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**Pressed To Change: Systematically Reconsidering Journalistic Boundaries in  
the Newsroom, Boardroom and Classroom**

FRANÇOIS PIERRE NEL

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at

City University London

Department of Journalism

2016

## **THE FOLLOWING PARTS OF THIS THESIS HAVE BEEN REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS:**

**pp.64-358: Portfolio of published work.**

### **Journals, Academic Book Chapters**

Nel, François, Ward, Michael & Rawlinson, Alan (2007). 'The Future Of Online Journalism.' In Anderson, P.J. and Ward, G. – *The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies*, Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 121-138.

Nel, François (2010). Where Else Is The Money? A Study of Innovation in Online Business Models at Newspapers in Britain's 66 Cities. *Journalism Studies*, Vol 4, No 3, 2010, pp. 360-372.

Hunter, Anna & Nel, François (2011). Equipping the Entrepreneurial Journalist: An Exercise in Creative Enterprise. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, Spring 2011, pp. 9-24.

Nel, François & Westlund, Oscar (2012). The 4C's of Mobile News: Channels, Conversation, Content and Commerce. *Journalism Practice*, Future of Journalism Special Issue, Spring 2012, pp. 744–753.

Nel, François & Westlund, Oscar (2013). Managing New(s) Conversations: The Role of Interactivity in News Provision and Participation. In *Handbook of Social Media Management: Value Chain and Business Models in Changing Media Markets*. Berlin: Springer, pp.179-200.

### **Industry Reports**

Nel, François (2010). Growth through Investment, Employee and Organisational Development. In Stone, M., Nel, F. & Wilberg, E. (2010) *World News Future and Change Study 2010*. Shaping the Future of the Newspapers Strategy Report 10.1. Paris, France: World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WANIFRA), pp. 51-72.

Nel, François (2010). *Laid Off: What do UK Journalists Do Next?* Report published in collaboration with Journalism.co.uk, September 2010. Available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/37088778/Laid-Off-What-Do-Journalists-Do-Next>

### **Articles in trade publications**

Nel, François (2003). Power - who has it, who should get it? *Rhodes University Journalism Review*, Issue 22, Summer 2003, pp. 14-16.

Nel, François (2006). Dive into digital exposes need for modern skills. *Press Gazette: Journalism Training 2006*, 27 October 2006, pp. 12-14 *Working Papers*

Nel, François (2013). *Pressed to Change*. New Economic Models for the Digital Economy. Retrieved from <http://www.nemode.ac.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2012/12/Nel-PressedtoChange-NEMODEcasestudy-April2013.pdf>

Nel, François (2015) *Taking the Pulse: An interim report of impressions from the Journalism Entrepreneurship Summit 2015*. Media and Digital Enterprise Project, University of Central Lancashire, Preston.

### **Books**

Nel, François (2005). *Writing for the Media*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press South Africa.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to present and reflect on a collection of research that has informed and shaped pedagogical and andrological praxis across the two decades since pioneers launched the first online news sites onto the World Wide Web<sup>1</sup>, thereby setting off what is frequently described as a revolution in journalism. It makes a case for revisiting core principles of systems thinking to develop a holistic approach to reflecting on changing journalistic realities. A critical systems heuristic is then operationalised to consider how the diverse work in this portfolio reconsiders journalistic parameters in newsroom, boardroom and classroom situations that are both distinct and interrelated. In doing so it illustrates how a commitment to social and cultural fluidity can enable researchers to constructively engage with role players inside and outside of academic interpretative communities. Furthermore, in its suggestions for further research this study adds its voice to other calls for journalism scholars to extend the boundaries of their concern beyond the academy and to generate insights that empower individuals and impact on industry - to the ultimate benefit of society.

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<sup>1</sup> However, news organisations had been actively exploring the potential of what is now known as the Internet before the World Wide Web browser interface made this possible (cf. Singer 2004).

## 1. Introduction

*The mark of a prudent man [is] to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and what is advantageous for himself; not in particular respects, e.g. what is good for health or physical strength, but what is conducive to the good life generally.* – Aristotle  
(Barnes, Thomson, & Tredennick, 2004, p. 209)

Certainly educational research seeks, in the first instance, to learn in order to teach better. As such, technical and practical issues are of interest. Ultimately, however, its goal is transformational. Researchers set out to respond to concerns that emerge during the course of ongoing education activity and to implement an intervention in practice or policy, observe how it plays out and, after reflection, to adapt the intervention or to seek an alternative that would better serve the student, in the first instance, and society, at the end of the day. So it has been for me since I stepped in front of a classroom around the time when the democratic franchise was first being extended to all citizens of South Africa and when, just over a decade later, I first launched a professional development programme aimed at equipping UK newspaper decision-makers to transform their businesses<sup>2</sup>. The various enquiries in this portfolio are markers along the route travelled in my thinking about the practice, business and purpose of journalism in service of my work with student cohorts that have spanned the gamut from prospective journalists on undergraduate courses to seasoned managers enrolled in professional development programmes to entrepreneurs starting up new media ventures.

As such, the collection of academic journal articles, monographs and book chapters as well as chapters from textbooks, industry reports and articles from industry publications constitute a case of research for pedagogical and andrological praxis<sup>3</sup>. That is, it is not purposefully

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<sup>2</sup> Senior editorial staff from Johnston Press were the first participants in the University of Central Lancashire's Journalism Leaders Programme which I established in 2005. Amongst them were editors from the Lancashire Evening Post, which in 2006 came the first UK newsroom to become fully converged with every journalist working across print and online (Luft, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The Greek term *andrology*, meaning 'man-leading' was popularised from the 1960s by the American scholar Malcolm Knowles in his work on adult learning. Since then, it has been applied more broadly in education to distinguish teacher-centred approaches to instruction, or pedagogy, from learner-centred ones, or andrology (c.f. Knowles, 1980).

theoretical or aimed at acquiring knowledge for its own sake, although a number of the texts have been widely cited by other scholars<sup>4</sup>. It is also not geared principally to being productive, although I have included extracts from a textbook that has been in continuous print by Oxford University Press South Africa since 1994 (*Writing for the Media* 1994, 1999, 2005 and forthcoming 2017). Instead, the purpose, or what Aristotle (2004, cited in Eikeland, 2007) referred as the *telos*, which guides the work discussed here is not the pursuit of narrow pragmatic knowledge, but rather the pursuit of practical wisdom, or *phronêsis* (Op. cit.).

As such, this portfolio does not illustrate the contemplative approach that is the hallmark of purely theoretical work. Nor does it document the ‘making’ or *poiêtikê*, the mode of enquiry Aristotle associated with the work of artisans or craftspeople, although journalism certainly incorporates elements of craft (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005 ; Shapiro 2010, et al.). For while they exercise some creativity, craftspeople typically start with an idea or a plan of the article they want to make. As they work, they may make some modifications, improve an idea and such, but they are limited in this by their original idea. Rather, this portfolio exemplifies Smith’s (1999, 2011) assertion that ‘where the productive begins with a plan, the practical cannot have such a concrete starting point’. By contrast, practical research emerges from a question or situation. For me, it was the challenges I have faced as an educator. Like all applied researchers, I started thinking about the situation in the light of my understanding of what is good or, as Smith (1991) says, ‘What makes for human flourishing’. For Aristotle, praxis is guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly; a concern to further human well-being and ‘the good life’ or *eudaimon* (Eikeland, 2007). This requires an understanding of other people because, as Nussbaum points out (Nussbaum, 1995), *eudaimon* is activity according to excellence, living well and doing well.

The concept of *eudaimonia* not only implies a critical perspective, it also indicates that reason should not only lead to individual autonomy but should also serve the collective good. This holistic view of performance is implicit in this portfolio that not only demonstrates a technical and practical interest in the changing activities, expectations and competencies of journalistic workers, the efficiency of evolving publishing processes, and the viability of the businesses on which the system largely depends. It also includes critical enquiries into the ethics of journalism and role and responsibilities of journalistic education. Thus this portfolio of 14 texts comprising two chapters from scholarly books, four academic journal articles, one monograph, four industry reports, three articles in trade journals and extracts from three editions of a critical textbook ranges across the spectrum of Habermasian human interest categories: technical (causal/predictive), practical (understanding/ interpretative) and emancipatory (critical) (Habermas, 1978). In the course of my work, I have reflected on both

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<sup>4</sup> Google Scholar on 01/03/2016 showed 138 citations of my work of which 108 were cited since 2011, resulting in an h-index of 7.

the deductive approaches of positivistic scholarship and the ‘meta-discourse’ of constructivist academics, which Bhaskar (1994, p. 4) describes as ‘talking about talking’ at the expense of interacting with ‘extra-linguistic realities’ (Ibid). I came to recognise the advantages of systems thinking and, in time, I found myself upon the ‘third way’ (Wright 2011, p.158) of critical realism, which Wright sums up as: ‘acknowledging the independent existence of objective reality, but asserting the constructedness of human knowledge about the nature of reality’ (Wright, 2011, p. 159 drawing on Bhaskar, 1979, and others). As such, traces of the critical realist’s quest to ‘generate expectations about the world and about the results of our actions in it’ (Sayer, 2000, p.43) threads through all these studies.

I am also aware of that critical realism has been accused of being ‘philosophy in search of a method’ (Yeung, 1997, in Wright, 2011, p. 168) and that there is no ‘cook book’ of established methods (Op cit.). Instead, critical realist scholars tend to adopt an assortment of qualitative and quantitative techniques in accordance with the specific research questions at hand (Olsen, 2010; Wright, 2011). That eclecticism is also evident in this portfolio, which illustrates the efforts one journalist-turned-academic or ‘hackademic’ to breach ‘the research-practice gap’ (Le May et al., 1998: 431–2).

By taking on the hackademic’s challenges of both integrating applied research directly into the academy (Bromley, 2013; Niblock, 2012) and applying critical enquiry to address wider journalistic concerns (Curran, 2010), this portfolio answers Niblock’s call for ‘forms of scholarship that cohere better with its industry-facing character’ (Niblock, 2012, p. 497). In doing so, I have sought to avoid what Blumler and Cushion (2014, p. 260) see as a ‘danger’ that the boom in contemporary journalism studies could become ‘too inward-looking’ because ‘scholars, authors, educators and students will focus more and more on the complex inner workings of journalism at the expense of attention to its external ties, impacts and significance’ (Ibid).

Next, I provide a retrospective review of the relevant literature and discuss the theoretical approach chosen to frame this thesis (Chapter 2). To follow, I will offer an overview of the methodology and outline the chosen methods, including their limitations (Chapter 3). After an evaluation of the studies (Chapter 4), I will conclude (Chapter 5) and then consider opportunities for further work (Chapter 6).

## **2. A retrospective literature review**

Identifying a robust, comprehensive theoretical model to frame this portfolio was not straightforward. Perhaps that is not surprising. For although journalistic activities have been around ‘since people recognized a need to share information about themselves with others’ (Zelizer, 2004:2), the study of journalism is much more recent (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch 2009) and its boundaries continue to be shaped (Lewis, 2012).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to review the variety of approaches taken in thinking about journalism, it is noted that they that run the gamut from normative/philosophical to predictive/empirical to cultural/interpretive to critical/post-structural epistemological stances and there is still no consensus on even the most fundamental concepts. Journalism, for example, is variously conceptualised as an activity, practice, profession, industry, literary genre, ideology, cultural or social practice (Deuze, 2005; Picard, 2006; Witschge & Nygren, 2009).

Furthermore, these studies also emerged during a period that Franklin (2014) observes has been aptly summed up by the ‘wonderfully expressive phrase’ as ‘this moment of mind-blowing uncertainty in the evolution of journalism’ (Domingo, Masip, & Costera Meijer, 2015). Franklin emphasises that it is not only the pace of change, but also the character of that change, that confounds publishers, industry analysts and academics ‘struggling to make their research findings and scholarly discussions relevant and timely’ (2014, p. 469).

These circumstances have challenged the postmodernist de-totalizing climate in which those who study journalism work, as Curran has noted, ‘for better or worse’ (1990, p. 158). Moreover, the enquiries in this collection nudge in a variety of directions as I have considered a wide array of issues affecting journalistic practice, enterprise and education and reflected on a range of concerns, including those of former and prospective journalists (cf. Nel, 1994; Nel, 2010a, Nel 2010b), journalistic sources (cf. Nel, 2002), audiences (cf. Nel & Westlund, 2012), current and prospective news media managers and entrepreneurs (cf. Nel, 1995; Nel, 2015), students and educators (cf. Hunter & Nel, 2011) and policy makers (c.f. Nel, 2010a; Nel, 2015).

Thus as I set off to identify the broad approach I eventually selected to frame this thesis, I was mindful of Picard’s (2014) caution to avoid the ‘same old ways’ of understanding (p.6). On route, I considered a range of research traditions that have both informed my thinking about journalism and to which other scholars have seen my work contribute. Next, I will describe these perspectives briefly in no particular order.

## **2.1. Considering relevant theoretical frameworks**

Given my widespread concern about the shifting boundaries in the field, I naturally considered the tradition of gatekeeping research.

Initiated in the middle of the last century by eminent social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947) and then applied to the communications context by Manning White (1950), there is now a growing body literature referencing gate-keeping, including my own (Nel, 2005; Nel, Ward, & Rawlinson, 2007; Nel & Westlund, 2013). Two aspects of my work in this area have been of particular interest to scholars. The first is that I have turned my gaze away from conceiving the gates as the products of newsroom routines or ‘repeated practices’ (Shoemaker & Reese,

1996) and instead considered how they emerge from relationships between various participants in the journalism system, both online and off (cf. Allan, 2006; Singer et al., 2011). The second aspect is the role of my handbook as a gatekeeper in the context of South African journalism education. This arises because the publication is recognised as the first such textbook produced in post-apartheid South Africa (De Beer & Tomaselli, 2000; DeBeer, 1995), and (De Beer & Steyn, 2002), and because it has seen three editions and has remained in print for more than two decades.

