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BODYING THE JOURNALIST^I



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ABSTRACT – This article lays out a theoretical framework through which the journalist's body is rendered both visible and accountable. Drawing on ethnographic and geographic scholarship, it argues that the journalist's body serves as a sensor, as a transducer (Helmreich, 2007), and as a depository. Conceiving the journalist's body as an instrument that simultaneously senses, transforms, and stores information opens the door to a rich and nuanced understanding of how sensing bodies participate in and contribute to the journalistic endeavor, both practically and epistemologically.

Key words: Bodies. Journalistic process. Journalistic epistemology. Ethnography. Geography.

ENCORPANDO O JORNALISTA

RESUMO – Este artigo expõe um quadro teórico no qual o corpo jornalístico é apresentado de forma visível e explicável. Com base em um conhecimento etnográfico e geográfico, argumenta que o corpo jornalístico atua como um sensor, como um transdutor (Helmreich, 2007) e como um depositário. A concepção do corpo jornalístico como um instrumento que simultaneamente sente, transforma e armazena a informação abre espaço para uma compreensão rica e nuançada de como o corpo sensitório participa e contribui para o esforço jornalístico, tanto do ponto de vista prático como epistemológico.

Palavras-chave: Corpos. Processo jornalístico. Epistemologia jornalística. Etnografia. Geografia.

CORPORIZANDO AL PERIODISTA

RESUMEN – Este artículo expone un marco teórico a través del cual el cuerpo del periodista es presentado de forma visible y relatable. Basándose en el conocimiento etnográfico y geográfico, sostiene que el cuerpo del periodista sirve como sensor, como transductor (Helmreich, 2007) y como depositario. Concebir el cuerpo del periodista como un instrumento que simultáneamente siente, transforma y almacena información abre la puerta a una comprensión rica y matizada de cómo los cuerpos sensoriales participan y contribuyen al esfuerzo periodístico, tanto práctica como epistemológicamente.

Palabras clave: Cuerpos. Proceso periodístico. Epistemología periodística. Etnografía. Geografía.

1 Introduction

Journalism as a field is always reinventing itself, and journalists likewise. In recent years, journalism has been experimenting with storytelling (Vanoost, 2019; Eyriès & Péliissier, 2014; Lasica, 2006; Feld & Brenneis, 2004) and with immersive journalism that both expose and sensitize the public to other worlds (Vanoost, 2013; de la Pena et al., 2010; Ekström, 2000; Fludernik, 1996). In bringing attention to the journalist's body – a neglected aspect of this more “textural” turn in journalism – this article's aims are twofold: to sketch out a theoretical framework that puts the sensing back into sense-making, and to breathe vitality and life into journalism.

The journalist's body – that complex assemblage of impulses, reactions, senses, emotions, energies, and physical states – has been largely overlooked when it comes to existing sociological and epistemological² studies in the field of journalism. The journalist's body is most often juxtaposed against reason, rationality, and objectivity – core journalistic values. This twinning reinforces the body's lack of place in the journalistic process, at least in terms of how it is seen: as something that gets in the way of good journalism at best; as something that leads to bad journalism at worst.

To be a good journalist is to stick to the facts (Chalaby, 1998; Schudson, 1995). It is to steer clear of the body – that irksome site of feelings, passions, and other unwelcome distractions that set one adrift (Pantti, 2010). Keeping one’s distance becomes synonymous with professional integrity (Peters, 2011; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018; Gans, 1979 [2004]). It is the Habermasian public sphere par excellence: the role of the journalist is to provide factual reports for rational debates. Small wonder, given this persistent privileging of mind over matter, that the journalist’s body has remained a theoretically barren terrain.

Some contemporary branches of ethnography and geography, on the other hand, are foregrounding the body both as an object of study and as a key resource when it comes to conducting research. In building a theoretical framework for the journalist’s body I draw on a scholarship to emerge from each of these fields: paying particular attention to the work of sensory ethnographers and “sentient” geographers (Frias, 2001). Of this sense-sensitive body of ethnographic and geographic literature, I ask the following: how is the body conceived, how is it defined? This then leads to a typology of how sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers frame and engage the body: as a “subject” of study; as an information-gathering “device”; as a “site” of experimentation; as a “means” of transformation. Pointing to the natural fit that each of these bodily framings has with the journalistic endeavor as a whole, I suggest ways that the practices and modes of seeing them could be adapted/adopted by working journalists. Throughout the article, I emphasize the practical and epistemological gains that journalism stands to make in allying itself more affirmatively with the feeling sensing body. The theoretical framework which develops alongside this appeal proposes three ways of conceiving the journalist’s body: as a sensor, as a transducer (Helmreich, 2007), and as a depository.

