



JOURNALISM AND TRUTH

The implications of a Foucauldian approach to knowledge and the subject on the role of the journalist in 2016 Britain



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Abstract

This project focuses on Foucault's accounts of knowledge and truth-telling, as found in his publications *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Subjectivity and Truth*, and the role of the journalist as an honest and self-reflective agent in a world where verification is not always possible or wholly useful. Written over the course of a year which saw the decision for the UK to leave the EU, and a British prime minister who called an election to increase a majority which she subsequently lost (not to mention the election of a highly divisive president in the USA), there has been little difficulty in grasping the urgency of understanding the position of the media in society. In each of these cases, the media can be seen to have played a central role in informing, and often persuading, the public in preparation for national votes.

It is argued throughout this project that, since the media carries a great responsibility for informing the public, and so plays a significant part in defining many streams of discourse (and subsequently what is held as truth), it is fundamentally crucial that journalists are people who set out to give full and accurate information to the best of their abilities. They should also provide informed, justified, and transparent arguments for their opinions in order not to mislead the audience. As such, the proposed approach to promoting truth-telling is discussed as concerning an epistemic awareness on the part of the individual (how much can we know and reasonably verify), and a personal sense of responsibility and desire for integrity in journalists. This need is recognized as reminiscent of the sense of parrhesia (an Ancient Greek term for courageous truth-telling) as discussed by Foucault in that it prizes personal integrity ahead of presentation, supporting an attitude which aims towards *being* trustworthy, rather than merely *presenting oneself* as trustworthy.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed:

Date:

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Introduction

Truth-telling – that is, speaking with a close concern and commitment to the aim of truth in what one is saying – seems entirely central to the notion of the provision information in a democratic society. This is not to say that everyone must tell the truth all the time, but that those in society who are entrusted with the task of informing the public are implicitly being relied upon to set out to tell the truth whenever they are communicating with the public. While this principle could be carried over to all areas of communication, public relations, sales, and marketing may legitimately fit as regular offenders against such an approach to truth; and the setting in which such relentless persuasion persists strikes me as so far in the direction of ‘post-truth’ that there is too little credibility to be of serious political concern. In other words, while a preference for competitive, tactical communication may be tolerable in some areas of society to a degree, it is essential for democracy that there remains at least one trusted category of information provision. This project takes the journalist, as a primary individual agent of the media sector, as the category of individual who must, as a duty, be fundamentally and professionally dedicated to presenting and discussing information and ideas as honestly, as thoroughly, and as clearly, as is possible.

This project has a direct connection with the work of Michel Foucault, most notably *Discourse and Truth*; but also considers a number of his other major works such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Hermeneutics of the Subject*. As I will explain in chapter 1, Foucault’s work supports a study concerning the position of the journalist in that it expresses the function of power relations and the potential for self-reflection as forces which produce and respond to discourse, which in turn allows for a strong understanding of the social and political position of individuals. More specifically, it allows for an account of the journalist as an individual with a simultaneous position of dominance (over readers

who trust them), and dependence (to the information sources on which they rely, and to the organisations responsible for publishing their work).

While Foucault may be best known for his work on domination from *Discipline and Punish*, I will present the power-relations involved in journalism in a form more reminiscent of the more passive sense he later put forward, described by Deleuze as ‘a relation between forces.’¹ By passive, I mean that these power relations are determined by how people interact, altering positions of dominance, but not necessarily in such a way that any or all of the people involved are aware of it. Indeed, just because someone believes they hold power over someone else, it is not always the case that they are correct. My interest is in the possibilities of action and attitude, and sense of choice in how people react to their perceived social position in society.

Also in the manner of the later work of Foucault, ‘my intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of truth-teller or truth-telling as an activity.’² As such, I will not focus on the hopelessness or importance of propositional truth (the factuality of the content of what is said), but I will discuss the inter-reliance of propositional and enunciative truth in so much as each relies on the other for its epistemic basis. This focus on enunciative truth will work towards an illumination of the conflicting elements of intentionality and cultural normalisation, paying attention to the sense in which a journalist (and indeed any individual) must balance various priorities (moral integrity, professionalism, retaining employment, for example) in order to get by and deliver a vital service in society. In this way, the central concern will be the contrast between a culture in which a rhetorical approach (worrying about presentation rather than honesty

1 Deleuze, Gilles, *Foucault*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), p.59.

2 Foucault, Michel, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, (Berkeley, 1985), p.74.

or truth) may be expected and perpetuated; over-riding concern for truth telling, without being challenged in a serious way.

I will set this project out in order to give a clear exploration of the position of the journalist as an individual in a society that does not always place truth first, and to indicate the form and extent of responsibility such a role demands if we are to support the idea of democracy. I accept that some may challenge democracy as an ideal, and do not plan to get involved in such a discussion beyond the implications that my position suggests. My position is that, for democracy to work in the sense of the people who are voting having their intended form of power (they understand what they are voting for and why), there must at least be a category of journalist that is fully devoted to honest and transparent expression. Without a strong concern for transparency, it seems possible for information services to be manipulated such that the public is either trained and coerced in particular frames of thought, or where the public simply refuse to trust any official media. This notion of 'transparency' will be discussed in terms of critical self-reflection, and honest expression.

The first chapter will outline and discuss relevant pre-existing literature on Foucault and media discourse, and set up the context for the discussion. The second chapter will focus on the theory behind my argument, emphasising the challenges faced by the individual in questioning and acting upon doubts about dubious virtues supported in society. These questionable virtues might include competitiveness at the expense of morality or a good other than one's own benefit, or the need to maintain vested interests. Fundamentally, the issue is with normality going unquestioned to the point that the individual accepts a fate they could otherwise alter, such as with a person who does precisely what they feel they are expected to do because they feel they ought not to take a risk or be seen as a

social outcast. The third and final chapter will highlight some key issues regarding the importance of morality and integrity in journalism, pointing to the tabloid approach to journalism as an opposition to honesty and transparency. This will include a close inspection of the approach of an article each from the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, demonstrating polemic language which refuses to question itself, and focusses on emotionally delegitimising the other side of the debate, and using ideologically loaded statements about concepts such as patriotism (and lack thereof). My aim with this final chapter is to fully clarify the kind of approach to journalism that contradicts the purpose that a democratic ideology effectively prescribes as necessary. The aim of this chapter is not be exhaustive, since that would require the space of a separate dissertation in itself, but illustrative, so as to take a few examples from contemporary journalism to show how a lack of commitment to truth telling might actually undermine democracy. Overall, this dissertation aims to provide an account of the position of the journalist in discourse, and the importance of aiming for truthful expression; at least in situations where the information or views presented are likely to affect the social and political decisions of the public.

Chapter 1

This chapter will set the scene and present the context in which my discussion will operate, both in terms of previous investigations in the field of study, and concerning the journalistic environment to be scrutinised. To begin with, I will explain, with the aid of essays by Flyvbjerg and Veyne, my decision to adopt Foucault's theory of power relations as a foundational basis for my project.³ Flyvbjerg outlines the significance of an underestimation of the importance of power relations in the downfall of Habermas's position, which might otherwise have been chosen as the starting point for this project. With reference to Veyne, I will focus on why power relations is an indispensable concept in any political or historical study, the simple reason being that it allows for various issues surrounding domination, expectations, and cultural practice to be discussed, without the need to pass judgement on whether a particular instance of dominance is held with benevolence or malevolence. Following this, I will introduce, with the assistance of essays by Arendt and Sharpe, the second, and equally important Foucauldian (or at least, as discussed by Foucault) concept of my project - *parrhesia*.⁴ This concept, which refers to courageous truth-telling, is useful for a study of the role of journalism because it introduces questions of motivation, intention, and expertise on the part of the author or speaker.

In the following part, I will look at the way scholars, such as MacDonald, Jordan, and Thorpe have related Foucauldian theory to media discourse; focussing on the uses and

3 Flyvbjerg, Bent, 'Ideal Theory, Real Rationality: Habermas Versus Foucault and Nietzsche' (*The Challenges for Democracy in the 21st Century*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 10-13 April 2000). Veyne, Paul. 'Foucault revolutionizes history' (1997).

4 Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and politics." (*Truth. Engagements across Philosophical Traditions*, 2010), 295-314. Sharpe, Matthew, 'A Question of Two Truths? Remarks on Parrhesia and the 'Political-Philosophical' Difference', (parrhesiajournal.org, 2007).

weaknesses of discourse studies, the position of those in media to critique media discourse, and the techniques of challenging and developing the self that allow an individual to position themselves in relation to media and more general discourse in their field of interest.⁵ After this, I will close in on journalism and the role of the journalist, with particular focus on Conboy, regarding the history and significance of journalism as part of the power changes surrounding the development of the printing press and news services. I will then consider McMullen's work on the media representation of the Westray disaster, and Carpentier on the ideological and practical role of journalists.⁶ This will prepare a basis for the more practical discussion of institutional problems in journalism (looking at Petley's critique of journalism ethics training), and examples of problematic approaches to journalism discourse, which will form the final chapter of this project.

To round off the chapter, I will outline the precise aims and methodology of my project, underlining the significance of epistemological issues and personal interests and motivations as the subject of my study. This should lead into the rest of my discussion in the following chapters; the second chapter focussing on the theory of knowledge-power and *parrhesia* in relation to journalism in a purely theoretical sense, and the third chapter

5 Macdonald, Myra, *Exploring Media Discourse*, (Oxford University Press, 2003). Jordan, Matthew, 'Thinking with Foucault about Truth-Telling and The Daily Show', (*The Electronic Journal of Communication*, Vol.18, 2008). Thorpe, Holly, 'Foucault, Technologies of Self, and Media: Discourses of Femininity in Snowboarding Culture', (*Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol.32, May 2008).

6 Conboy, Martin, *Journalism: A Critical History* (Sage, 2004). McMullen, John L., 'News, Truth, and the Recognition of Corporate Crime', (*The Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, vol.48.6, October, 2006), p.905-939. Carpentier, Nico. 'Journalism, media and democracy.' (*Reclaiming the Media: Communication Rights and Democratic Media Roles, European communication research and education association*, series 3, 2007), p.151-156.

working as an illumination of the theory with examples of journalism that demonstrate the potential impact of the issues under discussion.

On Power and Truth

To begin with, it would seem useful to explain why I chose to focus on Foucault and his investigations of knowledge-power and parrhesia. The short answer is that, in these studies, he addresses the sense in which power relations make each individual the subject and influencer of others. This refers to a combination of his earlier work on domination (in *Discipline and Punish*) – in which he describes a sense of discipline, developing within the classical age, which ‘produces subjected and practised bodies, “docile” bodies’ – and his later work on parrhesia, which is most prominently featured in his *Discourse and Truth*.⁷ Parrhesia refers to the ancient Greek notion of the act of courageous truth telling; ‘a form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor.’⁸ While these two concepts may appear to be contradictory, all that needs to be done to reconcile the two together is for it to be accepted that systems which utilise techniques of domination are not necessarily infallible, and are quite possibly not operated by people who understand the power relations involved. As such, it is perfectly possible for institutions and people of ‘authority’ to establish certain levels of influence over the public, while a potential remains for individuals to protest or simply ignore expectations. The primary issue here is that the power relations involved, both in discipline and truth-telling, are fundamental to understanding the position of journalists in society, and this is because their role is, very specifically, to communicate information and interesting ideas

7 Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish*, (Vintage Books, 1977), p.138.

8 Foucault, Michel, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, (Berkeley, 1985,), p.5.

to the public that could easily be selective or misleading in their sourcing. These messages can, therefore, be compromised by personal interests and deficiencies of agency where a journalist has trusted a source that was undeserving of that trust.

From reading Flyvbjerg's comparison of Foucault and Habermas, it can be seen that the factors I have just outlined are especially important when selecting one or the other as a focus of study, given that Habermas focusses on 'communicative rationality', which could be seen as equally relevant to the study of journalism.⁹ He proposes a 'universalisation principle', stating that:

a contested norm cannot meet with the consent of the participants in a practical discourse unless ... all affected can freely [zwanglos] accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual.¹⁰

It can be seen that Habermas is trying to create a normative approach to truth and defining rationality, which might sound appealing if we believe in the feasibility of the conditions given. Among other requirements, he even holds that for truth and validity to be supposed, 'existing power differences between participants must be neutralized such that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus'.¹¹ Is the facilitation of such a requirement even conceivable? Flyvbjerg asks the question as to 'whether one can meaningfully distinguish rationality and power from each other in communication, as does Habermas'.¹² It should be clear from my choice of studying the work of Foucault, rather than Habermas, that I am placing a considerable amount of weight on the supposition that

9 Flyvbjerg, Bent, 'Ideal Theory, Real Rationality: Habermas Versus Foucault and Nietzsche' (*The Challenges for Democracy in the 21st Century, London School of Economics and Political Science, 10-13 April 2000*), p.2.

10 Ibid. p.3 (quote from Habermas)

11 Ibid. p.3

12 Ibid. p.3

the answer to this question is 'no' – Habermas, in my view, is designing a view of truth that imagines a world in which power relations can be pushed to one side, and it seems to me that this simply cannot be done.

The games of power, as discussed earlier, can be seen to apply to all human interaction on various levels; power relations between parents and children, teachers and students, and of course, journalists and readers, cannot be entirely removed from any given situation. There is always an aspect of trust and responsibility between individuals, regardless of how hard they try to ignore or suppress it. As such, on a macro level, it is inevitable that these power relations will be relevant to the study of history; not only in terms of *how* it can be studied (how can we trust or properly understand documents with unknown authors?), but also in how events in history come to occur as they do. This is the basis of the concept of genealogy, a theory previously credited to Nietzsche, which aims to view history as a constant flow of actions without the expectation of a clear origin.¹³ Foucault describes this approach to the study of history in terms of domination: 'The domination of certain men over others leads to the differentiation of values.'¹⁴ Perhaps a fitting summary, in semi-metaphorical form, would be to say that it is power itself that guides history.

Paul Veyne illuminates this aspect of Foucault's theory with the example of the abolition of gladiator tournaments in Roman society. He argues that it was not Christianity, as such, that ended this activity, and that it was not terminated due to reasons of humanity, but that it was to do with changes in the nature of political power. An initial explanation as to

13 Foucault, *Michel, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, (Presses Universitaires de France, 1971).

14 *Ibid.* p.85

why Christianity can be disregarded as the primary force against gladiator tournaments is that it is the spectacle, and not the violence that most offended its principles, meaning that theatre was considered more problematic to the Christian way of life: 'While the pleasure of seeing blood flow brings intrinsic satisfaction, the pleasure of onstage indecency incites spectators to lascivious conduct in their daily lives.'¹⁵ It would therefore make little sense for Christians to be considered responsible for the termination of gladiator fighting while theatre remained on the scene. Equally, humanitarianism is ruled off the list of major causes because it is a temperament 'found only in a small minority of highly sensitive people'.¹⁶ Instead, Veyne argues that it is a Foucauldian conception of power relations and genealogy that allows for an understanding of why gladiator fighting was phased out.

To explain the principle, Veyne gives examples of different political systems, 'some of which objectify a population, others a fauna, still others a tribe, and so on.'¹⁷ The point here is that the objectification will have some effect on how particular problems and situations are understood and judged. In the case of the Romans, Veyne uses an analogy of a flock of sheep, which must be guided through un-owned territories in the interests of the flock as a whole: 'We shall beat them with sticks; if we have to, with our own hands.'¹⁸ This reflects the society in which gladiator tournaments are seen as acceptable; the gladiators themselves viewed like prostitutes, but engaging in a sport which simultaneously horrifies and excites the audience. While the audience would not want to

15 Veyne, Paul. 'Foucault revolutionizes history', (In: Davidson, Arnold I., *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, University of Chicago Press), pp146-82.

p.147.

16 Ibid. p.148

17 Ibid. p.151

18 Ibid. p.151

associate with gladiators as people, the fascination and competitive spirit drawn from such a spectacle, within a flock mentality, could be seen as a worthy cause for even the most brutal sacrifice of human life. As Veyne puts it, 'We are no more concerned about denying gladiators' blood to the Roman people than a herder of sheep or cattle would be concerned about watching over his animals' mating behaviour in order to prevent incestuous unions.'¹⁹ The crucial change that would lead to the ending of gladiator tournaments (and to governors becoming Christians) was the transformation from a herd-based leadership, with interest in the direction of the people as a whole, to a paternalistic leadership which is more concerned with individual sensitivities. What really occurs is a change in broad political attitude, leading to a new environment in which the governors do what seems right within the context with which they have been provided. Arguably, it is likely that it was this development that led to the progression of Christianity in society.

