

The Renewal of Journalistic Practice in Disaster:
Reporting from the 2010 Haitian Earthquake

Peter Downie

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By: Peter Downie

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Linda Kay Chair

Dr. Mike Gasher Examiner

Dr. Christopher Waddell Examiner

Dr. James McLean Supervisor

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

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Abstract

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Peter Downie

This is a study of the practices and experiences of eight Canadian journalists in the week immediately following the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The central assertion of this study is that a reenergized journalistic community is born in disaster in the absence of the comfort, familiarity and technical capabilities of the traditional newsroom and its decision-making structures. The exceptional conditions of the Haitian earthquake produced, with no formal planning, a mutually supportive and cooperative journalistic community. This research concentrates on how journalism operates differently in a disaster zone by rediscovering “the authentic” and how, amidst the ruptured meanings of daily life for Haitians, the earthquake represents a unique opportunity for professional renewal.

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Anthony Shadid

The world has lost a precious voice of hope. His brilliance turned reporting into a kind of beautiful and, at times, heartbreaking poetry. His compassion and understanding produced that rare and refulgent journalism that shapes how we might better understand the differences between each other.

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Chapter One: The Practice of Journalism in Disaster

People get their news about disasters through the media, specifically the Western media, which then have the power to propel an event into the realm of celebrity (Quarantelli 1989, 12). Like “Picasso” and “Pelé,” the unique intensity of one-word names - “Bhopal,” “Katrina,” Chernobyl” – have earned a distinctive place in popular culture. In the public imagination, these words ultimately come to represent destruction, fear, death, and human misery on a grand scale.

To this list is now added “Haiti,” signifying the earthquake of 2010.

To examine the role that journalists have played in this process of signification is to begin to understand how their routine necessarily changes when faced with the unique conditions of a disaster and to appreciate the impact of their work on the rest of us. This thesis proposes that a newly engaged, interactive audience empowered, in part, by the tools of social media is mobilized and, in a related phenomenon, that reporters in a disaster zone necessarily undergo a transformation in their view of the profession.

The study supporting this thesis follows eight Canadian print and broadcast journalists from the moment they learn of the tragedy of the Haitian earthquake in January 2010 through their determined efforts to reach the devastated capital of Port-au-Prince. It is informed by four basic objectives: to document the depth and causes of contemporary disillusionment about the profession; to dig deeply into the changed practice of journalism in the unique conditions of disaster, notably, active participation and advocacy versus detachment and observation; to examine

whether the cooperation and supportive environment that emerges in a disaster may have deeper implications for “moving journalism beyond its modernist moorings, where it can better navigate a digitally mediated environment that left modernity behind some time ago” (Zelizer 2010, 323); and to examine the critical role that major news events play in forming a group’s professional identity and conduct.

The role of journalism in a disaster is a relatively recent field of study. The range of scholarship has progressed impressively from the original objectives of “the counting and description of audiences and the measurement of direct effects on those exposed to communication” (McQuail 1969, 36). The work of scholars from mass communication and sociology initially dominated the literature. This is no longer true, as evidenced by the wide-ranging work of the Disaster Research Center (DRC) in the United States, “the first research center in the world devoted to the social scientific study of disasters” (McNeil and Young 2010, 5). The DRC has now produced close to seven hundred field studies of multiple types of disasters representing “interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research” (Ibid.).

The full portrait of the practice of journalism in Haiti, like a watercolour painting, features a complex blending of intensities that produces the subtle play of light and shadow, the richness of foreground and background components that, when mixed in the specific frame of a news story, offers a deeper and wider understanding of what happens to the journalistic routine under these intensely

special circumstances. It is a complex object of study that can be best approached through the recollections of those who experienced it first-hand.

For this reason, the research goals of this thesis are most effectively served by employing the methodological technique of “crystallization,” described as the deconstruction of triangulation, “the traditional idea of ‘validity’” and provides us with “a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (Richardson 1998, 358). The central imaginary of the crystalline approach is not the “rigid, fixed, two-dimensional” triangle but rather the crystal that can “grow, change and [is] altered but...[is] not amorphous” as it “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities and angles of approach” (Ibid.).

The impressions, expectations and influences of the journalists and producers on the ground in this disaster, the survivors, humanitarian workers, historians, trauma experts, the *general* audience and the *specific* audience of relatives of the missing all contribute to a more profound understanding beyond the assumption that “there is a ‘fixed point’ or ‘object’ that can be triangulated” (Ibid.).

This methodology acknowledges “the existence of multiple human truths and the conflict of a range of legitimate human values and goals” (Plaisance 2009, 239). It also nourishes “the intersection of observation and imagination,” understanding the crystal’s unique ability to “reflect externalities” (the chaos of a natural disaster, the political economy and cultural expectations of journalism, the lack of official sources) “and refract [those externalities] within themselves” (the upheaval of daily

practice, the emergence of cooperation and the awareness of the journalistic community that is reborn and strengthened in disaster) (Richardson 1998, 358).

Several data collection methods have been employed. All deploy the creative analytical process (CAP) of qualitative research. In-depth interviews have been conducted with eight Canadian journalists who reported from Haiti in the first week following the earthquake. In the interests of capturing and preserving the freshest and most accurate memories possible, these interviews, with the exception of one, were conducted within weeks of the earthquake. The interview with the CBC's Paul Hunter was conducted some months after the quake - after Hunter had returned a number of times to Haiti - and revealed a phenomenon of interest. As Hunter put it, "my memories are as fresh today as they were when I left that first time" (Hunter 2011).

The other journalists interviewed for this thesis include CTV reporters Daniele Hamamdjian, Paul Workman and Tom Clark. Their colleagues, CTV producer Pat Skinner and photojournalist and editor George Papadionysiou were also included. Sue Montgomery reporting for the *Gazette* in Montreal and Joanna Smith of the *Toronto Star's* Ottawa bureau are representative voices from Canadian print media. Paul Hunter continues to report for the CBC's *National* from Washington.

Hamamdjian and Smith were chosen because they were both recent graduates from journalism school. Neither had previously experienced the chaotic, emotional working conditions of disaster reporting and thus offer this study a valuable perspective through relatively "fresh" eyes. Their experiences and the

conclusions they reached, blended with those of the more experienced reporters in Haiti, will help illustrate not only the range and depth of disillusionment in the contemporary newsroom but they will also deepen the understanding of what happens to journalistic routine in the conditions of disaster.

Veteran journalists Paul Workman and Tom Clark were selected because both have years of reporting from natural disasters (Asian tsunami, Katrina) and war zones (Kosovo, Sarajevo) and will provide an important historical perspective, a part of the collective memory that helps to cement the bonds of the journalistic community.

Unlike the other journalists in this research, George Papadionysiou had a unique perspective as he saw the results of the earthquake through a single lens, unable to look away from the human suffering. This viewpoint, or prism from a disaster zone, creates “different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions” (Richardson 1998, 358).

Sue Montgomery of the *Gazette* was selected because she has a history of reporting on Montreal’s considerable Haitian community and has been to Haiti several times. In the aftermath of the earthquake Montgomery announced to a group of journalism students that she would leave the profession to pursue a more hands-on approach to help Haitians. While she didn’t follow through with this dramatically stated intention, it underlined the emotional intensity and personal impact of the experiences immediately after the earthquake. And her example illuminated the research question: What is the appropriate balance between

personal engagement and professional distance when witnessing such overwhelming scenes?

Television reporter Paul Hunter of the CBC offered not only his veteran insights into the particular approach of Canada's public broadcaster but he also discussed his professional and personal determination *not* to forget the people of Haiti. Hunter was on the ground in that first week of January 2010 but reported the slow recovery in four subsequent visits to the island over the course of the year following the tragedy.

This research deals only with anglophone reporters and media outlets, as the intention of the thesis was to examine the scope of Canada's national press. The journalists represent a wide range of experience, or "angles of repose," in the fancier language of Richardson and St. Pierre. In this sense, each journalist was a singular crystal projecting, with unique intensities and refractions, their own values and motivations that, when taken together, delivered a more substantial explanation of how journalists operate in disaster and, importantly, what was revealed to them about the profession in the process.

This study proposes that the authenticity and the interpretive role of the "eyewitness" have been all but stripped from daily newsgathering practices at home; i.e., journalists no longer *feel* like journalists. The business mindset "starkly pits the market values of profits against the public interest value of diversity" (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 156) and the lives of newswriters are "increasingly circumscribed by performance standards and management systems designed to ensure greater productivity, by bosses trained in the new techniques of scientific

management, by readership research and surveys, and by editors who have joined the marketing team” (Underwood 1993, 164). In such a system, news is regarded as a profit centre within giant media corporations where managers/editors are rewarded not for journalistic accomplishments but for devising and implementing successful schemes to increase that profit.

The consequences of what has been called the “Hollywoodization of news” is “instead of media that are diverse, innovative, substantive, and independent, the recent structural and strategic changes in the media industry have too often led to content that is homogenized, imitative, trivial and constrained” (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 151), eroding “the idealism that once inspired journalists” (Underwood 1993, 164).

This was foreshadowed by Habermas who identified these forces as an obstacle to the creation of his *ideal* public sphere. More recently, Habermas has argued “the commercialization of mass communication networks has virtually displaced ‘rational-critical debate’ into the realm of cultural consumption, thereby transforming active citizens into indifferent consumers” (Allan 2004, 216).

In bright contrast, it will be shown in this study that readers, viewers and journalists became unusually active and engaged in the coverage of the Haitian earthquake.

Daily practice has developed a system of newsgathering in which the reporter has been “reduced to a researcher, a gatherer of information, a functionary in the plan-package-and-market-the-newspaper-bureaucracy” (Underwood 1993, 164) where “the role of the media is reduced to that of a megaphone, amplifying the

voices of the dominant actors in society” (Schudson 2003, 113). It is in these traditional practices where there are “those who are entitled to express opinions and those who are entitled to experiences” (Scannell 1992, 344).

When viewed through the facet of political economy, the emphasis becomes even clearer. The frame of political economy emphasizes that, “definitions are grounded in social practice and evolve over time” (Mosco 2009, 24). The evolution and impact of corporate values on the practice of journalism has been steady and profound, “a corporate coup d’état in slow motion” (Hedges 2011, 213).

From this point of view the sense of professional worth that comes from *owning* the work, as well as a renewed connection to the process, have been increasingly diminished by the power of technologies to centralize the flow of information with its concomitant corporate streamlining of newsroom operations. In the substantial and complex machinery of mass communication, scholars have increasingly tended to characterize journalists as relatively minor players in a larger game they neither control nor completely understand.

Professional values in this view are dismissed as “really little more than tools management uses to control reporters in the newsroom” (Underwood 1993, 168). This is the business model that “sought to squeeze high rates of profit out of highly concentrated markets by pressuring variable costs - reporters - to produce more with less. As the quality of the product declined, so too did the value of the business” (Cooper 2011, 320).

It is argued here, so too did journalists’ faith and belief in the profession.

As seen through the corporate lens, journalism exists to serve Habermas' indifferent consumers not by challenging or even informing them but by appealing to the lowest common denominator where consumption involves no effort. "What is happening today, unfortunately, is that the lowest form of popular culture – lack of information, misinformation, disinformation, and a contempt for the truth or the reality of most people's lives – has overrun *real* journalism" (Allan 2004, 193; italics added). And journalists, once described as "progressive reformers" (Gans 1979, 69) find themselves now entangled in this "blind and mad pursuit of commercial advantage, of profit without honour" (Allan 2004,193).

The "bureaucratic and prosaic reality of most news gathering" on a daily basis is reduced to "representatives of one bureaucracy picking up prefabricated news items from representatives of another bureaucracy" (Schudson 1986, 1) leading to the conclusion that "the press's most serious failures are...sins of omission – the stories we miss, the stories we don't see, the stories that don't hold press conferences, the stories that don't come from 'reliable sources'" (Hedges 2011, 209).

