



Emotions, Technology, and Crisis Reconsidered: Ending

James set foot on the steps by the airplane back door and looked around. The land, up to the horizon, was unimaginably paralyzed by ice-nine. James saw the frozen remains of life (Image 5.1).

He had heard it sometimes happens before one dies. First the most recent and then more distant memories flashed through his head.

LONG STORY SHORT

Technology

It followed from James' conversations and experience that journalists' emotions were co-shaped by technology, a concept intrinsic to modern Western culture (e.g. Beck 1992; Foucault 1978; Heidegger 1977; Van Loon 2002; Williams 1974). In particular, the journalists' emotions were constitutively entangled (Orlikowski 2007) with the newsmaking machine: the complex of technologies of the self, technologies of power, technologies of sign systems, and technologies of production (Foucault 1988).

The technologies of the economic-emotional self, guiding individuals to perform forms of self-direction and self-management which result in both an economically desirable and personally attractive self (Illouz 2007), led the journalists to perceive and think through the organizational perspective. The emotional styles/organizational identities (Du Gay 1996) of the Cynics, the Stoics, and the Brokeners are thus outcomes of work on the



Image 5.1 A frozen city. Drawing by Peter Van Goethem, 2017. Courtesy of the artist

journalists' selves: results of “crafting” the experience of involvement, of “finding the right balance of disengagement and nonchalance” (Peters 2011: 303), and of finding the “right distance” (Bernard 2008; Castra 2004; Molinier 2009).

The practice of crafting a proper economic-emotional self is hardly distinguishable from the technologies of power: journalists' professional ideology and power circulating within specific media organizations. Furthermore, the practical performance of professional ideology is inextricably linked to views about how emotions should (not) appear in news:

the technologies of sign systems. While the traditional, positivist-realist journalistic ideology does not allow for journalists' emotions, the prevalence of Measurers and Franks proves that crisis reporters' practices of emotional management and their experience are shaped not only by the ideology but also by its critiques, which makes diverse emotional styles possible (Peters 2011). In turn, the reporters' subjectivity, including empathy, becomes central to their professional performance (Glück 2016; Steensen 2017). On the other hand, the freedom of emotional management is limited. If crisis reporters want to stay within the boundaries of quality journalism, they must exercise self-restraint and include their "authentic" emotional experience in the news only in a functional, understated way. (Yet, even the use of this limited freedom can help one not to break down and become a Stoic instead.) All things considered, the value of emotionless objectivity is not carved in stone or interpreted uniformly but rather is open for interpretation and related to particular circumstances (Skovsgaard et al. 2013). *Crisis* circumstances challenge the notion of objectivity as a *cornerstone* of journalistic professionalism.

The possible rethinking of journalists' professional ideology vis-à-vis crisis circumstances is thus intertwined also with the particularity of technologies of production in a crisis and in individual crises. Crisis circumstances inevitably alter journalists' practices and routines that are constitutively entangled with things (Orlikowski 2007). Rather than working as intermediaries, things and material technologies act as mediators with various shades of influence "between full causality and sheer inexistence" (Latour 2005: 72) on human action and emotion.

All these aspects together—all the technologies or matrices of practical reason telling people how successful professionals should conduct and operate their bodies, souls, and thoughts (Du Gay 1996; Foucault 1988)—construct the forms of subjectivity that are most appropriate to the practice of crisis reporting.

Emotions

To make a long story short, the typical emotional path is started upon with expectations and professional aspirations—in the case of James' colleagues usually with "idealist-activist" aspiration (see Urbániková 2015) and the mythic notion of becoming a renegade war correspondent (Pedelty 1995). However, the newsroom routine is often frustrating, heavy, tiring, and boring at the same time. Unexpected and surprising negative events

enliven the routine and resolve some newsroom problems but also trigger emotional shocks (Dubberley et al. 2015). Speaking about post-traumatic stress *disorder*, depression, early waking *syndrome*, and other forms of mental ill-health (e.g. Aoki et al. 2012; Feinstein et al. 2015; Reinardy 2011; Richards and Rees 2011), triggered by exposure to violent content, reproduces the tendency to see *social* and *systemic* problems as individual and biographical (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Schepers-Hughes and Lock 1987). The analysis shows exactly the opposite: what shapes crisis reporters' emotional culture and emotional styles are the intrinsic features of their job: the newsmaking technology and the crisis circumstances. Furthermore, it is precisely the act of individualization of crises, perceiving the emotional responses to social crises as an individual problem and subject to individual coping strategies, which turns reporters' emotions into a *sociological* problem.