This principle of the changing of political environments is extremely important in understanding the role of journalists in society, as it encourages us to give greater consideration to the influences of society on the constitution of journalists. Without this consideration, one might be tempted to put too much responsibility on those who dare to express themselves, leading to an analysis devoid of any useful sense of context. Having said this, it must also not be supposed that the journalist is completely deprived of agency. On the contrary, journalism is a suitable subject for the exploration of knowledge-power and truth-telling precisely because it is part of a prominent media for the distribution of information and the creative discussion of ideas. The questions I wish to ask of journalism relate to the fallibility and intentionality of the individual author, both in terms of interpreting information, and in presenting and commenting on it. As such, an account of power relations may be useful, but it would be incomplete without reference to agency.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.152

For Foucault, agency is to be discussed in terms of ‘technologies of the self’, and in the case of journalism, the corresponding aspect of this area of study is his work on *parrhesia*; that is to say, courageous truth-telling.²⁰

It was in reading Matthew Sharpe’s essay entitled ‘A Question of Two Truths? Remarks on Parrhesia and the ‘Political-Philosophical’ Difference’ that I first considered Foucault’s outlook on parrhesia. In this essay, Sharpe considers the distinction between how the idea of truth is interpreted in politics in contrast with a philosophical approach; referring to parrhesia as ‘true speech that ... presupposes an asymmetry of political power, whereby the parrhesiastes is subordinate to his addressee[s], and so always potentially runs a risk by expressing his true beliefs.’²¹ The assumed position of the philosopher can be viewed as in line with the truth value required by the parrhesiastes, if not necessarily in terms of bravery. Sharpe describes this approach of the philosopher as ‘impartial striving (or philia) for the truth in studied disregard for the opinions of his contemporaries: a disregard which already singles his pursuit out, in the classical world, from both the rhetoricians and the poets’.²² In other words, philosophers are concerned with something akin to an unravelling of truth, or at least a dedicated practice of honesty for the sake of gaining greater understanding and wisdom. Conversely, the role of a politician may reasonably include the protection of society through the crafting of words to suit a particular aim; this being the principle of rhetoric. Sharpe compares this approach to truth to the famous quote by Jack Nicholson’s character Colonel Jessop in the film *A Few Good Men*: ‘You want the truth? You can’t handle the truth!’²³ Quite simply, in some practices (for instance, espionage or

20 Foucault, Michel, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and the Truth*, (New Press, 1997), p.225.

21 Sharpe, Matthew, 'A Question of Two Truths? Remarks on Parrhesia and the 'Political-Philosophical' Difference', (*parrhesiajournal.org* 2007,), p.90

22 Ibid. p.89

23 Ibid. p.94

public relations) it can be seen as important that secrets are kept. The point that I take away from this distinction is that, if we know that a person could believe they are rightfully entitled to adjust their own representations of reality for what they consider to be honourable ends, we always have a reason to be sceptical of the transparency of others. This is especially problematic in the case of the media, which could have any number of reasons to modify its representation of reality, and will be in a position to do so on a regular basis, and on a huge scale.

In turn, Sharpe's essay refers to Hannah Arendt's essay entitled 'Truth and Politics'. Her approach to power and truth is not dissimilar to that of Foucault, in that she holds that 'The chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim indeed', arguing that truth and power are very closely related.²⁴ However, she seems to stand contrary to Foucault in terms of the political purpose of philosophical truth, posing that 'Since philosophical truth concerns man in his singularity, it is unpolitical by nature.'²⁵ By contrast, parrhesia (which is essentially the courageous expression of philosophical truth) is, in Foucault's terms, personal in the sense of 'knowing oneself', but social in the sense of having a transparent relationship with a mentor or person of authority, and political from an advisory perspective. In other words, 'The man who exercises power is wise only insofar as there exists someone who can use parrhesia to criticize him, thereby putting some limit to his power, to his command.'²⁶ In this sense, philosophical truth can be seen as not only compatible with politics, but crucial to its progression. Perhaps Arendt is overlooking the fact that, while truth is eroded by the front line of political discourse, there is still a need for openness and honesty elsewhere – not least to combat a tendency for

24 Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and politics." (*Truth. Engagements across Philosophical Traditions*, 2010), 295-314, p.3.

25 Ibid. p.11

26 Foucault, 1997, p.10.

tactical speech. Generally, it seems unlikely that people will deliberately fabricate information unless they consider it to be in someone's interest to do so. With this in mind, I will be discussing the significance of the journalist's alignment with parrhesia and rhetoric in chapter two.

As a final point, which can be related to Arendt's work on political truth, there is some benefit in drawing on Plato's distinction between dialogue and rhetoric when talking about the function of enunciative truth. Arendt summarizes Plato's account of dialogue as 'the adequate speech for philosophical truth', and rhetoric as an approach 'by which the demagogue, as we would say today, persuades the multitude.'²⁷ Parrhesia, then, can be identified as the subjective process by which a person engages in dialogue, while rhetoric is precisely what is to be tackled, as far as possible. However, Plato's account of dialogue is only relatable to Foucault's account of truth-telling as an aim or disposition, and not in its consideration of truth as a concept. Plato asks 'isn't dreaming simply the confusion between a resemblance and the reality which it resembles, whether the dreamer be asleep or awake?', holding that there is (or at least should be) a clear metaphysical distinction between reality (the thing in itself) and perception.²⁸ In contrast Foucault states that the object 'does not preexist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations.'²⁹ Here, he is presenting truth as subjective, and dependent on society, perception, and the forces within it (power). As with Foucault, this project supposes that truth is something that is

²⁷ Arendt, Hannah, 2010, p.928.

²⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, (The Penguin Group, 2007), p.198

²⁹ Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: and the Discourse on Language*, (trans. A.M. Sheridan, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972), p.45

formed through discourse, and not a thing in itself, there to be discovered as Plato supposes.

On Media Discourse

The purpose of my study of media discourse is not so much to learn what journalists are saying, but to consider the gap between what they say and the reasons for saying it. As with any textual analysis, one can only base an interpretation on the part of the author's thought process that they choose to express, and so matters of trust and competence are always of concern with any news article. MacDonald defines discourse as 'a system of communicative practices that are internally related to wider social and cultural practices, and that help to construct specific frameworks of thinking', and uses it as the object of her studies it because it 'allows flexibility in exploring the ongoing contest between differing ways of configuring "reality"'.³⁰ Consistent with the aims of my project, a study of discourse allows for an account of journalism that shows how it both reflects and influences public discussion and values; 'sometimes setting an agenda, but frequently reacting to perceived public desires or concerns'.³¹ As such, when analysing articles from newspapers in chapter three, I will be conducting an analysis of the part that the journalists in question play in discourse, which is to say, how they influence and are influenced by other commentators and general public discussion. I will also underline the epistemological questions which arise in the gap between the will and competency of the author, such as: Does the author actually trust their own expertise? Can the audience distinguish between an expert and a charlatan? What is the basis of such a distinction?

30 Macdonald, Myra, *Exploring Media Discourse*, (Oxford University Press, 2003), p.1.

31 Ibid. p.2

And so forth. It is the seeming impossibility of reliably answering these questions of truth, trust, and expertise that stand at the centre of this project.

Foucault treats discourses 'as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak', which is to say that standard concepts are formed by the nature of their occurrence in communication. For example, terms such as 'love' and 'hate' can be seen to have formed as a result of the feelings people have experienced and compared throughout history. While these terms may be imperfect (how can I truly know that my experience of what I perceive as love and hate corresponds coherently to someone else's perceptions of them?), they enable people to communicate, to an often acceptable extent, potentially complex issues in a very simple way. In light of this over-simplicity and imperfection in language, it is hardly surprising how terms gain troubling connotations and sometimes become blurred to the point where they no longer mean what they once did, sometimes losing any useful sense of meaning along the way. I have read and witnessed the term 'political correctness' being stretched to mean any number of things, from the quashing of free speech to rants about everything an individual doesn't like.³² While it can be argued that such a term does in fact have a standard meaning and is simply misused, in terms of discourse it is more significant that people use a term to mean a particular thing than to debate what a word has officially been thought to mean.

As with my project, in the case of John Stewart and *The Daily Show*, the matter of *how* the media portrays things is of as much interest as what is actually being portrayed. Jordan gives an interesting insight into the relation between Foucault's sense of irony (and that of Socrates and the Cynics, whom Foucault discusses in *Discourse and Truth*), and that of

³² <http://www.politicallyincorrect.me.uk/definition.htm> - This website appears to take anything the author does not like and labels it political correctness.

John Stewart, focussing on the latter's criticism of the way in which the US media presents news stories; framing in on the language used, and the attitude it displays regarding respect of the general public.³³ The argument Jordan puts forward is that 'Foucault's writing on parrhesia provides an ethical model for telling the truth that is more forgiving of the trope of irony than other theories of communication', seeing as the irony used by Stewart is aimed at eroding media devices which may be seen to insult the intelligence of the reader.³⁴ In other words, the kind of irony involved is designed to encourage people to be critical of the media and to be aware of the power issues inherent in interacting with it, aiming 'to teach certain truths about the nature of media, especially its predictable way of exhaustively covering sensational stories while avoiding controversial topics.'³⁵

Jordan shows that this intention to expose the deceit imbedded in mass media culture is not unlike the stance held by Cynic philosophers in ancient Greece, ridiculing a standard that is held as the norm in order to draw attention to the error in popular judgment which draws people away from the seeking of truth. The clearest example of this form of cynicism is displayed by Diogenes in his conversation with Alexander, in which he challenges the value of Alexander's wealth and political power which would usually be the source of great admiration; presenting a contrast in values between 'political power and the power of truth'.³⁶ The idea is that Diogenes, as with cynics in general, considers that 'a person is

33 Foucault, Michel, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, (Berkeley, 1985,).

34 Jordan, Matthew, 'Thinking with Foucault about Truth-Telling and The Daily Show', (*The Electronic Journal of Communication*, Vol.18, 2008).

35 Ibid.

36 Foucault, 1985, p.49

nothing else but his relation to truth', and that Alexander is really no more successful in life than Diogenes is.³⁷

In the face of rhetoric, through which form of communication the speaker shows little regard to their relation with the truth, 'The Daily Show constantly decodes such claims by citing constitutional law and telling the viewer how such rhetoric functions as media spin.'³⁸ This contrast between dialogue and rhetoric forces us to question the motives and integrity of the speaker, which in a culture fixated on competition and appearances may lead us to assume rhetoric. Correspondingly, in a culture which overwhelmingly prizes reason and honesty, one may be more likely to expect dialogue (although this can never be guaranteed either way). The assertion made by The Daily Show, that 'media figures cynically pose rhetorical questions', is one that pushes beyond the boundaries of my own project, given that my aim is to present the problems inherent in the *possibility* of rhetorical approaches in communication, and passive distortion that may or may not come as a result of willing misinformation. However, the similarity that does occur between our projects is the attention to a distinction in the cynicism of the ironic philosophers and the problems inherent in a form of cynicism within the media.

Jordan holds that the role of The Daily show is 'to expose the egotistical self-interest behind ideological phrases used by the ruling elite'.³⁹ The kind of cynicism which may occur

37 Ibid. p.56

38 Jordan, 2008

39 Ibid.

in the media relates to a principle of getting a job done in a way that pays little respect to truth or honesty:

The abuse of empty signifiers like 'freedom,' 'executive privilege,' and 'patriotism;' the Bush administration's 'cynical reason' takes the meaninglessness of these words into account but uses them anyway because they seem to be so effective since the rest of the media often acts as if these words meant what they were used to say.⁴⁰

The important thing to notice here is that those within the media are capable of disapproving of their own behaviour, while continuing on the basis that exaggerated stories will keep the viewers watching. This can be identified in the attitudes presented by the editor of *The Mirror* Piers Morgan, who said that 'the readers are never wrong - repulsive, maybe, but never wrong', and the editor of *The Daily Mail* Paul Dacre, who wrote on a leaked memo that he suspected that one of his journalists 'is a dinosaur but then I am pretty sure that a great number of our readers are too.'⁴¹ This could be seen as a problematic side of how the media try to draw in the interest of the public; deliberately setting out to give them what they want, rather than what is accurate or honest.

In searching for prior applications of Foucault's technologies of self, which works in close relation to parrhesia and certainly bears significance in the role of journalists, Thorpe's investigation into the relation of the media and the discourse surrounding female snowboarders provides an example of how normalisation and subjectivisation can function in culture. She comments on the problems inherent in focussing solely on Foucault's theory of domination, stating that for him, 'reflection was the essence of social change', which is to say that, as individuals develop an understanding of their current

40 Ibid.

41 Davies, Nick, *Flat Earth News*, (Chatto & Windus, 2008), p.370

position, they act as part of a process that will change it.⁴² With this as a basis for how identity and self-consciousness relate, Thorpe considers the power relations acting between female snowboarders, spectators (including the general public), and journalists as agents who contribute in forming a discourse of identity.

Thorpe's overview of the mainstream discourse surrounding female snowboarding provides a strong example of subjectivisation, which is a vital part of Foucault's theory denoting the way in which dominant discourse influences, and can seem to prescribe, the identity of individuals.⁴³ She draws on an observation that while women have become more prominent in the culture of snowboarding, they tend to be presented in a way which 'commonly promotes snowboarding as a fashion rather than as a fulfilling physical activity'.⁴⁴ She shows that, in a struggle against this, some women have created 'all-female snowboarding videos', which can be seen to 'provide women with the opportunity to define their own criteria for inclusion'.⁴⁵ The idea behind this is that subjectivised individuals are playing an active part in taking control of their own identity and reacting against their seemingly default position of subjection. What happens in the short term is that multiple discourses run parallel and in contrast with one another, but it is possible that one trajectory will dominate over the other and push it into the realm of the unthinkable – This could be said to have happened to a strong extent with integration over segregation in the US, or evolution over creationism in most scientific circles. Sadly, there will not be room in this project to consider, in any depth, the relations of "the unthinkable"

42 Thorpe, Holly, 'Foucault, Technologies of Self, and Media: Discourses of Femininity in Snowboarding Culture', (*Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol.32.2, May 2008), p.199-299, p.200.

43 I will give a much more detailed explanation of subjectivisation in chapter two.

44 Ibid. p.203

45 Ibid. p.220

and its relation to free speech and social power relations, but it is an area of study that relates quite closely to the ideas under discussion here.

My project will pay attention to the relation between what people say and what they could be taken to mean by it. This approach should prevent any temptation to make sweeping assumptions about what a person means to communicate by keeping it in mind that any reader or writer (myself included) can misjudge intention, make enunciative errors, or leave unintended room for interpretation. Alongside this concern, I shall consider the extent to which a journalist can critique his own profession, and to what extent a reader can be aware of the journalist's attitude to truth telling, and to what extent this is problematic. On top of this, I will discuss the power of the individual in shaping one's own identity, and responding to subjectivisation; noting that the journalist is at least as much the subject of power as the bearer of it.

On Journalism

Now that I have outlined some key contributions to media discourse analysis, and the theoretical structure of knowledge-power and parrhesia (of which there will be a detailed analysis in chapter two), as well as the methodological elements of the wider area of media discourse, I will proceed to focus specifically on journalism; both as a function in society, and as a role of professionals. On this subject, I have read a mixture of directly academic material by authors such as Conboy, McMullen, Carpentier, and Petley (among others) and critical literature by Davies, Jones, and a number of other professional journalists and commentators.⁴⁶ Naturally, the power relations involved in the case of the professional journalists writing about their own profession are rather different to those of

⁴⁶ All of which will be referenced later.

academic writers. As well as being more restricted in terms of the style and format of writing, an academic takes the risk of being attacked by the press for saying something compromising about journalists (via negative publicity), while the journalist mainly runs a risk of being shunned from work by all major media outlets as well as facing potential attacks from various institutions. This will be particularly noteworthy when I turn to discussing the parrhesiastic role of journalists later on. With a view to bypassing these issues, my intention is to refer to the problems that the journalists highlight strictly in terms of the potential for them to occur within the context of knowledge-power relations. In other words, when specific news outlets are described as having acted in ways which distort information, these references will be used as examples of the kinds of problems of which the reader would generally not be aware, but which would affect their outlook in some way; whether they would come to be aware of the issue or not.

In Conboy's book, *Journalism: A Critical History*, he sets out to demonstrate the part that journalism plays in society, stating that 'in the process of providing an intermediary between a consuming public and social and political change, journalism has been as much involved in resistance to change as a conduit for it.'⁴⁷ This is to say that, while journalists may be seen as standing in position to criticise the system, it is not always in their interest, nature, or power to do so. The approach adopted by Conboy's history of journalism is not unlike that of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault sets out to outline the way technologies of domination changed over time, with reference to penal practices from the spectacle of public torture to the one-size-fits-all prison system which prizes disciplinary procedures by the hour over bloody violence. For example, a notable progression illustrated in Foucault's work was how 'From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights.'⁴⁸ Likewise, Conboy

47 Conboy, 2004, p.1

48 Foucault, 1977, p.11

works through the history of the printing press, moving on to the development of the practice which we now call journalism. The point really is to address the way that the development and gradual diminishing of exclusivity surrounding printing capabilities would lead to legislation and practices of governance, presenting a society in which 'Power was being transformed into an ability to control communication.'⁴⁹ This "control of communication" runs in parallel to Foucault's conception of domination, while the parrhesiastic aspect of his theory would describe the position of the journalist (or the readers) to resist the flow of discourse.

An interest in notions reminiscent of parrhesia can be seen as implicit in the quote Conboy provides from Herd: 'There has never been a period in our history when authority has genuinely liked the idea of full publicity for all its activities and unchecked criticism of its conduct.'⁵⁰ This suggests that the authorities have always been somewhat worried that someone would be brave enough to challenge them, especially as information was becoming less exclusive and more fundamental to culture such that 'you were what you knew'.⁵¹ After all, if the working classes were reading about what was going on in the higher ranks, perhaps they would be less inclined to keep quiet and continue their roles as normal.