Given the context in which my work is situated, it also touches on the literature in education studies. And I did indeed draw particular inspiration from viewing the studies in this portfolio through the lens of Action Research, which is a staple approach used in pedagogical research and which I will discuss further in the next chapter on research methods. Furthermore, my studies of the competencies of prospective journalists and journalism entrepreneurs have been of interest to education scholars in the UK (e.g. Moloney, Jackson, & McQueen, 2013), South Africa (De Beer, 2010; Dube, 2013) and further afield (O'Donnell, Zion, & Sherwood, 2015; Cullen, Tanner, O'Donnell, & Green, 2014). For example, Dube's (2013) study, 'The Challenges for Journalism Education and Training in a Transforming Society: A Case Study of Three Selected Institutions in Post-1994 South Africa', not only cited my use of gatekeeping theory (p. 15, 16), but also noted in a review of textbooks used in journalism education that, 'only one book, *Writing for the Media* by François Nel, is published in South Africa' (p. 146). However, I did not consider the education perspective broad enough to fully embrace my interests in wider social, technological and economic issues affecting journalism innovation and entrepreneurship.

With that in mind, I also considered the political economy tradition of media. My early work in South Africa considered the role of media ownership, political context and resources in the selection, production, distribution and consumption of news in general, and the power of public relations professionals (Nel, 2001) in particular, all of which are issues central to the propaganda model of mass media (Herman & Chomsky, 2010). Later studies explored the key economic factors of production, in particular capital and labour. Not only do concerns about traditional news media companies' access to financial capital underpin many of the studies (e.g. 'Where Else is the Money?' (Nel, 2010d)), but I also explored issues of social capital (e.g. 'Managing New(s) Conversations' (Nel & Westlund, 2013)) and human capital, including entrepreneurship (Nel, 2010c in Stone et al. 2010; Hunter & Nel, 2011; Nel, 2015). In so doing, the core components in Marx's 'process of labour' also arose: labour, the subject of labour and the instruments of labour (Marx, 1887). Particularly in the study 'Laid off:

What do UK journalists do next?’<sup>5</sup> (Nel, 2010a), I reflected on anxieties around employment of journalists and the commodification of journalistic skills, themes that have been of interest to a variety of scholars including participants in an Australian government-funded Graduate Qualities and Journalism Curriculum Renewal project who have included my work among the core readings on their website and have cited it in several of the resulting publications (Cullen et al., 2014; Macdonald, 2006). The labour of ‘citizen journalists’ and ‘user-generated content’ is pertinent to a number of the studies (Nel et al., 2007; Nel & Westlund, 2013). These discussions might have been framed as exploitative, although that has not been my reading of them. Instead, I drew on the organisation-public relationship framework and considered issues of control mutuality and reciprocity (cf. Nel et al., 2007). This interest in relations between individual and groups in the journalistic system, and the relations between these relations persists, as evidenced by more recent enquiries in to entrepreneurial ecosystems (Nel 2015).

A strong case might also have been made for situating these studies in the context of the literature on business models. I was mindful that researchers have noted that few concepts in business today are as widely discussed as business models, but that it is also a concept that is often misused (Picard, 2000), poorly understood, particularly in the context of the Internet (Rappa, 2003), and seldom studied systematically (Weill, Malone, D’Urso, Herman, & Woerner, 2005). While the latter criticism is being addressed by increased attention recently to the business model concept (Al-Debei & Avison, 2010), the debate is far from settled (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). One obstacle in classifying business models in the digital economy is that many are still evolving, changing rapidly and dynamically (Wang and Chan, 2003). Emerging online business models may render the taxonomy of today obsolete tomorrow. Thus, in my studies I heeded the advice of Chaharbaghi et al. (2003), who argue that those wanting to understand the range of perspectives on businesses models are advised to step back from the business activity itself to look at the basis and the underlying characteristics that make commerce in the product or service possible. They proposed a ‘meta business model’ comprising three interrelated strands (1) the way of thinking; (2) the operational system; and (3) the capacity for value creation. In line with systems thinking, the researchers caution that while distinguishing each of the three strands is essential for explaining the concept of business, using each of these strands in isolation ‘will lead to a dead end’ (Chaharbaghi et al., 2003, p. 375). The implication here is that, while it vital to consider *what* firms do (a practical view) and *how* they do it (an instrumental view), what emerges from these activities – whether judged a ‘success’ or ‘failure’ – cannot be

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<sup>5</sup> *Laid Off: What do Journalists Do Next?* was published in 2010 in collaboration with the trade news site journalism.co.uk, where it was also widely discussed and remains available for download: <https://www.journalism.co.uk/news-features/-laidoff-sacked-journalists-still-passionate-about-industry-study-suggests/s5/a540441/>

understood without also appreciating *why* the firm's management chooses to go about things in a certain way (a theoretical view).

It was the satisfaction of applying this conception to thinking about the business of newspapers (Nel 2010a, 2012), that led me to consider the potential of the systems approach to help solve the problem of casting a suitable sense-making net over my inquiries into a variety of aspects of the rapidly shifting terrain in what Anderson et al. (2012) describe as an age of 'post-industrial journalism'. I was spurred on by Niblock's (2007) contention that 'there needs to be a new critical approach to journalism that illuminates the processes and decision-making from *within*, rather than making deductions solely on the journalistic output' (2007, p. 23).

Of course, as Zelizer (2004) reminds us, 'inquiry is not just a cognitive act, but a social one as well' (p. 31). As such, I was mindful that any elegant cognitive framework for these studies should not only have the potential to persuade the [traditional] 'interpretative community' of journalism, comprising journalism practitioners, journalism educators and journalism scholars (Zelizer 2007, p. 15), but that it should also have both the breath and the clarity to convince other role players inside the academy and outside. For, as Dahlgren (2004) observed, the role of theory is to provide 'intellectual scaffolding' across a variety of formal and informal contexts:

'[Theory] serves to orient us, to pull together sets of facts and assumptions, and offers normative dispositions. It helps to provide significance to what we observe, and to suggest the various types of action or intervention. In this sense, there may not always be demarcated distinctions between formalized theory and the more general (and less systematic) thought modes we use' (Dahlgren, 2004, p. 11).

Thus I have searched for just such an inclusive cognitive frame that might accommodate the interpretative approaches that have come to dominate much of contemporary journalism studies (Wright 2010) and also account for my own predisposition towards realism. In time, I found my way to critical realism which, though it has its own history, exemplifies the holistic concepts (Mingers, 2011) of systems thinking that provides the fundamental 'intellectual scaffolding' that orients and pulls together this research collection.

## **2.2. Systems thinking: background and major strands**

I am aware that my decision to position this portfolio in the context of systems thinking might be contentious, particularly because of its ties to the 'functionalist sociology of the 1950s', which McQuail (2002) opines 'was largely rejected because of fundamental theoretical vacuity, inconsistency with the new critical spirit of the 1960s and subject appeal of new theories' (Ibid., p. 7). In view of this, it might be prudent to provide a brief history of the development of systems thinking and to point out the various concepts that are relevant to

critical realism and how these have informed the critical heuristic I have employed to discuss how in my work I have challenged traditional journalistic boundaries.

Systems thinking or the systems approach<sup>6</sup> was developed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a response to increasing fragmentation and duplication of scientific and technological research, but has been traced back to the Greeks, especially Aristotle<sup>7</sup> (Mingers, 2011). German scholar Ludwig von Bertalanffy is often seen as the founder of the modern movement and, as such, it might be prudent to recall a passage in which he describes the set of theories that together comprise the framework for systems thought:

The 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conceived of the world as chaos. Chaos was the oft-quoted blind play of atoms, which, in mechanistic and positivist philosophy, appeared to represent ultimate reality, with life as an accidental product of physical processes and mind as an epi-phenomenon. It was chaos when, in the current theory of evolution, the living world appeared as a product of chance, the outcome of random mutations and survival in the mill of natural selection. In the same sense, human personality, in the theories of behaviourism as well as of psychoanalysis, was considered a chance product of nature and nurture, of a mixture of genes and an accidental sequence of event from early childhood to maturity.

Now we are looking for another basic outlook on the world – the world as organization [no added emphasis]. Such a conception – if it can be substantiated – would indeed change the basic categories upon which scientific thought rests, and profoundly influence practical attitudes (Quoted Von Bertalanffy 1973 in Lillienfeld, 178, pp. 7-8. as cited in Laszlo & Kippner 1998, p.5).

Although Von Bertalanffy originally presented his idea of a ‘General Systems Theory’ in a philosophy seminar at the University of Chicago in 1937, his first publications on the subject appeared only after World War II (Laszlo & Kippner, 1998). By the 1960s systems thinking began to be recognised as a paradigmatic effort at cross-disciplinary scientific integration and theory formation. Laszlo and Kippner point out that ‘no such effort from the natural sciences had been previously attempted’ (1998, p. 49). The transdisciplinary endeavour soon also spread to the social sciences.

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<sup>6</sup> The terms ‘systems thinking’ and ‘systems approach’ are used interchangeably in the literature.

<sup>7</sup> A good sources for an overview of the history of systems is Capra, 1997, and there is an interesting and very detailed timeline at the American Society for Cybernetics, 2006: <http://www.asc-cybernetics.org/foundations/timeline.htm> [Accessed: 12/07/2015]

In the 1950s, Von Bertalanffy met with scholars from other disciplines, notably the economist Kenneth Boulding, the physiologist Ralph Gerald and the mathematician Antol Rappaport at the Palo Alto Centre for Advanced Study of Behaviour Sciences. It became obvious that, while they were approaching the subject from different directions, their thoughts were ‘remarkably convergent’ (Op. cit.). A 1953 letter from Boulding to Von Bertalanffy indicates that the transdisciplinary endeavour of the systems approach was not restricted to the hard sciences but was beginning to spread to the humanities too:

I seem to have come to much the same conclusion as you have reached, though approaching it from the direction of economics and the social sciences rather than from biology – that there is a body of which I have been calling ‘general empirical theory,’ or ‘general system theory’ in your excellent terminology, which is of wide applicability in many different disciplines. (As quoted in Lilienfeld, 1978, pp. 7–8)

The central idea of systems thinking is its anti-reductionist stance that insists that the behaviour of entities and objects can’t be understood purely in terms of the nature and constitution of their *components* or *parts* (Mingers 2010). In that, the systems approach is ‘fundamentally different from that of traditional forms of analysis’ (Aronson, 1996, p.1). The clue is in the word ‘analysis’, which comes from the root meaning ‘to break into constituent parts’. Traditionally, scientists have simplified natural complexity by isolating individual items and viewing each in isolation from the complex set of relations that connect them to their environment. This has had many practical benefits, from making medicines to building printing presses, but this type of knowledge falls short in one key respect: it does not reveal how complex things behave when open to complex sets of influences.

By contrast, systems thinking focuses on how the thing being studied interacts with the other constituents of the system – a set of elements that interact to produce behaviour – of which it is part. Rather than isolating smaller and smaller parts of the system to be examined, systems thinking works by expanding its view to consider larger and larger numbers of interactions the more an issue is being studied. ‘This results in sometimes strikingly different conclusions than those generated by traditional forms of analysis, especially when what is being studied is dynamically complex or has a great deal of feedback from other sources, internal or external’ (Op cit.).

As such, systems thinking can model complex social (interpersonal, intergroup, human/technology), cultural, technical and economic (cf. Mintzberg, 1979<sup>8</sup>) interactions without needing to reduce the phenomena to individual motivations. In the natural science,

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<sup>8</sup> Mintzberg’s (1979) classic analysis of organisations as comprising five components – the strategic apex, middle structure, support staff, techno structure and operating core – is still widely referenced.

for example, systems thinking might lead to the reappraisal of the use of certain pesticides that not only eliminated crop-destroying pests, but also poisoned other wildlife. In the social sciences, for example, systems thinking might lead to politicians widening debates on controlling gangsters through policing by also considering the role played by family dysfunction and community amenities in how those concerns might be addressed.

Furthermore, Aaron (1996) observed that as a field of enquiry concerned with the integrative exploration of phenomena and events, the systems approach pertains to both the epistemological and the ontological. However, rather than constitute either an epistemology or an ontology, it is more reminiscent of the Greek notion of *gnoseology*. That is, it accommodates various forms of knowledge, including: inductive (empiricism), deductive (rationalism), abductive (i.e. hypothesis of the best possible explanation based on observation), retroductive (transcendentalism), contemplation (*theoria*), metaphysical, and instinctual or intuitive knowledge. All of which are said to contribute to the sense-making strategies of journalists (Schultz, 2007), managers (Shapiro & Spence, 1997) and educators (Burke & Sadler-Smith, 2011; Wright, 2011).

Like other innovative frameworks for thought, general systems theory passed through phases of disregard and disdain. Indeed, its role in underpinning what is seen as the ‘dominant paradigm’ of mass communication studies (see Gatlin, 1978; Hall, 1989) has, as McQuail (2002) notes, ‘been assaulted from all sides during the last 50 years’ (p. 7). But the systems approach persists, not least because, as Laszlo and Krippner (1998) note, ‘It capitalizes on the emergence of parallelisms in different disciplinary interpretations of reality and consequently provides a platform for the integrated study of complexity in the human experience’ (p. 50).

Thus the systems approach has also benefited from the parallel emergence and rise to eminence of cybernetics (Weiner, 1948; Castells, 2000) and information theory (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), and their widespread applications to initially quite distant fields, including studies of mass communication (Ibid). Social system theories by German scholars Niklas Luhman and Jürgen Habermas, in particular, have been widely debated in studies of journalism by Curran (1997, 2002), Dahlgren (2001) and others. It is not my intention here to review these arguments. Suffice it to say that they are different in basic assumptions, scientific techniques and aims, and they are often unsatisfactory and sometimes contradictory. They agree, however, in being concerned in one way or another, with ‘systems’, ‘wholes’ or ‘organisations’, and, in their totality, they heralded a new approach. And, as Aronson (1996) observed, in so doing the character of systems thinking makes it extremely effective on the most difficult types of problems to solve: ‘those involving complex issues, those that depend a great deal on dependence on the past or on the actions of others, and those stemming from ineffective coordination among those involved’ (p. 7).