2 Sensory ethnography and sentient geography to the rescue

The journalist’s body has long been missing in action. Practitioners of “sensory” ethnography (Pink, 2015; Csordas, 1993; Stoller, 1997) might have something of value to offer us when it comes to recuperating it. So too might “sentient” geographers, with their particular brand of “socio-anthropology of the sentient world” (Frias, 2001, p.16, my translation). Help might also be found in “live

sociology” (Back, 2012, as cited in Pink, 2015), “complex ethnography” (Atkinson et al, 2008, p.205), “somatic modes of attention” (Csordas, 1993), and in “visceral geography” (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010). We can also turn to phenomenology³ in our quest to “body” the journalist (Berrens, 2015; Holmqvist, 2013). What all of these scholarly realms share with journalism is an interest in living cultures⁴. Just what it means to “live together” in a deeper, more sociopolitical, sense is also a key concern of these various players.

Likewise, they share research methods and ways of writing up their findings (Cramer & McDevitt, 2004; Harrington, 2003). For example, immersion – the primary and distinguishing field approach used by ethnographers – also has a long tradition amongst journalists (see Leroux & Neveu, 2017). Used especially by those “ethnographic journalists” producing long investigative pieces, Hermann (2014, p.261) describes the emergence of “ethnographic journalism” in the USA as “an explicitly accentuated ideal for reporters in the United States who attempt to portray human environments from within”. Both in North America and beyond, examples of ethnographic journalism abound: from Nelly Bly’s 1887 sojourn in a psychiatric hospital (Cohen, 2015) to Gunther Wallraf posing as a Turkish immigrant in a German factory (1986); from Barbara Ehrenreich’s descent into poverty as detailed in her book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (2011) to Florence Aubenat’s *Le Quai d’Ouistreham* (2010) in which she describes her six-month stint as a cleaning woman in Normandy, France. As Gans (2010, p.100) observes, “[I]n some respects, sociology’s most powerful competition comes from journalistic ethnographers, notably book writers, who may not have ever taken a sociology course but are trained or self-trained in fieldwork and intensive interviewing”.

What is clear, in other words, is that the similarities between journalism and fields such as ethnography and geography are not only manifest but readily acknowledged. Less obvious is why the body – so central to these other two fields as both objects of study and aid to study – has remained largely absent when it comes to discussions of how journalists engage with their profession. As suggested earlier, sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers can help us shed light on this troublesome oversight, attuned as they are to the role that bodies – both theirs’ and others’ – play in their research. Examining how they conceive of the body is a first step towards inspiring journalists to do likewise.

3 Putting the body center stage

Sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers tend to see the body as the primary means through which human beings perceive, interpret, feel and experience life (Berrens, 2015, p.36). Bodies are central how we experience the everyday (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010, p.1273). The world “turns around” the body (Holmqvist, 2013, p.54); it is the “material basis of experience within the world” (Frias, 2001, p.39, my translation). The body of which they speak is a sensing and sentient body that places itself in the center of things. It is a body that makes the most of its “sensory potential” (Frias, 2001, p.39, my translation). Affect and emotions come into play here (Berrens, 2015, p.17), as do a whole range of physical sensations: “the bodily experience of feelings such as anxiety, rush, exhilaration” (Holmqvist, 2013, p.54); “the body, from its flesh and bones...[to] the sensory apparatus” (Berrens, 2015, p.27). Longhurst et al. (2009, p.334) add that the body is a relational entity when they speak of “the sensations, moods, and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live”.

As for reason, it is an integral part of this sensing, feeling, relating body. Sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers are quick to dismiss the traditional mind/body dichotomy, seeing reason and body as one. For Stoller (1997), head and heart come together in a “fusion of the intelligible and the sensible” (p.xv). For Frias (2001, p.16, my translation), dualisms have no place in contemporary theorizing around the body. His conception of the body is located at the interface of a subjective “inside” and a collective “outside”: a body at once “expressive”, at once a “sensor”; a body endowed with “a practical sense that bypasses consciousness and abstract rationality”; a “socio-cognitive” body that “takes its cue from the senses”. Likewise, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p.1274) express a “skepticism of boundaries – e.g. mind/body, representation/non-representation”, and call for a circumvention of them, “through insistence on the imagining and practicing of our (political) lives in, through, and beyond such tensions”.

If the rational and the sensory are mutually constitutive, the body is also an amalgam of individual prerogative and societal demands (Longhurst et al., 2009; Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Holmqvist, 2013). Bodies do not operate alone: they are a reflection of

the culture in which they live. Because perception itself is “structured by society”, it follows that a body is much more than just “an independent perceiving agent” (Berrens, 2015, p.27). In other words, cultural codes and societal norms act on bodies (Geurts, 2002). As Csordas (1993, p.135) puts it, bodies are “the existential ground of culture”. If Frias (2001, p.21, my translation) speaks of the “socialized body”, Classen (1993, p.437) reminds us that just as our use of our senses is “culturally anchored”, we also draw on them to convey our “cultural norms and values”. In other words, a circuitous and porous process is at work here: “Sensoriality is at once a means of expressive mediation, at once a means of selectively culling through the information that, when incorporated into our memory and daily routine [...] helps us to understand what’s going on and what is demanded of us in a given situation” (Frias, 2001, p.27, my translation).