Conboy also underlines the consistent requirement for newspapers to be profitable, and therefore predisposed towards a potentially unfortunate inclination to compromise on accuracy or quality in order to reduce costs or increase profits. As such, while the periodical newspaper has played a crucial part in the forming and perpetuation of public

49 Ibid. p.5

50 Ibid. p.16

51 Ibid. p.18

opinion and truth, 'if journalism can be defined as such a form of public philosophy based in the contemporary, then it has always been a philosophy conducted with one eye on the balance sheet.'⁵² In the case of *The Sunday Times*, Davies describes how the paper started out with a highly committed team of investigative journalists, but was faced with 'Not enough staff, not enough experience, not enough time' after Rupert Murdoch became the owner.⁵³ It was reported that when Andrew Neil, an editor Murdoch had appointed, left, Murdoch said in a speech that Neil's greatest achievement was 'that he was producing a paper that was three times as big as Harry Evans [the editor before Murdoch's ownership] but with the same number of staff.'⁵⁴ This reflects a manner in which the profitability of papers can lead to less thorough and dedicated journalism. Just like every part of this project, this economic incentive or restriction ties in very closely with the concept of power relations. Just like the cliché that knowledge is power, this is a demonstration of the other cliché that 'money is power', although not quite in the same way as usual. This is important because it illustrates how it is the conflict between domination and resistance that produces reality. For instance, if one needs a job to live, or if one cares more about one's career than the truth, or than a sense of good that is detached from personal financial achievement, these interests may well outweigh the ideals that one might theoretically set for a particular role; thus increasing the possibility of distortion and conflicts of interest.

In his essay entitled 'News, Truth, and the Recognition of Corporate Crime', McMullen sets out an account of the media coverage of a disaster at Westray mines, in which 'an explosion ripped through a coal mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia, killing 26 miners, 11 of

52 Ibid. p.19

53 Davies, 2009, p.302

54 Ibid. p.301

whom remain buried there to this day.⁵⁵ It is clear that he considers this disaster to have been preventable, and that the media played a significant part in defending the interests of the business owners. This can be seen in his outline of how 'the media governed themselves and others by the production of truth,⁵⁶ and in how he describes a mode of domination that assumes a certain level of conspiracy on the part of "the establishment". However, this formation of truth did not suffice to convince the families of the dead: 'Fully 85% of 52 relatives recently interviewed felt that blame had not been adequately attributed for the loss of life, and 58% felt that justice still had not been done.'⁵⁷ As such, it could be suggested that the media was mainly successful in presenting information to the point where it could not be said that it had ignored the case, but such that it drew insufficient interest in criminality for the pressure of the public to become a serious issue. For while the families would have seen the news, they presumably cared enough to look deeper, and did not simply take the publicised information at face value, holding their ground on an issue that they considered to have been falsely presented. Yet, a position of resistance will not necessarily succeed, even if it is highly devoted to a cause.

McMullen's essay includes various details of the subtle techniques used by the media to present a story in a way which corresponds to the power relations and interests involved. He states that 'Reporters typically over-represent the harm and criminality of those most vulnerable to authoritative labelling [...] and under-represent the harms caused by the powerful'.⁵⁸ While for the purposes of my project there is no need to discuss proof of such

55 McMullen, John L., 'News, Truth, and the Recognition of Corporate Crime', (*The Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, vol.48.6, October, 2006), p.905-939, p.906.

56 Ibid. p.911

57 Ibid. p.906

58 McMullen, 2006, p.908

an occurrence, it is worth discussing the interests and power relations involved in such a situation.

In a case such as the Westray disaster, it is worth bearing in mind that there could have been legal teams threatening the media (or fear that this would happen), conflicts of interest in the editorial departments of the newspapers, journalists who were afraid or did not want to take risks, or editors who did not have confidence in the available information to make assertions. If these things did occur, we probably would not know about them, at least not to a full and accurate extent. Although a certain amount can be gained from an investigation into what was actually presented, it would be very difficult - if not impossible - to prepare for every possible contributing factor in how things turned out. Given that power relations play to everyone's confidence or anxieties, and give a myriad of impressions of what is wise and what is possible, there could be all sorts of reasons for a pattern of stories which misrepresent the balance of responsibility in an event. For this reason, it is just as important for the scholar of media discourse to be critically aware of their own relation to power, as it is for that person to be aware of the power relations within the subject or object itself. As Foucault puts it, 'The positions of the subject are also defined by the situation that it is possible for him to occupy in relation to the various domains or groups of objects.'⁵⁹ In this way, while an event such as the Westray disaster may well have been strategically misrepresented, the extent of the potential corruption involved leaves any observer in a position of epistemological mist.

The essay 'Journalism, Media, and Democracy', by Carpentier, discusses the role of journalists in a manner quite similar to my own approach. Carpentier asserts the importance of the principle 'that journalists and media organizations are not situated

⁵⁹ Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: and the Discourse on Language*, (Pantheon Books, 1972), p.52.

outside ideology and will influence and be influenced by the ideologies, which circulate in society at a given time and space.¹⁶⁰ This is very much in line with the idea I just presented from Foucault about the subject's potentiality in relation to domains of objects, and challenges any temptation to leap to hasty assumptions that the media holds absolute control, while maintaining that journalists do have interests, and do hold some influence over the public. It is this position of conflict between being a potentially influential figure in society, and the fact that journalists are subject to the same trust and judgement issues that every individual faces, that forms the primary topic of my epistemological and ethical exploration in this project.

A pertinent trend that is highlighted in Carpentier's essay is a movement from objectivity to subjectivity in journalism, which places more weight on the honesty of the individual journalist, and less on verifying the truth of statements. 'Traditions like new journalism and human-interest journalism have pleaded for the centralizing of subjectivity (instead of objectivity). Especially in new journalism – developed in the United States during the 1960s – the undermining of the principle of objectivity is an explicit goal.'¹⁶¹ This principal of subjectivity aims to move the focus onto the exposing of the identity of the people involved in an event, centring the story on the agency and character of individuals, rather than just the events themselves. Seeing as it can be claimed that objectivity is essentially impossible, based on the principle that each person will interpret stimuli in varying ways and with particular preconceptions, subjectivity will at least offer an interesting and personal exposure of what the writer thinks about an event. This said, one could be forgiven for worrying about whether this approach serves a sufficient proportion of undistorted reflection on events, and the journalist would still need to be aiming for truth

60 Carpentier, Nico. 'Journalism, media and democracy.' (*Reclaiming the Media: Communication Rights and Democratic Media Roles, European communication research and education association, series 3, 2007*), p.151-156, p.152.

61 Ibid. p.153

for a subjective approach to work. It would hardly be enough to simply state within the text an article, or in foot notes, that one knows nothing about what they are talking about – or has relevant and problematic personal interests on the subject - in the context of a major public statement, such as a front-page article or headline in a national newspaper. While it may be, in a way, more honest in a world which struggles with honesty to be openly partial in journalistic discourse, it becomes difficult to gauge quite how the notion of enunciative truth (based on honesty – the theoretical position of the philosopher) can survive a culturally assumed approach to the dissemination of information which admits to a reliance on subjectivity, while neglecting a significant concern for self-reflection.

In addition, Carpentier also considers the general ideal of journalism to be presenting truth: 'Especially factual accuracy is considered vital to the journalist's professional activity, as it is with no doubt the most sacred belief held among journalists worldwide'.⁶² Although it is not my intention to demonstrate that this is in itself a universal ideal, and certainly not to prove that all journalists hold this ideal, I will question the practical extent that the role truth-telling can reasonably play in society while it is accepted that this ideal is neither widely enforced (enforceable even?) nor seriously expected.⁶³ Indeed, it is not only the actual actions and intentions of journalists which raises questions about the role of truth in society, but also the part of individuals as constitutors of 'public opinion' who must make judgments as to who and what to trust, and how to respond to it.

As I round off this section, I would like to mention the importance of Nick Davies' book *Flat Earth News* in the inspiration behind this project. It was his conception of the term 'churnalism' – the process of journalists processing stories almost, or completely, directly

62 Ibid. p.152

63 Except when someone wishes to sue for libel

from source (often the Press Association, an organisation which Davies says faces the same problem) without being allowed the time or resources to check their accuracy – which encouraged me to pay particular attention to the limitations, as well as the powers, of journalists.⁶⁴ Again, it will not be part of my project to prove that cuts to resources and dubious interests of media owners damages communication in society in a way that must be reversed, but I will be asking whether truth can really function in a way that is compatible with current discourse.

Now that I have outlined the current landscape of work on the area of media discourse, and some applications of the Foucauldian theories of knowledge-power and parrhesia, it is time to clarify what it is that I am trying to achieve with this project. Here, I will set out my aims and approach to the problems that I will be discussing. This will function as preparation for the second chapter, in which I will elaborate on the Foucauldian theories and their application.

My overall aim is to show how Foucault's theory of discipline, combined with technologies of the self and truth telling can give a helpful perspective on how media relates to British Society in 2016; bringing to question what can be meant by the term 'truth' in its practical sense. As I stated in the section entitled *Power and Truth*, it is fundamental to my project that discipline and technologies of the self are combined in order to show subjects as beings that exist under relations of power, which they are, at least in principle, able to influence themselves. Foucault clarifies that:

We must distinguish between power relations understood as strategic games between liberties in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn

64 Davies, 2009

try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of the others and the states of domination that people ordinarily call 'power.'⁶⁵

This first conception of power relations, rather than power as a state of domination, will allow an exploration of the role of the journalist in society that aims – or at least alludes to an aim – to be democratic; which is to say that political power is given to the public in the form of an equal vote for every person over the age of eighteen towards the electing of parliamentary representatives, with the assumption that each person has access to sufficient information to make an informed decision. The key questions here are: Why would the public take any notice of the media over and above anyone else (specifically concerning the information delivered by journalists), and is this source of information sufficiently reliable to form a significant part of the communicative culture of a democratic society? Rather than exactly considering whether we should trust the information we receive, I am particularly concerned about the implications of a trail of discourse that could potentially undermine notions of expertise and trust.

On the other hand, beyond considering expertise and trust to be important concepts for the development of society – and a world based on relativism and suspicion (which do seem to be the antitheses of expertise and trust, on which I will elaborate later) does not sound attractive to me – the principle of parrhesia, which stands for enunciative truth and often breaking rules and/or convention for the sake of improvement, is not something that I will be adapting into a normative concept. On the contrary, I will use the dependence of the often normative application of the principle of democracy on parrhesia, which is rendered problematic in a culture of rhetoric and relativism, as a demonstration of a fundamental problem with the way information is treated in British political discourse. My position it is that the honesty and self-reflection of the journalist is only sufficient for

65 Foucault, Michel, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and the Truth*, (New Press, 1997), p.299.

democracy when readers and listeners can reasonably suppose that the journalist is being genuinely honest, *and* that the journalist is sufficiently informed and educated in critical thought to have something to offer beyond an immediate statement of opinion. As Russell Anderson points out, the conditions required for us to trust a person's assertions in this way are absent in our society 'because the form of its truth, guaranteed by the ethos of the speaker, is no longer epistemically valid.'⁶⁶ Since verification has become a prominent basis for truth, and is not possible when it comes to the intentionality and trust in the senses of others, a culture of competition and persuasion responds and adds to difficulties of judging the character and intentions of others. In summary, because this relationship of trust in sources of information is a requirement for genuine democracy, and this relationship is unstable, it is legitimate to argue that democracy is in serious danger of becoming epistemically obsolete.

In order to fully explain my position, I will be using the role of the journalist as a representation of the professional dissemination of information in a field which needs to try to deliver an extent of impartiality in order for democracy to properly function. The aspect of doubt cast on the journalist's intention towards impartiality is important in that journalists – like most or all people – will always have to rely on a faculty of judgement that is susceptible to conflicts of interest, misinformation, and disinformation. In this way, the role of journalism should be expected to focus on honesty rather than, say, public relations, politics, or marketing. With PR and marketing, this distinction is particularly obvious in that the purpose of each is to encourage a certain desire or attitude in the public, which may well require a lax relationship with truth. Similarly, politics may well struggle to function with an approach to public information that is too open and honest, as there could be security risks, riots, or a lack of confidence for reasons that may or may

⁶⁶ Anderson, Russell, 'Enlightenment, Parrhesia, and the Intellectual in Foucault: Three Figures and a Response to Rorty', (*academia.edu*, McMaster University), p.10.

not be justified, but would nonetheless lead to considerably worse situations than through the classification of information. Although the interests of the political realm, PR, and marketing can seep through into the media, journalism can be seen to have an element of duty to truth that might not even be seen as advantageous in other areas of communication. While it is debatable as to whether even the government needs to be honest outside elections, and whether PR or advertising necessarily have any serious business with truth-telling, journalism is an area of communication that is to be relied upon in order for the wider public to be aware of what is happening in society. In other words, people rely on the media, and specifically journalists, to provide information that is either hard to find at all, or which would take too much time out of an already busy schedule to find. As a side point, education is an area that has at least as much concern with the truth as journalism, but beyond school level – which is where political matters tend to be discussed, and given that one must be at least beyond compulsory school age to vote - it is the media that has the much wider reach across the adult public.

In the final chapter, I will be giving examples of journalistic products in the form of two primary articles; each from the websites of the newspapers with the highest online readerships in their categories, which are *The Daily Mail* (mid-market) and *The Sun* (mass market).⁶⁷ The reason for selection on the basis of readership is that these papers will have the broadest reach of the public, but the fact that these two papers are not far apart in terms of political alignment and, perhaps more importantly, adopt a similar approach to addressing political and social issues, adds another important dimension to the situation. While the matter of political alignment is of some interest to this project, fundamental

⁶⁷ Categories taken from The National Readership Survey: <http://www.nrs.co.uk/downloads/padd-files/may-2016-release/pdf/newspapers-apr-15-mar-16.pdf>

issues regarding the way the papers discuss politics and truth itself will be the primary focus here.

With these selected articles, I will identify key aspects of the argument that rely on the reader's trust, or which could be seen to over-step reasonable boundaries in terms of power relations. It is notable that the articles I will review are presented as the views of their respective newspapers as a whole; an article from the *Daily Mail*, outlining dismay towards MPs who want a vote in parliament regarding the terms of leaving the European Union, and *The Sun's* article encouraging people, in no uncertain terms, to vote to leave The European Union.⁶⁸ While any expectation that an article is written wholly by a particular named author is really an assumption – and, I suspect, an unwise one at that – the point is more that the name given at the top of an article assigns responsibility to a particular entity, whether or not that person actually had full control of what was published. It could even be suggested that the credit to an author is a promise to the reader that this person takes responsibility for what has been presented, and that this is in itself a significant element of trust in professional journalism that is less of an issue on a television news station, which would introduce a presenter, but with no suggestion that the presenter did anything more than deliver a message. All together, these chapters should offer a solid view of the importance of truth-telling in journalism, and the problems of a lack of attention to honesty and ethical consideration when it comes to the dissemination of information and opinion in a democracy, where voters should, ideally speaking, be rationally informed when they place their vote.

68 Daily Mail Comment, 'DAILY MAIL COMMENT: Whingeing. Contemptuous. Unpatriotic. Damn the Breemoaners and their plot to subvert the will of the British people' (*Mail Online*, 12/10/2016). The Sun, 'SUN SAYS We urge our readers to beLEAVE in Britain and vote to quit the EU on June 23', (*The Sun*, 13/06/2016)

Chapter 2

At this stage, it should be clear that I am primarily interested in the knowledge-power relations surrounding the journalist as an individual, and the journalist's role as a truth-teller; and that this will be discussed within the context of contemporary Britain.⁶⁹ In this chapter, I will refer to the work of Foucault as an aid for these investigations, and give a detailed account of why these issues are important in understanding the character of truth in modern discourse. When I just say 'truth' I am deliberately allowing for some ambiguity between the positions of propositional truth and enunciative truth. This is because it seems to me that these two approaches, one of verification in the world, and the other of character and trust, are each vital for our everyday purposes, and yet their differences draw attention to the problems with each. A person can be utterly honest in every situation they encounter, but others will still have to judge this person on the basis of their own experience and understanding as a framework of how a trustworthy person behaves.

After a brief contextual summary of Foucault's account of knowledge and power, I will focus on the intentional relation that individuals hold with truth, paying close attention to the subject's awareness of their own capacity to possess truth, their role in disseminating what they believe to be true, and the nature of enunciative truth as distinct from propositional truth. This will relate to Foucault's discussion on parrhesia in *Discourse and*

⁶⁹ This is certainly not to say that the principles discussed are limited to the UK, or even to the journalist. The specific relevance of the location being Britain (as opposed to another similar-cultured country) will be more notable by the examples given in chapter three.