The journalism that is fed by the "voices of dominant actors" on a daily basis from the government-dominated cities of Washington and Ottawa, has become so predictable, so homogenous, so 'streamlined' through the use of syndicated video feeds that "you can work as a reporter for twenty years and never file an original story" (Clark 2010). The research indicates that the dependence on these official sources, so prevalent in the 'normal' routine, ensures that "those with power are

getting the stories told the way they want them told” (McChesney and Nichols 2011, 105).

But as Schudson has colorfully proposed, when “shit happens, journalists gain some freedom from official opinions, professional routines, and conventional wisdom” (Schudson 2010, 254).

The stories of disaster are the product of this freedom.

Whether print or broadcast, “the press has been losing its character as an instrument of substantive information” (Altschull 1995, 409) as the corporate bottom line has become the value that matters most. As Bogart has pointed out, “commercial culture assigns no value or meaning to communication apart from their market value – that is, the price that someone is willing to pay for them” (Bogart 2000, 66).

Soft, fluffy programming doesn’t challenge because “advertisers...want audiences to be in a relaxed ‘buying mood’ as they watch their commercials” and as Bagdikian has noted, “serious programs remind the audience that complex human problems are not solved by switching to a new deodorant” (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 157).

There is nothing “soft and fluffy” in a disaster. Both for the reporters on the ground and for the organizations that sponsor them, the single greatest impact from a disaster, like the Haitian earthquake, is the disruption of ‘normal’ routine. A disaster demands personal and institutional flexibility to adapt and to function productively in this new environment. As a result, a new set of professional journalistic practices was created outside the bounds of normal competitive

practices and institutional structures. What is clear from this research is that journalists and institutions *depended* on routine, wherever and however it is constructed.

If, as Giddens suggests, most actors achieve “ontological security” from routine (Urry 1984, 164), then the disruption of routine(s) and the insecurity that informs the unknowns of a disaster zone, perhaps means that reaching for this “ontological security” through the “enactments of routines” is at least as compelling a motivation for journalists as their use of key events to “make their professional lives meaningful and unite themselves” (Zelizer 1997, 402).

It is a fairly sensible proposition, then, to propose that the psychological journey from the familiar to the unknown lies deeply at the heart and experiences of a journalist’s life. The unique achievement of a disaster is its construction of a *physical* dimension to this psychological voyage that transports the journalist from the comfort and relative ease of the contemporary newsroom to a location often marked by horrific conditions.

But this thesis underlines that, at the heart of these structures remains the thinking, feeling human being called a “reporter.” The redoubtable Edward R. Murrow once suggested that a journalist didn’t need a thick skin, he should have no skin at all, a fact that the CBS bosses who would eventually fire him, grasped intimately about the psyche of their legendary reporter.

What Murrow profoundly understood, and brilliantly illustrated through his body of work, was that the effective journalist must remain *open* to produce journalism that reaches, touches people, that *means* something to them, and that the

journalist has to remain vulnerable – intellectually and emotionally – to all that comes before her. This uncomfortable posture demands that journalists must learn to trust “the world enough to take everything in, while distrusting themselves and others and the appearances of the world enough not to be taken in by everything. This requires both personal and constitutional tolerance of uncertainty and acceptance of risk and commitment to caring for truth” (Schudson 1978, 194).

It is argued here that this is never truer than when the role of the eyewitness is revived by the circumstances of disaster. The abundance of material in Haiti forced reporters to make editorial decisions and this as much as anything else, according to the journalists’ voices represented here, reactivated the journalistic ‘muscles’ of curiosity, intuition, judgment, and verification that have been allowed, even encouraged, to atrophy in the contemporary newsroom.

There is also the question of how journalists deal with emotions in a disaster zone. Scholars have recognized that “there is a lack of a methodology in journalism studies to explore the motivations and feelings of the practitioners” (Machin and Niblock 2006, 128) and that “attention has been directed primarily at a narrow and unrepresentative slice of the journalistic population” (Zelizer 2004, 40). The special circumstances, conditions and experiences in Haiti provided a rare opportunity to open this otherwise closed door.

The practice of journalism is a “historically specific, historically created activity” and “it does not maintain itself untouched as the world around it changes” (Carey 1988, 229). As we live in an age when “in a manner unprecedented in human history, our daily lives are saturated with media” (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 184), it

is useful to consider “news” as a “culture” that offers social knowledge because that frame “resists the analytical separation of the ‘cultural’ from the ‘economic’ and the ‘political’ prefigured by the media-society dichotomy” (Allan 2004, 4).

An enduring and fundamental belief of journalists is that their work contributes to society’s rational, informed debate on the issues that are of most importance to it. This idealism is found in both the theoretical and the practical dimensions throughout the history of the profession. Altschull argued that journalism holds within it the idealistic “possibility of inducing change and of helping to create a world that is more just and more peaceful” and Underwood declares that this idealism “continues to fire the imagination of journalists everywhere on earth” (Altschull 1995, 408; Underwood 1993, 169).

In 1965, one identified value of journalism was “the loyalty to the public as client above all other loyalties [and that] great reporters at the pinnacle of their careers retain an almost missionary zeal” (Lynn 1965, 256). Although this ideal public service model has been dismissed as a “romantic self-conception,” the stories that flow from intense human drama, found in an event like the Haitian earthquake, do “have the feel of truth because they are quick, subjective and incomplete, unlike ‘objective’ or reconstituted history, which is laborious but dead” (Schudson 1986, 1; Carey 1987, xix).

If the good reporter is one who can “isolate the singularities that will make his account real for his readers” then “the varnish of interpretation has been removed” (Carey 1987, xxx). This is a storytelling system reborn in disaster.

But on a broader canvas, the portrait of the profession that emerged from Haiti aligned itself on the banks of a wider current of social thought.

On the medium of television, Pierre Bourdieu argued, “the simple report, the very fact of reporting, of putting on record as a reporter, always implies a social construction of reality that can mobilize (or demobilize) individuals or groups” (Bourdieu 1998, 21). Journalists have always been drawn to the exception, an event that breaks from routine. Bourdieu argues that this pursuit of the extraordinary has had a deleterious impact on television reporting because everyone is after “the same thing. The search for exclusivity, which elsewhere leads to originality and singularity, here yields uniformity and banality” (Ibid.).

The argument here is that Bourdieu would get little disagreement about the uniformity and banality of reporting from reporters who work in the prefabricated information machines in capital cities like Ottawa and Washington, but his proposition does not take into account the changes created by a disaster that, demonstrably, do *not* result in formulaic or dull reporting.

In fact, this thesis makes the case that when mobilized by the Haitian earthquake, a reenergized group of journalists produced work marked precisely by originality that then stands as powerful proof of both James Carey’s ritual and transmission models of communication. Stuart Allan has suggested that one of Carey’s motivating fears, as his work and life progressed, was that “the membrane of civilization...is thin” (Carey 1989, xix).

An earthquake, this opening of the earth understood by some as a kind of mythical judgment from God, represents a ripping of that thin membrane, thus

creating a need for the comfort supplied by the “creation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs” in “the maintenance of society in time” as it “draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (Carey 1989, 33).

It is difficult to imagine two more powerful elements of human fellowship and commonality than the harsh role of fate in the randomness of an earthquake, and the inevitable fact of mortality; two hard and dark truths found in a natural disaster. Indeed, when the reporting from the dust and death of Haiti reached the sizeable Haitian expatriate community in Montreal, it became a kind of partner in the coverage, rallying to help journalists with their work. It comes full circle when the reporting ultimately then helped sustain the community.

This also demonstrates that the role of memory – both individual and collective – was pivotal in the creation of the unique journalistic community in disaster. The staggering reality of death and destruction in Haiti contained within it what Sontag acknowledged as the innate power and usefulness of “memory” in the human condition, even as she was arguing for more “thinking.” It is the sense that the journalist must acknowledge the reality that “memory is, aching, the only relation we can have with the dead” (Sontag 2003, 115).

According to those who reported on the Haitian earthquake, facing one’s own sense of mortality in a moment, or more likely, series of moments on the streets of Port-au-Prince, had an intensity and instructional quality unlike the safe predictability of daily practice.

This intensity, that fed this rejuvenation became a moment of discovery, understanding, and self-interpretation for journalists through “stories about their past that they routinely and informally circulate to each other” (Zelizer 1997, 405).

The CBC’s Brian Stewart, who covered the famine in Ethiopia in 1984, has pointed out that “years later many of us can’t talk about it without considerable emotion” and that “each of us was pushed to the very limits of our professional abilities” (Stewart, 2004).

Superficially, Stewart’s memories hold the promise for young journalists of the rushes of adrenaline and adventures that await them. But more significantly, “journalistic authority derives from memory systems, or shared ways of recollecting events across time and space” (Zelizer 1992, 190). Passed from generation to generation of journalists, this is a form of rhetorical legitimation “minimizing what is problematic and emphasizing what is admirable” (Ibid., 200) about the profession. It is the connective tissue of an interpretive community “united through its shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events” (Zelizer 1997, 405).

For decades, scholars have recognized that “the camaraderie among journalists is one of the attractions of the vocation” (Lynn 1965, 253). This critical sense of belonging, however, does not rest only on emotion. It has a real and practical purpose for journalists like CTV’s Pat Skinner who says, “my family doesn’t understand, still after this many years, they don’t know why I do that work or why I would want to. So I find for me the processing is talking about it with my colleagues and I need to be here at work to do that” (Skinner 2010).

At the same time, Skinner hints at the emotional price journalists pay for these experiences, “I don’t like taking time off. Because if I take time off, I’m sitting at home and I’m stewing about things.”

This concept of a common past is “one of the few ties that bind us as a whole” (Edy 1999, 71) given its “unique capacity to preserve pasts older than the oldest living individual” (Ibid., 72). It not only creates a “real solidarity” among journalists that can “reinvigorate the occupation with a new sense of purpose” (Borden 2007, 2) but it also “offers an exemplary case of the circular codification of knowledge by which re-tellers strategically authenticate themselves as cultural authorities” (Zelizer 1992, 200).

Ultimately then, this seemingly innocuous activity of Stewart and Skinner sharing stories, in fact, has a profound impact on a group’s consolidation and powerfully reinforces Carey’s ritual model of communication “by achieving *community* and *commonality*” (Ibid.).

The impact of collective memory is also critical to understanding Haiti, described as the world’s “unluckiest country” (Keating 2010). It is a nation seemingly strangled by its past unable, perhaps unwilling, to free itself from a history that produces a proud sense of resistance and legendary resilience. The earthquake invoked these forces of national character to the extent that they became clichés in the reportage of the event.

So collective memory is not restricted to how journalists “shape meaning about themselves” in the present (Zelizer 1997, 405) but, in Haiti, for both the reporters and the survivors, the force of memory guides them “into their own

future” (Zelizer 1992, 200) and, importantly, “contributes to our expectations” about that future (Edy 1999, 71).

Stuart Allan argues that while the concept of the public sphere may no longer be viable, the *social* role of journalism has survived, asking, “How can journalism best fulfill its social responsibilities?” (Allan 2004, 215). This study seeks to show how these responsibilities are magnified in a disaster and, further, that the emotional sphere, existing alongside the intellectual space argued by Habermas, has a powerful influence in disaster work. How did journalists control these emotions? What impact do they have on the reporting?

For veteran reporters like Hunter, Workman, Clark and Montgomery, Haiti represents a kind of “new ‘honeymoon,’ [offering] a sense of challenge, excitement, and risk” (Dayan and Katz 1992, 194). For younger reporters like Hamamdjian and Smith, the event provides “a demanding rite de passage and a taste of the old days” (Ibid.). In Haiti a unique relationship emerged between reporters and survivors, between victims and storytellers.

For the survivors, reporters telling their stories are “likely to underscore the suffering and need of the affected community. This media attention indicates to victims that their plight is being taken seriously” (Kitch and Hume 2008, 246). The witnessing of “calamities taking place in another country” has been described as “the quintessential modern experience” (Sontag 2003, 18) but where she sees journalists as “professional specialized tourists,” (Ibid.) others recommend that journalists be regarded as “first responders in violent situations” (Simpson and Cote 2006, 263).