It is not difficult to see the significance of this joined-up approach to those grappling to make sense of the sweeping changes in the journalistic ecosystem - struggles to adapt and master technological change, mass layoffs as most corporations grapple to turn increases in digital

audiences into revenue, the collapse of the traditional advertising subsidy, all at a time when journalist's professional authority and privilege is challenged by do-it-yourself and corporate publishing. Or when media organisations find that their principle competitors for investment from advertisers are not other media firms, but technology companies. Furthermore, critics have been contemptuous of much of the academy's contribution to the discourse to date. Picard (2014) notes that 'understanding of the conditions has been difficult because media and scholarly portrayals of the causes and solutions have been so poor' (p.1). News coverage of changes has been slated as shallow and self-interested (Chyi, Lewis, & Zheng, 2012). Scholarly work on the subject of the 'crisis' in journalism has been described as 'polemical, offering limited historical or comparative context, much less direct evidence of social effects from which to more fully comprehend the impact of the changes' (Picard, 2014a., p.1 with reference to Siles & Boczkowski, 2012a).

Therefore, it may not be surprising that despite earlier critiques (cf. McQuail 2002), systems thinking has been seeping back into journalism scholarship. For example, early researchers contemplating digital innovations in news organisation have been drawing on Rodgers's Diffusion of Innovations theory<sup>9</sup> to frame queries about changes organisational structures and news work and (e.g. Garrison, 2001; Manzella, 2000; Singer, 2004; Anderson, 2010). There are also been some attempts to think systematically about news outputs, such as Anderson's (2010) case study of news diffusion in a US news ecosystem and Domingo et al's use of Actor Network Theory to consider an integrated framework of the dynamics of news production, circulation and use (2015).

But with some notable exceptions (Ognyanova & Monge, 2013), there have been few attempts to draw the system boundaries wider. To extend Anderson's analogy (2010) that if studying newsrooms is akin to the study of factory-floor production (locus of the production of 'news goods') then research into news ecosystems contemplates the trade and circulation of such goods, I am here zooming out further I both space and time. These studies demonstrate how I have set out to think systematically about the evolution of the whole factory (not just the factory floor), and the whole information marketplace (not just the trade of news goods), as well as key related sub-systems, including those that equip current and prospective 'factory workers' and managers with the competencies they need (i.e. education), growth of new 'factories' (entrepreneurship) and related policy concerns.

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<sup>9</sup> Searches on 12/06/2015 showed that the first of 58 references to Diffusion of Innovations theory appeared in *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* in 2000. The first of 82 such references appeared in *Journalism Studies* in 2006.

With both the requirement for and the relevance of the systemic approach established, the need to operationalise a suitable cognitive lens through which journalistic endeavours might be examined is both necessary and self-evident, and will be addressed next.

### **2.3. Towards a framework for thinking systematically and critically about journalistic realities**

Researching complex social systems poses particular ontological and epistemological challenges, not least so for journalists-turned-academics, as the earlier discussion showed. Thus it has, to borrow a phrase from Harcup (2012), become ‘bleedingly obvious’ that the journalistic system is being profoundly reshaped as contextual and internal forces drive changes in its activities and redraw its boundaries.

Of late, a number of efforts have been made to pause, critically assess the shortcomings of the current journalism scholarship and offer heuristics to frame research agendas for specific aspects of the journalistic system, such as media management (Küng, 2007), news production and work (Wright, 2010; Lewis & Westlund, 2015), and to offer guidance to develop related theory (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012).

While the contributions are welcome, this dialectic also flags the alarming levels of entropy that had come to characterize the traditional, rather closed journalistic systems (both abstract/analytical and real) and points to the need for researchers to continuously reassess how they cast their epistemological net and the ‘organising force’ or ontological stance that has informed those judgements. For it follows that if we agree *that* journalistic boundaries are constantly in flux, we need a heuristic that would guide us on *how* to go about the critical assessment of these boundaries *continuously*.

It is with that in mind that I’ll next describe the theoretical underpinnings for that heuristic, which is deployed in later sections. As I set out to do so, I recall the Kuhnian notion that, as Zelizer reminds us, ‘inquiry is not just a cognitive act, but a social one as well’ (Zelizer, 2004, p. 31). And that, as such, any re-examination of the way we think about journalism needs to consider the social groups involved in giving it shape<sup>10</sup>. This portfolio demonstrates how I have engaged beyond what Zelizer identifies as the [traditional] ‘interpretative community’

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<sup>10</sup> Kuhn’s model also considers the *detector*, *selector* and *effector* roles by which controlled systems maintain their boundaries (Kuhn & Boulding, 1974). While this offers a potentially useful perspective for organisational studies into some of the themes considered in this portfolio, I have not employed this framework directly in any of the work included here.

of journalism, comprising journalism practitioners, journalism educators and journalism studies scholars (2007), to reach other role players, inside the academy and outside. The analysis of that work further demonstrates my commitment to a heuristic that would not only stand up to scrutiny from the scholarly community, but would also provide an elegant framework of use in practice.

Thus the quest for a meta-theoretical structure that could accommodate the critical benefits of constructivism (which has emerged as a dominant ontology in much of the theoretical work about journalism) and the allegiance to realism that characterises most practical journalistic endeavours, as well as my own propensity towards holistic thinking, have led me to join the growing ranks of scholars who have turned to Critical Realism (Lau 2004, Gauthier 2005, Wright 2010).

Another reason why critical realism appeals to a former journalist and educator like myself is that it maintains a strong emphasis on ontology. The first principle of critical realism is that the world exists independently of what we think about it. What is important is that it brings us to concede the infallibility of our knowledge and the prospect that we might get things wrong. There are two sides to knowledge, according to Bhaskar (1998): transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge. Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett (2010) sum up the distinction by noting that intransitive objects of knowledge do not rely on human activity. That is, it is the knowledge of things that are not invented by people, for example, magnetic forces, death etc. On the other hand, transitive phenomenon are ‘artificial objects fashioned into items of knowledge by the science of the day’ (Bhaskar 1998, p.11). These can be established facts, theories, paradigms, models, methods and techniques of study that are used by a particular researcher as well constructions such as ‘news’ used by journalists and non-journalists alike (Stephens, 2007).

Besides drawing a line between transitive and intransitive dimensions of knowledge, critical realism differentiates between the ‘real’, the ‘actual’, and the ‘empirical’ (Bhaskar 1975). Even though critical realism accepts that there is one ‘real’ world it does not follow that we, as journalists or researchers, have immediate access to it or that we are able to observe its every facet. Objects (physical or social), have certain structures and powers that can behave in specific ways and cause change. This potential still exists even if it remains unexercised. Thus the ‘actual’ refers to the changes that ensue when those powers are activated. Finally, the ‘empirical’ is defined as the domain of observation. The ‘real’ and the ‘actual’ as part of the critical realist ontology presuppose that not all the structures of the things that we experience may be in fact observable. As Sayer (2000) emphasises, ‘observability may make us more confident about what we think exists, but existence itself is not dependent on it’ (p.12).

This stratification of ontic depth, which Mingers (2010) reminds us is the core systemic idea – ‘that the characteristics and behaviour of entities depended on the structure of *relationships* between components rather than the properties of the components themselves’ – carries with

it several other concepts: *emergence*, *hierarchy* (or stratification as Bhaskar tends to call it) and *boundaries* (p. 3). Thus the systems approach provides the platform for the critical realist's conceptual map that allows for multiple layers, complexity, interweaving and dynamic interaction of the parts of that reality (cf. Olson 2004, Bhaskar 1997). It also suggests the necessity for what critical realism scholars describe as *retroductive knowledge* (Op cit.). That is, the need to not simply accept the logics of inductive- (i.e. from data to generality), deductive- (i.e. from generalities to data via hypothesis testing), or abductive reasoning (i.e. from emersion to a verbal summary), but instead to also ask: Why are things being observed as they seem to be? Olsen points out that this is a complex question that includes up to three sub elements: 'why do evidence and data appear to follow the patterns they do? why are theories about the world sometimes wrong and what kind of bodies of evidence are used to substantiate and underpin each theory? and finally, how do we explain the phenomena that we are currently interested in?' (2010, pp. xxv–xxvi). I would add that this also invites two further questions: why do the observed things seem to be the appropriate things or systems to observe? And how do we set about appraising and re-appraising the relevance of the boundaries of the system as we perceived it?

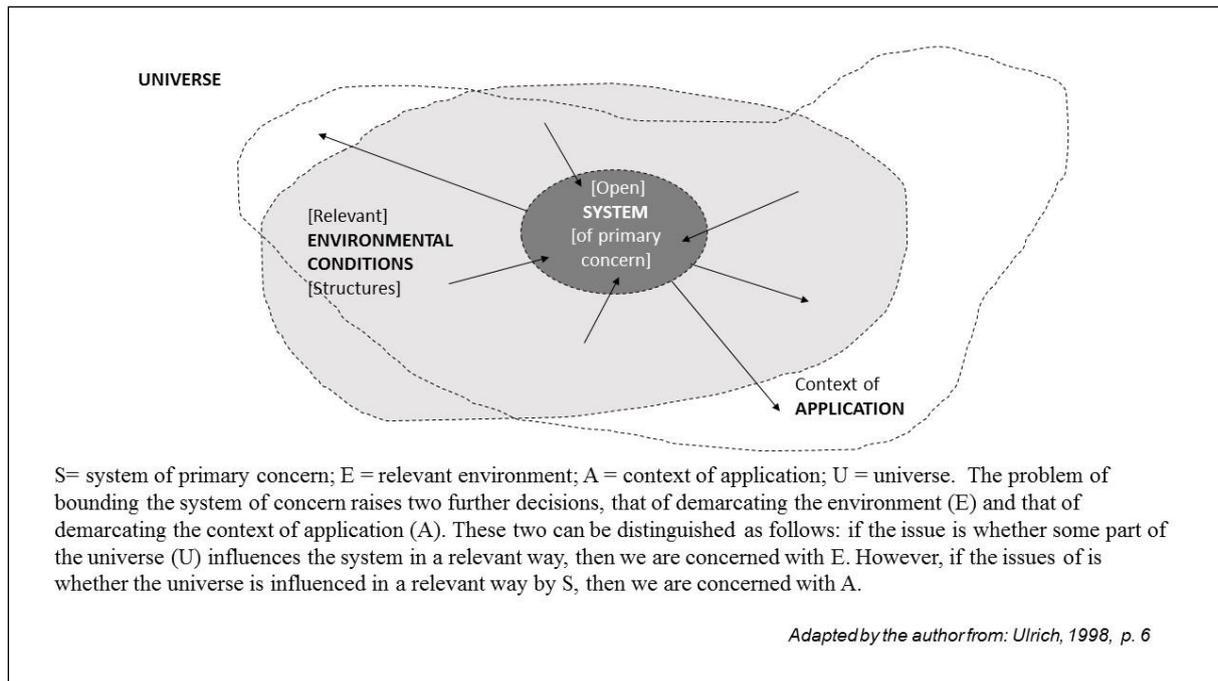
Central to my approach to problem solving what Bhaskar sees as the principle epistemic fallacy of modern scholarship – the failure to recognise that what is (ontological considerations) transcend our ability to discern it (epistemological endeavours) - is to turn back to what Ulrich calls 'the critical kernel of the systems idea' (Ulrich, 2005, p. 5). Specifically, that there are two fundamental limitations to knowledge: first, all our claims to knowledge, understanding and rationality imply that we consider the 'whole' of the system (cf. for example Nel, 1999, p. 32); second, that we can rarely if ever be certain of knowing and understanding enough (Ibid, p. 33). That is because even when the issue or situation is well defined, the job of considering the whole relevant system is by no means a trivial matter: it obliges us to understand all conceivable perspectives or options and explore all those known and unknown conditions within and outside the situation that could possibly have some bearing on our claims – an undertaking that finds no natural boundary. Therefore, to keep this requirement within reasonable limits so that we may hope to achieve some certainty about whether our claim to knowledge, understanding and rationality does in fact consider the whole relevant system, we would have to know or decide beforehand what the 'whole' is; that is, we would need to be able to bound the whole system in an objective or definitive way.

Of course, there is only one system of which we can say for certain that it represents the whole system. That is, the universe. All other systems are distinguished from the universe by boundary judgements. For all practical purposes then, there is no system without an environment and how we draw the line between a system and the environment is matter of judgement. This is why the concept of boundary judgements is fundamental to any critical employment of the systems idea (Ulrich 1983, p. 225). Boundary judgements are the conceptual border lines which distinguish the system of concern from its relevant physical and social environment; that is, they define the borders of concern. In conceptualising news, for example, the concomitant question then becomes: Who is concerned with making this

judgement? (cf. Nel 1999, p. 33). In conceptualising the competitive environment for media, the question becomes: Who else is concerned with creating, packaging and delivering news and information to consumers?

Ulrich also urges careful system thinkers to qualify the system/environment distinction further by differentiating between the relevant and the irrelevant environment. He defines the 'irrelevant environment' as 'that part of the universe that is not part of the system and does not influence the system', or if the manner in which it influences the system is not considered to be of concern; by contrast, the 'relevant environment' is that part of the universe that is not part of the system but nevertheless influences the system (Ulrich, 2005, p. 4). In my discussions about news judgements, for example, I describe the relevant environment for newsrooms in reference to McQuail & Windhal's analysis of the social forces on media organisations (1993, p. 191 cited in Nel, 2005, p. 8 ), which critical realists would see as being on the level of the actual. I invite the readers (typically, but not exclusively, university and college students of journalism) to consider the variety of internal and external factors that might influence how the facts (at the level of the empirical) might emerge as 'news'.

For further definition, it is relevant to reflect on a third type of boundary problem that Ulrich identifies – that of drawing a line between the system of concern and 'the context of application' (Ibid). By this he means the part of the universe influenced by the system. He argues that this notion presents a useful counter-concept to the environment because considering the environment 'merely ensures "strategic" concern for success; however, considering the context of application it implies a concern for the consequences' that activities may have on 'third parties' (Ibid). For Ulrich, the context of application is that conceptual part of the universe in which the normative content of a proposition or rationality claim becomes effective and visible (Ulrich, 1987, p. 276). For me, as a praxis-oriented educator, this insight has been key to my thinking about the affective boundaries of journalistic systems and raises questions such as: Who might be affected by the news/media business/journalistic education? And whom ought the news/business/journalistic education to concern?