Truth and technologies of self which also occurs in *Hermeneutics of The Subject*.⁷⁰ It is important to be aware that, while there are pressures on the individual from society and on more personal levels, it is quite possible for seemingly dominated individuals to take control of their situation and make a difference. It is this sense of taking risks in order to further understand and improve the self and society that makes parrhesia such a relevant concept, especially in conjunction with theories of discourse analysis combined with discipline which, in isolation, can come across as highly pessimistic and totalitarian. This section, along with the first, will set the theoretical foundations for my argument that a modern conception of parrhesia in journalism is both necessary for democracy, and a problematic basis for knowledge in a culture of competition.

In the second half of this chapter, I will focus on the positions of the journalist and the reader in relation to the concepts discussed in the first section. Having established the position of individuals in general within society, and their relation with the possibility of truth-telling, it should be a much more workable task to pinpoint the issues peculiar to the roles of journalists and readers concerning truth-telling and ethical awareness. This will allow for a clear and justified identification of the aspects of institutionally formed structures of truth and of normalisation most pertinent to each role, the particular problems implicated by combining propositional and enunciative truth (trust and

⁷⁰ Foucault, Michel, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia*, (Berkeley, 1985,). Foucault, Michel, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

interpretation, for example), and the consequences that these issues have for truth as a concept (weakness in democracy, security, and in trusting friends and colleagues).

Foucault, Power Relations and Parrhesia

The shift in Foucault's work from domination to the conscious position of the subject is important to my project because I aim to present a more rounded reflection on the journalist than just the direct limitations and forces acting against them; not discounting them, but also not presenting them as absolute restrictions. The intimate interweaving of knowledge and power relations plays a subtle but crucial role in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and is a prominent theme throughout *Discipline and Punish*. In the former, the focus is on how discourse produces objects which come to exist 'under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations'; these objects being what we consider to be facts and institutions, and the nature of the influences throughout discourse being what I understand as power relations.⁷¹ In a more authoritarian account, *Discipline and Punish* outlines the way the powerful have come to use their dominance in controlling society; focusing on 'the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle', and the recognition that a 'docile' body 'may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' for a particular conception of good.⁷² However, as Sarup states, Foucault's position in *Discipline and Punish* can be seen as 'rather weak and inadequate on the question of agency and the subject', finding it 'impossible to deal with identity as experienced'.⁷³ While this may not have been too much of a problem when discussing the broad changes in the way power was wielded, it would become a considerable issue when an account is required for the

71 Foucault 1972, p.45

72 Foucault 1977, p.7, 136

73 Sarup, Madan, *Identity, Culture, and the Postmodern World*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p.72

position of the individual in relation to power. Therefore, it is of particular interest for this project that Foucault would later go on to focus directly on the subject, self-reflection, and courageous truth-telling.

In 1982, Foucault noted that 'genealogy operates on three sets of relations: truth, power, and the subject.'⁷⁴ As such, although a certain amount could be taken from his disciplinary account of power alone in relation to the institution of journalism, it will be better to work with an account that takes into account all three; which is what his later discussions on the subject and power relations do. Following this, the approach I will adopt will correspond with Foucault's later statement, in an interview, that:

in human relationships, whether they involve verbal communication such as we are engaged in at this moment, or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other. So I am speaking of relations that exist at different levels, in different forms; these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all.⁷⁵

Also, Deleuze states that in Foucault's view, 'power is a relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a "power relation"', showing the extreme range of the term.⁷⁶ This broad but intriguing account of power relations is important to my project as it allows for very subtle, and even subconscious forms of influence over others, which indicates the complexity and importance of trying to understand one's own place in society. As with a parent trying to be the friend of their child (while the child knows that

74 Anderson, Russell, 'Enlightenment, Parrhesia, and the Intellectual in Foucault: Three Figures and a Response to Rorty', (*academia.edu*, McMaster University), p.9

75 Foucault, Michel, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and the Truth*, (New Press, 1997), p.291.

76 Deleuze, Gilles, *Foucault*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), p.59

the parent will remain somewhat in charge), positions of respect, fear, or authority can contribute to relations of power that were not necessarily consciously intended by the dominant party. With this in mind, it can be supposed that all individuals will hold various positions of dominance and submission throughout their lives with different people and institutions.⁷⁷

Furthermore, regardless of whether someone in particular is in control of the information available, or intentionally brainwashing the public, it is impossible to escape the fact that we are always under the influence of external information. If we look back to Hume, who states that ‘all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience’, we see that it is by no means a recent idea that we are profoundly reliant on our surroundings in order to make sense of the world.⁷⁸ As a consequence of this direction in thinking, the information we have access to is fundamental to our understanding of the world, whether it is presented to us by family, the government, the media, advertising bodies, or any other source. The fact that this information is communicated by other individuals who also face equivalent conceptual limitations shows how vulnerable people and conceptions of truth are to distortion and miscommunication. As such, this project is more aimed at drawing on the passive aspect of power relations (notably, the effects of incompetence combined with confidence, the consequences of the

⁷⁷ It is just about conceivable that someone could be so strongly oppressed that their position never really changes, but unlikely.

⁷⁸ Hume, David, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (Public Domain, 1902)

need to earn a living over ethical considerations, and the force of emotive language) than theories about active domination.

For these reasons, the main point of interest in Foucault's work, in relation to the position of the journalist, is in his later work on 'the problem of truth-teller or truth-telling as an activity', when he directs his attention toward the capacity of the individual to understand and challenge the ideas which prevail through normalisation and institutionally formed truth.⁷⁹ This can be seen in his account of parrhesia, which is an ancient Greek concept referring to the courageous truth-teller; and in his investigation into the concept *epimeleia heautou* which 'is care of oneself, attending to oneself, being concerned about oneself, etcetera.'⁸⁰ Although Foucault did not wish to apply parrhesia as a normative term, it seems interesting that the ideals of reflectiveness and courageously challenging norms, characteristic of the concept's ancient applications, reflect qualities that society needs at least some people to possess in order for a meaningful sense democracy to function today.

As Lee-Wright et al. put it, 'Information is to democracy what oxygen is to fire. Without one the other cannot survive: an uninformed voter cannot use her vote intelligently, nor hold power to account.'⁸¹ Without transparency and a certain amount of courage in reporting and discussion in the media, much of the public is not so much informed as coerced. For this reason, I hold that the epistemic problems of interpretation, different notions of truth, and tactical speech, within a discussion of the principles of honesty and courage within parrhesia, highlight serious potential problems surrounding honesty and truth in relation to the role of the journalist. Subsequently, although it would be

79 Foucault, 1985, p.74

80 Foucault, 2005, p.2

81 Lee-Wright, Peter, Angela Phillips, and Tamara Witschge, *Changing journalism*, (Routledge, 2011), p.5.

inappropriate to pretend that the concept of parrhesia could be placed directly into modern society (as it was in Ancient Greece), it is not only desirable, but necessary, for the problems of courage and truth-telling to be discussed and prioritised if we are to live in a society where public opinion is to be respected. As such, when I refer to parrhesia throughout the rest of this project, it is meant as a broadly equivalent collection of ideals in a sense which apply today. As such, there is no intention of applying an authentic transcription of the concept, but an appreciation that reflectiveness, enunciative truth, and courage are collectively of concern today in a modern way; presumed to be different from their consideration in Ancient Greece.

The inspiration we can take from parrhesia for an ideal in consideration of the role of the individual as a speaker or author seems quite clear – journalists who are transparent about the influence of their perspective, who have a concern for their limits (though understanding their strengths too) and who are willing to report wrongdoing, are stronger candidates to serve democracy in their craft than those who simply want a story and are not afraid to bluff their way through the details. They should understand that when any person speaks or publishes work which is intended to be taken as fact or opinion, they are adding to discourse in a way which could have serious repercussions, depending on their social standing and the nature of the contribution. This is an effect which will be increased when a person is either highly trusted, or has a wide-reaching platform, and will not necessarily be appropriately diminished by any lack of expertise in a particular area. The public needs such people to actually mean what they say, rather than merely appearing to. This is especially the case with celebrity endorsements of political candidates or a side in a debate, where a person might be a great actor or singer, but have no more of a clue about politics than any other layperson. The truly self-reflective person would make this lack of knowledge clear, and either remain silent about matters they know little about, or if asked, point out that they do not consider their opinion to be any more valid than anyone

else's. Especially considering his non-normative approach to discussing parrhesia, it strikes me as interesting that Foucault himself takes this position in response to an interview question regarding the methodological intentions of another author (Boswell), whose book was a guide for his work on sexuality. He stated that 'I could offer my opinion, but this would only make sense if everybody and anybody's opinions were also being consulted. I don't want to make use of a position of authority while I'm being interviewed to traffic in opinions.'⁸² More to the point, it does demonstrate the kind of transparent self-reflection that a study of parrhesia is posed to inspire.

However, the problem that arises, even when many people actually are being transparent and reflective, is that many people will not have the time or inclination to carefully determine whether a person or a source is trustworthy or competent. Consequently, content with a hint of irony may be taken at face value (especially if shared on social media), or articles written to fill pages regardless of the expertise of the writers (or for entertainment value) on a matter could be taken as reliable explanations of serious concepts. This means that the reflectiveness of even the most honest person must allow for the potential deception in which others may indulge; and so it would make sense to aim for a culture in which such deception would become unthinkable, rather than being merely frowned-upon, or even expected. The notion of caring for oneself digs further into the issues raised by parrhesia, namely with regard to maintaining clear and honest dialogue, and risking (or sacrificing) normalised desires in order to understand the true nature of the self.

When looking at truth in an objective sense, the problems brought to attention by the notion of parrhesia as courageous truth-telling amount to the questions of what it takes

⁸² Foucault, 1997, p.142

for a person to possess truth, how one can recognise truth, and whether a person chooses to express what they believe to be true. Alternatively, from a more subjective perspective, one could ask what it takes for someone to be in a reasonable position to make judgments of truth, and whether they can be trusted to maintain such an approach and present their judgments in an honest way. Due to the way I am framing the place of truth in society, it is this second, subjective view of truth-telling that is of primary concern here. It seems noteworthy that the term parrhesia was also on occasion used in a pejorative sense, 'not very far from "chattering" and which consists in saying any or everything one has in mind without qualification'.⁸³ However, I will refer to the concept in its positive sense, which requires parrhesia to consist in some form of truth-telling, with the pejorative sense being a possible (and likely) occurrence in practice. In ancient Greece, this form of parrhesia stood as a central requirement for democratic society, and the question remains that unless at least some people choose to speak truthfully and courageously, what is the point in a democratic parliament?

The basic principle of enunciative truth seems to be a significant problem in today's world. On the one hand, truth-telling may be valued for the sake of honour, justified decision-making (which leads to autonomy), self-esteem, democracy as a prized ideology, respect, or any number of other concerns; but the need to maximise profitability and earn a living – which relates to ideals of professionalism and entrepreneurship – reinforces a 'dilemma at the heart of any discussion about journalism and ethics.'⁸⁴ Whatever the actual extent of professionalism overriding ethics in journalism (a key issue for Lee-Wright et al. and Lane et al.), the very idea that it *could* be a problem in any given case, alongside the potential for the audience to suppose a lack of commitment in the journalist, is

83 Foucault, 1985, p.3

84 Lee-Wright et al., 2012, p.135

fundamentally problematic in our time.⁸⁵ In this way, public confidence can be expected to gradually disintegrate if the culture of a society tolerates a low concern for the concepts we can, in the sense I have discussed, describe as parrhesiatic: reflectiveness, transparency, and courageousness.

With the kinds of cynicism described by Jordan - both in the government's and the media's choice of terminology and representation, and in programs such as *The Daily Show* (TDS) which challenge common approaches to discourse - there does appear to be a desire for a genuine sense of truth in society.⁸⁶ 'TDS manages, as Foucault's Cynics did, to persuade people to change their lives by acting more truthfully.'⁸⁷ One problem with cynicism, however, is that it can be interpreted and enacted in multiple ways. Diogenes is said to have regularly been found 'criticizing conventional values, exposing shams, unimpressed by reputation of any kind', while asserting the importance of truth.⁸⁸ This kind of cynicism assumes that the pursuit of truth is of intrinsic value. Whereas, another form of cynicism occurs when people continue to do things while being convinced that it will not make any real difference, often for the purpose of remaining in a particular financial or social position. This second kind of cynicism is more in line with the attitude Jordan describes of the government and media, and that Conboy refers to in the British tabloids, using terms that they know are simultaneously virtually meaningless due to the size of the brush they paint with, yet loaded with connotations; while knowing that they will keep people engaged in the news to some extent.⁸⁹ This form of cynicism seems particularly descriptive

85 Ibid. p.135. Chapman, Jane L. and Nick Nuttal, *Journalism Today: A Themed History*, (John Wiley and Sons, 2011), p.19.

86 In the UK, programs such as *Have I got News for You?* and Charley Brooker's *Weekly Wipe* serve a similar purpose, as well as providing entertainment.

87 Jordan, Matthew, 'Thinking with Foucault about Truth-Telling and The Daily Show', (*The Electronic Journal of Communication*, Vol.18, 2008)

88 Dudley, Donald R., *A History of Cynicism: From Diogenes to the 6th Century A.D.*, (Methuen & Co., 1937), p.27.

89 Conboy, Martin, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a community through language*, (Routledge, Abingdon 2006), p.16

of today's mass culture within social and professional media and institutional communications, while Diogenes could appear to be merely an example of an eccentric character in Ancient Greece.

Then again, the position Diogenes plays, living out (as opposed to simply preaching) the conclusion of his scepticism towards everyday assumption, can be taken as inspiration for a certain kind of individual who wants to make a positive difference. Rather than simply appealing to others based on what they believe to be common sense values, they could seriously challenge normalised values and become, and expose themselves as, people who genuinely engage in following their conclusions through with their behaviour and attitudes. Such an individual would at least try to live their lives based on what they come to see as an ideal, rather than simply accepting a normal or expected way of doing things. For this to actually be of benefit to society, the individual in question would have to be overtly self-reflective. This is because the ideal here is not just a matter of conviction; it is a matter of challenging the prior convictions of oneself and of others, and then being confident enough in one's efforts to gain firmer understanding about one's position of 'being in the world' to be completely transparent in the governing of oneself and others.⁹⁰

This principle of being open and honest falls back to the aforementioned *epimeleia heautou* – care of the self. Socrates is a significant exponent of this approach, mentoring others (notably Alcibiades, a wealthy aristocrat) through encouraging the individual to look inwardly on themselves to learn precisely what is fundamental to their state of being,

⁹⁰ 'Being in the world' in the sense of Dasein as discussed by Heidegger throughout *Being and Time*, which I take to be a precursor to Foucault's focus on subjectivity and discourse due to a shared concern for reality as experience: Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, (trans. Joan Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, 2010).

and what they should aim for.⁹¹ Foucault explains that, as far as Socrates is concerned, 'This is Socrates' task', given to him by 'the gods', showing the level on which promoting and withholding this commitment to truth and openness is considered a duty.⁹² We could view this form of mentoring as helping others to understand themselves, and developing and altering the self through inward reflection. Rather like a dialectic in which one person places a thesis, and another challenges it before the first develops on that challenge, a person is caring for oneself when they question their own desires and allows their outlook and mode of being to change in favour of a newly found ideal. Without allowing for this 'spiritual' progression, a person would be locked in their current state of being, making improvement impossible (although potentially minimising risk).

The idea behind care of the self can be seen to take the opposite approach from what could be referred to as economic professionalism, where a person consciously tries to influence others, or maximise material gain through coercion and competitive spirit. The person who cares for the self, in the way I am outlining here, holds that one is better off engaging with a deeper attention to oneself, and self-improvement; especially considering one will later feel a duty to help others to do the same.

if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city, to be the master of a household in an oikos, if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know,

91 Foucault, 2005, p.35

92 Foucault, 2005, p.6

finally, that you should not be afraid of death-if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others. Thus, there is no danger.⁹³

In other words, this idea of care of the self demands that the individual is completely self-aware and open to improvement, and that this awareness will eliminate any desire for power beyond one's capabilities. A truly wise person (by this approach) will be neither arrogant nor modest, but optimally aware of their appropriate place in society.⁹⁴ It is from this principle that parrhesia takes its full meaning, as the parrhesiates will not speak without proper consideration, but will ensure that their position and commitment to truth is completely transparent. If everyone behaved in this way, it would theoretically be easier to maintain open dialogue, and arguably to maintain a just society, given that most people would have a reasonable idea of their place (in a functional rather than hierarchical sense⁹⁵), and it would be in the public's interest for them to be open and honest.

Following the principle that truth is maintained by discourse led by institutions and institutionally verified experts, which plays a leading part in a culture of normalisation (dominant strands of discourse adopted as 'normal'), we can see the individual as a creation of, and contributor to, the social reality of society. This presents an interweaving mutual reliance between propositional and enunciative truth, as many types of facts (not so much ontological facts such as what the world actually is, but things that we hold as facts) are dependent on the agency of the fact-makers. Following this, the attitudes (and therefore agency) of individuals will be influenced by interpretations of these facts. Given

93 Foucault, Michel, 1997, p.288

94 Not to be taken as knowing oneself perfectly, which seems both impossible and meaningless due to the fact that only the subject can observe their own experience, and cannot experience that of others, or view themselves externally.