Acting as a first responder implies a social responsibility and a deeper than usual personal involvement *with* and obligation *to* those whose stories the reporter chooses to tell. This can increase the appreciation of citizens and elites for “the situation of other human beings, notably non-elites, and learn compassion for them” (Schudson 1995, 29).

And journalists, also shaken by events, find comfort by constructing a new community where they assume the role of “agents of unification and reassurance” (Zelizer 1992, 62). Psychologists have suggested that emotional recovery can be nurtured by sharing “communal rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, and public statements [that] may also be vehicles for individual and group release of feeling” (Kitch and Hume 2008, 4). This is the *psychological* dimension of Carey’s ritual model of communication. It is ultimately responsible for changing, expanding and enriching what qualifies as “news.”

By its very nature, unearthing information buried deeply in the chaos and complexities of a natural disaster demanded a greater degree of *active* involvement by journalists, standing shoulder to shoulder with its survivors and victims, to “provide the background and interpretation necessary to give events meaning” (Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman 1976, 115) in the aftermath of what Levi-Strauss calls a “hot moment, when a group can assess its own significance” (Zelizer 1997, 405).

This shift in practice challenges the traditional criticism, especially of television, that reporters’ coverage remains superficial, characterized as swimming close to the surface, “concerned with the splashes and waves more than the

underlying currents” (Stephens 1988, 286). The Haitian earthquake, like most disasters of its magnitude, forced journalists into the swirling, deeper currents of human agony and triumph.

This thesis, therefore, proposes two significant changes to journalistic practice created uniquely in the Haitian disaster zone. The first is the absence, largely, of the usual fierce model of competition. “The scoop” has been dismissed as “a fetishism of the present, an occupational perversion” (Schudson 1986, 1), a criticism called “unfair” because “the most basic desire of the news audience (is) the desire to be aware of what is occurring” sooner rather than later (Stephens 1988, 231). This was replaced by the unspoken commonality of the journalistic community and how reporters situated themselves as “preferred retellers” of a major event – as “eyewitness, representative, investigator or interpreter” (Zelizer 1992,135).

The second unique condition of disaster reporting to emerge from this study flows from the elevated importance of “place” over “time.” This is not to argue that deadlines disappear in disaster. In fact, they may even be harder to meet given the changes in routine and diminished technical capabilities. But it *is* to suggest that “being first” has more to do with corporate sloganeering and the pursuit of advertisers than with any inherent journalistic value. Against the compelling stories of life, death, and survival in Haiti, being “first” with a story largely lost its resonance and meaning for journalists.

Competition in a disaster zone between journalists and media organizations doesn’t disappear. But it is suggested here that there is greater cooperation among

journalists in disaster, and when combined with greater devotion to telling the story (rather than meeting the deadline), the result is a shift “back” to an all-but-lost journalistic ideal.

As a veteran, CTV’s Pat Skinner takes comfort from the fact that “you’re pretty much never in a situation like that alone. There’s always one of the agencies, the American networks, European networks there as well. So, you know, somehow you’re going to be able to get your story out” (Skinner 2010).

In this crossing of institutional boundaries, the reporting becomes “a collective goal, to be realized through shared knowledge” (Zelizer 1992, 55). It is this cooperation of the ritual model of communication that helps establish “common boundaries and a collective frame for establishing (the) authority” of journalists in chaos (Ibid.).

The task of immersing oneself in chaos and human suffering, accepting the responsibility of capturing some truth from it, requires courage, commitment and faith in the methods and practice of the profession. It is the reporter’s duty, therefore, not to be “seized with the panic of near total insecurity” that C. Wright Mills predicted for those facing “a world of solid fact,” but to find the necessary strength in community and routine (van Ginneken 1998, 166).

Seen through this frame, the Haitian earthquake stands as “one of the major constitutive narratives of...journalism” (Zelizer 1992, 200) that upholds the profession’s “ideological importance” (Zelizer 1997, 407). Under layers of disillusionment and cynicism, rests the “authentic” as a “poker of memory” that “stirs the ashes of recollection and uncovers a forgotten ember still smoldering

down there, still hot, still glowing, still red as red” (Manchester 1980, 68). It is glowing with the power of story, “the dominant sound of our lives, from the small accounts of our day’s events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths” (Price 1978, 3).

“Communion. Community. Communicate. Ceremony. Ritual.”

These are the words that define the power and recovery of journalism in the sui generis environment of disaster as they helped “uncover the default assumptions that have guided our thinking about journalism as a field, a profession, a practice, and a cultural phenomenon” (Zelizer 2004, 3).

Machin and Niblock argue that, “in order to develop a better understanding of the processes and practices of news journalism in a contemporary context of conversion, competition and globalization, a dialogue with working journalists is long overdue” (Machin and Niblock 2006, 43). The eight journalists represented in this thesis help to fulfill this objective. They ‘open up’ in discussing the joys, challenges, exhaustion, exhilaration and difficulties of the work.

They were forced to deal with a new set of professional expectations that called into question their fundamental assumptions and beliefs about the profession. These acute challenges demanded a professional self-reflection that was neither easy nor straightforward. It is therefore a matter of some importance to carefully unpack what happened in Haiti because whatever it was, it “restored the faith” of journalists in their battered profession (Workman 2010).

CHAPTER 2

The Disaster Zone – Unique Conditions that Transform Practice

You sort of say to yourself, why am I doing this? Why bother? Why are we putting this kind of stuff on television? Surely there's more important things that need to be broadcast. (Workman 2010)

It matters little whether human beings produce a disaster or, like an earthquake or tsunami, is considered “natural” in origin, the result is the same for journalists. The world's attention galvanizes, however briefly, on the single event, thus automatically drawing critical attention and elevating the importance and impact of the reporting.

There are two central questions at the heart of this chapter. The first is asked above by veteran reporter Paul Workman as he considered the consequences of much of the daily reporting he now produces from Washington: Why do reporters *bother* reporting so much insignificant material? The Haitian earthquake, an “important thing” for Workman, begs the second question: What are the unique conditions of a disaster that renewed the motivations *behind* and the belief *in* the act of journalism for reporters? In addition, this chapter reveals how two enduring and fundamental components of journalistic practice are changed by the circumstances of disaster: the reliance on official sources and the degree of engagement of the reporter in the production of stories.

The literature is filled with work about the *relationships* created by disaster: the journalist and the victims, the journalist and humanitarian agencies, the journalist and trauma, the journalist and emergency measures officials, the journalist and governmental authorities, the victims and trauma, the journalist and the healing of communities.

But there is very little work examining the relationship that develops between journalists and journalism in disaster. This study addresses this gap in the literature by proposing that exposure to extraordinary human stories, often dramas involving matters of life and death, have a lasting and telling impact on the storytellers.

When the predictable and comfortable daily practice was unmoored from the anchor of institutional routine by a disaster, the journalists not only approached the work differently, employing their own resources of observation and curiosity, but they also came to view the profession from a new perspective.

To fully grasp the dimensions of this dramatic change, it is helpful to briefly consider the daily newsgathering routine that was left behind. As CTV's Paul Workman put it, "After a while, you do get worn down just by some of the things that we end up having to do and some of the situations that we're in – and I think it's also systemic. That the news business itself just creates that kind of atmosphere through editorial decisions perhaps, through ratings, through the kind of sometimes very shallow and superficial stuff we do on television collectively" (Workman 2010).

What Workman is pointing to, between the lines, is a feeling of alienation from the product for the contemporary journalist. He's expressing a kind of

helplessness in the face of contemporary values and organizational structures. This helps explain why scholars sometimes portray journalists as “self-deluded puppets” (Underwood 1993, 170), as manipulated dupes motivated by a naïve idealism but caught in a complex web of powerful economic and political forces they can’t control and don’t understand.

This study argues, however, that this portrayal of journalists is inaccurate and tantamount to suggesting that someone caught in the prison system is unaware of the significance of walls. Journalists, arguably more than anyone else, are acutely aware of the constraints and pressures that surround their work. Veteran journalists like Tom Clark shared this view:

In TV newsrooms now, because of budgets, they’re trying to rationalize something that should never be rationalized. And that is to say to journalists, ‘Well just sit in the edit room, you know you’ve got all these services coming in, just put the pictures together and put a narrative underneath it and there you go. This is posing as journalism. All it is is rewrite. There’s no value added to it. The problem is that doing original journalism is expensive. It doesn’t have to be horrendously expensive but, you know, you’ve actually got to go to where the story is happening and talk to the people involved because otherwise, if we’re leaving it up to two or three agencies to do this, we then have two or three people deciding what the narrative of the story is. If you’re just sitting back in Toronto or in London or in Washington just looking at the feeds, you’re not going to get a complexity of views. You know, these days,

you can have somebody who's been in the business for twenty years who's never once done an original story. And I think that's just really problematic. (Clark 2010)

Not being able to go to where the story is or to act like a journalist; i.e., asking questions and following one's natural curiosity, is a fact of life for reporters, trapped like "gerbils on a wheel" (Workman 2010), in the controlled information capital cities of Washington and Ottawa where doing "melts," voicing material provided by others, has become a lamented but common activity. The CBC's Paul Hunter recognizes the official information treadmill he's on and has come to terms with this reality:

My opinion is that that's the meat and potatoes. The gravy that makes that taste better is when you go to the Haitis or the Gulf of Mexico and the spill or to Japan or wherever when a major story breaks out. You can't ignore something when it's newsworthy even if you can't get to it. Somebody has to do those stories. So, you hold your nose and you do them even if you're reporting on things you haven't seen with your own eyes. It does wear you down a little bit but I can survive today because I know it's a necessary evil, if that's not overstating it. These are important stories and they're valuable to people who see them and it's important to have a Canadian perspective on American stories. Otherwise, what's the point in any of it? (Hunter 2011)

Tellingly, even the young journalists of this study appreciated escaping a routine where “you’re sitting and you’re doing melts, you’re waiting for stuff to come in from all over. They’re not *your* interviews so you’re working with somebody else’s stuff, which is frustrating” (Hamamdjian 2010). In fact, Joanna Smith of the *Toronto Star* believed that getting away from those frustrations of ‘normal’ practice made her a more effective reporter in Haiti:

I know my writing has improved. There’s just something about seeing so much all around you and not even really having to think about the storytelling because it’s right there really does a lot to your work. I found that Twitter helped with that too...just shortening things down, really simplifying things, getting rid of adjectives and adverbs and focusing on nouns and verbs. You know that’s sort of just a very basic writing rule but I found it’s just so much easier to do that when I’m not writing about policy. I’m writing about things right in front of my eyes. (Smith 2010)

It was, therefore, a common perception among journalists that a reporter’s personal initiative and instincts for a good story are devalued, if not simply ignored in the contemporary routinization of news production. The result, for many reporters, “banishes the sense of purpose” that attracted them to the profession originally. “Instead, the spirit of journalism had become identical to that of cutting trees, selling shoes, and running the nation’s savings and loans...corporate

journalism had no room for troublemakers. One cannot ask questions, as reporters are trained and bound to do, without causing trouble” (Underwood 1993, 165).

With consultants and marketing types now freely circulating in newsrooms, the primary goal is to increase the size of the audience by constantly aiming to please the greatest number of people. “Getting the reader’s attention was the only news ‘value’ raised in story meetings, we dream up ‘talker’ stories, stuff that will attract attention and get us talked about, tidbits for busy folks who clip items from the paper and stick them on the fridge...who the hell cares about corruption in city government anyway, much less dying Bosnians?” (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 161).

Given that audience size and attracting advertisers have always been factors in the production of news, one must be careful not to make too much of this point. But there *is* a need for understanding what has been lost in this equation as business values increasingly drive editorial discussions. And a significant part of that loss is the notion of journalism’s public service, importantly resurrected if only temporarily, in the conditions of a disaster.