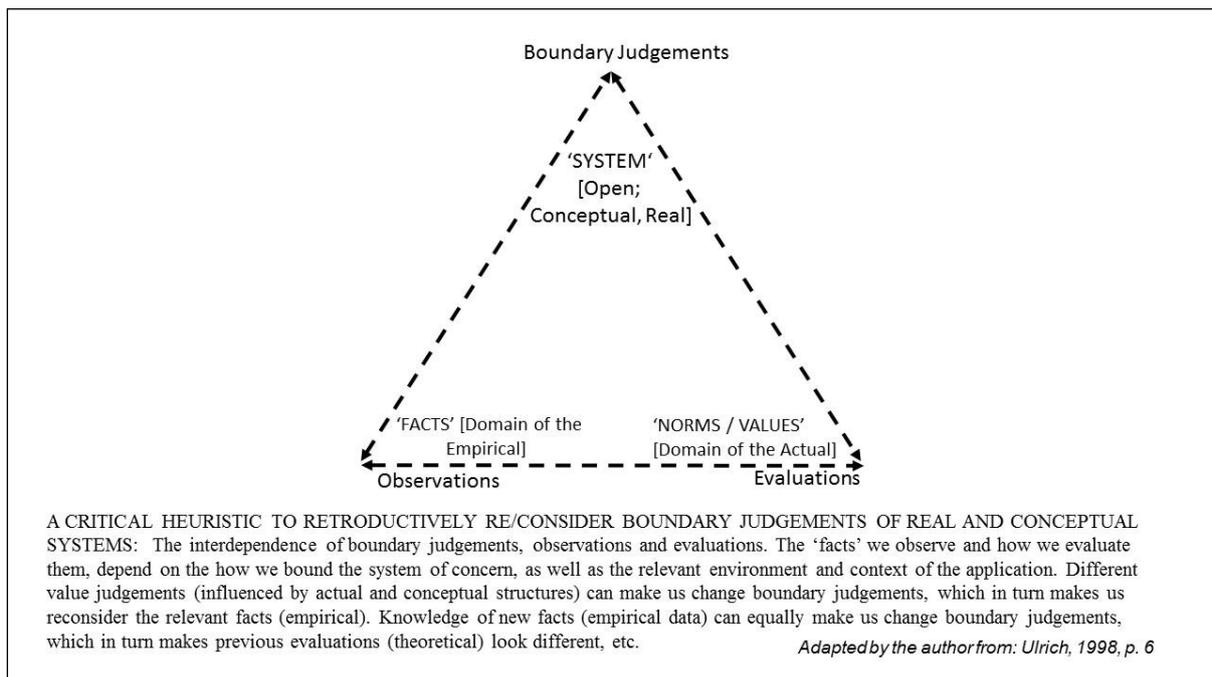
**Figure 1. Boundary judgements as borders of concern.**

Furthermore, Ulrich argues that this ‘critical kernel’ of the systems idea offers a basis to consider the critical competence of all the participants in the system. ‘The crucial point is that when it comes to making boundary judgements, experts and professionals have no natural advantage over lay people’ (Ibid). Professional expertise does not protect against the need to make boundary judgements; on the contrary, such expertise depends on them in the same way that everyday knowledge does. Nor does it provide an objective basis for defining boundary judgements. Since the ‘facts’ (observational statements) that are to be considered relevant change with our boundary judgements, and vice versa; and since new facts or different boundary judgements may moreover require us to reconsider our ‘values’ (value judgements), that is, the way we evaluate observable facts, it is clear that boundary judgements strongly influence the outcome of any professional as well as everyday discourse – including, for example, fundamental journalistic concepts such as what is or is not ‘news’.

Therefore we might say that our boundary judgements determine our partiality (selectively) which is inherent in all our claims to rationality. In concert with Ulrich, I contend that this partiality in news and other judgements need not be motivated by egoism or ideology or other forms of siding with any group or people or interest, as in cases of explicitly partisan newspapers and phobic reporters (c.f. Nel, 1999, p. 33); it simply mirrors our usual failure to reach comprehensive knowledge, understanding and rationality.

As such, it might be prudent to highlight Ulrich’s assertion that ‘the systems idea is not the cause of the problem, but only the messenger who bring us the bad news; accusing the messenger of the bad news will help as little as ignoring the bad news’ (Ulrich, 1983, p. 225).

On the other hand, the systems idea is not the solution to the problem either. Its message is not that we actually need to achieve comprehensive knowledge and understanding of whole systems; rather it admonishes us to reflect on the ways in which we may fail to consider the whole relevant system. In that vein, for example, in my textbooks I do not lament any of the factors that shape news judgements; I seek instead to identify and describe how the boundary judgements are made. Furthermore, I identify that the systems idea obliges us [journalists/media managers/educators/scholars] to take a ‘critical turn’ (Ulrich, 1983, p. 224) and always assume that we may not sufficiently know and understand the whole relevant system on which our claims depend; we must also assume an inherent partiality in our findings and conclusions.



**Figure 2. The interdependence observations, evaluations and boundary judgements.**

The epistemological implications of this concept of boundary judgements are significant. First, they compel us to make clear to ourselves and others concerned that there is a ‘built in’ in partiality. It means that in spite of the usual asymmetry of knowledge and skills between various groups – such as journalists and audiences, educators and students, scholars and lay people – at a deeper level, a fundamental symmetry exists among them. The professional judgements depend no less on boundary judgements than everyday judgements. Lay people and experts here meet as equals. This deep symmetry of all rationality claims is also a deep democratic symmetry. And this critical kernel associated with systems thinking opens up the potential for deep insights into the shifting boundaries throughout the journalistic system from the newsroom to the boardroom to classroom.

It might be prudent to stress as Ulrich does, that to realise the potential of this critical heuristic, boundary judgements may variously be employed in critical self-reflection, critical deliberation, and the polemical use of boundary judgements (Op cit.).

Reflective practice for critical realists invite questions such as: why do evidence and data appear to follow the patterns they do? What are the boundary judgements presupposed in what I believe or claim to be true about, for example, news values? Or the value of news? Or the value of news products? Or the value of those who make news products? Or value of the mainstream news media industry? Or journalism education? Or journalism studies? Should I consider alternative boundary judgements, and what would be their normative content? What ought to be my boundary judgements so that I can justify them vis-à-vis those concerned?

A dialogical search for mutual understanding and possible consensus through the deliberation of boundary judgements (as is the broad position of critical theorists) invites questions such as, for example: Why do our opinions or validity claims differ on journalistic issues, ranging from defining roles to purpose? What ‘facts’ and ‘values’ do journalists apply when making boundary judgements that are different from those of sources, commercial managers, audiences, or legislators? How does one position look from the other partner’s boundary judgements and vice versa? Can different participants in the journalistic system forge differing boundary judgements into some consensus? Or, if consensus is not possible, can everyone at least understand why disagreement exists?

In sum then, the systems approach provides the philosophical underpinning for critical realism, which Olsen notes have ‘offered a whole series of contributions to methodology’ (2010, p. xxi). Principle amongst these are the focus on ontic depth and the proposal that ‘retroduction is an excellent logic for enquiry’ (Op cit.). Pressing these concepts into the service of the much-needed, continuous re-evaluation of the conceptual and real boundaries of journalistic systems (amongst others) calls for a framework that might be operationalised by all concerned with these systems’ form, structure and state. Drawing on the work by Ulrich, I have offered just such a critical heuristic and illustrated it with, amongst others, examples from some of my own studies. I will employ this framework more fully in later sections of this essay.

With both the rationale for and the underpinnings of my methodological position established, I will next provide a brief overview of the various methods or techniques used to collect and analyse the data (or ‘facts’) for the studies in this portfolio

### **3. Discussion of methods**

Applied research sets out to respond to concerns that emerge from practice. For me this journey has been ‘a progression from fuzzy questions through fuzzy methods to fuzzy answers to less fuzzy questions, methods and answers’, which Dick (2002, p. 17) says characterises action research. Stringer (2007) notes that different interpreters of this approach

(Lewin, 1946; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Carr & Kemmis, 1988; Andersen, Herr & Nihlen, 1994, et al. cited in Stringer 2007) all acknowledge Action Research (AR) fundamentally comprises processes that:

- Are rigorously empirical and reflective (or interpretive);
- Engage people who have traditionally been called subjects as active participants in the research process; and
- Result in some practical outcome related to the lives or work of the participants (p. xviii).

Whether in the service of education-oriented studies that focus on the improving learning processes and competencies, or of project-oriented enquiries that emphasise developing and improving the research object itself (Kyrö, 2004; Suojanen, 2001), the key elements of action research are the cyclic planning, acting, observing and reflecting before acting again in a continuing response to learning outcomes from reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988, in Stringer, 1999). Confidence in the results of action research comes from checking and refining data and interpretations. As such, action research readily accommodates the critical realists' position that both 'qualitative' and quantitative data might be used to help the researcher detect and reflect on the context and social structures that shape and are shaped by human agency, processes which Archer (1995) (drawing on the work of Walter Buckley and Anthony Giddens) describes as *morphostasis* and *morphogenesis*.

Such processes are discerned through *retroduction* - that is the method used to move downwards (in ontological terms) from the level of events to the level of the real, generative mechanisms - and is the logic that weaves through the studies in this portfolio. For example, in the article on the entrepreneurial orientation of students, evidence about economic, industry, educational structures (the level of the actual) was gathered from the literature and press reports. Further original data (the level of the empirical) was generated through surveying students who participated in a series of workshops. These data were analysed reductively and the interpretation considered the agency of the students to shape those structures (morphogenesis). Also included was a self-reflexive section that pointed to the need for educators, like ourselves, to quicken the pace curriculum reform while also recognising the constraints put on such endeavours caused by accreditation bodies, university processes and staff inertia (morphostasis) (c.f. Hunter and Nel, 2011).

I have grouped the texts into the three broad situations of concern that provoked my enquiries: evolving journalistic practice; changing business models of news media enterprises; and relevant journalistic education. These issues are interconnected and, as such, the texts in each group have to varying degrees both informed and been informed by my work across all these situations. Therefore, it would be incorrect to view each group of texts as constituting a turn in a neat sequence of action-research cycles that set out to address a

specific task or problem of which the initial and target states, along with the methods, were clear.

Instead, the various enquiries in this portfolio contributed to what might be described as both a ‘ground-breaking case study’ and an ‘embedded case study’ (Scholz & Tietje, 2002, p. 26) of journalism. That is, the studies sought to address ill-defined or ‘ground-breaking’ problems in what I see as the broad journalistic system in which the initial state could not be precisely described, the target was not sufficiently known and the types of barriers to be overcome were not all anticipated. Furthermore, these problems are seen to be interrelated and, in character with embedded case studies (Ibid, p. 10), I applied a multiplicity of methods within the overlapping subunits.

With that in mind, Table 1 (below) draws on the three broad characteristics of action research Deacon et al. (1999) identified, to sum up the relevant methods, participants and outputs from the studies in this portfolio. Table 1 also confirms my respect for the critical realist tradition of enquiry by being interdisciplinary and showing a particular awareness of the need to ‘integrate evidence across historical periods’ (Neuman, 1991, p. 17).

### **3.1. Approaches, challenges and limitations in data collecting and analysis**

The specific rationales for the techniques used are included in the various texts, but to summarise I’ll point out that the data and evidence in these studies are drawn from: documents, in print and online; questioning people, in-person interviews and online surveys; observations of situations, dynamics, performance data of newspaper sales, website usage and online users, and from experience; and a novel co-research workshop, which stretches traditional focus-group methods.

Documents used are as diverse as an extract from the May 1955 edition of Drum magazine (cf. Nel, 1999; The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act No. 108 of 1996); Nel, 2005), a slide show entitled ‘Towards 2020: Transforming local media across the United Kingdom & Republic of Ireland – Vision, strategy and execution plan’, downloaded from Johnston Press’s corporate website (c.f. Nel, 2013), and the companion websites of regional and national newspapers.

A wide variety of people, including journalists (e.g. Nel, 1994, 2010b, 2010c), news media executives (2010c), public relations practitioners (Nel, 2003), students (Hunter & Nel, 2011), and those concerned with journalism entrepreneurship (Nel, 2015), were formally questioned using surveys and interviews, face-to-face and online. Observations were drawn from examining newsroom operations (Nel, 2013a), classroom interactions (Hunter & Nel, 2011), reflecting on personal experiences (Nel, 1993, 1999 & 2005) and observing trends that emerged from longitudinal studies. Media sales and audiences data came from recognised sources, including the Audit Bureau of Circulation and Experian Hitwise.

Next, I will discuss the variety of approaches, challenges and limitations of interpreting data drawn from documents, conversations and observations by grouping them into qualitative and quantitative methods, and discuss my exploration of a collective epistemology, which I describe as ‘co-research’.

Early research into online news publishing was dominated by investigations into the experience of news organisations in the United States (e.g. Brannon, 1999; Murrie, Thalheimer, & Mousavinezhad, 2001; Singer, 2004; Stepno, 2003). Studies of online business models of news organisations in the UK and elsewhere were rare. And while the work by Arampatzis (2004) and Thurman & Herbert (2007) provided useful reference points, they afforded neither the breadth that would enable widespread global benchmarking nor the depth that would assist those concerned with the detail of innovation in the British local press. With that in mind, I set up two longitudinal studies in 2008. The ‘World Newspaper Future and Change Study’ (now the ‘World Newsmedia Innovation Study’) was established in collaboration with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and surveyed senior decision-makers in the news media organisations globally. The other was an investigation into the online activities of the newspaper publishers in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. These studies help me forge a picture of the nature and sources of the evolving change in different areas of the journalism system; together they enable me to situate the minutiae of digital news media activities at operational level within the context of broader online network behaviour and the strategic priorities of media executives worldwide. This triangulation, I believe, helps to demonstrate the internal validity of the explanations offered for changes in the news media business model and has also helped to support the validity of the constructs that describe the collaborative nature of journalistic endeavours.

Although the methods of data collection varied, findings from the studies were presented numerically and I am aware that, as Deacon et al. point out, ‘the use of statistics in human sciences can evoke strong reactions’ (1999:81). I also recognise that when Gitlin (1978, cited in Deacon et al. 1999, p. 82) described quantitative audience research as ‘the dominant paradigm’ in its field, he was not only referring to the studies drawing on this method. He was also suggesting an intellectual hegemony. It might be prudent to note in this regard that while I value the insights offered by numerical information, as a critical realist I am aware that statistics do not represent ‘objective’ and incontrovertible ‘facts’ about our world. On the contrary, I support the view of Deacon et al. that social statistics are constructs rather than facts: ‘the end product of an inevitably value-laden research process’ (Ibid).