95 I do not mean to say that people would exactly know their 'betters' and 'lessers' in general, but that they would be more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, such that expertise in terms of experience and prior rational engagement would be more obvious.

the potential flaws in this system, based on the power relations which make it possible for individuals to distort information at any point - deliberately or through incompetence – we can already see gaping holes in a reliance on propositional truth and verification. Even if we assume honesty throughout the long and fragile chain of communications, human error and the epistemic limits of our perception, we cannot be sure that the bases for knowledge are secure, or even realistic. As such, we may accept that subjectivity is to take over from objectivity in our attempts at understanding the world, but this means that we can only maintain a useful sense of truth if journalists (at least) are fully committed to truth-telling as a basic requirement. In this sense, it seems to be a highly desirable (if not a required) prerequisite of reliable journalism that enunciative truth is assumed, and that we can, therefore, make reasonable judgements on the competence and background of the journalist, and the methodology and evidence behind given propositions.

The danger with a subjective approach to truth can be to consider one person's guess to be as good as anyone else's. However, in terms of care of the self and parrhesia, expertise still counts for something as long as the person is being honest with themselves and in their communication. A person who takes care of their self, in the way I outlined earlier, will only speak out when they are absolutely sure that they are a suitable person to do so, and so this person should be able to judge whether or not their contribution is likely to be worth listening to. In terms of institutional qualification, we rely on the word of a trusted body that we hope is somewhat resilient against corruption, and rigorous enough to avoid making too many mistakes; but we are still relying on the honesty of the intentions of those who hold the decision-making powers in each institution. This means that enunciative truth is just as much a requirement for propositional truth as propositional truth is for the factual truthfulness of the information delivered by the parrhesiastes – if not more so. It is for this reason that the role of the journalist, for democracy to function

without a serious re-conception, needs to focus on enunciative truth, even if this occurs within discourse which must assume the 'it seems to me' whenever it reads 'this is.'

The Journalist

Having outlined the influences, and the possibilities of agency of the individual in society, I will now discuss the specific epistemological and ethical issues faced by journalists as authors, and generally within journalism as an activity. Just as with any individual, the journalist must attain information from institutions and the various streams of discourse (anything from social media to universities), judging the legitimacy and honesty of those who have authored before. Equally, the journalist, must make decisions such as what information they will choose to present, how to present it, and how to present themselves as subjects; or perhaps how far to take an objective position. I will focus specifically on writers who are commissioned to write in major newspapers (examples in chapter three will be from The Mail Online, and The Sun Online – so electronic versions of newspapers).⁹⁶

For a journalist who works at a major newspaper, there will be certain expectations – or requirements - as to what will fit in with the culture and guidelines, which is evident from the kinds of articles I will discuss in the third chapter, given that they are published as written by the papers themselves. Quite apart from anything else, it may not be particularly easy to get a job at a newspaper, so for an aspiring journalist, it may seem to be worth compromising one's principles to get a foot in the door. Lee-Wright et al. state that in some papers 'Journalists are theoretically allowed to decline to write a story they

⁹⁶ This could theoretically include comedians and politicians, but each would involve complications such as satirical irony or clear personal or political interests, and would therefore need to be declared as separate from a standard career journalist.

don't agree with, but there is a clear sense that they wouldn't last long in that job if they took that position.⁹⁷ With a similar sentiment, Jones reports the story of a young journalist who accepted a job at the *Daily Star* because he desperately wanted to get into the industry, but the attitude was: 'This is what they want you to write: If you don't write it, you get a bollocking.'⁹⁸ In the same vein, Davies tells us about a reporter for the *Daily Mail* who said that "You knew instinctively what was required. There was no one who took you into a room and said "Right, you have to stick it to this sort of person ... " If you got it wrong, you wouldn't get into the paper or they would rewrite your copy."⁹⁹ In each of these extreme examples, it is easy to see how the journalist may be restricted in what they are able to get published. If an editor will only publish what they want the public to see, the journalist is extremely limited in their potential contribution to the communication of truth.

Then, on top of the actual governance of a newspaper, we have the culture that forms as a cause and result of such an institution. Foucault writes that 'The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.'¹⁰⁰ Admittedly, he was thinking of domination at the time of writing *Discipline and Punish*, but this account of normalization does fit in conjunction with his later formulation of power relations and the subject, as laid out at the beginning of this chapter. Even if we do choose to refer to domination, we can see the penalty for not writing what the editor requires as not getting one's work published, while the salary grade and increased authority in choosing what is published (and perhaps eventually becoming editor – following significant transformation

97 Lee-Wright et al, 2012

98 Jones, Owen, *The Establishment: and how they get away with it*, (Melville House, 2015), p.85.

99 Davies, Nick, *Flat Earth News*, (Chatto & Windus, 2008), p.382.

100 Foucault, 1979, p.183

of course) is the reward. Whether we base this on domination or on power-relations, we observe a system working by the principles of normalization.

As with Thorpe's account of how female snowboarders used to be set aside or presented as mere observers, exclusion may occur in the form of not hiring or firing people with certain qualities or opinions, or decreasing a person's popularity by making them a scapegoat (the person who loses private funding due to whistle-blowing, for example).¹⁰¹ Further still, sexism, racism, and ageism, may also become ingrained in the practices of an institution, making it difficult for certain people to get anywhere without a highly determined fight. Each of these elements of culture can be seen to be normalized at the point where employees either defend, accept, or refrain from challenging what they come to consider an inevitable part of life; the consequence being a cycle of self-perpetuated disciplines that normalize the members of the organization in question. In chapter 3, I will look at a more specific problem, identified by Petley, in the teaching of journalism ethics, which considers the normalisation of a dismissive attitude towards ethical practice.

The culture of a newspaper will have an impact on what the editors believe to be publishable, and what the journalist comes to accept as a reasonable line of discussion. The more obvious problems here, such as whether the published factual stories contain distortion and fabrication have been covered by Anderson and Weymouth, Gaber, Davies, and many others, but the primary interests here are the extent to which, in 'opinion' pieces, a journalist is free to write courageously and truthfully, and the challenges they face in actually choosing to do so. Crucially, when a journalist makes their contribution to discourse, to what extent are they concerned with the part it will play, and in the

101 Thorpe, Holly, 'Foucault, Technologies of Self, and Media: Discourses of Femininity in Snowboarding Culture', (*Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol.32.2, May 2008), p.199-299.

completeness and accuracy of its enunciation? Indeed, if these opinion pieces are written with a full awareness of the intellectual limits and power relations of the author and the reader, what attitude can each individual be expected to have towards the situation? 'in parrhesia, telling the truth is regarded as a duty', and truth-telling by the primary purveyors of information seems necessary for democracy.¹⁰² The challenge, then, is forming a journalistic environment in which devotion to truth-telling is self-evidently a higher priority than profitability and individual power.

In terms of interpreting the available information, the journalist is no exception to the individual's reliance on external information. They, too, must negotiate and draw from systems of knowledge based on conceptions of truth, normalized by the dominant discourses of institutions and power relations between individuals. It strikes me that the main difference is that major newspapers offer a platform to the journalist which implies a special status, granted by the fact that their contribution was considered worthy of being published. It may well be that this status is not quite what it could be – as people may become suspicious of the institutions involved, due to the expectation of the kind of behaviour reported in popular non-fiction by Davies and Jones – but whatever it is will play a part in the overall perception of the organisation and its constituents.

As it stands, there have been numerous attempts fairly recently to work from the idea that people are losing faith in the establishment (the collective position in discourse of powerful institutions): As a campaigner in the EU referendum in the UK, the British politician Michael Gove famously stated that 'people in this country have had enough of experts'; while UKIP leader Nigel Farage reportedly encouraged Donald Trump voters, saying 'You can go out and beat the pollsters, you can beat the commentators, and you

102 Foucault, 1985, p.5

can beat Washington'.¹⁰³ The fact that these politicians are effectively positioning themselves as experts by choosing to offer advice and trying to speak for the public, using their positions within the establishment to justify their understanding, suggests that they either misunderstand their own positions in discourse, or that they are simply hoping that no-one else will notice that their proclaimed message undermines their own positions. In the end, if we don't trust the experts or those in current positions of authority, why should we trust these speakers instead?

It seems to me that, while this tactic of persuasion may be considered fair game for a politician, for a journalist it is imperative that these power relations are factored into the presentation of their own ideas; ensuring that the reader can tell what factors may call for an adjustment of interpretation – such as the interests and background of the journalist. In principle there can be no assumption that a journalist is worth listening to unless they can be seen to be trusted, and even then they must display at least an awareness of their own limitations. In this way, the journalist must deeply understand their own position, and present their position such that the reader understands it as well. Then, whether or not the information they present is factually accurate, the reader should be able to tell that the author believes it to be so. In simple terms, the journalist must be trusted where other members of society may not have to be, and it is difficult to put this in terms other than that it is the duty of the journalist, not so much to *be* trusted, but to make themselves trustworthy. The distinction here is that a journalist must put their efforts into being as transparent and self-reflective as is necessary to get a fully justified position across to the

103 Mance, Henry, 'Britain has had enough of experts, says Gove', (*Financial Times*, 3 June, 2016). AFP, 'Trump finds anti-establishment ally in Brexit's Farage', (*Mail Online*, 25 August, 2016).

reader, rather than putting the effort into convincing or persuading the reader to trust them.

So, we see that the journalist has a duty that is essentially defined by what their purpose is – to inform and challenge. I would even suggest that to disregard this duty is to endanger and disregard any desire for an honest and truthful discourse. However, even if a journalist intends to fulfil this duty, critical literature demonstrates, at the very least, examples of how they may be in no position to achieve such a standard. Lee-Wright et al., Davies, and Jones show that journalists are often at the mercy of an editor, who is not necessarily working for truth, but for the loyalty of the reader, and the optimisation of newspaper sales. According to Dacre of the *Mail*: 'My job is to edit my newspaper, to have a relationship with my readers, to reflect my readers' views and to defend their interests.'¹⁰⁴ In this way, the paper is directed towards a primary aim of supporting the assumptions of its loyal readers, but presumably with an awareness that the information will be presented in such a way that some will be convinced into believing the paper's representation of reality, and may even generate enough outrage in other circles to gain extra attention. Even if we look at the position of the editor, it is not necessarily fair to blame them personally for the approach they take in directing the production of their paper, as they will have to report to owners and shareholders, who may be more interested in profit (or other vested interests) than delivering accuracy and honesty.

The bottom line seems to be that there are so many obstructions in the way of truth-telling, as the objective of the journalist, that one is more or less forced to maintain some extent of cynicism towards how the media operates. Only if journalists were employed for the explicit purpose of expressing their long-considered, and highly developed

¹⁰⁴ Davies, 2008, p.370

perspective, would it be reasonable to expect them to live up to the standard that democracy demands of them. Even then, there would still be doubt as to whether journalists actually would live up to the expectations. It seems to me that it only takes a cultural acceptance of a lapse of duty for that duty to become seen as unimportant. Once it is normal to ignore or excuse a lack of a given duty, those who hold onto it become the exception rather than the rule. As Arendt puts it: 'Where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truth-teller, whether he knows it or not, has begun to act.'¹⁰⁵ For this reason, the normalisation of indifference to truth-telling can be identified as the glue that holds a post-truth society in place – at least until enough people accept the challenge of standing up to it.

The Reader

Following the battle to get an against-the-odds, truthfully articulated article through the editorial process, there is another hurdle for the message to clear in the transmission of information – the perception of the reader. It is at this stage of the communication process that the message of the journalist is in the form of a finished product, made public for many to read, and difficult and potentially humiliating to retract. As a writer, this finality of publication is a considerable transition from the private and easily amendable, to the public artefact, and it seems to me that if the writer has been parrhesiastic in their expression, they should be comfortable that they have not tried to deceive (to 'get away with it'); but experience some anxiety in having presented such an intimate representation of their views. For the reader, however, it cannot be verified that the author truly believes what they said, and any claim to expertise must be taken on trust; whether this must be trust in the author, or trust in the institution that awarded a particular qualification,

¹⁰⁵ Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and politics." (*Truth. Engagements across Philosophical Traditions*, 2010), 295-314.

position, or recommendation. Placing too much trust could lead the reader on a false course of understanding, while placing too little trust may lead to nihilism and relativism; lacking the confidence to learn anything from anyone.

The element of choice is fundamental to an understanding of the place of journalism in what might be considered a liberal society. While directly forcing someone to do something may be seen as abhorrent, coercion may effectively be encouraged. In a society where the ability to 'sell oneself' becomes a key skill for gaining employment and in entrepreneurship, trying to convince others of qualities, which may or may not be assumed by the speaker to be true, is seen as less a negative act of deception, and more a way of presenting a positive, elevated version of oneself. It may even be said, in some cases, that to not try to coerce is to not try hard enough in a broader sense. If coercion becomes a staple requirement to be successful, choosing parrhesia – by which approach pure coercion is counter-productive – may be seen to cause deliberate harm to one's chances in society. This can be identified as a primary reason for parrhesia to be seen as unviable; it is not immediately clear that it will work to the advantage of the author, because it shows the individual in the most accurate representation possible, rather than in the best way possible.

While the journalist may well wish to represent their views in the most honest way possible, the normalised assumption that it would not be to their advantage would perpetuate and accentuate the problem of trust. Perhaps the most notably parrhesiastic aspect of full and open truth-telling today would be the risk that is taken in representing oneself without embellishment: 'the commitment involved in parrhesia is linked to a certain social situation, to a difference of status between the speaker and his audience, to the fact that the parrhesiastes says something which is dangerous to himself and thus

involves a risk, and so on.¹⁰⁶ As such, it would be expected that the audience will be unsure of whether to trust the author, and the author would have to trust the judgement of the audience in recognising honesty – otherwise they could expect to find themselves at a distinct disadvantage. Another potential problem is that, while it would be hoped that the author would only take the risk of missing an opportunity to make themselves look good if they believed in the benefits of writing truthfully, the audience may well be aware that this could be a trick. If a journalist, or an editor, knows that appearing to be honest makes for a more convincing performance, they may go to great efforts to simulate an honest representation of something. After all, it is not factual truth that is at the centre of subjective writing, but the *apparent* awareness and openness of the author towards their part in the story or idea. If a reader has any reason to believe that a journalist may be dishonest, the integral force of the message will be reduced or lost.

It is also notable that entertainment and competition for readers can be seen as a significant part of funding journalism.¹⁰⁷ Postman considers a focus on ‘emotional gratification’ as crucial to the limited dialogue and focus on buzzwords and short stories in television media: ‘A news show, to put it plainly, is a format for entertainment, not for education, reflection or catharsis.’¹⁰⁸ Firstly, this may in itself lead to more people giving up with written news due to television watching involving less effort, but it may also lead to more people taking some interest in the news; albeit, not in an overly engaging way. Simplifying complex situations such as war, politics, and economics, may give the impression that anyone can understand such things without the years of studying, training, or experience usually required to begin to understand the details, potentially leading to an anti-intellectual outlook; losing respect for expertise and skill in complex areas.

106 Foucault, 1985, p.3

107 Assuming, naïvely, that the aim of news corporations is the product rather than the profit.

108 Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, (Penguin, 1985), p.88.

Furthermore, the competition the newspapers face seems likely to lead to more emotionally appealing tactics in written news, seeing as readers cannot be attracted by content if they have no reason to choose to read it. It is all very well having the most perfectly researched and presented story, but if people are not drawn to reading it, it will surely remain largely ignored.

Though the reader may like to think that news sources will focus on content, the amount of choice available suggests that this is hardly possible, seeing as much effort will have to go into promotion and presentation. As such, it could take a lot of time for a reader to find an article that is genuinely interesting unless they know exactly what they are looking for, so there will always be a lot of influence in the function to make recommendations and promote stories. It seems strangely ironic that in the world of YouTube, which offers everyone with a camera and internet-connected device a chance to upload and share videos, it seems that a clique of elite users is now, theoretically, in a position to recommend, and more or less determine, the next viral videos and YouTube stars. With that old cliché 'you are who you know', the safest path to fame on the internet is likely to be getting recommended by a leading vlogger, and once someone has gained enough subscribers, the next logical step seems to be to get a book, music album, or even a film, published.

I use this example because it shows a form of media that started as something which might have been assumed to be meritocratic, but is now so saturated that users are likely to accept help choosing with what to watch; offering powers to those who have gained a following to give their opinion and potentially determine the next big thing. It shows that, for most, it will not matter how important and authentic a story is, so long as there is no one to recommend it, and nothing to make it stand out. In this way, the reader is indirectly

told by recommendation (by position in paper, search function on website, personal account settings and user history) whose work is entertaining and is of interest, but not necessarily because the author is writing parrhesiastically, or because they are an expert on the matter. In fact, some recommendation services could even (theoretically) have been designed to avoid courageous stories in order to avoid legitimate controversy (but that is another story). It strikes me that it is this seemingly natural human response to saturation of choice that makes presentation, promotion, and recommendation so important in a commercial market.