But even journalists involved in public broadcasting, where by definition a different rationale presumably exists, are now feeling the economic pressures familiar to those in private industry. According to Paul Hunter, “When you get beyond stories about incredible natural disasters and human tragedies like Haiti, a lot of the stuff we do isn’t necessarily ratings drivers. But we do them anyway and we do them thoroughly and we do them at length because we think it’s important to and we don’t run *CSI Las Vegas*. We run *Man Alive* as a lead-in to the *National*,” Hunter claims, “because we think we ought to and nobody else will.”

Man Alive was a prime-time weekly CBC documentary program dedicated to matters of faith and spirituality. It had, in the history of Canadian broadcasting, a remarkable run from 1967 to its final episode in 2000. When I, as a former host of the program, suggested to Hunter that the existence in prime time of *Man Alive* is now inconceivable on a public broadcasting system, chasing viewers as rabidly as any other broadcaster and airing the imported game shows *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* while largely imitating successful programs on American television, he recognized the curious attachment to a past ideal as well as the pressures of the day.

“Yea, you’re right,” he said. “When you’re looking at, in a recession, a government that is I think it’s safe to say, conventional wisdom says, not fond of the CBC and if you say, ‘well we’ve got half the audience of the others, then they will rightfully say, ‘Well, if no one is watching, why should we pay for it?’ That’s the problem right now, right? Everything is measured in ratings.”

This is the territory where the ideals of public broadcasting confront economic realities and, in a sense, where scholarship meets practice. When the response to Hunter is that the use of ratings is precisely a *false* way of measuring the contribution and role of a public broadcaster, he doesn’t hesitate:

Absolutely it is. But it has pushed the CBC, right? I’d have to test this against rundowns of the various line-ups but if you look at the types of stories we do, a lot of them would be grouped into what you might call ‘water cooler stuff,’ more now than were ten years ago let’s say. Some will ask, is that a bad thing...doing news about things that people are interested in? It is where the

CBC is right now and it's a struggle that the CBC has, because it has to look out for its own skin. (Hunter 2011)

This study argues that it is “a bad thing” because there is a real danger with concentrating on ‘water cooler stuff,’ a variation of the ‘talker’ newspaper stories noted previously. This is not to ignore or reject the importance and value of looking out for one’s skin in a shaky political and economic climate. But it *is* to recognize that when the primary journalistic impulse is to give the viewer or reader what one imagines she or he wants, then one dismisses, (a) what the journalist might actually believe is important and more critically, (b) it relinquishes any claim journalism has to more serious intentions, like serving the needs of democracy through an informed citizenry. With no larger objective informing the ‘normal’ modern practice of journalism, the confidence, spirit and faith of reporters is bruised.

This is the disappointing environment that reporters escaped when the Haitian disaster struck.

The event offered a dramatic transformation of journalistic practice. For a journalist like Paul Workman, with both public and private broadcast experience, Haiti represented fresh opportunities. “I mean often when you’re working in television, you think ratings, you think ‘OK I’m going to beat the competition. We’re going to get more viewers with our story’ and that’s part of the reason that you do things. I didn’t feel that at all in Haiti. It was a question of just trying to tell these very traumatic tales of human misery and that was driving me more than anything else” (Workman 2010).

And so there is something deeper and more powerful at play for the journalist in disaster reporting than simply a change of routine, the rush of adrenaline or the love of adventure when the 'normal' work routine is upended. To be driven by the story is the rare opportunity that a disaster offers the reporter.

The professional 'crutches' of official sources and press releases - remember that "reporters use no documents apart from press releases in the preparation of three-quarters of their stories" (Schudson 1995, 151) - disappear with profound consequences for the *kinds* of stories that are told in the conditions of a disaster as, "clearly, whom one asks for information influences what information one receives" (Tuchman 1978, 81).

The 'normal' practice produces journalism that "is the story of the interaction of reporters and government officials, both politicians and bureaucrats" (Schudson 2003, 150). In contrast, journalistic practice in a disaster allows for new voices to be heard and so, instead of "amplifying the voices of the dominant actors," Haiti represented a form of "social and moral disorder news [that] involves, by and large, ordinary people, many of them poor, black and/or young" (Gans 1979, 60).

There is another practical consequence from this absence of interaction with official sources. The journalist in a disaster becomes a more *active* participant in, not just the collection of facts, but in a story creation process that "cannot be done without play and imagination" (Carey 1988, 230). If one carefully lays Schudson's concept of "play and imagination" over the template of a disaster where few, if any, trusted sources exist, the journalist *by necessity* becomes a creative participant and

therefore must inevitably inject personal views and judgments about what facts are reliable and trustworthy.

An obvious example of this was the attempt to determine the death toll from the Haitian earthquake. The difficulty was that there was no agency left operating with sufficient tools and reach in the country to offer such a number. As Paul Hunter related, the absence of this “official” version of events was never far from the minds of the journalists: “Well, on the way there...all I was thinking was what the hell are we going to find when we get there...how bad is it? How many dead people will there be? And you have no idea because there was nobody there to tell you, pretty much” (Hunter 2011).

As a result, the degree of reportorial verification actually *increases* in a disaster and the freedom from what might be called the golden handcuffs of easily supplied contacts and story suggestions through daily formal press releases and conferences, changes the obligations of the journalist who now has “personal responsibility for the information he seeks to transmit,” and to bring the argument full circle, “his relationship to news sources is more circumscribed; sources provide leads but the reporter must sift through them for the real story” (Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman 1976, 115).

By altering this fundamental interaction, the Haitian earthquake forced journalists, as it did Haitians, to find their feet again. This sharp contrast with ‘business-as-usual’ re-ignites the passion for reporting in the “What-a-story!” (Berkowitz 1997, 363) moment this disaster represents.

As Daniel Berkowitz has argued, there are three elements of this model of disaster reporting. “First, newswriters are surprised and acknowledge it. Second, newswriters decide to give non-routine news better play than most routine stories receive. Third, newswriters become willing – and see a need – to stretch resources in terms of news space (or time), personnel, and equipment to give the story special treatment” (Berkowitz 1997, 364).

The news routine that develops is, therefore, characterized by improvisation and negotiation, no more apparent than when journalists simply – *not* so simply, in fact – attempted to reach the location of the disaster. From the moment the reporters first learned of the disaster, their firsthand accounts revealed the unique moments of unusual cooperation between traditionally *über*-competitive media organizations and journalists.

The seven-word note - “Gone to Haiti. Back soon. Don’t worry.” - that *Gazette* reporter Sue Montgomery left her family on the door of the fridge captures the emotions of leaving home to cover a disaster (Montgomery 2010). Within hours - for some within minutes of the earthquake - reporters left the safety and relative comfort of their respective newsrooms and were scrambling to reach the destruction and horrors awaiting them in Haiti, conditions and circumstances that all report were the worst they had ever encountered.

Pat Skinner, a veteran *CTV* producer, was enjoying her first day off in months on January 12th, 2010:

I had worked through December, through Christmas, through New Year's and had not really had a day off since early December. I was trying my best not to look at my Blackberry and I didn't even see a message about it until 8 p.m. I'd been to a movie and checked the Berry coming out and thought, 'Holy shit!' So then, it was pretty clear and I started thinking about what I need to take and the next morning I got a call saying, 'OK, you're going.' So it was full bore from that point. (Skinner 2010)

The suddenness of a disaster like the Haitian earthquake also challenges the flexibility and organizational suppleness of media institutions. CTV had options and decisions it had to make quickly. There was an opportunity for one journalist to catch a ride with the Quebec television network TVA, whose crew would be traveling to Haiti in the private jet of *Quebecor's* Pierre Karl Peladeau. It was scheduled to leave Wednesday afternoon from Montreal, less than 24-hours after the earthquake had struck.

Another choice for CTV journalists was to travel with the Canadian military leaving on a humanitarian flight from the base in Trenton, Ontario at 3 a.m., Thursday morning of that week. There were three spots open for journalists on that flight and as producer Skinner recalled, "There was a fair bit of discussion (on Wednesday) about who was going to try to go what route so we had three different teams going kind of three different ways and, in the end, that Trenton flight ended up being the best one so we were pretty pleased to be on it."

The *Toronto Star's* Joanna Smith was at her desk in the Ottawa bureau on that Tuesday afternoon in January, when the earthquake struck, working on a story about malaria nets, one she remembers didn't end up running as it got "bumped for space." Her inclusion in the paper's Haitian coverage illustrated a weakness in the 'normal' routine of daily decision-making that discriminates against those *not* in the immediate eye-line of the editor in the newsroom:

My deputy national editor asked for help speaking to the Haitian community in Montreal – not many people speak French at the *Toronto Star* so I'm called all the time to do these things often, which has actually been great for me over the years. Then all of a sudden my editor called and said, 'Would you like to go to Haiti?' And I said, 'Sure.' And he said, 'Well, OK, they've asked one person who said no and they're trying to find...they can't locate the second person. I'm not trying to give you the impression that I'm working my way down the list but they always forget that there are capable people in Ottawa when big things like this happen and they just sort of look around the room.' And so he said, 'I'd like to put your name in the hat, can I do that?' And I said, 'Of course' and then about five minutes later it was a 'go.' It (the earthquake) happened at 4:53. I was told I was going just before 6 p.m. (Smith 2010)

Sue Montgomery of the *Montreal Gazette* is a weary veteran of budget cutbacks, staff downsizings and the ongoing disruptions at the paper. Virtually every

recollection she has from Haiti is tinged with a palpable contempt for what has happened to the newspaper business in general and her paper in particular. As one example, she said her first visit to Haiti in 2004 was a reluctant one but offered the chance to “get out of the hellhole I was in” as a new editor “and all those assholes” arrived in the *Gazette* newsroom (Montgomery 2010).

Regardless, that first trip began her love affair with the people of Haiti. And so she stayed up all night on January 12th watching the news at home in 2010, worrying about her many friends there and wondering if the paper would “bother” sending anyone.

I was at home on Tuesday night and, of course, I heard about it and I was freaked out because I have lots of friends there and so I was immediately on the Internet, following all the tweets and realizing that this was massive. And then I got an email from a friend in Washington who worked for *CBC* and she was heading down and I said, ‘Oh, you should stay at the Montana Hotel.’ And she jokingly wrote back and said, ‘Yea, if it’s still standing.’ We didn’t really have a sense of the enormity of it. And then I felt kind of envious of her so the next morning – you know, I was up most of the night watching on the Net - I sent an email around 7:30 a.m. to the city editor and said, you know, ‘Stupid question: are you sending somebody?’ Surprisingly, they got back to me right away – the joy of Blackberrys right? – she said I’m on the phone right now with the managing editor and I’ll get back to you. And I thought, ‘Oh my God, like this is a possibility’ because of course, we’re in dire straights. So then she

sent an email around 8 o'clock and said, 'When can you be ready?' And I was out at the airport by noon. So I didn't even see my family. I didn't say goodbye to them. I mean I left a note, right? I was gone. (Montgomery 2010)

CTV's Quebec correspondent Genevieve Beauchemin was shaken by the news from Haiti as it brought back unsettling memories of the recent death of her cameraman in a helicopter crash the previous August. Those memories fueled the fears for her own safety in Haiti and resulted in a family decision that had her declining the offer to go.

Fortuitous news, as it turned out, for her colleague, Daniele Hamamdjian, who was at home in bed in Ottawa recovering from food poisoning when she heard of the disaster. The next day, Wednesday, she was in a car on her way to Montreal to help Beauchemin record the reactions from the city's sizeable Haitian community:

I was sick in bed watching *CBC* "breaking news" – there's been an earthquake in Haiti. I go into work on Wednesday. I'm just recovering. I have no food in my system. There was this whole debate with Toronto – what are we going to do?

At that point I was not going to go. I leave with a cameraman and a technician, we rent a car and we're on our way to Montreal on the Wednesday at noon. I get an email from Bob [CTV Ottawa Bureau Chief Robert Fife]. He said if Tom Clark makes the TVA flight you are leaving at 2 a.m. And I thought to myself, 'yea OK, it's never going to happen... One day I'd love to go but it's going to take years.'