With that in mind, three factors that influenced my quantitative studies are worth flagging: the sample construction, the data collection process, and the presentation of the findings. Next, I will discuss each study in turn.

	<b>ACTION RESEARCH</b> (Deacon et al. p. xviii):	1. Draws on research methods that are rigorously empirical and reflective (or interpretive)						2. Engages people traditionally called subjects as active participants in the process			3. Results in some practical outcome related to the lives or work of the participants		
	<b>Text</b>	<b>Documents</b>		<b>Questioning</b>			<b>Observations</b>				<b>Participants</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	
Methods		Qual. & critical content analysis	Quant. analysis - content, dynamics	Surveys		Interviews	Workshop	Field	Copy sales, readers, online users	Dynamic changes of thought, acts	Personal		
				Quant.	Qual.								
Considering boundaries in journalistic practice	Power – who has it, who should get it? (research-based article)	X				X					X	News sources	Revised curricula for media students, conference presentation
	Writing for the Media (3 textbooks)	X	X			X			X		X	Students, practitioners, educators	Learning and teaching materials
	The future of online journalism (book chapter)	X							X				Academic citations

**Table 3. Main methods used in the texts submitted for PhD by prior publication.**

	Text	Documents		Questioning			Observations				Participants	Outcomes
Considering boundaries in the news business model	Where else is the money? (journal article)		X					X	X		Newspaper companion websites	Industry conference presentation, academic citations
	Managing New(s) Conversations (book chapter)		X			X			X		Websites, mobile sights	Academic citations, conference
	Pressed to Change (monograph)		X	X				X		X	Websites, journalists, editors	Course work, industry conferences
	The 4C's of Mobile News (journal article)		X						X		Websites, m sites, apps	Academic citations
	WNIS / Credibility Crunch (report)				X	X					News media executives, media academics	Industry conference presentation, academic citations
	WNIS / Building Employee and Organisational Development (report)				X	X					News media executives, media academics	Industry conference presentation, academic citations
Considering boundaries in education	Laid Off: What do UK journalists do next? (report)			X	X						Former journalists, journalists	Report, curriculum, academic citations
	Dive into digital (research-based article)			X							News orgs., incumbent and prospective newsroom execs.	Curricula, conference papers, academic citations
	Equipping the Entrepreneurial Journalist (journal article)	X	X		X						Students	Curricula, conference presentations, academic citations
	Taking the Pulse (report)	X	X	X		X	X				Entrepreneurs, prospective entrepreneurs, educators, trainers, funders, policy makers	Report, further programming, academic article (in progress)

### 3.1.1. *Drawing data from documents*

Given the noted paucity of praxis-orientated scholarship in this area when I initiated the longitudinal study into the online activities of UK newspapers that underpin several of the studies in this portfolio (Nel, 2010a; Nel 2010b; Nel, 2013a; Nel & Westlund, 2012; Nel & Westlund, 2013), I factored in theoretical perspectives of business models and chose to take an exploratory approach to gathering evidence related to three questions:

- How were news organisations taking advantage of the Internet's capacity to facilitate interaction?
- How were news organisations integrating digital revenue streams into their online activities?
- How were news organisations incorporating mobile channels?

This strategy enabled me to generate original datasets that would support both retroductive approaches to analyse the observations and as well as to critically infer principles from the observations.

In keeping with my commitment to educational praxis, the primary motivation for the study was to generate applied knowledge that would feed directly into my existing teaching activities<sup>11</sup>. Although this was not the initial priority, I also hoped that the studies would support scholarly theorising, which has indeed been the case (cf. Nel, 2010d; Nel & Westlund 2012, Nel & Westlund 2013).

At the time, I was principally working with editors in the UK regional press<sup>12</sup>. Given that I did not have the resources to survey the entire population and that I wanted to include my local newspaper in the study, it was decided to construct a purposive sample comprising the companion websites of the largest circulation newspaper in each of the country's 66 cities listed on UKCities.com. These ranged in size from London, population 7,172,091 to Ely, population 15,102 (ONS, 2001). Initially, only news websites were studied. Then, as they

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<sup>11</sup> I had in 2005 become the founding director of the Journalism Leaders Programme at the University of Central Lancashire and was, at the time, developing and delivering professional development courses for editors of the 100+ weekly newspapers owned by Johnston Press, one of the UK's largest local and regional news publishers.

<sup>12</sup> The Newspaper Society (UK) defines a regional / local newspaper as: 'Any publication in written form, on newsprint or similar medium, published in the British Isles (excluding the Irish Republic) at regular intervals not exceeding seven days, and available regionally rather than nationally (i.e. not available throughout all or most of the British Isles). It should contain news and information of a general nature, updated regularly, rather than being devoted to a specific interest or topic' (Newspaper Society, 2007).

emerged, we included the adoption of social media channels (e.g. Twitter, Facebook), sites optimised for mobile devices, and latterly, apps for mobile and tablet devices.

The coding frame was devised and implemented according to the conventions of social scientific research. When the study was launched, I had developed a 105-item coding schedule with reference, in particular, to the typology of general online business models by Rappa (2001). This was selected because the research aimed to identify not only the online business models the news publishers were employing but also to note areas that remained unexplored. By 2014, the instrument had grown to cover 193 items as new activities were detected. Each year, updates were also added to the accompanying coding manual. This helped ensure accuracy and consistency of the data, which were collected each year by two coders, including the author. Routinely, the findings were compared and variances in findings by the coders were investigated and resolved. The findings were analysed using simple descriptive statistics; because the number of sites studied was small and the sample was not random, more sophisticated statistical measurements were not employed.

While the statistical data were summarised numerically, I took advice that ‘often the most effective way of presenting quantitative data is visually, using graphic techniques’ (Deacon et al. 1999, p. 93). The bar and pie charts that were created showed that ‘a well-designed graph can demonstrate the prominence of an attribute or the strength of a relationship far more dramatically and intuitively than a row of bald statistics’ (Ibid). This was particularly evident when the findings were presented at industrial fora, such as the World Editors Forum 2013, the 11<sup>th</sup> World Newspaper Summit 2012 and the UK Society of Editors Conference 2009. And it reflects my approach to presenting the findings from surveys used in three other enquiries, which will be discussed in the next section. Before I turn to those studies, it is pertinent to reflect on the broader point raised here about the language and tone of the presentation of insights or *theoria* in praxis. At risk of stating the obvious, it is worth reiterating that if insights are to be use in practice, they need to be understood. Reflecting on this point, Küng (2010), a senior media manager who had turned to academia and then returned to (also) work in industry, observes that ‘once back on the other side, it became clear relatively fast that that same academic knowledge was not really very relevant — certainly not without a complete makeover that involved what felt like extracting every element that made it “respectable” as academic scholarship’ (p. 55). First among her concerns is the form in which the insights are presented:

Academic material is, it seems, too abstract and too vague to be useful in practice, and full of impenetrable vocabulary... It is extremely difficult to make theoretical concepts relevant to real-life organizations. They are simply too abstruse and rigid. That hard-won elegance and semantic precision, so crucial to theory development, erects huge hurdles to comprehension in the minds of senior managers who have neither the time nor patience to decode terminology or grapple with categorization schemes (Op. cit., p. 55).

Thus a commitment to pedagogical praxis also demands a commitment to fluidity. Linguistic fluidity, certainly, but also social and cultural fluidity, which Hadzantonis (2012) defines as ‘a facility with switching between identifies, discourses, texts, and contexts’ (p. 64). This dexterity is implied both by the tone and language in the assortment of articles in this portfolio, and by the fora in which they have been presented. This point will be expanded and discussed in Chapter 5.

### *3.1.2. Questioning: interviews and surveys*

A variety of questioning approaches were used in the studies collected here (cf. Table 1), from highly-structured, self-completion questionnaires to unstructured, non-directive interviews in a free format. While I don’t here want to rehearse the specific arguments made in the papers for the selection of each of these approaches as well as how they were operationalised, I do want to reflect on some of what I have learned in the process.

Of particular importance to the studies in this portfolio are the datasets derived from two online survey: a study of UK journalists who had been laid off and a survey of news media executives for the Newsmedia Innovation Study (formerly the World Newspaper Future and Change Study). Though both surveys included questions that gathered information across all four the categories identified by Dilman (1978) - i.e. behaviour, beliefs, attitudes and attributes – they varied significantly in scope and

### *3.2.3 Performance measurements: newspaper sales, readership and online audiences*

The scale of various news media activities, whether measured by sales, audience reach, employment, or profits, are discussed either directly or indirectly in all the texts in this study. In the main, the audience-related data were drawn from acknowledged sources that are publicly available, such the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) and the Audit Bureau of Electronic Circulation (ABCe). However, in two of the studies (‘4Cs of Mobile News’ and ‘Managing New(s) Conversations’) I also made use of unique online traffic data supplied by the commercial online market intelligence company Hitwise, now a subsidiary of Experian, which provided unique network-centric data.

The unique properties of these data are worth noting. Unlike traditional product-centric copy sales data, Hitwise data are not derived from tracking the movement of the newspaper as artefact. And unlike consumer-centric readership data, they do not aim to quantify the number of people who engage or ‘read’ a particular product. And unlike site-centric web metrics, the data do not track the number of times a web page or object on a web page located on the site’s server is called up by a particular IP (Internet Protocol). And unlike user-centric data, Hitwise does not only monitor the behaviour of a panel of Internet users by installing a piece of software on their computer. Instead, network-centric data emerge from analysing the anonymised website usage logs created from all interactions on the networks of an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Moreover, Hitwise amalgamated the data from a variety of ISPs. Thus they not only generate information about the interactions between humans, humans and

machines, and machine and machines in the network, they also provide insights into the dynamic boundaries of the network. The data to which I had access, in part, because I had served on the Hitwise research advisory panel, have been employed in the course of pedagogical activities and also inform the argument in the book chapter ‘Managing New(s) Conversations’ (Nel & Westlund, 2013). Working with the data has also influenced my thinking about the nature of systems and how insights are co-created with and emerge from inter-related systems or networks.

### *3.1.3. Adapting methods: co-research methodology for collaborative praxis*

In this pursuit of practical wisdom it has been instructive to note Eikeland’s observation that for Aristotle praxis knowledge is the *theoria*, or insights, that emerge from a relationship between colleagues deliberating on common standards for approaching their professional activities (Eikeland, 2007a, p. 351). This common and equal relationship to practical standards also sets an ethical standard both for practical professional communities of equals, and for a scholarship that is very different from one based on the traditional spectator form of theoretical stance. ‘Praxis knowledge regulates, or organises, the relationships between equals’ (Eikeland 2007, p.). It constitutes a ‘we’ as a community with common standards (as in grammar), and it regulates relations among ‘us’, not between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Eikeland stresses that ‘the division of labour between researchers-knowers and researched-known is suspended. All those with an equal practical relationship to the common standards make up the relevant ‘we’ as a community’ (2007b, p. 314). This epistemological position is implicit throughout this portfolio, but its operationalisation is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the report ‘Taking the Pulse’, which reflects on the process, participation and outcomes of the Journalism Entrepreneurship Summit 2015 (Nel, 2015).

<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Critical Co-Research</b>
Conceptual	Concerned with discovering facts about social phenomena. (deductive)	Concerned with human behaviour from the informant's perspective. (inductive)	Concerned with forging knowledge that contributes to universal good.
	Assumes a fixed and measurable reality.	Assumes a dynamic and negotiated reality.	Assumes a reality comprising both potentially dynamic and potentially fixed elements.
Methodological	Data are collected by measuring things.	Data are collected by participant observation and interviews.	Data emerge from an interdependent process as participants negotiate the boundaries of concern with reflection on observations ('facts') and evaluations ('values').
	Data are analysed by numerical comparisons and statistical inferences.	Data are analysed by themes from descriptions by informants.	Data are judged with attention to the relevant environment and the context of application.
	Data are reported through statistical analysis.	Data are reported in the language of the informant.	Data are articulated in the language(s) of the participants in praxis.
<b>CRITICAL CO-RESEARCH:</b> This conceptualisation of Critical Co-Research by this author draws on the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research in Minichiello (1990) and is particularly informed by Ulrich's (2005) description of the operationalisation of the critical systems heuristic, Sanders & Stappers' (2008) discussion of co-creation and design, and Eikeland's (2007) conceptualisation of action research in 'From epistemology to gnoseology – understanding the knowledge claims of action research.' The critical co-research concept is distinct from Grounded Theory in, among others, two aspects: its commitment to praxis, which does not distinguish between the research knower and research known; and its adoption of the key principles of Critical Realism (c.f. Bhashkar 1994, Archer 1995)			

**Table 4. Summarizing the distinctive characteristics of Critical Co-research methodology**

#### **4. Evaluation of findings**

In the following section I will discuss how the texts in this portfolio demonstrate my critical thinking about boundaries in three situations relevant to my andrological praxis: the newsroom, the boardroom and the classroom. In doing so, I will operationalise a critical systems heuristic that draws on the work of Werner Ulrich, as discussed earlier<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> A fuller discussion of Ulrich's conception of the critical systems heuristic see: <http://wulrich.com/readings.html> [Accessed: 17/02.2016]

#### 4.1. In the newsroom: systematically re-thinking practice boundaries

While thinking about the shifting boundaries in journalistic practice is a theme that continues to occupy scholars, educators and practitioners worldwide, my work in this area is principally, but not exclusively (c.f. Hunter & Nel, 2011), apparent in the textbook *Writing for the Media*. Published by Oxford University Press South Africa, it has been widely used in the region for more than two decades. Therefore, I will briefly sketch the situation that gave rise to the textbook, and outline key aspects of the relevant environment and the context of application. I will then employ the critical systems heuristic to reflect on the explicit and implicit boundary critiques of journalistic identity, news judgements and journalistic purpose offered in the book (I intend to follow a similar structure in the other two sections of this chapter).