In sum, the body can be understood as the central pivot of human experience through all of its sensory reactions and responses; and as an influence on, and a reflection of, the culture from which it emanates and through which it is regulated. We now turn to how this centrally located, sensing and sense-making, culturally embedded body is mobilized by sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers as they go about their work.

3.1 Putting the body at the service of society

Sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers expect the body to be of service to society. Approaching culture through the sensorial, through the visceral: these are approaches that arise from a pressing need to penetrate a given culture; to understand it from the inside out; to offer descriptions and interpretations that stray from the text, that sidestep words and discourses, that spring from a bodily engagement and a whole host of felt sensations (Stoller, 1997; Csordas, 1993; Holmqvist, 2013).

Frias (2001, p.12, my translation) is quick to point out the basic shortcomings of a purely “textual” approach when it comes to studying a city, for example. Cities, he insists, are “living” and “practiced” places; we bring them into being through “inhabiting” them, not through “counting or decoding them, as one would an object or a text”. For Frias, the “disembodied and all-seeing gaze of the researcher” will always be at odds with the “organic and fluid nature of social life”. To study the city as

a sentient geographer is to get right in there with the city. It is, as Frias explains, “to move towards the ‘very things’” (p. 29, my translation).

The literature emerging from these ‘body forward’ sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers suggests four distinct ways that the body is mobilized:

- 1) As a subject of study, paying particular attention to how those subjects sense the world around them and react to it corporeally;
- 2) As an information-gathering device, paying particular attention to what it means to use their own body as part of a scholarly “toolkit”;
- 3) As a site of experimentation, paying particular attention to their bodily sensations and reactions as they live and experience a culture alongside those they are studying, to better describing said culture;
- 4) As a means of transformation, paying particular attention to the inherent porosity in the researched/researcher relationship, and how the researcher’s own body changes as a result of living, experiencing, and studying a given culture.

I now examine each of these aspects of mobilizing and engaging the body in turn. At the end of each section, I suggest ways that journalism might borrow from these “body forward” practices and ways of seeing, and outline the practical and epistemological gains to be made by adopting/adapting a similar approach.

4 Four ways of mobilizing the body

4.1 The body as a subject of study

Seeing the body as a “subject”, studying how that body experiences the world at the sensorial level, at the corporeal level – this is the terrain that concerns us here. Howes (1991, p.3), for example, is interested in what he terms “bodily modes of knowing”. His particular route into understanding how bodies come to know is through an “anthropology of the senses”, while Pink (2015) speaks of “sensory modalities” (p.xiii) and “multi-modality paradigms” (p.18).

Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p.1274) see the

growing interest in the senses as conducive to “a greater understanding of the agency of physical matter, both within and between bodies”. Back (2012, p.29), too, emphasizes the benefits of paying attention to “a wider range of senses”, arguing that this “first principle of live sociology” results not only in a better quality of data but “makes other kinds of critical imagination possible”.

As for Atkinson et al. (2008, p.179), the importance of paying attention to “sensory data” is justified, in part, by the significant role played by the senses in several cultures. Understanding such a culture, they argue, demands a heightened awareness of how the senses relate to a particular convention or code or even underlie an entire organizational structure. They point to the Tzotzil of Mexico, for example, who organize their ceremonies around “thermal dynamics”; to the Ongee of the Andaman Islands who see the sense of smell as primary, and believe in “an olfactory cosmos”; to the Amazonian Dezana for whom color is the “dominant cosmological principle”.

Some perpetuate their culture by absorbing it, via the senses, into their bodies. Stoller (1997, p.3) offers the example of the Songhay in West Africa: “Songhay sorcerers and griots learn about power and history by ‘eating’ it – ingesting odors and tastes, savoring texture and sounds”. The body, here, at once consumes, at once carries with it, the Songhay’s past, present and future. In absorbing their culture’s epistemology through its sounds, smells, tastes, and textures, “Songhay griots eat history and as a consequence are ‘owned’ by ‘old words’ they have ingested” (p.47).

Another example is offered by Geurts (2002, p.42), whose immersion amongst the Anlo in Ghana alerted her to “seselelame” – a multi-faceted form of sensory embodiment which includes, but is not limited to, the experience of “feeling in and through the body”. An amalgam of the physical and the emotional, a way of both interpreting the world and deciding a course of action, Geurts explains how seselelame “houses the cognitive function of perception as well as the somatic phenomenon of sensation (inside the flesh)”. Adding that the term is also used “in connection with certain emotional states”, she gives an example of how it all comes together for the Anlo: “Sese is hearing hearing – not hearing by the ear but a feeling type hear – within me”. In other words, by hearing oneself hearing, and by remaining attentive to what feelings are evoked as one hears oneself hearing, everyday gestures and actions fall into place.