As a result of a culture of saturation of choice, normalisation and recommendation, but also distrust of what is perceived to be authority,¹⁰⁹ it can be seen as inevitable that many members of the public will seek or accept assistance when it comes to deciding what to read (or think). As such, the power of major newspapers to influence the reader comes into play when it comes to the design and inclusion of certain stories, and the omission of others. This power, as should now be clear, comes not from an overbearing authority, but from the assumption that many members of the public are likely to be overwhelmed by the available information, and are likely to take a helping hand that appeals to their outlook. This can be connected to the sense of populism that is evident with Dacre's and Morgan's approaches to editing (as discussed earlier), but also to the position of the politician, and potentially of the journalist if they choose to take advantage of their strategic position. For a career journalist, who just wants to secure their job, there would be an immediate advantage to writing an entertaining or emotive article which draws in the reader, but is largely or completely false. As long as the view appears to be of the author, and cannot be directly and conclusively refuted - such as plain facts might (generally, particular words will definitely have been said, and particular things will have

109 returning to previous sentiments by Gove and Farage on p.36, and the liberal objection to excessive rules

happened, whichever way we interpret their meaning) - there is not much stopping a journalist from doing this. A strategically or carelessly written article, interpreted as parrhesiastic, could be the seedling of a political discourse which appears to spread a diabolical truth about the establishment for the good of 'ordinary' folk, while actually being fuelled by the will of news outlets to sell stories, and perhaps for some politicians to rise through the ranks. This condition and attitude towards the dissemination of information is what I take to be the meaning of the now popular term 'post-truth'.

This kind of distortion of information may or may not be deliberately obstructive, but can (so long as anyone trusts any of the promoted information) have a huge impact on the direction of public discourse. At the point where people tend not to trust people of authority, confidence in expertise (which may be seen to stem from the same place) may well also wane, leading to a relative view of truth and reasoning. In a way, this could be identified as a legitimate position on the basis that one can always doubt the effectiveness of our institutional grasp of truth, and with all the manners of truth I have covered. However, in practice, someone who has studied or worked on understanding a specific area of thought or function in society is surely likely to be able to make a more informed decision than someone who has just a passing thought about it. I am sure there are exceptions to this, but that does not make it reasonable to assume that the novice and the master of a subject are equally worth taking advice from. For the reader, this is a judgement which should not be too difficult to make most of the time, but the main difficulty, from an epistemic point of view, is knowing when to make an exception; especially when the reader is also a novice in the subject at hand.

So, while I would not claim to have covered every possible epistemic problem for the journalist and reader, I hope to have given a justified and sufficient account of the

problems of truth, knowledge, and judgement to present a serious problem for the role of truth in journalism – and by extension, democracy. The media can be seen to play a considerable part in the normalisation of ideas, contributing to, and responding to discourse; but always in a position of heightened authority over the views of the general public. Individuals rely on journalism for the capacity to inform, in a way that would not be expected of politicians or marketers, and so the responsibility of the journalist seems clear. For democracy to function in a helpful way, there must be a positive attitude towards self-reflection and courageous truth-telling in a public part of society, and it makes sense for that part to be journalism. However, I have no expectation that such a crucial element of democracy can be upheld without a very significant change in the normalised standards of society, seeing as truth-telling is hardly viable, let alone expected in a competitive, saturated market-based society. In the third chapter, the focus will be on recent issues in journalism, such as the side-lining of ethical concerns and ideological subtext, and aggression in tabloid newspapers. Then, I will present two main articles, one each from the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*; and I will show how a lack of reflection and a commitment to particular ideologies makes them suspiciously predictable, and how they fail to be usefully informative due to the excessive use of emotive language and immediate dismissal of any rival ideas.

Chapter 3

Throughout this project, I have focussed my attention on the epistemology and sense of duty regarding theoretical approaches to truth-telling as an activity in the role of journalism. Now, I will point to some prominent issues in recent journalism, with a view to highlighting the practical problems regarding truth-telling and ethical concern which occur, most prominently in the tabloid press. Firstly, it is suggested by a number of academics that the official ethical standards taught to many journalists in the UK are lacking in vigour, being more concerned about pushing the limits of law than any notable sense of morality.¹¹⁰ There also seems to be conflict and considerable issues of trust, both between the rival media companies, and towards the various strands of the press from the outside (most notably the *News of the World* which was not to survive a phone hacking scandal¹¹¹). My stance will acknowledge the justification negative stories and scandals offer to a sceptical view of the press, while holding that it would not be reasonable to suppose that most (or many) journalists deliberately set out to mislead the public; only that there may be times in their careers when they feel they must choose between making a living and sticking devoutly to their own firm ethical principles. On the other hand, my later critiques of two articles will show that there are approaches to journalism which present a willingness to

110 Petley, Julian, 'The Leveson Inquiry: Journalism ethics and press freedom', (*Journalism* vol.13.4, April 2012), p.529 –538

111 Carlson, Matt, 'The emperor lost his clothes': Rupert Murdoch, *News of the World* and journalistic boundary work in the UK and USA, (*Journalism*, vol.15.4, April 2013), p.389-406.

represent certain ideas in excessively forceful and non-self-critical ways, which may well mislead or misinform sections of the public, regardless of intent to do so.

Rather than simply running through the major journalistic events of the past decade, to arrive merely by chronology at the focal points of this chapter - an article each from the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* – I will refer to notable issues that have occurred in the relations between media institutions and the public eye, in order to set a background in the problematisation of truth and morality in journalism. I will begin by discussing the part of ethical training and normalisation of attitudes towards morality in the practice of journalism. Then, the discussion will move on to Ideological subtext in relation to how tabloids make assumptions about the views of the reader, while reinforcing ideologies such as patriotism and anti-liberalism. From this point, I will progress onto an illustration through an article from the *Daily Mail* of the role of presenting information as the devoted and loyal friend of the reader, and finally, an article from the *Sun* which directly urged readers to vote 'Leave' in the EU referendum of 2016 – the focus being on the use of broad assumptions to justify even broader claims. Above all else, this chapter aims to present kinds of approaches to influencing discourse which seem particularly problematic to the democratic requirement to keep the public reliably and accurately informed.

Problems in Journalism

As I mentioned earlier, the conflict between morality and profitability in journalism seems rather key to the problem of trust and truth-telling. This is not only because a journalist who needs to meet certain requirements from management may also need to be willing to compromise their principles to do so, but because the possibility and motivation for such a conflict may be seen as a justification to trust nothing; leading to a general sense of apathy in the reader. In addition, a weakness such as this in holding the trust of the

reader may be invoked by anti-establishment rhetoric of the sort that can be seen in both of the articles that I will talk about later. In each case, the reader must interpret the implications of the use of certain emotive terms (such as 'metropolitan elites' or 'antipatriotic'), and make a decision regarding the intended meaning: What does the writer include within this bracket? What is the significance of the choice of language? Does the writer truly believe what they are writing? Ultimately, these questions respond to issues which should be less problematic with a more self-critical and honest approach to journalistic discussion, addressing the importance of understanding the agency of the writer and the likely perception of the reader¹¹².

Petley, an academic who was asked by Lord Justice Leveson to contribute to his investigation of ethics in journalism, holds (and Cathcart and Philips agree) that ethics is largely limited to legal concerns in the training of journalists via the National Council for the Training of Journalists:

from my experience of teaching the NCTJ-accredited law module, its central concern appears to be simply teaching journalism students how far they can go whilst still staying within the law as opposed to how far they should go, which is primarily an ethical issue in that it concerns adhering to the underlying ethical principles on which laws are based.¹¹³

The problem is that 'The competitive and 'legalistic approach' can be seen to create an environment in which 'ethical considerations can all too easily be seen as an unaffordable luxury'.¹¹⁴ In other words, the approach recommended by a major body for training journalists is not only allowing for a lack of ethical focus, but effectively endorsing its suppression for the sake of producing competitive and profitable journalism. Ultimately,

112 To some extent, likeliness can be inferred from normalised discourses.

113 Petley, 2012, p.531

114 Ibid. p.532

this suggests that economic focus above ethical concern is not only an accepted and normalised consequence of a market-based culture in the press, but an attitude that is reinforced on a deliberate institutional level.

The market-based approach in the press, which functions 'to maximise profit, not to maximise democratic debate', might (on some level) seem somewhat justifiable to the extent that the public chooses which papers to read, and product or service satisfaction can be inferred from continued interest and loyalty; but this only goes so far.¹¹⁵ The problem is that there is a difference between directing material towards what a person wants to read, and presenting the issues that society needs voters to be informed about in order to make rational decisions in elections and referendums. The need for profitability (or at least to keep afloat) occurs as a potential diversion from public service, seeing as a prerequisite for a viable news source is the funding to support its contributors in devoting their time to research and writing, and the means to distribute and promote the product to the public.

Further to this, the fact that it is perfectly possible for anyone with internet access and word processing facilities to publish their own stories and share them across social media at no cost, means that 'journalists can no longer assume that their 'professionalism' has a secure value'.¹¹⁶ This means that, as I suggested in chapter 2 with YouTube and the focus on promotion and social leverage, it becomes necessary for the press to be competitively entertaining, or to successfully assure readers that their output is of supreme quality, and completely trustworthy (whether or not it actually is). Moreover, with the deliberate use of emotive terms to the tune of deception, betrayal, and lies in the tabloid press, they can

115 Lee-Wright, Peter, Angela Phillips, and Tamara Witschge, *Changing journalism*, (Routledge, 2011), p.135.

116 Ibid., p.8

even be seen to draw attention to issues of trust in society.¹¹⁷ While this might not seem like a bad thing if it leads to a culture in which people strive to be more honest, the extent of cynicism in terms of the establishment may just as easily lead to readers losing trust in institutions that are offering valuable information. As such, I would suggest that a healthy and constructive response to deception and spin in any area of society would be to take the initiative and personally adopt the position of transparency one desires (leading change by example), as opposed to reacting with abusive and emotive language, fighting a position with the very tactics one is condemning. This is to say that one ought to *aim* for reasoned dialogue, even (especially) if it is difficult to avoid rhetoric and polemics, such as when a speaker makes personal attacks, demonstrates creativity with the truth, or tells outright lies.

The *News of the World* phone hacking scandal, which led to the paper's closure in 2011, brought ethics to the centre of press issues, albeit for reasons somewhat opposite from complaints for lack of truth-telling. The significant aspect of this event in relation to this project has more to do with the response from other newspapers, trying to distance themselves from Rupert Murdoch and his corporation *News International*, placing the NOTW's actions as 'synecdochic deviance'.¹¹⁸ In other words, seeing as a particular organisation has been brought to task about its methods, it is vital for the sake of credibility and public confidence that these methods are not seen as typical for the whole of the media establishment. This case is significant to a discussion of trust in the press because, as Carlson shows, it is fundamentally important to newspapers that the public sees them as honest. At the same time, the *Independent on Sunday* and *The Guardian* wanted to show that journalists were still engaging in courageous investigations, arguing that 'Hacking voicemails could be justified if there were good reason to believe that it

117 Conboy, Martin, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a community through language*, (Routledge, 2006), p.13.

118 Carlson, 2014, p.392

would expose greater wrongdoing’, and ‘Journalism must sometimes operate on the margins of law and morality’, respectively.¹¹⁹ This could be taken as an attempt to show that journalists really are conscious of ethical concerns, while maintaining sufficient autonomy to do a professional job; but it could also be seen as a sign that the press is afraid to lose its right to acquire dubiously sensitive information and express itself as it wishes.

Attempts to define the acceptable parameters for ethical activity in journalism work to aid both the strength of brand in marketing and profitability, and the reputation of the newspapers in terms of public service. Given that the hacking scandal was primarily a response to the hacking of victims’ families, it is noteworthy that ‘The Sunday Telegraph concluded that the previous lack of interest in the hacking revelations indicated ‘many considered celebrities and MPs fair game’’, because it suggests that there is reason to believe that these supposedly more tolerable activities are fairly standard practice.¹²⁰ Furthermore – and perhaps as an insult to any credibility that the newspaper may hold, given its founder’s infamous press baron status – the Daily Mail attacked Murdoch directly, insisting ‘We must never again allow a mighty media mogul to put our democracy in danger’.¹²¹

This leads into another problem with competition, especially in the areas of the press (most notably the tabloids) that are not afraid to operate as ‘attack dogs’ against anyone

119 Ibid., p.395

120 Ibid., p.394

121 Ibid. p.396

or anything that challenges the perceived views of the readers.¹²² The attack dogs, as Cammaerts et al. put it, work at 'delegitimising political actors that dare to challenge the status quo', perhaps with the intention of appealing to the readers' expectations and making them feel like someone is listening (which may also help to sell papers). This may just as easily contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy, perpetuating the interest of an audience through repeated use of emotive terms that create their own sense of factuality and self-evidence. As Conboy puts it, 'The idiom/style which the tabloids embody can be defined as a popular-hegemonic approach to national audience building', which is to say that their aim is to appeal to and maintain a unified sense of 'us'.¹²³ As such, it is hardly surprising that this would tie in with a tendency to reinforce the notion of a 'them'.

When trying to represent the will of the people – seeing as most will presumably consider themselves to have a low level of social power compared to someone else, somewhere – it can be appealing to set one's rage against 'the establishment', whatever this may be seen to be, and whether or not this is at all helpful. Importantly, if there is talk of a problem of trust in general discourse, it seems reasonable to suppose that it will spread unless someone finds a compelling way to dismiss it. This means that a newspaper with enough loyal readers can begin to undermine the position of an established institution by casting doubt on it in a public and forceful way. In so far as gullibility and ignorance are highly stigmatised concepts, fear of being fooled into believing something could be seen as a significant factor in the spread of distrust, especially when the pride of 'winning' the argument eclipses concern for truthfulness. Plato's distinction between dialogue and rhetoric (as mentioned in Chapter 1) almost seems to taunt us today, given that constant honesty is not only difficult to maintain, but ultimately frowned upon in practice. In fact,

122 Cammaerts, Decillia, Magalhaes, and Jimenz-Martinez, 'Journalistic Representations of Jeremy Corbyn in the British Press: From Watchdog to Attackdog', (*London School of Economics and Political Science*, July 2016), p. 2

123 Conboy, Martin, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a community through language*, (Routledge, Abingdon 2006), p.10

rhetoric may even be seen to be held in higher esteem much of the time (such as with an emphasis on 'winning' debates). Equally, if the only way to defend oneself appears to involve deception or bluffing, it seems fair to suppose that this will be the chosen option, given that the alternative may feel like giving up when in an environment where everyone else appears to be acting in this way. As such, maintaining self-reflective honesty oneself may take no small amount of courage and will power, thus relating to the sense of parrhesia outlined in chapter two.

Cole et al state that those who claim to doubt the truth of the newspapers are usually 'people who, rightly, believe most of the facts they read in newspapers'.¹²⁴ This may be a reasonable assumption, but the trouble in this discussion, it seems to me, is not so much the facts, but how they are presented. It usually is not necessary to lie if there is a way to frame the information (or omit it) that puts the desired spin on it, possibly leading to a dubious interpretation, but leaving enough room to displace a certain amount of responsibility from the writer. What is more to the point is the matter of whether obvious aggression in certain parts of the media primarily draws greater division between newspaper readerships, such as with the Daily Mail's reaction to High Court judges ruling that the triggering of 'article 50' for the UK to leave the EU would require a vote from parliament. The headline read: 'Enemies of the people: Fury over 'out of touch' judges who have 'declared war on democracy' by defying 17.4m Brexit voters and who could trigger constitutional crisis'¹²⁵ It is noteworthy that criticism of this headline, and of similar attacks by the Sun, the Telegraph, and the Daily Express, were covered by newspapers such as the Guardian and the Independent, effectively distancing themselves from the tabloids,

124 Cole, Peter and Tony Harcup, *Newspaper Journalism*, (Sage, 2010).

125 Slack, James, 'Enemies of the people...', (*Mail Online*, 04/11/2016)

while simultaneously working to maintain a strong counter discourse against them.¹²⁶ The effect is that much of the press that positions itself as being less reactionary has to defend itself through the fact that by taking the opposition of the populist position, they are at risk of being labelled as just another part of the establishment, and by extension, another 'enemy of the people'. Due, in part, to this sort of discourse, one can expect a tendency for the wider press to engage in what Sambrook refers to as 'the journalism of affirmation and assertion', which merely asserts or affirms ideas and beliefs, rather than discussing them.¹²⁷

In this way, one of the major problems in the press industry is the erosion of trust that the more vicious tabloid language perpetuates in the press, arguably helping to legitimise extreme and, often, arguably unfounded sceptical positions towards trustworthiness in certain areas of society (particular political parties or newspapers), while apparently assuming the integrity of the holders of such views. I hold that each of the articles that I will discuss later makes particularly broad claims that are backed up with little more than an assumption that is taken to be the default view of the reader. This kind of assumption is ideological, in that 'ideologies are generally implicit assumptions'¹²⁸. 'For Fairclough, ideology comprises a set of assumptions and presuppositions (the 'given') within a particular discourse style which are realised linguistically and assumed to be held in common between writer and public relating to what Habermas has called a shared lifeworld.'¹²⁹ In this sense, the articles are written as if anyone who reads them already

126 Walker, Peter, 'Daily Mail accused of 'attack on the rule of law...'', (*The Independent*, 04/11/2016). Bowcott, Owen, 'Attorney general defends judges criticised over Brexit ruling', (*The Guardian*, 07/11/2016).