As I do so, I am mindful of two issues: first, the general point Altbach et al. (1991, p. 257) make that ‘textbooks are one of the most important educational inputs: texts reflect basic ideas about a national culture, and ... are often a flashpoint of cultural struggle and controversy’ (cited in Pringle 2010, p.7); second, this textbook has been seen both to demonstrate and to contribute to critical discourse about journalism in South Africa, where it has been cited more than 30 times by, for example, De Beer (1995) in ‘Looking for South African journalism education scholarship in unusual places’, among others (e.g. (DeBeer, 1995; De Beer & Tomaselli, 2000; Dube, 2013).

*Situation of the studies and andrological praxis:* Up to the point where I started researching the first edition, I had never contemplated authoring a textbook. The problem emerged when I took up a lecturing post, asked about a South African journalism textbook, was told none existed – and was challenged to step into the breach.

*The relevant environment:* Within the context of broader social and political change, news organisations were under pressure – not least from the ANC-led government-in-waiting headed by Nelson Mandela and empowered civil society groups – both to reflect the changes in their organisations and to participate as change agents of the revolutionary ‘New South Africa’ (De Beer & Steyn, 2002; Dube, 2013). These expectations fell to educational institutions too.

*The context of application:* The Cape Technikon (now the Cape Peninsula University of Technology) had been established in 1920 as a white Afrikaans-language institution. The pedagogical emphasis was on vocational skills training in line with national curricula set and monitored by higher education officials in Pretoria. That strategy, according to Prinsloo et al. (1991, p. 190), had traditionally ensured that apartheid ideologies of ‘separate and, contrary to their stated position, unequal education were fostered’ (p. 190). It also meant that any curriculum innovations could potentially have national impact.

*Observations:* By the time I started teaching in South Africa, officials had opened up admission to students of all races and tuition was also offered in English. The legacy of

Dutch and English colonialism followed by 47 years of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid was still clearly evident: as I recall, when I arrived at the Technikon none of my teaching colleagues was black and fewer than 10 percent of my students were. The pedagogical challenges were also formidable. Summing up the situation for a UNESCO conference in 1999 (five years after the first edition of the *Writing for the Media* textbook was published), Prinsloo (Prinsloo, 1991, p. 2) writes, ‘South Africa is an emerging democracy and the need to develop a democratic sensibility is undermined by the authoritarian technical delivery of education and conservative transmission paradigm that informs it. “Active readings” have been disallowed and to transform such entrenched practices will require steady and incremental attempts to reformulate the ways people engage with texts’ (p. 2). Against that backdrop, Prinsloo contends, it is ‘imperative to think about strategies that will lead to the inclusion of creative and critical Media Education’ (In Schludermann, 1999, p. 28).

*Evaluations:* I concluded that to be effective the textbook on writing should not confine itself to provide a guide to journalistic craft skills alone, but should extend to developing the readers’ (students’, educators’ and practitioners’) general media competencies and democratic sensibilities. In that, my approach implies that I broadly subscribe to the expectations the gave rise to the Social Responsibility Theory of the press (Siebert, 1956).

*Boundary judgements:* The textbook(s) invites readers to critique media in three ways: analytically, by grasping the complex influences and processes of media in a democracy; reflexively, by challenging readers to apply analytical knowledge to themselves and their actions; ethically, by considering that dimension which brings together analytical thinking and reflection under the auspices of social responsibility. All three objectives are evident in the first chapter of *Writing for the Media* (2005), ‘Why the media matters’ (p. 2), which outlines the learning goals as enabling readers to:

1. Discuss the assumptions we make about the mass media.
2. Understand the basic role of news in society.
3. Recognise the importance of a free media in a modern democracy.
4. Identify the key knowledge and skills needed to be a responsible journalist.

Further analysis of the creative and critical strategies I follow in the textbooks shows a variety of other professional, sociocultural and political biases.

*Professional boundaries.* Although my work does not explicitly engage with the ongoing debate about professionalism journalism (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005), I am seen as contributing to the discourse (e.g. Nel 1994 cited in Greer 1998; Nel 1999 cited in Kruger 2004). More specifically, while my work implicitly conceives of professionalism as comprising craft competencies, personal agency and public accountability, it extends the franchise to beyond those working inside the mainstream newsroom. This functionalist approach to the professional journalistic identity is evident in the foreword of the first edition. I lay out my stall by describing the purpose of the book as being to help the readers tell good stories well. Drawing on Pesman (1983), I make it clear that I take journalism to be an

activity and judge the boundaries of professional journalistic identity to extend to ‘all people who go out to do a story – regardless of whom they’re writing for’ (Pesman, 1983, pp. 25-6, cited in Nel, 1994, p xiii).

*Sociocultural boundaries:* Furthermore, I am frank about my own cultural biases and seek to engage readers in reconsidering such boundaries. For example, in the foreword of the first edition, I acknowledge that I draw primarily on the conventions of Western journalism, which becomes evident through frequent citations of then-popular texts (e.g. Harriss et al., 1981; Teel and Taylor, 1988; Ward, 1985). I am also open about the fact that I have drawn from my own training and experiences as a journalist which, at that point, were principally in the US (e.g. Nel, 1994, pp. xiii; Nel, 1999; p.12). On the other hand, I have also explicitly sought – and continue to seek – to engage readers from others cultural contexts by translating key terms in the textbook (written in English) into three other of South Africa’s 11 official languages. Initially, Afrikaans terms were included (Nel, 1994; Nel, 1999); in the third edition (Nel 2005), Xhosa and Zulu translations were added. I further challenged Western notions of ethical decision-making by inviting pioneering African media scholar Francis Kasoma to contribute a discussion on African ethics (Nel 1999, pp. 267-70). In doing so, it has been said that I answered calls for the de-Westernisation/Africanisation of the curricula in African journalism education and training institutions (Ankomah, 2008, p.162; Groepe, 2008, p.137; Botha & De Beer, 2007, pp. 201-202; Rabe, 2005, p.4; Wimmer & Wolf, 2005, p.3).

*Political boundaries.* Attempts to ‘develop a democratic sensibility’ among the readers go beyond the explicit deliberations about the role of media in democracies, ethics and codes of conduct (e.g. in the chapter entitled, ‘Doing the Right Thing’ (Nel, 1994, pp. 197-218). This ambition also informed my choice of anecdotes to illustrate discussions about journalistic concepts. For example, in discussions that denote the norms of journalism (including ideals such as freedom of speech and the press) I connote the values associated with a universal human rights culture by situating these as norms in the ‘new’ South Africa. It might be pertinent to note that, at the time, it was not only the social and legal rights around race that were being redefined, but also other mores, including gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The following examples demonstrate my point:

- To illustrate column writing, I searched the archives of Drum magazine for a 1955 piece by the prominent, black journalist Todd Matshikiza, who had been banned by the South African government and died in exile: ‘Then said Louisa Emanuel to Isaac Peterson, “Will you be my turtle dove, or not? Isaac replied (in the English used in Show biznes), no I ain’t no turtle and I ain’t no durv. So I can’t be yo’ turtle-durv...”’ (Nel, 2005, p. 46-7).
- To illustrate feature writing, eight pages were devoted to reprinting in full and analysing a story from The Charlotte Observer in North Carolina entitled, ‘Ken Schell was knifed 27 times and left for dead. Why? He’s gay.’ (Suchetka, 1991, pp. 1-2E, cited in Nel, 1994, pp. 100-107). The analysis by the writer focuses on the narrative structure and literary

devices used and does not engage in a discussion about gay rights, connoting that it should be norm in progressive societies<sup>14</sup>.

- To illustrate newspaper design, I used the front page of the The Sowetan newspaper with its strapline, 'Building the nation' (Nel, 1994, p. 189). The front cover of this newspaper, which targeted black South African readers and was stridently anti-apartheid, was presented without comment, connoting its legitimacy as a mainstream news source.

These examples may appear as instances of 'typical-case sampling', which Deacon et al. (1999, p. 53) note occurs when 'the research seeks to identify a case that exemplifies the key features of a phenomenon being investigated'; however, given the specific social and political context in which these cases are situated, they may also be described as illustrations of theoretical cases in which 'the researcher seeks out respondents who are most likely to aid theoretical developments' by extending and even confounding emerging concepts. Furthermore, they illustrate how, in line with the critical realist perspective, I relied on a multiplicity of methods to collect evidence which was analysed reductively with reference to a variety of theoretical perspectives and in recognition of the causality of both the real and actual structures as well as the potentially morphogenic and morphostatic agency of the (would be) practitioners.

#### **4.2. In the boardroom: systematically re-thinking boundaries in the business of newspapers**

*Situation of the studies and pedagogical praxis:* At first suspicious, even hostile toward the Internet, most mainstream news companies in 2005 started diving into digital (Nel, 2006). Technological changes and challenges that had been rocking the newspaper industry and reshaping its culture on both sides of the north Atlantic for a decade and more had combined with increasingly dire financial prognoses. In the United States, the industry's health continued to worsen, with circulation, advertising revenues, and profit margins all falling – and, in an expanding number of markets, taking staff size down with them (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). But it was not only the industry attitude towards technology that was being rethought. Demand for new skills and fresh approaches had news organisations reconsidering their stance on staff development, too. In the US, the American Press Institute teamed up with Harvard professor Clayton Christenson to launch the Newspaper Next (N2) Project, which in 2006 would introduce the concept of 'disruptive innovation' into news media circles. In the UK, responses were less coordinated, if no less ambitious. Among those was the partnership between the then-leading UK regional news publisher Johnston Press and the University of Central Lancashire, home to the UK's oldest

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<sup>14</sup> Sexual orientation was included in the bill of rights of South Africa's founding constitution, making it the first country in the world to do so (IGLHRC, 1996).

journalism programme. Fuelled by a five-year grant from the company, the team set off to explore what to do to reinvent newspapers and how to equip newsroom staff to do it. To lead the former, they appointed Jane Singer to the UK's first Chair in Digital Journalism. For the latter, they appointed me as Director of the Journalism Leaders Programme and I teamed up with the then-President of the Society of Editors and the Poynter Institute to develop it. Top of our agenda was to better understand editors' current activities, their perceptions of future challenges and their own perceived knowledge and skills gaps (Nel, 2006; Nel & Singer, 2008).

*Relevant environment:* The local and regional press in Britain is overwhelmingly dominated by paid and free weeklies, which in 2004 accounted for nearly 1,200 of the nation's 1,308 local and regional newspapers (ABC, 2004). Still discernible was the England described by Samuel Johnson in 1758: 'Almost every large town has its weekly historian, who regularly circulates his periodical intelligence' (Murphy, 1846, p. 385). However, although some small publishers survive, the industry was heavily consolidated, with the top 20 regional publishers accounting for 89% of all titles and 97% of total weekly circulation (Newspaper Society, 2008). In the 1990s and into the 2000s, not only small publishers but also organisations with strong cross-media interests sold their local press assets to regional newspaper groups; these sought economies of scale by sharing resources within geographical clusters and, in some cases, by paring staff (Williams, 2006; Williams and Franklin, 2007; Nel 2013).

*Context of application:* 'There is no tradition of mid-career training in British print journalism,' noted Stephenson (2003, p. 35). 'Indeed, the national newspapers have in the past not been involved in serious journalism training of any kind, relying instead on being able to recruit experienced journalists from regional newspapers.' Thus it was that editors were apprenticed and, once appointed, seldom entertained hints that there might be more to learn – especially not from outside the fraternity. While most industries came to see investment in staff development as a norm, turning MBAs into a must-have for executives and phrases such as 'our people are our most important asset' into clichés, journalism relied on a cliché of its own – the School of Hard Knocks (Nel, 2006, p. 140). The result: 'The journalism side of media organisations are managed by people with less formal training for the task that they are expected to perform than would be found in any other comparable activity,' said Stephenson (Op. cit.).

*Observations:* One of the first steps was to conduct a survey among editors to better understand their current activities, perceived future challenges and skills needs (Nel, 2006; Nel & Singer, 2008). What emerged was that the editors studied held conflicting views about the changes sweeping their industry, seeing them as 'both an enormous opportunity and perhaps their biggest challenge' (Nel & Singer, 2008, p. 27). They were confident of what they knew about the existing news operations – and they knew it is not enough to guarantee either their newsroom, where most of their attention is focused, or their company, of whose fortunes they were keenly aware, safe passage through the ongoing cultural upheavals and economic downturns. In response to the need for practical wisdom, I then launched the two

longitudinal studies already discussed earlier. From these emerged the key insights that informed the curriculum and associated andrological activities of the Journalism Leaders Programme and underpinned articles in the trade press, academic papers, and book chapters. The insights were also shared directly at national and international academic and industry conference conferences (e.g. Society of Editors Annual Conference 2009; 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> World Editors Forums 2008, 2009; 11<sup>th</sup> International Newsroom Summit 2012; News: Rewired, 2013).

*Judging the boundaries in news media business models:* The research invited reassessment of the traditional boundaries of aspects of the news media business models. The most obvious was its challenge the notions of the direct link between value creation and value capture. That is, if news organisations managed to convert their print products to digital ones that attracted audiences, the traditional advertising revenues would follow. While researchers had identified evidence of alternative thinking in practice (Krueger & Swatman, 2004, Herbert & Thurman 2007), the dominance of this perspective in industry is further illustrated in the ‘Envisioning the Newspaper 2020’ report that WAN published in November 2007, in which 22 thought leaders were asked to predict the future of the industry. The essay by Jeff Jarvis, who is described in the report (Stone, 2007, p. 5) as ‘blogger at Buzzmachine.net and head of the interactive journalism program at City University of New York’, is entitled ‘News organisations will be built on large advertising networks in 2020’ (p. 45). The longitudinal study of online activities of UK newspapers did not only seek to identify the online business models the news publishers were employing, but also to point towards alternative revenue streams on which other online businesses relied. The title of the first paper published from the research, ‘Where Else is the Money?’ (Nel, 2010, also republished in Franklin, 2011), which at the time of writing had been cited 33 times, according to Google scholar. I have also been invited to present aspects of the study as a variety of national and international industry conferences, including those convened by the World Association of Newspaper and News Publishers and the Society of Editors UK. These provide further evidence that my work in this area has been influential in shaping discourse on the boundaries of news media business models inside and outside of the academy.