Frias (2001, p.16, my translation) maintains that when the body

is the subject of study, we gain access to “the pre-categorical meaning of things”. In concerning ourselves with those aspects of a culture that revolve around sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste, what emerges is “the organizing role played by the body when it comes to becoming socialized”. In effect, this is what Frias is referring to when he speaks of “the socio-anthropology of the sensory world,” as discussed earlier.

For journalists, taking a similar interest in the body would open them to a whole new range of subjects – both human and non-human. It would provide them with a broader spectrum of knowledge-rich in cultural diversity and insight. And it would expand and enhance their vocabulary. Imagine a type of journalism that would draw on all of this to reflect on the practice itself. What kind of inspiration could journalism take from these various sense-based ways of making meaning – the “feel-feel-at-flesh-inside” (seselelame) of the Anlo, for example?; the epistemological ingestion practices of the Songhay? And how might the general public be better served by more emphasis on the “organic” and less on the “textual”? By more access to the “sensory modalities” of Pink (2015)? To the “pre-categorical meaning of things” of Frias (2001)?

The desire to better understand what Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010) refer to as “the agency of physical matter between bodies” would necessitate a whole new range of analytical frameworks – the kind of frameworks that allow for the emergence of “new critical imaginaries” (Back, 2012) in the public sphere. It would also encourage journalists to experiment more freely with new journalistic formats and to explore more fully the range of possibilities inherent in our burgeoning multi-platform mediascape.

The body as a subject of study opens up the path towards the three other ways that the body is mobilized: as an information-gathering device, a site of experimentation, a means of transformation. Let us turn, now, to the ethnographer and geographer bodies researching their respective realms of study, and to the journalist bodies that could learn from them.

4.2 The body as an information-gathering device

Using one’s own body as a primary information gathering device is what interests us here. To this end, geographer Frias (2001, p.16) offers us the image of the sensor or “captor” body that goes around “picking up information” (p.27). When this body is fully alert –

antennae at the ready – a world of smells, sights, tastes, sounds, and textures becomes available to it. It experiences nothing short of a “sentient epiphany” (p.26). This, at least, is what should be happening to the geographer body as it moves around the city, according to Frias. To feel the city – to truly experience it, describe it, understand it – you must treat your body as sonar, and the city as “a multi-sensorial structure” (p.26, my translation). In much the same way, Berrens’ (2015) researcher body is “a *medium* from which to perceive, interpret and feel the world” (p.36, my emphasis), while Geurts (2002) likens the body out there in the field to a *site*: “a site where social contradictions play themselves out” (p.13, my emphasis). What all three conceptions of the researcher body – captor, medium, site – have in common is that the body as receiving surface is a powerful information-gathering device.

Peters (2011, p.14), on the other hand, turns his attention inward. Primarily interested in what’s going on inside the researcher’s body – in those emotional responses that “register” in the researcher’s “physical and dispositional being” – he stresses the importance of “capturing” those internal signals that attest to the fact “[t]hat it matters, that a person cares about something”. Paying attention to these internal signals is crucial, insists Peters, for they contain important information in themselves about a culture, a person, a milieu, or an event. Csordas (1993, p.138) concurs, proposing the term “somatic modes of attention” to describe those “culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others”. Stoller (1997) offers us the tantalizing image of “lend[ing] one’s body to the world and accept[ing] its complexities, tastes, structures, and smells” (p.xvii). Likewise, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p.1273) acknowledge that their task is “not only to research bodies but also with bodies”. Pink (2015, p.27) encapsulates how researcher bodies are both mobilized and conceptualized within sensory scholarship: “The idea that ethnographic experiences are ‘embodied’ – in that the researcher learns and comes to know through her or his whole experiencing body – has been recognized in much methodological literature”.

Journalists – whether they are conscious of it or not – also put their bodies to use when it comes to gathering information. Like the sentient geographers and sensory ethnographers referred to above, their bodies are a key element of their investigatory “toolkit”. Discussing, for example, “the much-celebrated and high-prestige

genre of investigative journalism,” Wahl-Jorgensen (2018) describes how “the most complex forms of emotional labor” might be required: “Reporters wrangle reactions and the attainment of sensitive information from sources, negotiate access and forms of attribution, and carefully calibrate the generation of moral outrage and, through that, solidarity with the sufferers of wrong-doing” (online). As she makes clear, this whole emotional roller coaster of a process not only demands much of journalists from a bodily point of view but might also take its toll on their bodies.