Direct or vicarious on-site presence, facing risk and empathizing with the Others who suffer in parts of the world sharply contrasting with Europe, bring about states and feelings of sadness, indignation, pity, revulsion, consternation, anger, fear, stress, tension, guilt, absurdity, compassion, horror, and tiredness (cf. Dubberley et al. 2015; Hight and Smyth 2003; Pedelty 1995). All these emotional states make the professional paradox of acting and observing (Richards and Rees 2011) more pressing. Eventually, the continuous oscillation between boredom and emotional jolts may lead to cynicism and compassion fatigue (Moeller 1999)—emotional states that threaten not only the journalists' well-being but also their personal integrity and the quality of their journalism.

Crisis

Getting to the cynical standstill is facilitated by routinization of crises. In the minds of the journalists, crisis became a norm and the absurd turned into routine (see Koselleck 2006; Pedelty 1995; Zelizer and Allan 2011). The journalists saw crisis as a ubiquitous, all-encompassing phenomenon; crisis was defined by its inflation, generalized character (Vincze 2014; Wagner 1994), by its polyphony and multi-level scope. To James' colleagues, "crisis" could mean anything—and meant everything. An inside-the-media crisis (Olsson and Nord 2015), usually organizational, technological, professional, or personnel situation not far from a breakdown. At the same time, it meant an outside-the-media temporary or continuous major negative event with wide impact on society. Crisis even

meant the very essence of the current phase of modernity with its global risks and insecurities, biographized by individuals and manifesting in peoples' everyday lives (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Giddens 1991). For crisis was delimited by the suffering of individuals coming largely from areas that contrasted with the journalists' own worlds but also by the journalists' own trauma. Crisis was also understood as both the real and the media-constructed (Beck 1992; Van Loon 2002). All these meanings of "crisis" were interconnected, resonated, or interfered with each other, dragging the journalists into a mental state of continuous awareness of existential problems, death, suffering, catastrophes, and, perhaps most importantly, the world's absurd inequalities and uncanny differences.

Their lived experience proves that while mediating between and existing within the incommensurable worlds, they are actors too—even more inevitably when they find themselves in the middle of events. The notion of their "dual state" is thus based on the false assumption that journalists are, on grounds of their professional authority (which is, in turn, based on the objectivistic illusion of Truth), able to step out from the world—albeit only with one foot—and to look at events from above—even though only with one eye. James' colleagues, however, actively lived inside crises: they were witnesses, victims, and political actors (Ben-Yehuda et al. 2013; Van Der Meer et al. 2016).

Those who did not break down thus became to some extent cynical or stoic, the difference being that for Stoics, maintaining professional principles, such as following the facts, was vital (Becker 1998; Sellars 2006).

This was the account reconstructed in dialogue with James' memories.

EMOTIONS, TECHNOLOGY, AND CRISIS RECONSIDERED

And the account shed new light—sometimes reaffirming, sometimes further complicating—on the once-provisionally defined concepts of technology, crisis, and emotions.

Emotions

Most obviously, it had become even clearer that emotions are not merely innate, biophysiological phenomena (Thoits 1989). Even emotions once considered "basic," "primary," and culturally universal (see Ekman 1999; Ekman and Cordaro 2011), such as fear, anger, disgust, relief, and amusement, are historically and cross-culturally variable based on situational

causes, experience, meaning, display, and regulation (Thoits 1989). Paul Ekman himself later in life reconsidered his initial claim about cultural universality: even the basic emotions “differ in their appraisal, antecedent events, probable behavioral response, physiology and other characteristics” (Ekman 1999: 45). Indeed, the fear, anger, disgust, relief, amusement, and other emotions felt by James’ colleagues not only emerged from the context of crisis reporting, but their experiencing, meaning, display, and regulation also varied based on their constitutive entanglement with the newsmaking machine. Most importantly, the journalists’ emotions also yielded to the individualist and/or macho myths still surrounding crisis reporting. The very fact that many journalists considered their work-related emotions an intimate, personal problem, even a taboo, even though “subjective experiences and emotional beliefs are both socially acquired and socially structured” (Thoits 1989: 319), adds one more dimension to the social character and sociological relevance of emotions, laying bare the process of individualization and biographization of risks and crises (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Giddens 1991).