#### **4.3. In the classroom: systematically re-thinking boundaries in education**

By and large the declining fortunes of many traditional news media businesses have not been felt in the academy (Nel, 2010b). Indeed, by many measures – number of courses, students, fora for publishing research – the journalism academy has flourished (cf. Bromley, 2013b; Medsger, 1996; Tumber, 2005). But all is not well. Not only have deep fault lines been detected between the occupation and the academy, but there are schisms inside the academy itself between research- and practice-oriented faculty (Harcup, 2011c: 2). Zelizer summed up the situation thus: ‘Journalists say journalism scholars and educators have no business airing their dirty laundry, journalism scholars say journalists and journalism educators are not theoretical enough, journalism educators say journalists have their heads in the sand and journalism scholars have their heads in the clouds’ (Zelizer, 2007, pp. 15–16). Those thinking

about ways to breach these professional and institutional boundaries have frequently turned to the medical field for inspiration. The success of medical ‘practitioner-researchers’ (Bromley, 2013, p. 6) and ‘teaching hospitals’ (Anderson, Glaisyer, Smith, & Rothfeld, 2011) have been held up as role models. Here I offer an example closer to home. By not only reflecting on the published texts, but also describing the motivations and intertwined processes from which they emerged, as well as the various ways in which these activities impacted the work I do from within the academy, I seek to demonstrate how a commitment to pedagogical praxis along with cultural and linguistic fluidity can enable one to integrate roles of practitioner-trainer-educator-scholar.

*Situation of the practical research and pedagogical praxis:* So, how do journalism educators prepare traditional students – who enrol in higher education with the expectation of employability – for the realities of a shrinking jobs market in a sector struck not only by the cyclical economic downturn, but also by the structural shifts wrought by changes in technology and consumer behaviour? (Hunter & Nel, 2011).

*Relevant environment:* I have watched closely as declining corporate profits have restructured operations, often taking jobs and, increasingly, entire news operations down with them (Nel, 2010c; Nel, 2010b). But, to be honest, I had not been confronted by the toll this was taking on the lives of individuals until one evening in September 2010. I sat down at my desk and started examining the 144 responses to an online questionnaire into what journalists do after they have been laid off (Nel, 2010a). The stories were sobering. ‘I worry about money and I worry about direction – where I’m going, what I’m doing, who I am now,’ wrote a 46-year-old former section editor who was chosen to take a redundancy package in April 2009 along with ‘a third of the staff’ in her office. Her concerns about finding not only a new income, but also a new professional identity as the boundary of employment was lost, was echoed by many respondents. Asked what it was like to know that their careers in traditional newspaper journalism might be over, many respondents found it difficult to maintain a stiff upper lip. ‘Gutted,’ said a 46-year-old male photographer who has a GCSE qualification, 19 years of experience in regional papers and dependent children living at home. ‘I feel sh\*\* after reading that question,’ said a 28-year-old former assistant magazine editor with a postgraduate degree. ‘And wish I had never even tried to get into this bloody profession’ (Nel, 2010a, p. 3).

*Observations:* I felt compelled to respond, fast. I also recognised that the wheels of academic re-curriculation turn very slowly. So, in collaboration with a colleague, Anna Hunter, then from the University of Central Lancashire’s Centre of Employability in the Humanities, I developed a project designed to enhance journalism students’ awareness of their own enterprise abilities and to enable them to form realistic expectations about the working environment that they would enter following graduation. From the outset it was agreed to document the project and to share the information gathered, internally and externally. The project, ‘Equipping the Entrepreneurial Journalist’, which has been detailed in two papers and a journal article, took the form of a series of workshops running from November 2009 until

April 2010. These sought to introduce journalism students to the diversity of experience encountered by journalism graduates, while introducing them to the concepts of enterprise and entrepreneurship in a manner that maintained direct relevance to their own subject areas.

*Evaluation:* By following this model of situated, enquiry-based learning it was anticipated that journalism students would develop a discourse within which to frame their own potential, not just as employees of the sector, but as self-managing, independent entrepreneurs. Crucial to this process is the concept of creative enterprise; students were directed to consider themselves not only within a framework of business and entrepreneurship but also as creative, imaginative individuals with a unique contribution to make to a sector that is in need of rejuvenation.

Further, it was hoped that the dialogue between business sector skills and creative inspiration encoded within the notion of creative enterprise would encourage the students to recognise the strong similarities between two apparently disparate fields; to see the innovation and creative thinking behind successful entrepreneurship and the intrapreneurial quality of the creative artistic mind.

Overall, the students who attended the three workshops seemed to have some awareness of both enterprise and entrepreneurship as valid concepts within which they could plot their future development. Indeed, there was a sense at times that, although reporting increased awareness of both, the students were already familiar with many of the issues the project raised. The question that needed to follow from this exercise was: how to translate this knowledge into action?

The students who took part in this project demonstrated that, far from being ignorant of the current realities of the journalism industry, they were in fact ideally placed to capitalise upon the shifts in practice that have occurred in recent years, whereas those who have been working in industry may struggle to adapt to such seismic changes in their working practice. In response to the evaluation undertaken as part of this project, the journalism students questioned demonstrated both the enterprising mindset and the entrepreneurial ability needed to adapt to changes in the jobs market; the onus therefore was on the academy to hone and refine this talent in order to produce employable, successful journalists. In order to help me understand how best to do just that, I set out to discuss the issue further with various communities inside and outside my university.

Extending the boundaries through discourse with journalism educators, journalism scholars, journalism practitioners and policy makers: First, I drew my thoughts together for a discussion paper presented to the [UK] Association of Journalism Educators' conference (Nel, 2010d) and then incorporated the feedback into a revised paper that was presented later that year at the 2nd World Journalism Education Congress (Nel, 2010b). Following the presentation, the then-editor of *Journalism of Mass Communication Education* invited me to submit an article on the topic for publication (Hunter & Nel, 2011). Since then, the study has been cited 13 times by scholars exploring journalism curriculum renewal in the UK (e.g.

Charles, 2013; Elmore & Massey, 2012) and internationally (e.g. Cullen et al., 2014; Ferrier, 2014; Schaich & Klein, 2013) and has prompted me to engage in further public discussions about the journalism curriculum reform (Albeanu, 2015). In addition, a Google search on the terms 'Francois Nel' + 'Laid Off' + 'Journalists' yielded 'About 1,860 results' and indicated that the study had been discussed widely, inside and outside media circles by, for example, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers' (WAN-IFRA) Shaping the Future of the News report (Mensching, 2010) and the New Statesman ('UK journalism jobs decline steeply over last decade', 2010).

*Extending the boundaries of journalism curriculum:* I have long argued that being independent of commercial pressures is not the same as being ignorant of commercial imperatives (François Nel, 2008, 2010, 2010) and that it is crucial for journalists to understand the various aspects of the business in which they operate (François Nel, 2010, 2010). The first curricular response to the practical knowledge gained from the 'Equipping the Enterprising Journalist' project took the form a new module for postgraduates, JN4110 Fundamentals of Business for Media Entrepreneurs, which was welcomed by my colleagues and the external examiners and incorporated into both the MA Publishing and the MA Magazine Journalism course at UCLan. The aim was to emphasise the notion of creative enterprise and to equip students with the critical and practical skills they needed to contribute to business (re)development in the sector by building and sharing knowledge of innovation inside and outside the academy through open forums, including a student blog, 'The Business of Media Entrepreneurship'<sup>15</sup> and a wiki, 'Book Publishing in the UK'<sup>16</sup>. At the time of writing, I am also engaged in further work to embed business and enterprise across the undergraduate journalism curriculum as part of a curriculum review process under way in my division (Freer, Hawtin & Nel, 2011).

*Extending the boundaries through discourse with journalism entrepreneurs:* Next, I wanted to find ways to support journalism entrepreneurship more directly from the academy, but not only inside the academy. Studies into the sustainability of news start-ups (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012), which show that success is limited, echoed my informal encounters with entrepreneurs through fora such as the Digital Editors Network, which I co-founded in 2007. My observation was that, in the main, start-ups were attempting to replicate the stressed business

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<sup>15</sup> Available at: <http://thebusinessofmediaentrepreneurship.blogspot.co.uk> [Accessed: 10/05/2015]

<sup>16</sup> Available at: <http://ukbookpublishing.pbworks.com> [Accessed: 10/05/2015]

models of traditional news organisations (Nel, 2010a) and were attempting to do so with fewer resources. So, while easier access to digital technologies had lowered the perceived barriers to starting up, the monopolistic tendencies of network effects (Katz & Shapiro, 1994) would suggest that staying up would be very challenging indeed. A proposal to establish the Media And Digital Enterprise (MADE) Project was named in November 2011 as the only UK winner of the International Press Institute's inaugural News Innovation Contest sponsored by Google. The project, which was launched in February 2012, worked with more than 50 media start-ups and prospective entrepreneurs in the UK and in Turkey (Otárola-Silesky, 2011)<sup>17</sup>.

Again, the process has been studied and plans are under way to publish the findings in a variety of forms in order to contribute and connect discourses across an array of subgroups within the journalistic system. In the interim, I have been invited to present elements of the project and related insights into media innovation at a variety of industry conferences, including News: Rewired in London (Belam, 2012), the 11th International Newsroom Summit of the World Association of Newspaper and News Publishers in Hamburg (WAN-IFRA, 2012).

The experience with MADE also helped me recognise the need to extend my own thinking about which environmental forces were directly relevant to the success of journalism entrepreneurs to include not only funding and support agencies, but also policy makers, educators and researchers. Having observed how disconnected these discourses are, I was prompted to convene the UK's first Journalism Entrepreneurship Summit in February 2015 in collaboration with MADE partners, the International Press Institute, Talk About Local, and Google. Again, the intention was not only to stage a pedagogical intervention, but also to reflect critically on the experience and to share those insights in the language, forms and at a pace that would be meaningful for all the relevant discursive communities. To this end, the workshop used open digital tools, including a blog, Google forms, docs and Twitter to share materials used in the event and observations from the event.

A descriptive report with preliminary 'impressions' from the summit was published in March 2015, one month after the event (Nel, 2015), a timeframe that would have been impossible to

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<sup>17</sup> As detailed on the project blog ([uclanmade.blogspot.co.uk](http://uclanmade.blogspot.co.uk)) each cycle of the MADE project, which has been piloted in the UK and tested in Turkey, included: 1) an initial 48-hour workshop, the MADE Weekend for News Start-ups; 2) an intensive 12-week business coaching programme, the MADE Hothouse; 3) the MADE Network, which facilitates on-going discussion via Facebook, Linked In and Twitter; and (4) the MADE Toolbox, a growing online database of curated links to other relevant support. MADE Project participants, which also included UCLan students, staff and academics from other universities, are also the core of an online MADE Network group on Facebook.

achieve in standard academic publishing. In an attempt to foster wider collaboration and dialogue, a list of all the speakers and attendees was included, with links to blog posts and articles by participants. In line with the conceptualising of critical co-research, as described earlier, the report a reality comprising both potentially dynamic and potentially fixed elements in line with the recognition of the causality of structures and the agency of participants. It also details how the data emerged from an interdependent process as participants negotiate its boundaries with reflection on observations ('facts') and evaluations ('values'). Furthermore, it illustrates how data are judged with consideration to the relevant environment and the context of application, and are then articulated in the language(s) of the participants in praxis. Shortly after the summit, I was invited to make presentations about the workshop at two fora, one a conference aimed at primarily at educators (the Association of Journalism Education's annual conference 2015) and the other described as a free and open 'event...about community and hyperlocal media' with 'contributions from practitioners, academics, and policy makers' all responding to the question 'What next for community media?' (Scarborough, 2015). Furthermore, the report was downloaded 115 times within three months of publication and 36 people chose to leave their contact details. Among those, more than a third (36%) were entrepreneurs or prospective entrepreneurs, nearly half were researchers and educators (46%) and 15 per cent described themselves as being either investors or from a support agency. The others were from the regional press (one) or 'just curious' (two). All indicated that they were interested in remaining informed and becoming involved in future initiatives, including research. Together, these activities and interactions demonstrate Niblock's (2012) point that discovery is a process, not a destination.

## 5. Conclusion

I have taken advice from Grix (2004), who warns that those who want to conduct clear, precise research and evaluate others' research need to understand the philosophical underpinnings that inform their choice of research questions, methodology, methods and intentions (p. 57). I therefore considered it prudent to start by noting that I here employ Bodgan & Biklen's (as cited in Mack 2010:5 ) definition of a paradigm as 'a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research'. I have been clear that my desire as an educator was to generate practicable knowledge to effect positive change and challenge dominant discourses in and about the newsroom, boardroom and classroom. As evidence of my endeavours, I offered for consideration a diverse portfolio of texts that supports Niblock's (2012) assertion that their needs to be a revision of the 'prevailing view within journalism studies that research is delimited by formats and outcomes and to envision journalism research as the articulation of a process' (Niblock, 2012, p. 498).

Having taken that tack, it might seem superfluous to point out that these studies did not emerge from a positivist paradigm which, as Deacon et al. (1999) note, argues for 'objective' researchers who keep their distance from their subjects and do not allow their work to be

influenced by their own values or subjective judgements. Deacon et al. (1999, p.7) also observe that 'positivists also talk about 'producing' research 'findings', as though the social 'facts' they are interested in were always there, waiting to be uncovered by the correct methodological position' (p. 7). Of course, this language also echoes through the arguments of those whose ontological and epistemological perspectives call for 'objectivity' in journalism (e.g. Patterson 1998, McNair 1998, and, more recently discussed by Skovsgaard et al. 2012). Not only did I not adopt positivism in my research but, as my discussion about the textbook *Writing for the Media* indicates, I also critiqued the 'post positivism' stance in journalism that 'claims a certain level of objectivity rather than absolute objectivity, and seeks to approximate the truth rather than aspiring to grasp it in its totality or essence' (Crotty, 1998, p. 29).