The standard journalistic technique of interviewing is another arena where bodies are mobilized. Geurts’ (2002, p.567) description of what happens when we speak to another person is useful here: “Words do not just have meaning – they are breath and vibrations of air, constituted and shaped by the body and motives of the speaker, physically contacting and influencing the addressee”. If a good interview consists, in part, of “capturing” these vibrations to better gauge the drives and motivations of the interviewee, remaining attentive to how their own body is being affected by what the speaker is saying is crucial for journalists. Does a certain detail unsettle? Does it shake the journalist to his/her core? These are important bodily signals that deserve attention, that should not be ignored.

In short, the obvious benefits of possessing an inbuilt method for cross-checking and triangulating information demands the question of just why journalists wouldn’t mobilize their bodies to take on tasks which are, after all, the cornerstones of the profession (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Shapiro et al., 2013). For wouldn’t treating their “captor” or sensor bodies (Frias, 2001) as an essential aspect of the journalistic tool-kit – be it as Berrens’ (2015) “medium” for perceiving, interpreting and feeling the world, or as Geurts’ (2002) “site” on which social contradictions are both inscribed and played out – not open themselves to those “sensory epiphanies” of which Frias (2001) speaks? Wouldn’t “lending” their bodies to the world (Stoller, 1997) and paying heed to those “somatic modes of attention” (Csordas, 1993) not “thicken” (Geertz, 1973) the stories they so want to make known? In a sense, just the simple act of extending a microphone towards a person whose voice has previously been absent from the public sphere is to use one’s body as a “capturing” device, as well as to turn oneself into a “transmitting” body.

4.3 The body as a site of experimentation

In an attempt to better describe the culture or physical environment they are studying, sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers use their bodies to live and feel what their subjects are experiencing. Helmreich (2007; 2012) refers to this body as the “transducer” body. Stoller (1997, p.23) suggests that ethnographers must “open themselves to others and absorb their worlds”. To do this, they must not only pick up on their own internal and external bodily signals as they conduct their research; they must also treat these “somatic” insights as key pathways to better understanding and describing the culture they are studying. Helmreich (2007, p.622) contends that researchers who remain sensitive and attentive to what their bodies are telling them are likely to produce scholarship that belies the conventional: “an inquiry motivated not by the visual rhetoric of individual self-reflection and self-correcting perspectivalism”.

That said, the act of putting their bodies on the front line – of attempting to step into their subjects’ lives and live what they are living – is motivated by more than just the desire to produce good (unconventional) scholarship. What also motivates these sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers is a desire to test out for themselves how power relations are operating in an institutional setting; how a particular political, judicial or social system is impacting people; what hierarchies are at play in a corporate environment; what it means to walk the streets of a high-density urban neighborhood. If the descriptions they produce as a result of this bodily immersion are all the richer and denser for it – prime examples of what Geertz (1973, p.6) refers to as “thick description” – what is equally characteristic of this front line approach to research is that its practitioners have a good idea of what they are looking for from the outset, as well as a clear understanding of how their particular ethnographic or geographic field can facilitate that quest. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p.1273), for example, discuss how a study looking at the impact that a specific physical environment was having on people and their relations to others within that environment was organized around, and later confirming, a preliminary “hunch” that “visceral geography advances a greater understanding of the agency of physical matter, both within and between bodies”. It is important to emphasize here that though the specific angle of the research determines how the researcher initially “deploys” her information-

gathering body in the culture or environment being studied, that angle – and with it, the way the researcher mobilizes her body as an experiencing and investigating site – is constantly being revised and adjusted as findings come in and data are analyzed.

Two additional processual levels are incorporated into these ethnographers' and geographers' standard practice: they put a lot of consideration into how they will carry out their field research; and they are constantly reviewing the categories, the meanings, the commonly-held values, and the taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie how they organize and make sense of information. Pink (2015, p.7) explains how sensory ethnographers spend a lot of time analyzing not only what they pick up in the way of "sensory perception, categories, meanings and values, ways of knowing and practices", but also how they pick it up. Reconciling the differences between a city's "official" line and what the researcher's "captor" body picks up about that city is likened by Frias (2001, p.12) to a dialogue. In this dialogue, "the material and sensory substrate" of the city, along with "the primary qualities of the social world" that catch the attention of the sentient ethnologist rub up against "the official codes or images" of the said city, creating resonances and dissonances that inform the research.

Atkinson et al. (2008, p.205) describe the "complex multimodal ethnographic analysis" that results when this degree of cognitive and corporeal commitment is involved. Not only "smell, touch, and hearing are important resources. So too is the physical presence and embodiment of the ethnographer, so that all the senses, and one's entire physical and cognitive resources, are potentially significant in the conduct of ethnography." Rosas (2018, p.2115) stresses the importance of developing "a multimodal grammar" to adequately convey the level of complexity involved. Even thirty years ago, Csordas (1993) was talking about "embodiment as a methodological field" that had to be taken seriously in its own right.