Technology

Second, the analysis illustrates a line of continuity between the Foucauldian notion of technologies of (bio-)power, defined above as the power that brings “life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations” (Foucault 1978: 143), measures them, objectifies them, and sets them into productive coordination, so that they may operate as one wishes, and the equally influential Heideggerian notion of technology. For Martin Heidegger (1977), technology means revealing and enframing. It “reveals the Earth, man himself” (Inwood 1999: 211), molding and fulfilling our purposes, revealing us and everything in nature as standing-reserve. It is also a way of enframing and ordering beings, a ceaseless objectification, qualification, quantification, and systematization of the world reducing it to the level of stock (Rayner 2001). Technology transforms human beings and culture into a stockpile. According to Timothy Rayner (2001), the concepts intersect in important aspects: they both conceive reality (the whole of nature in Heidegger’s case and the human population for Foucault) as a field of resource; both regard the objectification-commodification of reality as mediated by technology, driven by the vision of situating all forms of life within a domain of technical manipulation; both pursue setting all natural “material,” that is, life, in order. In other

words, both concepts pursue the overall management of life. The emotional management (Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2007) that James' colleagues exercised, making their emotions more closely harnessed to instrumental action and economic rationality, is an example of these intersections. In line with the application of Foucault to labor process theory (see Knights and Willmott 1989), Eva Illouz (2007) and Peter Fleming and André Spicer (2003) understand “colonizing” the identities of workers and their emotions as a mark of the latest phase of capitalism and its managerial logic, in which

corporate power and worker subjectivity intersect within social relations of organizational domination. (...) What we take to be our most intimate and personal habits and dispositions cannot be separated from the political economy of the post-industrial labour process and late capitalism. (Fleming and Spicer 2003: 158)

Thinking of this absolute rationalism embracing human subjectivity and emotions, James, while descending the last few back door steps, recalled the “human crisis” that Viggo Mortensen, on behalf of Albert Camus, spoke about (Camus 2016).

Crisis

Third, is not this what crisis means above all? Camus, speaking of “the human crisis,” equates the results of absolute rationalism to those of nihilism. Similarly, for Heidegger, nihilism is synonymous with the inherently modern all-encompassing technological enframing, leading to the forgetting of being as such (Rayner 2001).

More specifically, the empirical data show the way in which the technology of crisis reporting and journalists' professional ideology partly overlap with ideological cynicism: journalists need to be able to work despite anything that might happen (Sloterdijk 1987), which also means staying at least partly detached under any circumstances and being able to work without delay (Deuze 2005). This requires a certain limited variety of emotional postures—including, by the way, the cynical one. In this sense, the newsmaking technology turns humans into human resources (see Heidegger 1977; Rayner 2001). In order to be respected professionals, it is favorable that the journalists turn their once-indexical emotions into a stockpile and merge their emotional and economical selves (Illouz 2007).

In terms of media professionals' precarity, the crisis reporters' (self-) precarization—regardless of whether they were formally employed or worked as freelancers—thus consisted not only of the physical and psychological risks they faced at work but also of the often thought-through translation of their emotions into resources and, in turn, into forms of capital. For Heidegger and Camus, this alone would be a sufficient symptom of the “human crisis” and a “forgetting of being as such” (Rayner 2001).

James still needed to descend a step deeper, though. For the absolute rationalism expanded from journalism's ideology to the realm of media representations, marking another aspect of the human crisis. “There is a human crisis, because in today's world we can contemplate the death or the torture of a human being with the feeling of indifference. Friendly concern, scientific interest, or simple passivity,” Viggo echoed in James' head. The ideological cynicism (Sloterdijk 1987) resided precisely in this apathy and refusal to engage with the world (Bewes 1997). Particularly the focus on the technological, aesthetic, and linguistic details of others' suffering, driven by economic rationality, in short, its spectacularization (Boltanski 1999; see also Debord 2005) or valorization (Van Loon 2002), keeps not only journalists but also audiences detached and disconnected from the world, since the escalation and intensification of mediated violence and horror leads to compassion fatigue (Moeller 1999). Consequently, audiences are unable to meet the essentially humane moral commitment to take action—albeit in a form of “mere” committed speech—when witnessing others' suffering. In this context, Luc Boltanski (1999: xvi; see also from p. 147 on) speaks about a

contemporary crisis of pity which is characterised, precisely, by a loss of confidence in the effectiveness of committed speech, by a focus on the media and the ‘spectacle’ effects they produce, by a temptation to fall back on the community, and finally, and most profoundly, by a scepticism with regard to any form of political action orientated towards a horizon of moral ideals.

In other words, the increase in the quantity and intensity of the spectacles of suffering brings about uncertainties about the suffering and its representation. These uncertainties, in turn, dissolve the moral commitment and lead to a crisis of humanitarianism.