127 Sambrook, Richard Jeremy, 'Delivering trust: Impartiality and objectivity in the digital age.' (*Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, University of Oxford, July, 2012). p.15

128 Fairclough, Norman, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, (Longman Group Limited, London, 1995), p.6.

129 Anderson, Peter and Weymouth, Anthony, *Insulting the public?: The British Press and the European Union*, (Longman, 1999) p.17.

holds a certain set of values, and that all the writer has to do from that point is to justify a particular position by appealing to these values. This does not have to involve lies - particularly if a debate is based around predictions of the future consequences of the decision in question – but may involve tactics such as undermining the credibility of the opposition (accusations of deceit, for example), or labelling opponents with terms which place them as ideological enemies, (anti-patriotic, anti-democratic, xenophobic, etcetera). To some extent, it can be supposed that a certain extent of this kind of ideological framing occurs across all discourse, but here I am particularly interested in how it comes across in the tabloid press.

The idea that there is a set of ‘given’ principles, in a loose but present way, throughout the primary discourse of a newspaper does not have to be so overtly problematic in and of itself. In fact, it would probably feel rather hollow and lacking in contextual groundedness if every article in a paper came from a completely unrecognisable position from the last. The problem is more the forcefulness with which some papers, such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, present these values, and especially if we are to heed the claim by Cole and Harcup that the *Daily Mail* is ‘taken immensely seriously by politicians across the spectrum as representing a hugely significant and un-ignorable strand of public opinion’.¹³⁰ While I am not wholly confident that the *Daily Mail* is quite so trusted by politicians as this claim would suggest, it would certainly be a serious potential for weakness in our political and democratic system if the centre of the establishment really does consider the paper as a representation of the views of the people. Firstly, it seems difficult to gauge how the *Daily Mail’s* editors could possibly be sufficiently engaged with the public to have such a clear idea of their values; and secondly, if the paper is seen to present the views of ordinary voters in an excessively angry and unreflective way, it might convince other people

130 Cole, Peter and Tony Harcup, *Newspaper Journalism*, (Sage, 2010) p.28

(including MPs) that ordinary voters are not rational enough to be worth listening to. Furthermore, there is the dual effect of those who hold similar views to such tabloids being assumed to believe them because they have been brainwashed by them (an argument which can end up being thrown backwards and forwards), and the fact that some people probably actually will develop their own ideas partially from tabloid sources. The suggestion that either of these factors is the 'main' problem would be overly simplistic, but together they contribute to a basic understanding of how discourse can influence and be influenced in such a context.

Now that I have outlined some key problems relating to trust in recent press discourse, it is time to discuss a couple of articles which I feel stand out as lacking in self-reflection and trying to appeal to what they assume the reader already supposes. My reason in each case for holding that the assumptions made in the articles are heavily ideologically dependent is the fact that it is extremely easy to challenge the grounds for many (or most) of the claims made.¹³¹ Another thing that is particularly notable in these articles is the fact that they are each published in the name of the newspaper rather than an individual journalist. This does not so much suggest something about the author and their intentions or lack of personal reflection – the issue is quite the opposite. By not assigning the articles to any person in particular, no individual is left with any public sense of responsibility (thus minimising a need for self-consciousness in the writer), while the article also comes across as a representation of the views of the newspaper brands as units, encompassing

¹³¹ Although, not necessarily in a way that would completely refute the argument.

everyone within them. This can be seen to strengthen the notion of 'us', which can be used against whichever sense of 'them' comes to pass.

The Daily Mail

With more than 18 million readers each month (based on June and July, 2016), the *Daily Mail* and the *Mail on Sunday* stand together as the most read newspaper franchise in the UK, compared with second most read, *The Sun*, at 13.7 million.¹³² For this reason, combined with the often aggressive approach of the *Mail* and *The Sun*, I have chosen to focus on these two papers to illuminate the problems I have discussed so far. At this point, it should be pointed out that my choice of articles was based firstly on the fact that they would be from the papers with the largest readerships, and secondly, on the tone of the articles in terms of language and approach. If my comments appear to support a particular view relating to the topic of the article, this is both unintentional and unfortunate. As such, I hope to avoid making any actual value claims, or assertions of opinion, with regard to the content. I aim to focus only on the approach.

Firstly, I would like to offer a background on the *Daily Mail* before proceeding to analyse an article to do with the aftermath of the 2016 EU referendum in the UK. According to Cole et al.:

The Mail is the embodiment of the idea that a successful newspaper both reflects and reinforces the prejudices of its readers. It believes it knows what these are, more than the politicians who seek their votes. The Mail is suspicious of what it sees as the metropolitan liberal consensus of the 'political and media classes'. It regards this as out of touch with

132 'NRS Jul15-Jun16 fused with comScore Jun2016', (nrs.co.uk, 23/08/2016)

'ordinary voters', by which it means Mail Readers. It despises political correctness and what Dacre refers to as the 'subsidiariat'.

This aspect of reflecting and reinforcing 'the prejudices of the readers' would appear to be the essence of a tabloid newspaper, and the assumption that it knows voters better than politicians do comes across particularly strongly in some of its columns. A major part of tabloid discourse – that which is not straight forward entertainment – tends to be polemic. There is a tendency to categorise discussions 'into binary divisions of the world', with those who are with us, and those who are against us neatly sorted into groups. When Foucault states that 'Polemics defines alliances, recruits partisans, unites interests or opinions, represents a party; it establishes the other as an enemy, an upholder of opposed interests against which one must fight until the moment this enemy is defeated and either surrenders or disappears', his words could just as easily be describing a modern tabloid such as the *Daily Mail* or *The Sun*.¹³³ The significance of this approach in relation to truth-telling and reflectiveness is that it resists any attempt to progress understanding or to engage in dialogue by focusing on keeping its readers within a comfort zone. Likewise, we could say that with the tabloid's approach, the person in disagreement 'is not a partner in the search for the truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat.'¹³⁴

Richard Littlejohn, for example, regularly writes ideologically emotive articles for the *Mail*; examples of his headings include: 'Why Trump's victory is a timely reminder to those in Britain who defy the will of the people', and 'This is a coup, a victory for enemies of democracy. If the roles were reversed there would be riots in the street, so we CAN'T let

133 Foucault, 1997, p.112

134 Ibid., p.112

Brexit be derailed by this City slicker and a Brazilian crimper'¹³⁵ The first heading refers to the similarity between the election of the US president Donald Trump, and the 52% to 48% win for the British *Leave* campaign in the EU referendum, making the assumption that each win is seen as a protest vote against the status quo and the establishment. The second refers to a ruling in the High Court by three judges, which concluded that members of parliament must be allowed a vote on the conditions of triggering article 50; this article overtly calling for a resistance to the verdict (while also effectively standing up for the executive power of prime minister Theresa May to plan an agreement behind the scenes).¹³⁶ These headings each match the sentiment that the *Mail* is writing to appeal to people who already hold particular ideals, and that to not hold these views is to be classed as an outsider.

Katie Hopkins, also writing for the *Mail*, offers the headline: 'I was right. Trump's triumph has crushed the lefty luvvies, useless pollsters, multicultural mafia and gender Nazis who refuse to listen to regular people. So, from a Brexiteer, thank you America'.¹³⁷ As with the second heading by Littlejohn, Hopkins uses overtly derogatory and belittling terms to describe types of people who are surely in reality far less one-dimensional than is suggested (and perhaps do not really exist in the form she presents). This approach, when given such a large platform, can be seen to delegitimise certain perspectives (potentially even that of the speaker if they upset enough people), given that no one much would claim to be a gender Nazi, or admit (publicly) to being associated with a position to the extent that they are really comparable to members of a criminal organisation. It is not exactly as if opponents of Hopkins's position are likely to declare themselves as most of the categorizations she gives, but once such a categorization is formed, it becomes more

¹³⁵ Littlejohn, Richard, (*Mail Online*, 04/11/2016 and 15/11/2016)

¹³⁶ Referring back to the same discussion mentioned earlier about the attacks on the judges by the tabloids.

¹³⁷ Hopkins, Katie, (*Mail Online*, 09/11/2016)

convenient to disregard whole lines of discourse that might be perfectly legitimate (inequality or scepticism towards extreme patriotism, for example). It is notable that Hopkins is particularly known for embracing her right to offend, although this approach has back-fired on at least one occasion, given that she was successfully sued for libel by a food blogger, Jack Monroe, for the insinuation via a tweet that she supported, condoned, or would take part in, the defacement of war memorials.¹³⁸ While this may seem like a bad thing for Hopkins, it is possible that some loyal followers she may have would take her courage, which led to being sued, as a triumph of her commitment to her position

In the cases of Littlejohn and Hopkins, it can be seen that each (especially Hopkins) is positioned as if they are speaking the hard truth, and that they are courageous in doing so. While it would be inconsistent with my position to firmly assert that they are not reflecting on their own positions, and that they are speaking primarily to confirm their own instinctive position and that of the readers, the use of loosely emotive terms conjoined with sweeping assumptions which reflect particular ideologies (which happen to be consistent with what Cole et al. and Anderson et al. say about the standard views of the *Mail*) places a certain amount of fog on any notion of truth. This is to say that their approaches are clearly coercive (and possibly hyperbole – although these examples do not come across as irony or comedy to me), whether or not they communicate truth; making it difficult to judge the merit of the position on any terms. This highlights the sense in which it is important for journalists to communicate in a truthful manner, rather than merely presenting oneself as such.

The article on which I will now focus is signed off as by 'Daily Mail Comment', which is not peculiar to tabloid press; it can be found in most papers with a comment section, including

¹³⁸ BBC News, 'Jack Monroe wins Katie Hopkins libel tweet case', (*BBC News*, 10/03/2017).

in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. As such, my claim that this is problematic applies to any newspaper which has such a section in so far as it coerces the reader into taking a particular perspective; and I am not suggesting that this is not the case in other papers. The focus of the objection is on the use of language that clearly assumes a disdain towards a targeted view which in any other situation could be justified, and this comes across particularly strongly in this selected case in that the heading itself emphasises a series of insults, many of which assuming a particular attitude from the very beginning.

The full heading for the article is 'DAILY MAIL COMMENT: Whingeing. Contemptuous. Unpatriotic. Damn the Breemoaners and their plot to subvert the will of the British people'.¹³⁹ It is referring to a campaign by a number of MPs, including Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg, to make sure that there is a vote in parliament on the terms of leaving the European Union - primarily focusing on whether the UK would leave the single market as well as the EU itself. The *Mail* positions itself very much against this, as it holds that the referendum itself was sufficient mandate for the prime minister and her cabinet to pass a 'Brexit' deal through without external input. This heading alone contains enough ideologically loaded language to make it clear that, even if the article could be attributed to one journalist in particular, there would be no hint of an intention to provide a self-reflective and thoroughly considered contribution to a grounded dialogue. As such, it seems like a fitting example of polemic discourse in that it attacks an enemy that is written off immediately as completely void of credibility.

The first word 'Whinging', and the term 'Breemoaners', place emphasis on the idea that the people in question (those who oppose the unchallenged passing of article 50) are unreasonable and immature. These are sufficiently loose terms to cover any Remain

¹³⁹ Daily Mail Comment, (*Mail Online*, 12/10/2016)

supporter who would be unreasonable in the case of a lack of cause, and someone who believes that they have a genuine counter-argument (considering the article rejects the possibility of one)¹⁴⁰. Again, as with the heading by Littlejohn and Hopkins, the idea that the opponent is simply whinging contributes to a delegitimization of any objection to the given position. This means that, rather than offering a position which is open to fair discussion, the terminology is in place for a battle of pure insults, which is likely to go nowhere at all. It will take someone who can successfully convince the loyal supporter of the paper's position that the terminology is flawed to even begin a reasonable dialogue. This means that the given position by the article is reduced to an obstruction or distraction which requires a rejection of a framework of given ideology that may be challenging and counter-intuitive to someone who holds related preconceptions to a strong extent, or has held such views for an extended period of time.

The word 'Unpatriotic', while perfectly characteristic of a tabloid paper according to Conboy, is oddly placed considering the point made by a Labour frontbencher (before the referendum) that 'it would be hard for pro-Brexit MPs to resist the Commons deciding Britain's future relationship with the EU, as it would demonstrate the principle of parliamentary sovereignty eurosceptics have been demanding for years.'¹⁴¹ The term 'unpatriotic' could really be applied to any decision or action that did any harm, or is perceived to be likely to cause harm, to the country in mind. As such, on the basis that there is not enough information to determine what is a lie when discussing options with future effects, as such statements can only be based on opinion and prediction, a paper or journalist may get away with the use of a term if it *could* be interpreted in an appropriate way. From the point of view of transparency and reflectiveness in

140 More on this later.

141 Conboy, 2006, p.50. Landale, James, 'MPs 'considering using majority' to keep UK in single market', (*BBC News*, 06/06/2016)

communication, however, it does not seem to make for a helpful contribution to discourse, given that it is likely to cause more conflict than it solves.

The piece continues to make strong statements about the credibility of those who are seeking a parliamentary vote; referring to Ed Miliband as a 'trades-union puppet' and 'one of the most unelectable politicians ever to hold high office'.¹⁴² Gaber illustrates the hefty campaign that the *Daily Mail* led in the 2015 general election, smearing Miliband's reputation with headings including 'Red Ed's pledge to bring back socialism is a homage to his Marxist father. So what did Miliband Senior really believe in? The answer should disturb everyone who loves this country.'¹⁴³ They also ran 'the notorious 'Man Who Hated Britain' article', which focussed on the Father of Ed Miliband, who was labelled a Marxist revolutionary.¹⁴⁴ Given that this coverage all happened during Miliband's campaign to become the prime minister, it seems reasonable to suggest that Miliband's being 'unelectable' may have had something to do with the *Mail*, and that whether or not this is truly the case, using it as a description of the man in broad terms does not seem entirely fair. Even if we suppose that Miliband never had a chance of winning the election, he is still an MP, and the idea that his loss is relevant to the discussion of a parliamentary vote (which would later be ruled as entirely lawful) seems remarkably ad-hominem.

Another significant claim made by this article which is placed as factual, but cannot possibly be known for sure, is that: 'what the public voted for was simple: to regain control of our borders in order to end mass immigration; reclaim control of our laws: and stop

142 Daily Mail Comment, 12/10/2016

143 Gaber, Ivor, 'The 'Othering' of 'Red Ed', or How the Daily Mail 'Framed' the British Labour Leader', (*Political Quarterly*, vol. 85.4, October–December 2014), p.471-479, p.471.

144 Ibid., p.472

sending billions of pounds to Brussels...None of this is possible inside the single market'¹⁴⁵ Regardless of whether it is true that this cannot be done while within the single market, there were many different components to the referendum campaigns, and there is limited reason to assume that every voter made their choice because of these factors. It is possible, but how could we know? Arguably contradicting the certainty in this claim, it is later stated that the vote was about 'more than just leaving the EU...It was about a deep and profound sense that the public's concerns on everything, from immigration and rip-off energy bills big to business not paying its taxes, have been ignored for too long.'¹⁴⁶ So, in addition to knowing that every single voter (or at least enough to account for a greater percentage than the remain vote) voted against open borders, sovereignty, and payments to the EU, the *Daily Mail* claims to know that they voted for these things on top of casting a general protest vote. Given that the vote asked a very simple in or out question, it does not really seem appropriate to infer so much in such a direct and matter-of-fact tone.

Additionally, the article claims that the Remain campaigners 'invented – in the newspeak style of Orwell – some new phrases. The British people, they decided, had not voted for 'hard Brexit' – even though nobody had even heard of the expression until after the referendum.'¹⁴⁷ Hard Brexit refers to the UK leaving the EU and the single market, as opposed to a 'soft' Brexit, where the UK would remain in the single market. While these terms may not have been used with any great presence or regularity in the wider public before the vote, they had certainly been discussed in their conceptual form. The BBC published an article on the 6th June, 2016, stating that ministers 'say it would be legitimate for MPs to push for the UK to stay in the single market because the Leave campaign has refused to spell out what trading relationship it wants the UK to have with the EU in the

¹⁴⁵ Daily Mail Comment, 12/10/2016

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

future...As such, a post-Brexit government could not claim it had a popular mandate for a particular model.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, it was not a secret that there were expectations that multiple options for the type of Brexit would need to be considered. While the terms 'hard' and 'soft' may have been new, at least to the *Daily Mail*, it does not make it true to say that the fact that many people may not have heard of them makes it necessarily the case that the public had a particular vision in mind. Similarly, even if a soft Brexit would not be possible, some people may have been persuaded by the idea that the UK could be more independent without having to leave the single market. Whether or not this option is possible, it could be claimed just as easily that many people would have voted for that, and would not be happy with the 'hard' option. Whichever way it goes, the fact that people were unaware of a consideration in the vote does not help a case which insists that the people have spoken and that they made a properly informed decision.