The term "transduction" – a term borrowed from the anthropologist Helmreich (2007; 2012), who in turn attributes his use of it to Sterne (2003) – is a useful one when it comes to describing the process by which those bodily signals and the information amassed through embodiment become "translated" into intelligible research "findings". Transduction, for Helmreich (2012), necessarily involves "transformations of matter and meaning": it is "a process of constituting, structuring, and modifying spatial and logical relations"

(p.170, my emphasis). That combination of capturing/translating/modifying/transforming is a transduction⁵. Helmreich (2007, p.622) claims that “the metaphor of transduction can tune one into textures of disjuncture, to the corporeal character of transferring signals, particularly in cyborgian settings”⁶. Helmreich (2012, p.170) prefers the term transduction to the more common ethnographic term, immersion, as it incorporates the analytical work that is involved in the ethnographic process. Insisting that transduction “press[es] us as ethnographers towards discernments of material and semiotic relationships often washed out of attention by the all-encompassing idiom of immersion”. Helmreich (2007, p.622) also maintains that it pushes us to question categories such as “insides and outsides, subjects and objects, sensation and sense data [...] presence and distance, at scales ranging from individual to collective”.

In short, transduction implicates the researcher at every level: from picking up on the whole gamut of corporeal signals being experienced; to confronting, questioning, and comparing the emergent embodied data; to organizing that data into intelligible findings; to questioning the very model of organization used to render them so. Both analytically and experientially, the researcher has to open herself to a wide range of approaches and possibilities. There are numerous corporeal “paths” that can be taken, and sometimes a combination of these bodily options must be pursued to get closer to experiencing and feeling what those being studied are experiencing and feeling. The following list outlines them in brief:

- Picking up on internal and external bodily signals;
- Analysis through a specific lens: power relations, political economy, class systems, etc;
- Critical reflection: questioning, for example, the givens, the taken-for-granted assumptions, underlying existing categories;
- Constant revisiting (and readjustment) of the original analytical filter and research lens;
- Critical self-reflection: ongoing questioning of one’s own ethnographic or geographic methods;
- Devising modes of transmission that effectively “translate” all of the above into an intelligible and accessible format.

Some journalists do adopt these practices and open themselves in a bodily way to the reality of others: when they

venture into a dangerous ground or tackle a sensitive issue, for example; when they see, feel, taste, touch for themselves what those in the story they are covering are experiencing; when they practice “embedded” journalism (see for example Bizimana, 2014) or ethnographic journalism. Wolfe (1973) provides a good description of the body-mobilizing journalist, eager to “absorb the world”:

Often you feel as if you've put your whole nervous system on red alert and turned it into a receiving set with your head panning the molten tables like a radar dish, with you saying, 'Come in world', since you only want... all of it (p.52).

Roeh (1989, p.166), whose interest is in storytelling in journalism, offers this description of what it involves:

A complex of cognitive, affective and instrumental factors is involved in the process. It involves at the same time learning from other people's experiences, and a kind of vicarious evocation of emotions of empathy or distances renunciation.

If we accept that a wide range of bodily investments and engagements are at work when journalists go to work, it remains that ethnographers and geographers have much to offer them in terms of how to reflect more deeply on what they do, and how to apply those insights to their actual practice. In other words, in addition to going about the routine aspects of their profession (gathering evidence, reading reports, interviewing spokespeople and public relations officers of various groups, etc.), in addition to embedding or immersing themselves in a given context, journalists can open themselves to others more and absorb the realities of those others' lives. They can invest and engage their bodies in a manner that goes well beyond the conventional journalistic understanding of what this entails. This means trying to feel what those impacted by stereotyping or unequal power relations or a corrupt judicial or political system are feeling as a way into questioning such phenomena. It means putting together news stories in such a way that the entry point for the audience is through empathy (Lasica, 2006; Ekström, 2000), or through making them feel as if they were actually “there” (Vanoost, 2013; de la Pena et al., 2010; Fludernik, 1996). It can mean blending into the background and allowing those oft-hidden social injustices to speak for themselves (Eyriès & Péliasser, 2014), or it can mean saturating a finished report with multiple levels of meaning to convey the irreconcilability of the various positions involved (Feld & Brenneis, 2004). It can simply mean bringing to the foreground those ideas usually pushed to the

margins, and relegate to the backseat the standard authoritative voice of the journalist. It can take many forms, but across the board, what this invitation to decompartmentalize traditional journalistic formats (Francoeur, 2012) lends itself to is a more nuanced approach to information gathering and a less superficial reading and rendering of the issue or situation being covered.

Such a methodological shift precipitates a whole new line of questioning: what happens to traditional journalistic “sense-making” (Delforce, 1996) in the context of sensory journalism? Where does the sensing journalist situate herself concerning society and the status quo (Bird & Dardenne, 2009)? How do we conceive of the journalist’s microphone, camera, notepad – the former “basics” of her professional “toolkit” – now that her body is the primary “device” in that toolkit? And what new representational tropes are needed to make sense of how power operates when journalists are not just embedded, but also embodied and “embrained” (Braidotti, 2019, p.11)?