“Crisis” can thus also mean the irresistible spreading of ideological cynicism.

(EXTRA) MEDIA ACTION?

Cynicism was a phenomenon that did not yield to James' embryonic cynicism. As has been said, he maintained and even believed in some humane and journalistic principles and ideals. "Compared with previous ages control of emotions in experiencing nature, as that of nature itself, has grown. Involvement has lessened, but it has not disappeared," Norbert Elias wrote in 1956 (Elias 1956: 228). In the sea of cynicism, James, feeling some vague responsibility, still hoped to see a few islands of possible engagement and spontaneity. Corresponding to the two areas of the "human crisis," these islands appeared in three realms: media practices and representations, media organizations, and non-media global actors.

First, as argued in the sections on journalists' professional ideology, focusing on technological, aesthetic, linguistic details, or speed is not necessarily a sign of an ideologically cynical attitude. Such a focus can be a manifestation of the journalists' professional sense of accuracy, immediacy, validity, and thus the commitment to stick to the public service ideal (Deuze 2005). Be they public service, commercial, or independent, media professionals and organizations can thus actively question the traditional professional ideology as a whole and strengthen and build on this non-cynical part of their ideology by insisting on: providing public service (i.e. active collecting and dissemination of information in the name of people and public service principles), fairness and honesty (i.e. processual objectivity rather than the neutral and detached version of objectivity), autonomy and independence (in their everyday practices and journalistic routines), accuracy rather than precedence, and ethics (Deuze 2005).

However, such a deliberate abandonment of media practices connected to ideological, modern cynicism does not mean that journalists should forsake the irony, mockery, and satire of classical cynicism. On the contrary: this challenging "pissing against the idealist wind" (Sloterdijk 1987: 103) with its truth-telling and care of oneself (Foucault 2005), and especially with its intellectual rebelliousness against existing beliefs and practices, is compatible with certain parts of the journalists' professional ideology.

More generally, such a critical reappraisal of journalists' professional ideology means accepting *prudence*—the ability to weigh a particular situation in its complexity and make decisions that help the journalists to meet the values and fulfill their roles in the best possible way (Champy 2009)—as a defining feature of professionalism. In practice, prudent crisis reporting would entail sensitivity to the particular objectivity-as-a-practice

(Carpentier and Trioen 2010) and using emotionality in a nonviolent, moderating, peaceful way. In this sense, prudent crisis reporting would be close to Johan Galtung's notion of peace journalism: "journalism of attachment" to all victims that "tries to depolarise by showing the black and white of all sides, and to de-escalate by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence" (Galtung and Fischer 2013: 99; see also Neumann and Fahmy 2016 and Ruigrok 2008).

Galtung and Fischer (2013) suggest that empathy and creativity are required of peace journalists; Glück (2016) extends the ability to empathize to all good journalists. Similarly, Boltanski (1999) claims that the media, to avoid spectacularization of suffering and reproducing the crisis of pity, can take action through a form of effective speech, consisting not only of hard facts but also of description of the journalist's internal states (such as indignation). Boltanski further suggests that a possible way to simultaneously tell the facts about suffering and to show how one has been affected by it is to nourish the imagination by denunciation, sentiment, and aesthetics. The most suitable form for feeding the imagination is, according to the author, narrativized reality or realist fiction: "These forms actually seemed to be especially suitable for the description of affective states which do not normally figure in juridical, economic or political documents" (Boltanski 1999: 54). Narrativized reality, not surprisingly, lies at the core of narrative journalism which, as Eric Neveu (2014) believes, could be a decent future for the profession.

Prudent crisis reporting could thus also mean including some principles of literary or narrative journalism into everyday journalistic performance: employing more authentic and openly emotional journalistic discourses, using the—often already available—freedom of emotional expression, creativity and the lens of one's feelings, thoughts and experiences (Harbers and Broersma 2014; Pauly 2014). Such journalism would not only better capture the richness of social complexity but also lead to more critical and ethical engagement with the suffering of Others.

The point, however, is by no means to advocate the egocentrism of the Western visitors to crisis zones that several James' colleagues so harshly criticized. The point is to encourage media professionals, once they witness things that appear unthinkable and unreasonable within their privileged bubble, to act as full-blown *mediators* between the contrasting worlds. Nikki Usher (2019: 142) perfectly encapsulates the role that journalists' open emotionality can play when she asks: "Can journalists stop talking about themselves? Probably not. But perhaps they need to do a better job showing why they—elite national journalists—matter."