Given that I have been both participant and observer in many of the studies described in this thesis, it might not be surprising that I felt a greater affinity for the interpretive tradition which holds that all knowledge is co-produced out of the multiple encounters, conversations and arguments researchers have with the people they are studying. I have certainly applied my mind to what Geertz (1973: 20 cited) sees as the core task of interpretive research – to decipher the way various journalistic communities make sense of their worlds by continually 'guessing at meanings, assessing these guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses'. But my studies also breach these boundaries by exploring the broader social, cultural, political and technological formations that shape it in line with realist traditions. I have further sullied the strict interpretive conception that rejects any form of counting or calculating by, as Silverman 1993) noted, getting my hands 'dirty' (Ibid., p. 204) with techniques of quantification, as well as drawing on quantitative techniques. In line with the systems approach, I have also been concerned with holistic thinking and recognised the value of generating praxis knowledge by employing transcendental arguments.

As such, my research may best be described as falling into the tradition of critical realism. Certainly central to my work has been the assumptions that journalistic activity is an expression of social life that is both shaped by and has the potential to shape the structures from which it emerges. And that, as Giddens would argue, to make sense of it one cannot study it by seeing it merely as mass of micro-level activity – but on the other hand, one cannot study it by only looking for 'macro'-level explanations (Gauntlet, 2002). Instead, as Giddens suggests, human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure (Gauntlet, 2002). For me, this has meant examining the social structures that give form to the journalistic system - traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but it also meant that I recognised that these could be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them, or reproduce them differently. However, in line with Bhaskar and other realists, I also take it that is also structures of reality that are beyond our ability to perceive it and that are causal forces independent of the influence of people.

I continue in the tradition of critical theorists (Johnson, 2000) by assuming that the outcome of my work should be directed at improving a holistic understanding of society and argue furthermore for practical wisdom that contributes to the ‘good life’ (Aristotle, 2004). I believe that this is best achieved by attempting to integrate all the major social sciences, including geography, economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and psychology, as well as accommodating various forms of knowledge, i.e. inductive (empiricism), deductive (rationalism), abductive (i.e. hypothesis of the best possible explanation based on observation), contemplation (theoria), metaphysical, and instinctual or intuitive knowledge, but have recognized the specific value of reductive knowledge. Furthermore, my respect for historical specificity is obvious through, for example, the inclusion in the writing textbook of timelines of mass media history as well as examples of writing by [black] journalists from the 1950s, and the longitudinal studies that inform much of my later work. It is also evident that I have been a realist. That is, my starting point has been an acknowledgement of the facts I find them.

As such, I have faced what Deacon et al. (1999, p. 11) note as the ‘formidable challenge’ confronted by critical realist scholars: the need to tie together the detailed practices in newsrooms in South Africa and the UK, with assessments of how social, political, economic and, in particular, technological dynamics are shaping global communicative activity and the new business models required to thrive in the digital economy. In doing so, I have recognised that if I were to produce comprehensive and convincing accounts of these relations my research would need to be interdisciplinary, drawing on a variety of methods and insights from across the whole range of social and human sciences. In this I humbly followed in the footsteps of W. Alfred Neuman who describes the approach taken in his seminal study, *The Future of the Mass Audiences*, as ‘meta-theoretical’ (1991, p.21). That is, this portfolio represents an attempt to ‘assess and integrate evidence across historical periods, across methods, and across levels of analysis’ (Ibid). I am also conscious of the weaknesses in such a strategy. Like Neuman, I recognise that it is ‘extraordinarily difficult to weigh and integrate evidence from different levels of analysis’ (Ibid). And also that, given the diversity of materials presented, it may be ‘difficult to convince the reader that the selection of evidence is systematic and fair-minded’ (Ibid). Nevertheless, I also hold that the diversity of some phenomena requires a meta-analytical approach and that, as such, ‘the social scientific enterprise requires a movement back and forth between the rigor and focus of the individual study and the integrative and evaluative efforts of others who put these accumulated findings in perspective and hope to tease our insight to guide further research’ (Ibid).

I borrowed a Harcup phrase and noted that it has not only been ‘bleedingly obvious’ (Harcup 2010) to me that the boundaries of journalism were being challenged in what Anderson et al. (2013) describe as the ‘post-industrial’ age, but also that, as Picard (2011) notes, ‘we cannot understand the roles of media and news organisations in the same old ways’ (p. 115). I took this to be an invitation to reconsider the ‘organising force’ or logic that had informed those and other boundary judgements by journalistic communities. I was also mindful of the Kuhnian notion that, as Zelizer reminds us, ‘inquiry is not just a cognitive act, but a social

one as well' (Zelizer, 2004, p. 31). And, as such, I was aware that any re-examination of the study of journalism needed to think about the social groups involved in giving it shape. Hence the leitmotif of this portfolio, the changed character of that 'organising force' of journalism as seen from a variety of perspectives, inside and outside the traditional interpretative community comprising journalism practitioners, journalism educators and journalism scholars.

In my endeavours to reconsider problems as varied as explaining how different news organisations might define 'news' and 'fairness' for an undergraduate handbook to supporting newspaper executives in their efforts to foster greater collaboration among various functional groups, I was bolstered by recent developments in the area of critical systems thinking and adopted a critical systems heuristic technique to consider how the texts in this portfolio have contributed the discourse on the conceptual and practical journalistic boundaries. I reflected on what Ulrich calls 'the critical kernel of the systems idea' (1998, p. 5). That is, that there are two fundamental limitations of knowledge: first, that all our claims to knowledge, understanding and rationality imply that we consider the 'whole' of the system; second, that we can rarely if ever be certain of knowing and understanding enough. Furthermore, I note Eikeland's observation that for Aristotle praxis knowledge are the *theoria*, or insights, that emerge from a relationship between colleagues deliberating on common standards for how to go about their professional activities (Eikeland, 2007, p. 351). From this, I have conceptualised a critical co-research technique and described its application in the report 'Taking the Pulse', which reflects on the process, participation and outcomes of the Journalism Entrepreneurship Summit 2015, which was the first of its kind in the UK (Nel, 2015). The critical co-research concept is distinct from other research traditions in that it does not differentiate between the research knower and research known and also acknowledges the egalitarian nature of boundary judgements.

Throughout, I have sought to demonstrate how, as a practitioner-trainer-educator-scholar standing at the confluence of the powerful forces of social and technological change that are shaping journalism, I have been spurred on by the observation of the American philosopher Eric Hoffer (to whose work I had been introduced as an undergraduate in Chicago): 'In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists' (Hoffer, 1973, p. 32).

## **6. Directions for future research**

The need for practical wisdom about journalism has perhaps never been greater. In response, it is imperative for 'scholars with distance and time to come together with practitioners and organisations who have data and experience' (Kleis-Nielson quoted in Nel 2015, p.16). But even more is required. Among the many avenues that may be productively pursued, the studies in this portfolio suggest four themes for future research.

First, there is a need to reconsider the boundaries both of producer-centric and demand-centric studies of the use and usefulness of journalism. As important as it is to understand the relationships between national mainstream media systems, news media content, the citizens' civic knowledge, and the state of democracy (Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009), on the one side, and the users' perceived 'worthwhileness' of news media (Schrøder & Larsen, 2010); on the other, we need to widen our gaze even further. In the opening remarks to the Journalism Entrepreneurship Summit (Nel, 2015), I make the case that, 'if it is to matter at all', the starting point to understanding the 'crisis' in journalism (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012) 'cannot be what we are doing, but why and for whom?' (Op. cit.). It is a question that US researchers and policy-makers have framed as, 'What are the information needs of communities?' (Waldman, 2011). I believe it is crucial to have a deeper understanding of what these needs (which I describe as a 'Democratic Stack') are in the UK context (and elsewhere). Furthermore, we need a deeper understanding both of how (or not) all segments of society are currently being served in this regard, and how that challenge might be met in the future.

Against that backdrop, a second theme of enquiry might well be to better understand and map the varied new and emerging news provision landscape (c.f. Allan, 2006; Picard, 2006). It is important to continue to explore the institutional shift from an industrialised, product-oriented mindset to a service-dominant mindset (Nel, 2013b), understanding what Picard (2014) describes as 'the deinstitutionalization of news and the profession and trade of journalism' (2014, p. 277).

Third, the implications of these two lines of enquiry for the journalism academy needs further attention. Certainly the emergence of the Internet and the concomitant upheaval in the newspaper industry provided an opportune time to rethink [again] journalism education that, for historical and institutional reasons, have to a greater or lesser degree retained the structure of an industrial model of training (Menching, 2012). Broadly, two dominant strands are emerging in the debate. One strand advocates even closer working relations with the mainstream industry which, while cutting staff, is also expanding operations across new media channels, and requires new skills at all levels, from the newsroom to the boardroom. As such, opportunity-rich but resource-poor organisations are increasingly turning to academic institutions not only as a source of new talent, but as partners in the process of innovation. Proponents include advocates of a 'Teaching Hospital' model that anchors journalism education and research at the heart of the evolving industry (C. Anderson, Glaisyer, Smith, & Rothfeld, 2011). The other strand advocates that journalism education should decouple itself from the legacy media, who are not only increasingly demanding but also a shrinking employment destination for graduates, and instead steer its curriculum towards serving the wider, evolving communications industry (Hunter & Nel, 2011). But this much is clear: further applied research is necessary to support decision making inside the academy if education reformers are not only to conceive relevant curricula, but also to convince administrators and other stakeholders that they need to implement it.

Finally, there is scope to explore and expand new methods to supplement insights derived from the array of critical realist approach. The critical co-research methodology and the specific methodology explored in this thesis seeks to contribute to these efforts. More work is needed to flesh out the concept, to clarify its methodological position and demonstrate its usefulness in praxis.

In summary, this thesis has invited those concerned with the transformation of journalism to adopt holistic approaches to understanding newsroom, boardroom and classroom realities and to employ mixed methods and transcendental arguments to reconsider the relevance of conceptual and practical boundaries in the field. Furthermore, I have challenged fellow scholars not to confuse critical perspective with outsider status. Rather, I have hoped to amplify earlier calls (e.g. Niblock, 2007) that have urged all researchers, including those without a background in practice, to join practitioner-trainer-educator-researcher colleagues who see themselves as a part of, rather than apart from, the journalistic system as a whole. And to work towards 'the good life' (Aristotle quoted in Barnes, Thomson, & Tredennick, 2004, p. 209) collectively.

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## Portfolio of published work

### *Journals, Academic Book Chapters*

1. Nel, François, Ward, Michael & Rawlinson, Alan (2007). The Future Of Online Journalism.’ In Anderson, P.J. and Ward, G. – *The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies*, Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 121-138.
2. Nel, François (2010). Where Else Is The Money? A Study of Innovation in Online Business Models at Newspapers in Britain’s 66 Cities. *Journalism Studies*, Vol 4, No 3, 2010, pp. 360-372.
3. Hunter, Anna & Nel, François (2011). Equipping the Entrepreneurial Journalist: An Exercise in Creative Enterprise. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, Spring 2011, pp. 9-24.
4. Nel, François & Westlund, Oscar (2012). The 4C’s of Mobile News: Channels, Conversation, Content and Commerce. *Journalism Practice*, Future of Journalism Special Issue, Spring 2012, pp. 744–753.
5. Nel, François & Westlund, Oscar (2013). Managing New(s) Conversations: The Role of Interactivity in News Provision and Participation. In *Handbook of Social Media Management: Value Chain and Business Models in Changing Media Markets*. Berlin: Springer, pp.179-200.

### *Industry Reports*

6. Nel, François (2010). Growth through Investment, Employee and Organisational Development. In Stone, M., Nel, F. & Wilberg, E. (2010) *World News Future and Change Study 2010*. Shaping the Future of the Newspapers Strategy Report 10.1. Paris, France: World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), pp. 51-72.
7. Nel, François (2010). *Laid Off: What do UK Journalists Do Next?* Report published in collaboration with Journalism.co.uk, September 2010. Available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/37088778/Laid-Off-What-Do-Journalists-Do-Next>

### *Articles in trade publications*

8. Nel, François (2003). Power - who has it, who should get it? *Rhodes University Journalism Review*, Issue 22, Summer 2003, pp. 14-16.
9. Nel, François (2006). Dive into digital exposes need for modern skills. *Press Gazette: Journalism Training 2006*, 27 October 2006, pp. 12-14

### *Working Papers*

10. Nel, François (2013). *Pressed to Change*. New Economic Models for the Digital Economy. Retrieved from <http://www.nemode.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Nel-PressedtoChange-NEMODEcasestudy-April2013.pdf>
11. Nel, François (2015) *Taking the Pulse: An interim report of impressions from the Journalism Entrepreneurship Summit 2015*. Media and Digital Enterprise Project, University of Central Lancashire, Preston.

### *Books*

12. Nel, François (2005). *Writing for the Media*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press South Africa.

Note: Earlier editions of this textbook were published in 1994 and 1999 of which only extracts are included in this portfolio, specifically:

- (1994) Chapters 1, 7 and Appendix A
- (1999) Chapters 1 and 2

A fourth edition is expected to be published in 2017 and will reflect on the shifts in both theory and practice discussed in this study.

## Statements by Co-Authors of Joint Publications

Co-Author	Publication
<p>The signed statements from co-authors of articles included in this portfolio confirm that François Nel has played a leading role in initiating each study, defining the overall problems and proposing the core research ideas to solve them. Furthermore, the statements verify the prominent role he played in drafting the papers and submitting them for publication.</p>	
<p>Anna Hunter (UCLan, UK)</p>	<p>Hunter, Anna &amp; Nel, François (2011). Equipping the Entrepreneurial Journalist: An Exercise in Creative Enterprise. <i>Journalism and Mass Communication Educator</i>, Spring 2011, pp. 9-24.</p>
<p>Michael Ward (UCLan, UK)</p>	<p>Nel, François, Ward, Michael &amp; Rawlinson, Alan (2007). The Future Of Online Journalism.’ In Anderson, P.J. and Ward, G. – <i>The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies</i>, Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 121-138.</p>
<p>Oscar Westlund (University of Gothenburg, Sweden)</p>	<p>Nel, François &amp; Westlund, Oscar (2012). The 4C’s of Mobile News: Channels, Conversation, Content and Commerce. <i>Journalism Practice</i>, Future of Journalism Special Issue, Spring 2012, pp. 744–753.</p> <p>Nel, François &amp; Westlund, Oscar (2013). Managing New(s) Conversations: The Role of Interactivity in News Provision and Participation. In <i>Handbook of Social Media Management: Value Chain and Business Models in Changing Media Markets</i>. Berlin: Springer, pp.179-200.</p>