journalists and members of the public get out of it. This is not to suggest that people do not like being creative, but rather to consider the motivations of those in a position to champion it. And here it appears that there is a genuine sense that this is a good thing, not (usually) in the potentially patronizing sense of giving voice to or empowering journalists and their publics, but something more akin to respecting them. This is in line with contemporary personnel management styles which are, in the words they use at least, more holistic, their concerns addressed to discrete individuals rather than the work they do. But however well-intentioned, low pay rates and systemic job insecurity for the majority of media workers demonstrate that they are not substantively respected. While it is very likely that many will derive satisfaction from being able to work more creatively than would have been possible in the past, creativity is at base a mode of communication that has much in common with the broader culture of personalization, but which has little scope for responding to what are political and economic problems (partly because the appeal to creativity is itself implicated in these problems).

The norm of respect is also implied in the way that many in the creative industries distinguish themselves against other ways of working. The distinction against material labor was noted above, but there is also a strong resistance in the creativity discourse to traditional or received notions about working in an office or newsroom (Oldenburg, 1999; Nerone and Barnhurst, 2003; Anderson, 2011). Creativity is set in opposition to the dehumanizing aspects of office life, from routine and dress codes to staticity and bloodless language. This has the appearance of a fairly conventional counter-cultural critique of modern life, and in some cases (Google, for instance) the 'creative' response has risked appearing juvenile. But for our purposes, it will suffice to be consistent with the arguments set out above and posit that the environments and practices intended to provide a corrective to stifling conformity are differently, not less, structured. The language used to talk about creativity in the creative industries inevitably develops its own conformities, whether through colonization by management speak or the repetitive demands of grant applications and audits. It is worth noting that in the 'spontaneous' discussions I witnessed at the *Guardian*, workers often reached for well-worn clichés and jargon – as I am aware I do in faculty committee meetings.

But if office life is considered dehumanizing, it is worth reflecting by way of conclusion on what sort of humanizing alternative creativity offers. It is certainly true that producing cultural objects and seeing them valorized by others is a potentially important component of subjectification. The distinction with creative production is that it is not only your ability to meet professional standards in transforming events in the world into symbolic goods that is assessed, but your personal integrity, likeability and, yes, creativity. As none of these are qualities one would not want to have, it is understandable that journalists engaging in blogging or social media practices will engage in the performance of self to their audience. Since we do this in everyday life this may be experienced as a fairly normal thing to do, but in everyday life the meaning we take out of social encounters is governed by well-established (if unacknowledged) rules of reciprocity. In broadcasting to a largely undifferentiated audience the rules are less clear, but there are several types of

seemingly authentic self that have market value and each requires the mastery of believable subjectification. None of which is to suggest there is something disingenuous about journalists' presentation of selves: they may self-consciously deploy disarming and flattering techniques from the red-top or broadsheet playbooks, but the phenomenological literature predicts that they will come to experience such communicative requirements as second nature, instinctively resorting to self-deprecation, specific cultural references or knowing offensiveness as appropriate to project a palatable identity to symbolic consumers. The crowding out of conventional news values makes sense at a time when personal authenticity and affect are increasingly central features of our cultural life. But it bears emphasizing three final remarks. First, the rules by which authenticity is collectively recognized are not well understood. Second, the role that creativity plays in establishing authenticity is ambivalent: on the one hand, the fact of expressing oneself creatively is prioritized over the content of what is expressed; on the other, in a professional environment only a limited range of creative practice is authorized. Third, there are stakes in creativity, yet those starting from a relatively dominated position have little scope of using it to their advantage in a journalistic context. The result is not dissimilar to Hegel's position on the dilemma of enfranchisement: while everyone may be authorized to be creative and be themselves, to do so only reveals their powerlessness.

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### Notes

1. The conceptual viability of cultural hegemony is beyond the scope of this article; for present purposes, its commitment to functionalism or cultural teleology obscures some of the nuances of the determination of journalistic practice under discussion here.
2. That is, the quantifiability, uniformity and reproducibility of values and practices.

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