The important thing that should be taken from this critique is not whether the *Daily Mail's* stance on the EU is actually well founded, but whether it is presented in a way which demonstrates self-reflection, and gives a fair analysis of the available information to the end of involving readers in a discussion with multiple view-points sides. It does not seem unreasonable for the paper to urge towards a preference to some extent, given that any person who has an understanding of a situation and cares about it is presumably going to have a bias of sorts. However, the insulting language, the ideological basis for some of the attacks (particularly on Ed Miliband), and the dubious direct statements as fact, showed a highly problematic (and un-democratic) approach to journalism. This critique, in conjunction with my argument regarding the necessity of a focus on a form of parrhesia to maintain a useful form of modern democracy, demonstrates a problem in a kind of reporting which focusses on appeasing a particular kind of reader by pummelling an

148 BBC News, 06/06/2016

ideological rival (who, in most cases, will not even read the paper) with polemic insults and dismissal; creating an unnecessary state of binary rivalry rather than open-ended, and perhaps somewhat rational, enquiry. It seems clear that the article is not written for just anyone, or at least that it is willing to offend in order to encourage enflamed discussion on its website, which will draw traffic and therefore advertising funds to the organisation. While such a tactic seems legitimate in commercial terms, it is inherently problematic in terms of wider public service value.

The Sun

The Sun, with its large readership, second only to the Daily Mail, is another tabloid which is known for its aggressive approach; but also for its playful and morally rebellious side. For many years it has incorporated its 'Page 3' models (topless women), showbiz elements, and sport sections.¹⁴⁹ Although the Daily Mail also has similar features, The Sun can be seen to have more focus on entertainment, while serious news seems to be more of an after-thought unless it has something striking to put on the front page. One headline '1 in 5 Brit Muslims' Sympathy for Jihadis' was sufficiently controversial to ignite a considerable backlash, as the poll the statistic was taken from did not use the word 'jihadi', while the ambiguity of the word 'sympathy' was somewhat damaging for the poll in the first place.¹⁵⁰ The position of the Sun is 'arguably, symptomatic of and contributory to a political culture in which popular pleasure is routinely articulated through oppressive ideologies that operate in fertile chauvinistic ground.'¹⁵¹ In other words, it is populist in

149 Conboy, 2006, p.8

150 Melley, James, 'Do 20% of British Muslims really sympathise with jihadists?', (*BBC News*, 01/12/2015)

151 Conboy, 2006, p.12. (quoted from McGuigan)

that it aims to entertain and defend simple pleasures and patriotism, regardless of whether the views are the explanation for, or the result of, the paper's market survival.

Perhaps one of the bigger scandals supported by a major pillar of the press was The Sun's report of the 'Hillsborough Disaster', for which it officially apologised in September 2012.¹⁵² The disaster occurred in 1989, and The Sun's article (uncomfortably headed 'The Truth') supported claims by the police, which incriminated football fans, while it has more recently been reported that 'FORTY-ONE victims of the 1989 FA Cup semi-final horror could have been saved if emergency services had acted faster'.¹⁵³ While part of the outrage was that The Sun had stood up for the police, while the families of fans fought for truth and justice, the article was also guilty of insisting that mere allegations about fans who were killed in the incident were the truth. It has since been reported that the author of the story did not mean for it to be presented as fact, but in a 'fair and balanced way', and that the editor at the time, Kelvin MacKenzie, wrote the controversial headline.¹⁵⁴ This relates to the earlier mentioned issue of the journalist not always being in a position to control their own output, and suggests that even if an individual in such a position tries to be honest, there could be someone who chooses to present possibilities as fact. It also presents a similar situation to MacMullen's portrayal of the Westray disaster, discussed in chapter 1, in that it shows how the media may sometimes be in a position to trample on those who do not have much political power.

As with the article from the Daily Mail, the article I will now be discussing relates to the EU referendum of 2016; but in this case, it was a pre-vote appeal for readers to vote to

152 Moriarty, Veevers, and Newton Dunn, 'Hillsborough: The Real Truth', (*The Sun*, 12/09/2012)

153 Ibid.

154 Metrowebukmetro, 'Sun journalist who wrote Hillsborough 'The Truth' article 'aghast' at headline', (*metro.co.uk*, 07/09/2012)

leave the EU. Other similarities with the Daily Mail article include the use of polemic language, the fact that it is authored by the paper as a whole, and the fact that it is staunchly pro-Brexit. Again, it is in a way unfortunate that both of the papers I am discussing are largely on similar sides politically, and that it could appear that they have been chosen and criticised for the benefit of my own political ends. Then again, it does mean that the two highest selling newspaper franchises in the UK are each biased in a similar direction, and so it would seem unreasonable for a loyal reader of either of these papers to complain too bitterly about any suspicion of bias on my part.

The heading for the article is 'SUN SAYS We urge our readers to beLEAVE in Britain and vote to quit the EU on June 23'.¹⁵⁵ Although this seems like a rather bold statement for any newspaper to make, and demonstrates a complete disregard for any concerns toward intense bias in the media, it is at least not entirely angry. It does, however, immediately play on the idea (although through the pun, 'beLEAVE', which lightens the impact somewhat) that it is by voting to leave the European Union that one can show confidence and pride in the UK. This can be seen to play on the long-held position by the tabloid press of maintaining a nationalistic bias, uniting people in the love of their country, while also maintaining a shared ideology that can be seen to perpetuate a sense of belonging that will encourage a loyal readership.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the use of the word 'urge' suggests that

155 The Sun, (*The Sun*, 13/06/2016)

156 Conboy, 2006, p.9

there is a sense of urgency, rather than simply advice, but it is not really until we get into the article itself that things begin to get more heated.

The first statement of the article is presented in the form of a rant, with no notable qualification, and with no hint of concern for the fact that all of the available information was speculative or subjective¹⁵⁷:

We must set ourselves free from dictatorial Brussels...Throughout our 43-year membership of the European Union it has proved increasingly greedy, wasteful, bullying and breathtakingly incompetent in a crisis...Next Thursday, at the ballot box, we can correct this huge and historic mistake...It is our last chance. Because, be in no doubt, our future looks far bleaker if we stay in.¹⁵⁸

Here, the idea that 'dictatorial Brussels' looms over us and is something from which to 'set ourselves free' presupposes that any powers the EU does hold over the people of the UK are problematic, and that the alternative is clearly preferable. Later, the EU is described as 'the ever-expanding superstate', referring to the expanding size of the institution.¹⁵⁹ This shows a disdain for the loss of power for the UK, without clearly stating exactly what it is that the control of the EU really affects, meaning that the reader is being given nothing but a leading statement, filled with negative connotations, and void of justification. The main reference to any firm values of the British government is the statement that 'We will re-establish the basic principle that we are governed by politicians we elect or eject every five years, not foreign bureaucrats'¹⁶⁰, and this would seem like a reasonable justification

¹⁵⁷ By June 2017, it is still being discussed how Brexit would actually work.

¹⁵⁸ The Sun, (13/06/2016)

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

if it were actually explained how the EU is different; rather than simply presenting it as a malevolent dictatorship made up of foreigners.

Indeed, the choice of the word 'foreign' (in 'foreign bureaucrats') gives an indication of the kind of patriotism that is being put forward, which is placed without context, and with no justification or alternative. There seems to be a strongly held underlying belief that these other people, from countries with which the UK has formed a union, are fundamentally distant from the UK, and that they will (or should) remain so. There is no consideration for a duty beyond the boundaries of the UK, and the mention of the UK's future as a 'self-governing, powerful nation envied by all' suggests a sense of competition that is not obviously helpful to anyone much (aside from the press, who get interesting stories to publish during social or political friction). This tallies with Conboy's description of the tabloid press's focus on nationalistic ideologies, and supports a suspicion that the seemingly tempting notion of a unity against outsiders is being used to create a sense of common desire to be a separate and independent nation. The fact that this occurs as an assumed ideal says a certain amount about the position of the journalist in a paper such as The Sun, given that they have the option of questioning or explicitly justifying these positions, or simply taking them for granted. The honest and reflective journalist would surely credit the reader by giving them an opportunity to understand the position they are being encouraged to adopt (or showing how it fits with counter-arguments), rather than appealing to the position in an emotional way; coercing rather than reasoning with the reader.

It follows from my position that a criticism of one campaign in a journalistic article must be contextualised with at least an attempt to acknowledge the conduct of the opposing campaign, seeing as the article could play a notable part in someone's impression of

reality¹⁶¹. In the article, there is a straight-forward partaking in the polemic battle which occurred between the primary campaigns, by stating that 'Remain has conducted a deceitful campaign. It has been nasty, cynical, personally abusive and beneath the dignity of Britain.'¹⁶² The trouble with this is that, while this may well contain truth, it does not comment on the credibility of the Leave campaign, which must be properly defensible if the conduct of the other 'side' is to be condemned; otherwise, any comment seems inherently hypocritical and potentially misleading. Within a society that promotes competition, and where slogans and advertising are normal and expected, it is difficult to see where the boundaries could lie between a deceptive and honest campaign. By the standards for which I would argue in journalism - of reflection and honesty – it is crucial that the tactical aspect of politics is not continued in the media, as such an approach inevitably distorts and places bias on the available pool of accessible information.

Finally, the article ends with the statement 'This is our chance to make Britain even greater, to recapture our democracy, to preserve the values and culture we are rightly proud of...A VOTE FOR LEAVE IS A VOTE FOR A BETTER BRITAIN.'¹⁶³ Again, this is an assertion which is presumably to be backed up by the values that it is assumed that a true British patriot would have. It is not put in an advisory way, but as a direct proposition. Yet, while it is not demonstrably false (it is based on a prediction), it can be said that it muddies the discussion in its emotional appeal to a love of one's country, which can be seen to play a part in perpetuating a notion of common sense surrounding the importance of nationality and old fashioned community. Just as an example of a response to this, growing up in a world with instant communication with anyone in the world, it is not necessarily the case that someone of a younger generation would expect to feel a connection with someone

¹⁶¹ This is not to say that I assume many people only read one article and believe it.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

in their own town, let alone country, that is more intimate or ideologically unified than with someone from the other side of the world. It seems to me that once this aspect of modern society is considered, there is little surprise when people (perhaps those of older generations who are used to a more proximity-based community) become afraid that the kind of community they value is compromised by close communications with other parts of the world, and with other cultures. The Sun could be seen to be appealing to these instincts, 'defending' more traditional readers from the change in social cohesion that inevitably develops through stronger global communication.

This article seems to me to be an example of a descendent of the pejorative form of parrhesia, or of rhetoric, whereby the writer is aiming to persuade or reinforce the views of the reader without serious concern for truth values, or other aspects of current discourse. Indicators of this include the use of emotional and ideologically driven appeals to patriotism and the benefits for Britain being the only worthy consideration; a lack of attention to the actual justifications of claims that the UK would be worse off within the EU; the hypocrisy of accusations of scaremongering by the opposing campaign whilst presenting the EU as an oppressive force that must be escaped; and a complete absence of consideration for the affects that either vote would have on non-British people. While, in an article written by a named journalist, overt bias could be somewhat remedied by a sense of objective distance between the newspaper and the author – along with the possibility of publishing contrasting articles – in the case of an article presented as the view of the paper itself, it seems even more important to take a full account of the information and arguments available. This is not to say that individual writers should not be concerned with such problems, but that a lack of transparency is even more fundamentally problematic when there is not even the defence that the paper can distance itself and publish contrasting views. If the article clearly presents a view as that of the institution itself, it has a duty to give a full account of the assumptions made,

because this view could influence not only the public, but also the decisions of particular writers to agree to work for the paper; which could in turn reinforce a significant echo chamber effect. This problem would apply to any article which is presented as representative of a newspaper as a whole and does not allow for the potential disagreements between even the organisation's own journalists.

At the centre of the problem with this article, in relation to the duty of the journalist to deliver an open and self-reflective perspective is the apparent position that The Sun can be seen to be taking in relation to a political campaign. It is made explicitly clear that the views are presented as those of The Sun, in that it is headed with 'Sun Says', showing that the article is not in itself a universally factual view.¹⁶⁴ Yet, as should be clear from the examples I have already given, each assertion is written as if it is an objective fact, despite each statement being contestable. Rather than commentating and outlining the views being discussed within the political debate, and perhaps stating a preference with reasons, the article fights for a particular side as if the other side of the debate were entirely illegitimate. This might be (although I would like to think that it is not) a vaguely acceptable approach in politics, where each side is expected to compete against the other with little regard for truth, but I do not believe that there is any need, let alone a strong justification, for such an approach within the media, given that media is needed to give the information to diffuse such tactical rhetoric – not to add to it. In fact, if the media does contribute to such a disregard for truth, it is essentially propaganda, and therefore destructive towards the notion of democracy.

If democracy requires transparent information and open debate to operate, it needs a sector which encourages and facilitates such discussion. The approach taken in the two

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

main articles I have discussed from The Daily Mail and The Sun do not only fail to deliver on these requirements – They actually stand against them, effectively following a somewhat authoritarian approach to discussion. While there are other choices of newspaper, the fact that these papers contain such a high focus on entertainment, combined with headlines clearly composed to draw attention allows for a suspicion that news sources are frequently chosen for reasons other than their informative value. While it may or may not be fair to assume that many people are actually strongly influenced in their own opinions by these newspapers (though it seems likely that some would be), the idea that that high readership in itself would be seen to reflect a strong preference for a particular kind of politics seems problematic, due to the appeal of other factors in a person's choice of newspaper. Also, while many people may well hold the views in these papers, whether or not they hold them because they have been influenced by them (it is likely to be circular anyway), the emotional polemic approach, and lack of an attempt at objective detail, may simultaneously legitimise certain positions due to their prominence in discourse; and yet reduce the credibility of valid perspectives due to an overly simplified and undignified representation of them. The suspicion in each case is that the tabloids may benefit greatly from drawing in readers due to the way they appear to represent the views of a somewhat mythical idea of an 'ordinary voter', because it keeps them in business, and may in some cases be used to serve their own interests; while the reader may benefit little beyond a potential feeling of comfort in their values. With this kind of journalism, people can more easily categorise themselves, but they may struggle to really inform themselves.

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I have combined an attention to the problems of passive power relations with an account of how a journalist can be seen as duty-bound to emphasise a concern for transparency and honesty in their work if support of the notion of democracy is assumed. This does not mean that a journalist should always be right, but that they should make it clear how and why they came to any particular conclusions, giving the reader the best possible information for making their own judgement. My intention throughout has been to show how a person is guided (but not completely restricted) by a general sense of normality, such that an individual sense of judgment can decide whether and how to challenge the current expectations sensed in the social environment of the subject. This means that, while it may come to be accepted in certain media organisations that the aim of drawing interest is a reasonable substitute for a thorough provision of information, the acceptability of such an aim may be challenged by an individual who refuses to conform for the sake of maintaining the status quo. As such, while one may *feel* as if they have to act a certain way, it is not necessarily true to say that they have no choice at all.

My criticisms of the tabloid approach in journalism should demonstrate the kind of discourse that I aim to discourage: the use of aggressive language to delegitimise an opponent, a failure or refusal to acknowledge the basis of another side of a debate, and the perpetuation and manipulation of certain ideologies (extreme patriotism, for example) for the sake of coercion. Each of these approaches in journalism ignores and/or obscures the potential transparency of dialogue by placing importance on strategic or defensive forms of speech. This not only fails to contribute usefully to open discussion, but can be destructive to the attitude, judgement and understanding of the public in that it may

encourage people to disregard the opinions or advice of people who have something useful to say. For example, it is all very well being cautious of trusting politicians, but simply disregarding anything they say is likely to be harmful to one's outlook, as they may have valuable information or say something that makes people think about their own position. Taking the words of an ideological opponent (in as much as it is ever useful to consider someone as such) seriously can be a helpful exercise in the process of understanding and reflecting upon one's own position. We may maintain our position after a self-critical process, but in a situation where we are asked to give an opinion officially (as a vote), it would seem to be helpful for society if people were aware that they may have skipped over important details in their initial considerations. As such, encouraging self-reflection should lead to people thinking twice (at least) before they speak or act.

While this project has focused on the role of the journalist, it would also be interesting to consider the implications of truth telling and self-reflection in other forms of social discourse. Unfortunately, there was not the time or space to go into social media and citizen journalism in this effort, but that is precisely where I plan to go next. In fact, the principles and concerns regarding the position of the individual in society do hint to a direction of thought that could be applied to each person who engages with others in a context where they can write something, check it, and then publish as is done on Facebook or Twitter. It is interesting to think of the disputes that will likely have been caused, at least in part, by rushed comments and angry responses which could have been avoided or vented more diplomatically with some further attention to the individuals' own positions.

Although a simple account could be given for this kind of issue from the discussions I have entered into here, it would seem much better to leave such questions for a future project.

It is my hope that this contribution to discussions of trust, agency, and transparency in journalism will provoke further attention to the problem of truth-telling for the individual journalist, and that such an ideal can be brought fully to the centre of press culture. Further to this, it seems to me that honesty could be brought into greater prominence in other realms of society; for example, in the world of marketing and commerce, such that people are encouraged to buy and sell products and services that actually make a positive and sustainable improvements to our everyday lives, rather than simply trying to sustain an economy. It seems to me that cynicism of a modern kind has come to make us chase values that we know are hollow, but that we suppose must serve some sort of greater good that we do not really understand. Instead, we should be trying to understand exactly what it is that we want from life, and what sort of system can really bring self-esteem to each person in society. Such a system would surely rely on honesty rather than pretence, as honesty allows us to better understand what it is that we want, rather than what we are supposed to want.

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