Second, the privilege of Western crisis reporters does not exclude their precarity. In fact, the “privilege” to witness how the planet turns, to be there when history unfolds, their interest, and involvement form its core. Getting stories, they take risks. Face to face with the world’s absurd contrasts and the Others’ tragedies, they need to perform tough emotional labor. In the worst-case scenario, they end up broken: overworked, burnt out, and cynical. Their privilege thus creates a potentially destructive cocktail of good and bad work processes (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

Therefore, the cynical crisis, manifesting itself by turning journalists into human resources, is to be fought in the newsrooms and corridors of media organizations. After September 11, Howard Tumber wrote that “It is imperative that measures are taken worldwide to improve the safety, security, and psychological welfare of journalists and the prosecution rates of those responsible for the killing of journalists. Without such actions, we are all vulnerable to the spin and propaganda of governments, military, warlords, and the operations of international crime” (Tumber 2011: 333). There are also sufficient legal arguments (see the section “Coping Strategies”) that media organizations should attempt to prevent work-related health problems, which result, in some cases, in cynicism.

“I personally find it a disaster, the way in the big newsroom we do not pay attention to the risks associated with crisis,” Nicolas said, criticizing his employer. Media organizations should help journalists to deal with difficult emotions. Similarly to breaking news manuals, media organizations should “get a range of measures ready, which, however, must be applied with regard to the individuality of each reporter” (Šimon). Raising awareness of potential mental health problems may be a good beginning (Aoki et al. 2012); at least some emotional and psychological training both in newsrooms and journalism schools could reduce the emotional shocks. As Nicolas suggested, helping journalism students to understand their possible future problems and raising awareness by the cooperation with NGOs, universities, and media houses can prepare their brighter future. In addition, the newsrooms should, according to Nicolas, draw on the knowledge of such trauma more by formally employing senior reporters for on-the-spot reporters’ support and supervision:

to have at least, let’s say, what I call ‘a control tower.’ So when you’re in a war zone, or in a crisis zone, somebody that you can call and say, Nicolas, I got into a problem, what would you do if you were me? ... Making sure that you have somebody experienced, staying at the newsroom, accessible ... who would give you advice. (Nicolas)

The problem with such prevention, supportive, and also therapeutic tools (see the section “[Coping Strategies](#)”) may be that, if isolated, they can be further criticized for producing forms of subjectivity ideal for crisis circumstances, that is, adapting individuals for the continuous state of crisis. Therefore, without keeping the supportive and therapeutic mechanisms de-individualized by questioning what the journalists can see (or saw) and can do (or did), without making relevant the crisis itself and the journalists’ position within the crisis, the therapy, prevention, and support are primarily simply further technologies of governmentality (see Väliaho 2014).

Furthermore, in accordance with the above-suggested questioning of the traditional professional ideology, strengthening of its non-cynical parts, and including narrative journalism into everyday journalistic performance, Sven proposed that media organizations can help to reduce journalists’ work-related stress by encouraging them to focus on positive (not only negative) events and constructive solutions to social problems and by advancing new, creative media genres and formats that help journalists to express their on-the-spot experience in its complexity. These approaches that understand objectivity as an ethical practice rather than an objectivistic norm, not only help to de-escalate conflicts, bridge the gap between here and there, but also make journalists’ work-related emotional experience sustainable.

Third, the ideological cynicism is, as some of the reporters suggested, nourished by the exploitative logic of the media industry. The logic determines the conditions under which the crisis news is produced, that is, outsources the risks to individuals, and is kept alive by the graded levels of risk that the different groups of individuals involved in crisis reporting face. Risk, as Creech (2018: 578) points out, thus “takes on a particularly economic tenor, echoing the increasing precarity of all news labor.”

Therefore, a way to tackle the ideological cynicism could be bridging the contrasting worlds not only by narrative approaches but also by “recasting witnessing not just as a moral imperative, but one that also comes with costs that are distributed unequally” (ibid.: 579), and eventually, by evening up the precarity of employed international correspondents, freelancers and local journalists, fixers and stringers. This requires decoupling the work of crisis journalism from its solely market-oriented understanding, decoupling the risk of individual bodily harm from economic logic, and re-centering it within the realms of policy and politics. However, it takes including a wider variety of actors than just news

organizations, such as national governments and global NGOs. The latter have already done good job of making the risk, precarity, and their unequal distribution more visible, and of interconnecting the journalists' global community.

James stepped on the ground. He felt tingling in his feet. An amber gleam in Sophie Schlesinger's eyes pierced the dimness of the airfield when she glanced back at him from a clunker, stopped in front of the arrivals hall.

"Comin' with us?" she called airily.

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