So I'm on my way to Montreal...and in my head 'It can't be. I've been here for a month – how are they going to send me?' So then, sure enough, I'm kidding around with the guys and then five minutes later, Sean O'Malley, the assignment editor in Toronto calls and he says,

'Daniele, we just want to make sure – are you feeling OK?'

Of course I say, 'Yes!

'If we send you...'

YES!!

And so he said we just want to make sure you understand that we're not forcing you but of course I jumped on it. Oh my God, you don't say 'no' to that. You don't say 'no' to that! (Hamamdjian 2010)

George Papadionysiou is the veteran CTV shooter who accompanied Skinner and Hamamdjian on the Trenton flight. But, like Beauchemin, he couldn't automatically say "yes" when the invitation was extended:

I was actually at the foreign affairs building just about to shoot a press conference when I got the call to see if I could go. You know when you're in a family you're not the one who makes the decision, right? It's a group thing so I spoke to my wife because there are childcare considerations, stuff like that you know. From a professional standpoint, 'Yea, I want to go to this thing but it's not about me here.' So I talked it over with my wife and she said, 'If you think you're going to be safe' and I go, 'Well, we're staying with the military,

we're going to be at the base' and she goes, 'Yea, if you think it'll be fine, go for it!' So, that's how it happened. And then that whole day was a scramble getting gear together, logistics and then we flew out at 3 in the morning.

(Papadionysiou 2010)

There was no hesitation for the CBC's Paul Hunter who saw the alerts on the news wires in Washington and right away understood, "This was bad:"

The decision to go was made almost immediately. The question was do we scramble to get part way there tonight or do we go the next morning? And we made probably the smart decision, in some ways, to gather ourselves properly and go the next morning. We flew to Miami and then to Dominican Republic where we then tried to get a plane into Port-au-Prince. We were in cue to go but then they closed the airport so we had to go to Plan B.

We rented two minivans and drove the nine hours to Port-au-Prince.

(Hunter 2011)

At the moment the quake struck, CTV's Tom Clark was on the television set of his Ottawa-based political program. Without accurate information available at that moment, he declined to mention the quake at the end of his program. But when he learned the dimensions of the disaster, "if they weren't going to send me, I would have demanded that I go. So I was already packing my bags." He did eventually get on the TVA jet from Montreal the next afternoon:

Yes, I was on PK's jet – I mean what a way to go to a disaster! That was fantastic. So then we got in on the private jet...I mean there was, you know, a faint hope that we'd be able to fly into Port-au-Prince but by then it was all shut down. Then I organized a convoy overland to go in through the Dominican and drive into Port-au-Prince, which ultimately was the only way to get in there. Wednesday night I was in Santo Domingo and the following day, the 14th, I was in. (Clark 2010)

Clark made no mention of the fact that the younger Hamamdjian, with no disaster experience, got to Port-au-Prince before him and filed the first reports for CTV from Haiti, a fact that Hamamdjian said left him "so pissed that he was stuck in the Dominican." This thesis argues that while this incident revealed the normal 'healthy' competition between reporters, it also helped confirm that, while the news routine changed in some fundamental ways in the conditions of disaster, the traditional newsroom pecking order survived nonetheless.

In the short-term, as Clark indicated, the first and most pressing practical challenge was how to get into a broken country where air traffic has stalled and communication is unreliable. Through a slightly longer lens, the journalists' scramble to reach their destination is the first and most compelling example of the rare degree of cooperation that marks such events.

The Haitian airport was quickly closed to most air traffic in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. The community of journalists became a migrating flock

of a “distinct human subspecies” (Carey 1988, 232) landing at the airport in Santo Domingo, a ritual ‘nesting’ reenacted from disaster to disaster.

If one belongs to this community, one “can recognize one another in whatever small town or far corner of the earth they chance to meet” (Lynn 1965, 259). But there was no place far enough away to escape the authority of the desk and the editors back home. Or, as *The Star’s* Joanna Smith put it:

While we were waiting at the airport in Miami, we started looking up charter flights. We found one for \$15,000 and our editor-in-chief nixed it.

So then we flew to Santo Domingo. We did find another charter flight that actually Paul Hunter from the CBC was supposed to be on as well. And our editor okayed that one but then it was canceled. So by this point we had already lost the people we were talking to about sharing a bus, and sharing a taxi, and sharing drivers.

So then we’re just...we’re standing around the airport at a bit of a loss for what to do. And saw a bunch of people with equipment and ran after them and they were Fox News, sound guys, and they had a convoy so we found a driver to join their convoy and we drove in overland with them. It was just, you know, tons of journalists, just tons of NGO workers and just tons and tons of people going up to other people with cameras or other people with equipment – or other...white people really – you know, you’re trying to get to Port-au-Prince and trying to figure out how we’re going to get there basically. (Smith 2010)

And so journalists looked out for each other while devising strategies to reach the devastation of Port-au-Prince. “We got to Santo Domingo,” remembered CTV’s Paul Workman, “and then were stuck:”

And we tried to fly...I was in an airplane actually on the way just about to enter Haitian airspace on the second or third day and they closed the airport and we had to turn back. So then we drove overnight with our colleagues from *ABC America* in a big bus and got in the next day. We were supposed to helicopter in and we did have a helicopter that would take us in but they couldn’t drop us at the airport. And we had no idea or any sense of where it was that they said they were going to put us down and so we canceled that. We didn’t take the helicopter charter and, on second thought on finally getting in there, it was a mistake, we should have gone. (Workman 2010)

This was more than likely the helicopter that the *Gazette*’s Montgomery and photographer Phil Carpenter eventually hired to get them in:

We got two seats on a helicopter for \$6900, which was a deal when you compare what *CBC* spent. *CBC* and *LaPresse* hired a plane for \$50,000. The price in the morning was \$2500 but because the *Gazette* had sent us down there with no money, we spent the whole day going from bank to bank getting an advance on our Amex and, as we were doing that, the price kept

going up. In fact, when I got to the airport, they wanted eight grand and I told them to go fuck themselves. We had a deal, right? (Montgomery 2010)

The \$50,000 figure that Montgomery repeated as “fact” reflects an uninformed but not uncommon resentment of Canada’s public broadcaster and its presumed resources by those, in print and broadcast, who work for private media organizations. This negative view is so ingrained in the consciousness of Canadian journalists that it acts as a kind of general catch all for a variety of complaints about the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The resentment is so widespread that it doesn’t matter if, indeed, there’s any truth to a particular claim unless, that is, you’re a public broadcaster like Paul Hunter:

I’ve never really understood why some people in this country display such singular disdain for CBC News, especially when their criticism is so ridiculously baseless. Secondly, I wonder why journalists who do have such ill feelings toward us don’t simply pick up the telephone and ask someone (that is, DO SOME JOURNALISM) before passing on scurrilous rumour as fact. Short answer: Not only did we not pay 50k, but we didn’t even fly. We drove to Port-au-Prince. As an aside, I don’t think we even ever encountered anyone there from *LaPresse*.

So this argumentative but tightly knit community came “together by creating stories about their past that they routinely and informally circulate to each other –

stories that contain certain constructions of reality, certain kinds of narratives, and certain definitions of appropriate practice” (Zelizer 1997, 405).

There *was* a degree of rare cooperation that emerged in this disaster but, just as reliably, the ‘normal’ competitive spirit remained, as did the humanity behind the impressive efforts to reach Port-au-Prince in trying circumstances. Joanna Smith of the *Toronto Star* remembered:

I didn’t expect it to take us so long to get there...just this endless journey of two days I guess. I just wanted to go. I was hearing about more and more people getting in. I heard the *Globe (Globe and Mail newspaper)* got there before we did and, you know, was already filing. I was excited. I was starting to get a little bit nervous. The Fox News guys were really skittish at the border and told us to remove all jewelry and everything and I overreacted and thought, ‘Oh my God, like even my wedding ring?’ So I wore it around my toe...so that was overreacting, right? (Smith 2010)

This anecdote revealed not only the anxiety associated with a new experience that promised to be difficult but it also shed light on the need for journalists to assume a particular ‘public’ persona to protect and defend their professional credibility. Little did *Toronto Star* readers know that their intrepid and insightful reporter who informed them of Haiti’s pain and destruction was, in fact, a slightly gullible and nervous young woman who entered the country with her wedding ring on her toe.

One of the key elements that distinguished the coverage of the Haitian earthquake for journalists was the freedom of access they enjoyed in the immediate aftermath. There was no one in authority left on the streets of Port-au-Prince. While this meant that official sources, “the smallest interactional setting of journalism” (Zelizer 2004, 150), so prevalent in the ‘normal’ routines, had vanished in the dust of Haiti, reporters found themselves free to go wherever their curiosity took them.

The veteran broadcast journalist and amateur pilot Tom Clark compared the practice of journalism in these conditions to a kind of aviation freedom:

There are two types of flying. There’s the flying you do in and around New York City where you have to stay within fifty feet of where you are told at all times. All decisions are made for you and you must fly exactly as you are told. And then there’s the flying that you do over northern Quebec, which is completely free. Do whatever you want to do, go wherever you want to go...and the liberation of that is fantastic. I think we need to exercise those journalistic muscles every now and again. (Clark 2010)

As a result, for the CBC’s Paul Hunter, Haiti “was an incredible journalistic experience. Tremendously satisfying from both a craft and human perspective. It’s in a way difficult to explain to non-journalists, but it’s as if – suddenly – that elusive thing ‘the truth’ could be told. Easily.”

It was in the unique conditions of a disaster when “the truth” became a less complicated concept than usual for journalists. This was mainly because the

unrestricted access to stories in Haiti made the act of reporting far more hands-on than usual. The routine that developed organically demanded an increased participation in story production by each journalist who, as a result, experienced a rare sense of ownership and pride in the work they produced from Haiti, confirming the view that “journalists find their joy and identity in the adrenaline rush that comes from...triumphs against all odds, nobility in the face of suffering...and other unplanned and unanticipated scandals, accidents, mishaps, gaffes, embarrassments, horrors, and wonders” (Schudson 2003, 6).

Certain themes about the behavior of journalists and victims during catastrophic events have remained constant from the earliest research to contemporary studies. When these conclusions, from a broad spectrum of disaster scholarship over many years, are set against the practical experiences of the journalists in Haiti, some are confirmed and others are challenged.

Media play a crucial role in creating the meaning of a disaster and, therefore, in the shaping of the widespread public perception that people panic or psychologically break down in disaster. Every journalist in this study made reference to the resiliency, gentleness and welcoming nature of the Haitian survivors in the aftermath of the earthquake. These practical experiences on the ground reinforced the conclusion reached by scholars that, in fact, “human beings respond remarkably well to extreme stress” (Quarantelli, 1989: 6).

The temptation that some journalists in Haiti succumbed to in portraying the situation as more dangerous than it actually was also confirmed the research that shows “journalistic accounts seem to stress the negative about individual behavior”

(Ibid., 7). It appeared, while Workman and Hamamdjian didn't once portray the situation as threatening, this was in fact an issue for both CTV journalists and executives, as Hamamdjian remembers:

When I got back that was one thing Bob [Ottawa bureau chief Robert Fife] told me he was very happy about, that Paul and I had stuck to that whereas Tom was giving the impression that tension was growing and violence ... and, Bob Hurst, the president, called me and he's not the type who would ever tell you 'good job,' he just wants to see if you're back OK, and he asked me what my impressions were and I told him that it was a bit frustrating to hear Toronto push that it was dangerous. And he told me that at one point he did pull one of the headlines because it was a bit too much. (Hamamdjian 2010)

At the same time, the Haitian earthquake challenged the conclusion that journalists have "a tendency to focus on the positive about organizational behavior" in disaster (Quarantelli 1989, 7). The difficulties began at the Haitian airport where "it was so disorganized that we had to circle for three hours," says Daniele Hamamdjian, "And we're in a C17 so we're all against the wall, soldiers, there's a helicopter right in front of me with boxes of medical goods, water bottles...so we landed and literally there's one runway and we were just all there. It was like the world was meeting in Port-au-Prince."