Journalistic “transduction” thus consists of the totality of activities involved in the capturing and analysis of those internal and external bodily signals experienced while covering a story, and the processes involved in shaping them into a finished report. It consists of opening oneself to others, absorbing their reality, and describing it. It also consists of critically questioning existing and evolving journalistic methodologies and epistemologies. These activities do not take place in isolation or succession. Rather, they seep into each other and inform each other, creating a “multimodal grammar” (Rosas, 2018) and a “methodological corporeality” (Csordas, 1993) that revolve around:

- Gathering and cross-checking information;
- Ongoing *in situ* questioning of how to organize and categorize the information;
- Adjusting the story angle as one goes along;
- Assuring good sound and image quality;
- Remaining aware of how the journalist’s presence might be impacting people’s behaviors and responses;
- Questioning journalistic processes and practices;
- Reassessing key journalistic concepts such as “sense-making”, “in the public interest”, and “Democracy’s Watchdog”;
- Producing a finished report that reflects these multimodal elements.

4.4 The body as a means of transformation

In this section, the porosity that exists between the researched and the researcher is introduced into the mix. What interests us here is the transformation that the researcher's body undergoes as it serves as a storehouse for what is "picked up" and "transduced". This is the "depository" body: a body that cannot help but be affected, marked, changed, by what is deposited in and across it. As Stoller (1997) insists, "flesh both *inscribes* and *incorporates* cultural memory and history" (p.47, emphasis in original). When sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers go to work, they practice a form of "embodied hospitality" (p.xviii); their bodies become a kind of "indexed memory" (Frias, 2001, p.29). Their bodies do not just find themselves "situated at a particular moment not only in space and society but also in time and history" (Berrens, 2015, p.27); they also become "profoundly involved with a society's epistemology, the development of its cultural identity, and its forms of being-in-the-world" (Geurts, 2002, p.3).

Replete with these new pieces of knowledge, the "depository" body in turn becomes more alert – more finely attuned – to what is happening around it. In Csordas' (1993, p.135) words, this enhancing of "perceptual experience" and one's "mode of presence and engagement in the world" are routes to enrichment. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p.1274) suggest that this process leads to "more contextualized and interactive versions of the self and other". While Frias (2001) emphasizes the increased expressivity that comes of the gradual accumulation of these new bodily pieces of knowledge and posits that in influencing how we interact with others and the environment, this newfound form of self-expression can even end up transforming "the web of personal or collective experiences" (p.12, my translation).

The journalist's body also serves as a depository for those signals "picked up", those experiences "transduced", in the course of putting together a news story. Those voices that the journalist renders audible, bring to the public's attention: they have first passed through the journalist's body, have been filtered through that body. And without a doubt, those voices have marked that body: left their trace. In playing host to those voices, even if only fleetingly, journalists experience the "embodied hospitality" of Stoller (1997); their bodies become "anchored" in a particular moment of space and society, of time and history, as described by Berrens (2015). In

a sense, you could say that those journalists who have developed a certain bodily awareness become “tattooed” by that which has marked them, enriched them, become deposited across and within them. And with this new bodily awareness comes a “being-in-the-world” (Geurts, 2002) that is sharper, more alert; an “indexed memory” (Frias, 2001) that is revitalized, more multi-layered. What is clear is that this expressive and sensorial “depository” journalistic body, both singular and collective, opens itself to a whole new mode of interacting with others and organizing information as it goes about its task of reporting and storying that “web” of personal and collective experience (Frias, 2001).

5 A theoretical framework for the journalist’s body

Drawing on the work of sensorial ethnographers and sentient geographers, a theoretical framework that applies to the journalist’s body takes shape. Its underpinnings are the sensor body, the transducer body, and the depository body.

- The sensor body picks up on signals experienced both internally and externally and treats these signals as one would any other piece of information about the story being covered;
- The transducer body conducts numerous reflective activities relating to the corporeal signals that are picked up: this ranges from what they mean to how best to process them; from the method used to “capture” them to how one goes about writing them up;
- The depository body archives these journalistic corporeal experiences and draws upon them when it comes to future reporting.

All to say that from the initial choice of subject matter to a story’s completion, the journalist’s body can be mobilized. In its capacity as a sensor, a transducer, and a depository, the journalist’s body has the potential to become the device, the site, and the means through which the journalistic process happens. Just how much a journalist allows her body to be put to the service of the profession will of course vary, and can be dependent on the time frame available to her, the nature of the subject being covered, or even on how “available” she chooses to make her body. She can also parse out her

body as the situation demands: mobilizing just her sensor body to cover a short news story, for example; bringing in her transducer body for more in-depth reporting. The more frequently, the more intensely, she lends her body to the journalistic process, the more alert, the more sharpened, her depository body will become. An undeniable porosity exists between the sensor, transducer, and depository bodies, and each mode coexists alongside, has an influence upon, and is influenced by, the others.