The difficulties distributing supplies to the desperate survivors in Haiti from the chaotic airport was a prominent theme of news stories throughout the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

Given that “general knowledge and perceptions of most disasters anywhere, but especially in developing countries, is almost exclusively dependent on reporting by the Western world mass media,” both television reports and newspaper stories “call up and then reinforce or challenge shared understandings of cultural difference” raising questions about the motivations behind such extensive coverage (Quarantelli 1989, 12; Lutz & Collins 1993, 1).

The January 2006 CARMA Report on *Western Media Coverage of Humanitarian Disasters* contains a conclusion that “western self-interest is the precondition for significant coverage of a humanitarian crisis” (CARMA Report, 2006: 5). Although it is the suffering of victims that tends to grab the public’s attention, the report argues, “there appears to be no link between the scale of a disaster and media interest in a story.” Instead, the research demonstrates “a clear correlation between the perceived economic impact of a disaster on western markets and the quantity of media coverage” (Ibid., 6).

The conclusions of the CARMA study are confirmed by and have particular relevance in the wake of the Haitian earthquake.

At the time of the earthquake, Haiti was Canada’s largest foreign aid recipient after Afghanistan with an intense involvement “in Haiti’s prisons, its justice system, and indeed the very security and stability of the country” (Petrou 2008). The United

States has been involved militarily and financially since at least its initial occupation of the island in 1915.

As the head of the *Center for Democracy in the Americas* told the New York Times, “The classic U.S. role in the whole hemisphere is either complete neglect, or we come in and run the show” (Cooper and Landler, 2010).

CARMA identifies four motivations for Western markets: “global economic interest, national political advantage, involvement of westerners and a ‘feel-good’ from giving to a good cause” (CARMA Report, 2006: 6). Haiti therefore clearly matters to both the American and Canadian governments and the consequences of this investment were reflected by the resources assigned to cover the earthquake.

Tom Clark argued that a kind of compassion fatigue had set in, “look at the difference in our responses between, say, Haiti and the [February 2010] earthquake in Chili. Not that Chili was huge, but in other circumstances, it would have been considered pretty big. And there I think it was just, ‘Well, I think we’ve had enough of earthquakes for a while’” (Clark 2010).

But note that it was the *economic* interests that acted as the justification for media organizations to spend the money and effort sending crews to the site of the Haitian disaster.

In the infancy of disaster scholarship, the media were regarded as “poor reporters of disaster happenings” whereas the contemporary debate centers not so much on whether the essential facts are right as it does on the role of the journalist as a participant in the event. When Gans distinguished between what he called the “typical” versus the “enduring” values of journalism, he presented four kinds of

“disorder” stories – “natural, technological, social and moral” (Quarantelli 1989, 4; Gans 1979, 52).

The Haitian earthquake has within it these four typifications, a fact that serves to highlight the phenomenal growth and increasing depth of disaster scholarship. Advanced communication technologies allow for virtually the instant sharing of images and words from a ‘natural’ catastrophe. But it is the social dynamic and the moral challenges informing the practice of journalism in these extraordinary conditions that now draws our attention.

Chapter Three: In Their Own Words – The Stories Behind the Stories

One big difference between there and here [Washington] is that we NEVER would begin the day by seeing something in the paper or on TV and going out and trying to find it. Everything was absolutely original entrepreneurial journalism. We'd hear stuff from our fixers about a clinic in trouble up the street and go. Or, in going somewhere we'd see something, stop and explore it. Total in your face stuff. (Hunter 2011)

Lives, careers and perspectives are all changed by disaster.

Through clogged airports and collegial cooperation, the Canadian journalists finally arrived on the streets of Port-au-Prince to undertake Lippmann's challenge to record as *precisely* as possible the horrific aftermath of the earthquake. The practical experiences of these journalists on the ground in Haiti will both substantiate and confront academic ideas about journalistic practice, resulting in a fresh understanding of why and how the news routine changes in disaster.

This chapter takes the position that when Lippmann declares, "unless the event is capable of being named, measured, given shape, made specific, it either fails to take on the character of news, or it is subject to the accidents and prejudices of observation" (Lippmann 1922, 123), then invisible and, likely unconscious pressures are created for journalists to record an event with just the right amount of detachment to be able to observe but with sufficient involvement to reach as full an understanding of the moment as possible.

In this sense then, news stories are ‘acts of precision.’ And the challenge facing the journalist is “to seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us” (Carey 1989, 49).

This process of an orderly systemization, especially conducted within the chaotic randomness of a disaster zone, is what Brown has called the selection of “a tiny number of salient points [where] each one is like one of the disparate sharply etched dots in an impressionist painting, which make little sense when examined up close but taken together give the illusion of a coherent whole” (Brown 2008, 4).

Just as *whom* one speaks with determines *what* one hears, *where* journalism is practiced is equally determinative. This unique Haitian “newsroom” began to take shape at 4:53, local time, on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 12, 2010 when the earthquake struck. It was measured at 7.0 on the Richter scale, the strongest earthquake to hit the area in over two centuries. Its epicenter was 16 kilometers southwest of the heavily populated Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince. Within seventy-two hours, all the journalists in this study were on the ground witnessing the aftermath and telling its stories.

It would be beyond the scope of this study to go into great detail about the tortured history of Haiti with its dismal statistics of per capita income, education rates, political instability and the enduring absence of reasoned governance. But to understand the interaction with journalists after the earthquake, it *is* useful to consider the history of Haitian life through a frame in which collective memory resolves “ambiguous events and complex characters into simple, moral tales

populated by heroes, villains, and fools [as] they take on the characteristics of ‘true stories’” (Edy 2006, 204). In Haiti, past is truly prologue.

According to a 2007 World Bank study of Haiti, the country is “beset by widespread poverty and inequality, economic decline and unemployment, poor governance and violence” (Verner and Egset 2007, xiii). This violence was most pronounced during the Duvalier regime from 1957 to 1986 when *Human Rights Watch* estimates that between 20,000 and 30,000 civilians were murdered (Ibid., 75). The point here is that random disappearances and death are not unknown to both the imagination and the reality of Haitians.

The percentage of the population living in urban settings increased from 25 per cent to 40 per cent between 1982 and 2003 (Ibid., xiii). This dramatic influx from Haiti’s impoverished and denuded rural areas has led to a rapid increase in slum neighborhoods. Current estimates are that half of the country’s population now lives in the metropolitan area that makes up Port-au-Prince.

This human density, and the fact that the January 2010 earthquake was also particularly shallow according to geologists (only 10 kilometers below the earth’s surface) dramatically increased the destructive impact of shaking in the capital city. The journalists who flocked to Haiti encountered a people for whom history has offered singularly hard lessons.

For the poorest among them, this collective memory has translated to an acceptance of struggle, an appreciation of faith and a determined belief that they have and can survive whatever natural or man-made calamity is visited upon them. In the altered routine of newsgathering, with its absence of official sources, these

voices were the ones that journalists had to depend on in the immediate aftermath of the quake. Their accounts connected the earthquake to their ongoing struggles and, inevitably, to the island's history, leading to the conclusion that if Katrina "revealed the Third World of the United States to Americans, the Haitian earthquake revealed to everyone the Third World's Third World" (Diaz 2011).

There has been the predictable confusion about the ultimate death toll from the quake, both the deliberately uncertain estimates - tied to the political maneuvering behind multi-billion dollar aid and reconstruction agendas - as well as the more well-intentioned estimates offered for the sake of historical accuracy and journalistic use.

For the record, at the time of this writing, the Haitian government maintains that 316,000 of its citizens were killed whereas an unpublished report, commissioned by the *US Agency for International Development*, puts the death toll between 46,000 and 85,000 (BBC 2011).

Regardless of the true number, likely never to be known, the aftermath of the 2010 Haitian earthquake will become, if it hasn't already, the new measuring stick of death and destruction for journalists. It will be used as a means to evaluate and interpret the size and impact of the next disaster.

This comparison between disasters forms a vital link in journalistic discourse connecting not only practice from events past to future ones, but also establishing a connective thread between generations of journalists. Even for those reporters with extensive war and disaster experiences, the realities of the Haitian earthquake were shocking and unprecedented.

“I’ve been to four major natural disasters and eight wars,” said CTV’s Tom Clark. “And if you took all the natural disasters that I’ve been to and added in a war or two, *that* would have been Haiti. Because it was so massive, nobody will ever know what the death toll is...200, 250 thousand...but, as always in these things, the dead are the lucky ones. The ones who are alive...the misery of that place over the next year or two is going to be almost unbearable” (Clark 2010).

Paul Workman, Clark’s CTV colleague at the time, recognized the population density of Port-au-Prince as one reason for the overwhelming impression of destruction in Haiti:

I think one out of every three buildings was either destroyed or damaged and you saw that immediately. The impact was enormous compared, for example, I covered the earthquake in northern Pakistan which was spread out over a much larger area, much more rural area. And while, in Mustafabad the capital, it looked really horrible, it was outside where most of the damage was. You didn’t see it in the same context that you did in Port-au-Prince. It was pretty, pretty amazing – the amount of destruction...probably the worst I’ve seen, absolutely. (Workman 2010)

The difficulty in deciding on what story to tell on any given day, in an environment where “there had to be a hundred stories in front of you” was a distinguishing feature of the Haitian earthquake coverage (Hamamdjian 2010).

This is the “newsroom” where journalists set up shop in January 2010 and which profoundly changed the newsgathering routine.

For Paul Hunter, the routine was less predictable and formulaic because, “Unlike in Ottawa, where you hear from somebody and ‘OK, now go get the opposition perspective and somebody else to comment on the two other opinions that you have,’ here it happens in front of you and you tell it. That’s what I mean about the truth, right?” (Hunter 2011).

For reporters in the pre-packaged information capital cities of Washington and Ottawa, and especially for Canadian journalists in Washington where “you might as well be Soviet journalists from 1972” where in the pecking order of journalists, “a Canadian reporter ranks just slightly higher than Radio Zambezi,” the daily work has become a kind of Ikea journalism, where materials are provided with some assembly required (Hunter 2011; Oliver 2011, 131).

The so-called “melts,” where reporters simply ‘voice’ material; i.e., interviews and footage of events provided by newsgathering agencies, have come to dominate the daily news routine. They emphasize news *construction* rather than the skills of *gathering* material. From a corporate, bottom line perspective, these “melts” make perfect sense. They are an efficient and a relatively inexpensive way to appear to be covering the world without having to deal with the expense and messiness of actually being in it. For journalists, the “melts” are personally frustrating and professionally unsatisfying because they feel inauthentic.

This explains why the news routine in disaster invigorated the reportorial senses by restoring the function of being the eyewitness to a “frantic mess that’s

been created by nature that affects tens of thousands of people” (Workman 2010). Workman continued, “I think it makes you much more sensitive to what you’re doing and that you realize that the stories you’re telling really have an effect that is immediate. And it touches something in people that you know there’s a huge sympathy factor that you wouldn’t get if you’re telling a story about Barack Obama’s nuclear arms policy.”

What Workman identified as a more “sensitive” approach in practice confirms what scholars regard as the power of news media to “evoke empathy and provide deep understanding so that citizens at large can appreciate the situation of other human beings in the world and so elites can come to know and understand the situation of other human beings, notably non-elites, and learn compassion for them” (Schudson 1995, 29).

The physiological meaning of “sensitivity” is the degree of susceptibility to stimulation. It appeared that journalists couldn’t help but be *over* stimulated by the sensory onslaught from a disaster like the Haitian earthquake but there are degrees to the scale of this exposure. A reporter or producer can always look away, if only for a moment’s relief.

But this luxury didn’t exist for CTV cameraman George Papadionysiou, who said he found himself navigating the fine line between respecting those he observed and the act of observation; i.e., the accurate recording of the event. “I guess what you’re trying to do is not to sort of ... these people have been through enough and you don’t want to disrespect them whether they’re dead or they’re alive,” he says. “You know, you just want to try to match, report what’s going on. It’s a fine line too

because just being there with the camera...there were times, you're feeling useless because here you are in the midst of all this stuff and you can't do anything. You almost want to help" (Papadionysiou 2010).

The plaintive phrase, "you almost want to help" captured, in only five words, the dilemma, made more penetrating and acute in disaster, that has filled library shelves with scholarly attention. The reporter must balance the ingrained professional belief in maintaining a distance with the understandable personal feelings so powerfully provoked by the terribly unsettling images and situations of a disaster. Papadionysiou acknowledged the difficulty in achieving this balance:

When you're working, you're doing what you have to do and you're always thinking about that...but in the back of your mind, you think, 'Wow, these poor people...what's going on here?' I saw a woman...they had just sort of left in the streets. She was covered up there. I shot her. You go into overdrive you know, thinking, 'OK, I've got to get my establishing shots', whatever. If I didn't get the shot or shots...you can't actually have a black hole so you're wallpapering, shooting whatever you can and in the back of your mind, you're thinking about your sequences and all the stuff that has been pounded into your head over the years and years of doing this. I saw a coffin by the side of the street...saw these people carrying on a stretcher another dead body zipping it down the street covered up in a rag. After that I saw something covered in white and I went to go shoot it and it was a dead body.

You sort of block it out...and you just do what you've got to do.

(Papadionysiou 2010)

Finding the balance between the jumble of personal emotions and the professional act of observing was so difficult that Papadionysiou sounded apologetic when he explained that “the day that Daniele and I left, we were at the airport waiting to get on this West Jet flight out and it was full of medical supplies. They had to unload the plane before we could get on with 135 evacuees or something so I just said, ‘Screw this, I’m going to help them unload the plane.’ It was my little bit that I could sort of do, right?”

The sheer intensity of what reporters found in the immediate aftermath of the Haitian earthquake accentuated this challenge to remain apart from what one was seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling. Part of the unique difficulty lay in the fact that this disaster, in particular, simply didn’t allow for much physical or emotional distance between reporter and subject.

And, as the CBC’s Paul Hunter remembered, there was also an abundance of stories, “You arrive there and it’s like, ‘Holy God. Look at this!’ Not only were there people trying to haul people trapped out of the rubble there but we met this guy who was building two coffins,” Hunter says. “One was for his Dad and one for his Mom. His Mom had died in a collapsed church. His Dad had died in the Hotel Montana and they were trying to get his body out. Boom! There’s your story for tonight. We hadn’t gone more than a few blocks from where we’d slept.”

As this model of journalistic practice in Haiti began to emerge, held up against the expectations of the daily contemporary newsroom (left behind at least temporarily), three integral components to the selection and production of stories following the earthquake also began to take shape: First, the sheer amount of material available to the journalists, in the absence of official sources; secondly, how, as a result, these stories differed from those produced in the more 'normal' news gathering routines; and, finally, the impact of the long distance relationship with institutional control through the news editor(s) on "the desk."

Although not expressly mentioned in their reflections, it is important to appreciate that a disaster creates an atmosphere of fear in which journalists must operate. It is a level of uncertainty that becomes part of the routine and is familiar to veterans like Paul Hunter:

I have found (and this is especially true in Afghanistan) that a VERY hard part of the job in such places when it comes to personal safety, is constantly reminding yourself that you're not in Kansas anymore. Or Toronto. Or Washington. Or anywhere that you've spent a lifetime inherently believing you are safe. It's so easy to forget about that. In Afghanistan, ONE of the difficulties was reminding yourself every moment outside the wire that your next step could be onto an IED - so you had to think about every single step you took. Stop. Think. Then proceed smartly. Meanwhile every instinct says Go! Go! Go! (Hunter 2011)

CTV veteran producer Pat Skinner identified one of the unique conditions created by an earthquake, “If you’re in a war zone, you kind of have a sense of you’ve got warring combatants and they’re on opposite sides of the town or the road and you work out, where am I in relation to them? And you can figure out if I’m in this place, I’m in relative safety,” she says. “But when you’re in an earthquake zone with aftershocks going on all the time, *that* was a different feeling. You have no control” (Skinner 2010).

As the concept of loss of control is anathema to journalists, it is not surprising that none used that particular language in their recollections. Whereas Skinner’s comment has to do with personal safety in an earthquake zone, this research revealed that journalists in Haiti, bombarded hourly by deeply compelling stories, also experienced a kind of surrendering of editorial control.

Or, as veteran CTV reporter Paul Workman describes it, “There’s much less, I guess much less, research that goes into the kinds of stories you’re trying to do. Essentially you just, you’re an observer, you’re a witness much more than we are generally on a day-to-day basis in doing political reporting, for example. It’s really what you see, hear, smell, learn on the streets in a story like a huge earthquake or natural disaster like that....that goes into your story, becomes your story in fact.”

In Haiti, Tom Clark believed that the change in routine was less about the ready availability of stories, important as that phenomenon was, than it was about the unlimited access in the disorganized aftermath of the quake:

The story is there to be had before the authorities gain control over what's going on and I think Haiti was just so massive and so big, that there was no authority anywhere in the world that could control this story. There were no restrictions anywhere because there was no authority anywhere...even the Americans, who were running the airport which was their little piece of Haiti, it took them two weeks before they really got control of that airport...to be out in the streets, the restrictions that you had were really sort of restrictions of your own safety and what you judged the situation to be. (Clark 2010)

Paul Hunter's almost 'stream of consciousness' memory of arriving on those streets richly illustrated what journalists faced on the ground:

So, on that first day driving in we're all just sort of freaked out, right, because we don't know what we're in for and we hit a cemetery and there seemed to be a kind of commotion at it. We got out and people were digging holes as fast as they could and pick-up trucks were arriving, almost lining up outside, with makeshift coffins and they were burying people as fast as they could.

And it was like, you've got to be kidding!

Susan Ormiston [CBC reporter] was with us and she did a stand-up and within a half hour of being at the cemetery, she had a story for the news that night. We then got back in the vehicle and we drove about a block and there was a collapsed building and people, with their hands, were trying to dig through the concrete, because there were believed to be people alive still

inside. So we stopped again. And I got on the phone to *Newsworld* and described what I was seeing. There was a kind of a secondary collapse and people were scrambling. I got knocked to the ground and sort of trod upon while on the phone, then got up, we started shooting, did a stand-up, did some interviews and within twenty minutes I had a story. It was unbelievable!

This was effectively the first block into the earthquake zone and we'd spent forty minutes and we had two stories for the *National* news. (Hunter 2011)

In terms of storytelling then, Haiti *appeared* to be an editorial free-for-all, a kind of journalist's dream environment. But the improvised and negotiated routine that emerged nonetheless retained the familiar components of daily practice, for example the morning story meeting, confirming that journalists find a way to re-establish familiar patterns of behavior even in dramatic non-routine events (Berkowitz 1997, 373).

The issue of editorial control, not unfamiliar in the 'normal' practice of journalism, was also present in the new routine in disaster. As Papadionysiou remembered, "There were bodies everywhere crushed under the rubble, arms sticking out...stuff like that and you're thinking, 'OK, how much of this can I show? Is that my decision to make?'"

These editorial decisions depended on the power relations, influences and degrees of trust between the institutional interests that in a disaster are represented by the desk, the responsibilities of the producer on the ground to both

the institution and the journalist and, finally, the storytelling challenges for the reporter.

At its best, this is an editorial process of consultation and collaboration between respected peers. At its worst, it becomes an arbitrary top-down decision-making mechanism that can cause more problems than it solves in the field for already cranky and likely exhausted journalists.

This was when the value of a familiar routine became apparent and most useful, as *CTV* producer Pat Skinner acknowledged:

We would have a meeting at the beginning of the day and there's certain things you just kind of know – somebody's got to do aid delivery, somebody's got to do the clinics, the hospitals, the rescues...that kind of thing. The three reporters would all head out in the morning with a sense of, 'OK, what am I going to look for.' But within an hour, on most days, most of them had been sidetracked and would just kind of zero in on something and we kind of approached it that way every day. We had a good system going...only text message was really working...people were required basically to be sending messages back at least once an hour with, 'I've got this. I've got that. My story has completely changed. I found so and so and I've got to do something on this.' I trust reporters to make good decisions like that and stay focused once they find something and they were all good on it. (Skinner 2010)

What is becoming clear is that an unusual level of cooperation emerged in this changed practice where, “journalists set aside competitive considerations to help their colleagues and endure extreme personal hardships to give communities the news they need” (Davis and Stark 2001, 15). While George Papadionysiou is the first to downplay any personal hardship he experienced, his memories do offer a rare first-person glimpse of the working conditions in the earthquake’s aftermath:

From my perspective, it was tough because I didn’t have a bed for a week. I basically slept outside and then I had a couple of nights inside on the floor pushed into a corner with other people. Outside I guess they said was safer to sleep because if anything happened at least you were outside but the third or fourth night outside my hands were covered in bugs, bug bites and everything like that too and getting a shower on the fourth day was a treat. Living on power bars, protein bars and military rations is kind of interesting because you don’t look forward to eating any more. (Papadionysiou 2010)

Competing media organizations did help each other in these conditions. For example, CTV fed its earliest reports using CBC facilities before repairing its own distribution system (Hamamdjian 2010).

But more common than the institutional synergy in Haiti was the cooperation between individual reporters. “We’d all go out,” Hamamdjian remembers, “and then we’d all come back and say, ‘what did you see? I see this. Is that what you saw? And

then we'd go to where they were the next day.' So stuff changes and that's how you find amazing stories too."

When Hamamdjian comments that "stuff changes," her tone conceals a more difficult moment she had to face as a young reporter. It occurred when Tom Clark and Paul Workman finally managed to get to Port-au-Prince. Looking back, she now says, "At that point, it was me and the two ... you know, giants ... so that was, for me it changed because it wasn't just me anymore and I was back in my little corner."

But this was more a moment of CTV's institutional branding by using its more established and credible "faces" from Haiti than it was about competition between the reporters. When Hamamdjian was asked about being put back in her "little corner," her careful reply was, "I mean, say what you want about Tom, he told me you know, 'You should be proud of yourself. I've gotten a lot of emails about your work.' So that was nice of him" (Hamamdjian 2010).

This cooperation between reporters was encouraged by the daily routine, as producer Skinner said, "Because we were in constant contact, you know, Paul would see something that would fit in with Daniele's story or Tom would see something to fit in with Paul's story. So they were constantly shooting little bits and pieces that they would hand off to each other at the end of the day."

Workman's explanation of this unusual sharing between reporters introduced a couple of important points. The first is that the heightened sense of a journalistic *community* in disaster grew in relation to the understanding of the *common* difficulties facing reporters and secondly, given the emotional intensity and

potential impact of the situation, the *story* became the most important consideration. The experienced Workman said:

You see somebody and you know you've got something that's good or that they're interested in getting something, you're happy to pass it on to them. Because we all know we're working under the same difficult conditions. It's just not easy at all. I think the story takes over rather than what you're doing personally. If I had material that I thought would fit into a story that Daniele was doing better or if I had enough material, I would certainly pass it on to her or pass it on to Tom. Yea, we were trading a lot of information that way. (Workman 2010)

For Tom Clark, the daily routine was akin to hunting trips so that when he and his colleagues gathered at the end of the day, "everybody would sort of exchange stories," he recounted, "I mean it is like coming back from the hunt and seeing what it is that you had."

Setting aside, for the moment, Clark's disturbing imagery of being on a "hunt," this informal gathering at the end of the day was a significant part of the changed and more supportive than usual routine in Haiti. With his experience in war zones, Workman accepted the collaboration in the aftermath of the earthquake but understood that it was "perhaps not quite as much as covering a conflict or a war where you really do depend on other journalists for knowledge about, 'Where is it safe to go? What will I find up ahead? Can I go down this road?'" In this case, it was

really just a sense of sharing information that you know is not life threatening but you're willing to do it anyway because we're all in the situation and that we'll be in the same situation again and meet the same people. And we all kind of depend on each other (Workman 2010).