6 Conclusion

This article has aimed to formulate a theoretical framework for the journalist's body. To do so, I have taken inspiration from several scholarly practices that bear a resemblance to journalism. Amongst these, sensory ethnography and sentient geography have played a pivotal role: providing me with a working definition of the body, and how it can be mobilized to gather and process information. I have posited that the body – conceived of as the totality of its reactions and responses within a culture that both produces it and regulates it – can be understood to be the culturally embedded, central pivot of human experience. I have then drawn on sensory ethnographical and sentient geographical approaches to suggest four ways that journalists might also use their bodies in the line of work. Finally, I have pointed to the practical and epistemological benefits to be had in mobilizing their bodies in these ways.

Out of this, a theoretical framework for the journalist's body has emerged: one which revolves around the “sensor” body, the “transducer” body, and the “depository” body. As working tropes, these theorizations of the body address the relative silence that has characterized its treatment in most of the journalistic literature – an omission reinforced by the tendency to oppose the body to reason. These tropes can also contribute to epistemological discussions about journalism and its ways of approaching “reality” (Hermann, 2014; Labasse, 2015; Ekstrom, 2002).

At the same time, there are limits to what this theoretical framework can do, based as it is on a literature review. Sensory ethnographers and sentient geographers acknowledge the same kinds of limitations in their work: Pink's (2015, p.5) difficulties when it comes to categorizing the senses and Atkinson's et al. (2008,

p.203) recognition that analytical systems in this area are woefully under-developed are two examples that immediately spring to mind. As Csordas (1993, p.148) explains, “the indeterminacy in our analytic categories is revealed when we encounter phenomena as essentially ambiguous as somatic modes of attention”. But as Csordas also points out, “this indeterminacy, it turns out, is an essential element of our existence” (p.148). Frias (2001) uses the term “positive definition” (my emphasis) to evoke the idea of a “social ontology where beings and things are in hybrid, transitory states that are always in motion” (p.31, my translation). Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2010, p.1283) are similarly aware of and drawn to drawn, those “categories and incarnations [that] defy themselves, daring to be understood”.

The same challenges and nuances apply to journalism. The body’s reactions, impulses, senses, emotions, energy flows, and physical states are not easy to categorize or analyze. This could make notions like the sensor, transducer, and depository bodies hard to digest: especially given journalism’s longstanding mistrust of the body, that unruly site of feelings, passions, and other “drifts” (Pantti, 2010). The driving question is this: how to reconcile a mobilizing of the body with the kind of professional distancing traditionally associated with journalism (Peters,2011; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018; Gans, 1979 [2004])?

The answer lies, in part, with journalists themselves: conducting ethnographic research into how they “use” their sensor, transducer, and depository bodies; discovering how this theoretical framework applies to working journalists on the job. Heeding Simon Cottle’s (2000, p.19) call for “a ‘second wave’ of news ethnographies”, such an investigation would test many of the propositions presented in this article, allow for a revisiting and revising of the theoretical framework outlined here, and work towards finding a viable place for the body in contemporary journalism.

NOTES

- 1 This article was originally published in *French at Revue Française des Sciences de l’information* et de la communication (DOI : 10.4000/rfsic.8959). We would like to thank the RFSIC editors for allowing us to an English version of this article at *Brazilian Journalism Research*.
- 2 When I speak of “journalistic epistemology”, I am referring to “modes of knowing within journalism”, to journalism’s “methods

- of approaching the real” (Labasse, 2015, pp. 6 and 71, my translation).
- 3 Phenomenology is seen here as a philosophical approach that pays special attention to how we conduct ourselves in our daily life, to “our ‘being in the world’” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, as cited in Berrens, 2015, p.27). Our experiences, emotions, thoughts, perceptions and bodily reactions are all of interest to phenomenologists.
 - 4 I draw, here, on the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn’s all-encompassing definition of culture: “The total way of life of a people; the social legacy the individual acquires from his group; a way of thinking, feeling, and believing; an abstraction from behaviour; a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; a storehouse of pooled learning; a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems; learned behaviour; a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour; a set of techniques for adjusting both to external environment and other men (sic); a precipitate of history” (as cited in Geertz, 1973, pp. 4-5).
 - 5 Silverstein (2003) also uses the term “transduction” to describe the processual difficulties incurred by ethnographers when translating the language of the group being studied, into the language of the finished ethnographic account. Simondon (1964) also speaks of “transduction”, though in relation to the process of individuation – a usage that doesn’t concern us here.
 - 6 Helmreich (2007) conducted a sound immersion in a submersible engine for scientific purposes. If his use of the term “transduction” emerged from this particular context, it seems to lend itself well to a wide range of other cultural contexts. it seems to lend itself well to a wide range of other cultural contexts.

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