Not all journalists in Haiti, however, shared this sense of community. The *Gazette's* Sue Montgomery preferred to be alone:

I don't like that mob mentality. I mean there is the aspect that people help each other, you depend on each other but I really don't know what the experiences of other journalists were because I didn't hang out with them and there was very little contact. I got emails from the *Globe* [Globe & Mail] and Global [television network] who had all gone to the Oloffson Hotel and they said, 'what are you doing? Come and stay here...you can share.' And I said, 'you know, I don't want to. (Montgomery 2010)

It wasn't just a personal choice like Montgomery's that offered the opportunity to work independently. A notable consequence of a wide-open disaster like Haiti was that the impact of pack reporting was diminished in favor of, what can only be called, a more adventurous approach to newsgathering. It was an approach in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake appreciated and exploited by the *Toronto Star's* young reporter, Joanna Smith:

We really got the sense that we were discovering something that no one in the city had seen. We were telling a story that was completely different. We had fired our fixer and we hadn't found a new one yet. And we were climbing a demolished village that could have caused a landslide at any moment. We really had to trust our gut. The people we met were just such characters and they were so good to us. You know just the simple raising of a notebook, and 'We're Canadian journalists' and all of a sudden they're holding machetes and that could have gone wrong and yet they would sort of extend a hand to help us up the hill, it was just a really special, special moment. (Smith 2010)

This potentially dangerous trip up a steep hill to a tent city was a practical example of the different approaches taken by veterans and disaster "rookies." For Paul Hunter in Haiti, "You had to resist the temptation to climb, probe, explore crumbled buildings (all natural physical journalistic tendencies) and simply to be careful" (Hunter 2011). But for Smith and her photographer, that climb led to the favorite piece of work they produced from Haiti. It highlights another unique consequence of disaster work in that it forced the journalist to re-consider her role and to appreciate the plight of victims:

I would start to interview one person and then everyone would come around and start interviewing me ... felt like I was in a scrum. And I felt, you know, I felt a duty to answer their questions. That's the least I could do. They were hungry for news. I would tell them what I knew ... in the beginning the crowd would know I was a journalist because that's how I introduced myself but the

newer people would think I was an aid worker or a politician or something and start challenging me on things and going on and on. And then eventually I would say, 'Listen. I am not from the government. I'm a journalist. My job, my goal here is to tell the government that you are in need of help and that it's not coming fast enough.'

And they would always say, 'Oh,' and then thank me. (Smith 2010)

It is clear from the reporter's stories in Haiti that the ability to follow one's instinct, rather than the pre-packaged directions from press conferences and releases, was professionally liberating. But more significantly, the newsgathering routine in disaster exposed how malnourished the 'normal' diet of news actually is. Only through the lens of a disaster can it be truly understood how official sources have become editorial and creative blinders while the habit of returning again and again to the same spokesperson on any given issue narrows drastically the vision and the abilities of journalists to initially find and then tell the often more comprehensive and compelling story, a recognition not lost on Tom Clark:

The richness of what you were able to get...I've only experienced that a few times in my career where you had a story that was yours and wide open...Haiti was certainly one of them. You feel much more like a journalist. It is a great moment when you can bring all your instincts to bear on the story and nobody else is telling you what you can't do...the ability to have no overlay, have no spinners, have no...whatever you want to call it...no

interference whatsoever, you know it's that wonderful breakout moment that you have when you say I can now actually use my storytelling abilities. If there's a true test being a journalist, then put somebody in that situation and see what they write. If what comes out is pretty good, then they're probably a pretty good journalist. If what comes out is wooden and leaden, then they should take up another profession. (Clark 2010)

This sense of feeling “much more like a journalist” who owns the story was a significant characteristic of the routine that developed in Haiti. For example, CTV cameraman George Papadionysiou was responsible for the shooting, editing and feeding of material on a daily basis. While producer Pat Skinner was concerned about the impact of prolonged exposure to such unsettling images because he “never got a chance to step back from it,” the veteran cameraman characterized the routine in disaster quite differently, “It was a good thing because I was in charge of everything that I did. When you work as an editor, you know, I knew what was available. I didn't have to go through somebody else's tapes. It was probably one of the only times in my life that everything I shot got used ” (Skinner 2010; Papadionysiou 2010).

Although relatively new to normative newsroom practices, CTV reporter Hamamdjian also recognized the opportunity offered in Haiti to *own* the story, “It just...I felt, you know, I felt at home. That's what I love to do,” she says. “In Ottawa, you're sitting and you're doing ‘melts,’ ... *this* was refreshing and it was

gratifying too because at the end of the day, it was ‘our’ story, they were ‘our’ interviews.”

The telling fact that both veteran and ‘rookie’ reporters shared a similar disappointment with the routines of the contemporary newsroom, a judgment brought into sharp relief by their experiences in Haiti, indicates the undeniable and increasing values gap between institutional and journalistic motivations and intentions.

And so the relationship between the journalist and the desk, as it represents institutional priorities, is worth examining. Like the tension of a rubber band that increases in direct proportion to the distance between the ends, the nature of the give and take between the desk and the journalist is intensified when stretched by geographical distance.

This long-distance editorial relationship is a simple, enduring fact of journalistic life. As CTV producer Pat Skinner recognized, “They are your bosses. It can be a difficult situation and I think, you know, depending upon maybe how overtired you are or how stressed you are from other things that might be going on, maybe you handle it better or worse at any one time.”

In the aftermath of the earthquake, there were moments of strong disagreement *with*, if not interference *from*, what one journalist good-naturedly called “the dreaded desk” (Hunter 2011).

The *Toronto Star’s* Joanna Smith and her photographer filed a harrowing story and photo when a 15 year-old Haitian woman, Fabianne Geismar, was shot by police as a looter. In the story that ran on January 20th, 2010, Smith wrote:

They were tearing at each other as police officers in fluorescent yellow vests shot their rifles into the air, at one point aiming them at a man before drop-kicking him into the dirt and then letting him go.

She was standing on the roof.

The officer was standing on the street.

He shot her. She died. (*Toronto Star* 2010)

Both *Toronto Star* journalists expected that this dramatic death would be given front-page prominence. And when it wasn't, there were direct consequences for the kinds of stories they pursued in the days that followed, as Joanna Smith recalls:

Lucas (photographer Lucas Oleniuk) risked his life to get that photo and then they didn't run it on the front. It was extremely dangerous for him, he had to make some huge judgment calls and I guess, you know, he's not a cowboy...and he's willing to risk but you want to make sure it's worth it. And he was deeply affected by that – so that's when we said, 'OK we're done with the bang-bang. If they're not running this stuff on the front any more then we need to really think more big picture, we need to regroup, we need to step off from the daily news... you saw things changing. You saw it going from the immediate aftermath of the earthquake to sort of longer-term problems and you saw that fairly quickly. I mean you saw that by day eight. (Smith 2010)

When Smith returned to Canada, and her photographer remained in Haiti, the distance allowed her to view the incident more philosophically, “I remember sending him a note and I said, ‘ You know what? Everyone is talking about that photo and that story so maybe it wasn’t on the front but it was on our website a lot.’ He’s a visual guy,” Smith explains, “he’s a photographer so where things are laid out mean a lot to him whereas, me? I’m just happy to get something out there.”

While not physically with the journalists on the ground, the desk *is* in a position to enjoy a wider vision of the event, to offer “big picture guidance.”

The individual journalist, like Pat Skinner, recognized this bird’s eye view as an advantage:

They know what Canadians are engaged by in your story whereas you, on the ground, won’t necessarily know that. If you’ve got a good relationship with your desk, there is some give and take. On this particular story, you know the kids from Nelson, B.C. who were stuck and everybody in Canada seemed to be very caught up in that story. And we were all in Port-au-Prince going, like ‘what’s the big deal, you know? Like they’re fine. They’re going to get out. None of them were hurt or, if they were, it was very minor. And we’ve got a lot of dead people over here, you know?’ (Skinner 2010)

Or, in the view of the *Gazette’s* Sue Montgomery, “At one point they wanted me to follow the Canadian army to Jacmel and I said, ‘I don’t care about the Canadian angle, like that’s not the story.’ The same with going to the Hotel Montana. I didn’t

go. Not only because I was upset about it but I just didn't want to write about white people who had died."

It was evident that the institutional interests of the desk can differ from the motivations of the journalists on the ground. At times, like the placement of Smith's story, it is the line drawn between journalism and the concerns of audience, presentation and packaging. "I've been on stories before where Toronto is absolutely insistent that certain things were happening on the ground and we were absolutely insistent that, 'No, that's being over-hyped, that is not the case, that is not going on!'" says Skinner, "And so you do have to have a good trusting relationship between the two where you feel comfortable enough to say, 'You know what? You're wrong.'"

This study found that disagreements between the journalist and the desk in Haiti took one of two forms. Both result from a basic misreading by the desk of what was and wasn't practical for the reporter on the ground. The editors on the desk at the *Toronto Star* made a request that, due to security concerns in Haiti, was simply unworkable for Joanna Smith:

That was a situation where one of our editors wanted a story on the women singing at night and you know, it just wasn't working. It was one of those, you know, 'story meeting ideas' where it sounds good. So I'm going and I'm talking to all these women and I know they don't start singing until night anyway and that was kind of logistically difficult because we just were never out on the streets after sunset for safety reasons.

So I'm going up to these women and I ask, 'Why the singing?' and they're looking at me like I'm crazy, 'Because it's music!' you know. So then I get an email from the editor ... 'Oh how's that going ... like we think we want to lead with it ... you know 'a big resilience in the city' story and I go, 'Ohhh, I said you know it could be a little sidebar but... there's really no resilience here yet ... like it's too early. (Smith 2010)

But the second problem between the desk and the journalist in Haiti was less benign than a simple matter of practicalities. It was the deliberate push from the desk for audience grabbing, sensational material based on what *it* believed was happening in Haiti and what its readers and viewership would understand and accept.

In the case of the earthquake, this essentially meant dead bodies, increasing danger and random violence from so-called 'looters' in the aftermath of the earthquake. "I was the first *CTV* person in Haiti," recalls Hamamdjian, "so they're of course thinking there are bodies lying all over the place but I'm still standing in the middle of the runway, I'm not seeing anything."

As the days of that first week of coverage passed, Hamamdjian continued to feel and to resist the pressure from the desk in Toronto to emphasize a danger she, in fact, wasn't feeling. Looking back on the experience, she said, "I think what I'm most proud of is not giving in to the whole violence thing. They kept asking...I stuck to what I saw and I said, 'No, there might be in certain neighborhoods but they're isolated incidents.' It was frustrating to see it...it's almost as if they wanted to hear

it...that we felt in danger when, honest to God, I did not feel, for one second, in danger.”

The fact that this young reporter was congratulated on her return by CTV management for not exaggerating the dangers of Haiti reveals an intriguing contradiction between what the editors on the desk in Toronto were demanding of the reporters on the ground in Haiti and what CTV *News* executives were prepared to accept and the type of work they valued and ultimately praised. This seeming disconnection between journalistic and institutional appetites and opinions of what was appropriate deserves further study.

Audiences too became involved with opinions on what was appropriate with a focus on the language reporters were using to describe events in the aftermath of the earthquake. For example, defending her use of a loaded word like “looter,” or “pijaj” in the Creole dialect, Joanna Smith argued that she used it not only because of the demands of Twitter for conciseness but also because she considered that there was a different journalistic standard on social media from the printed page:

I sort of responded to readers on Twitter about this a little bit. I don't want to sound condescending but there's something about actually being down there that makes these sort of things seem a little ridiculous. The Haitians didn't change the word – pijay is pijay is pijay – and yet there's all nuance that goes into that word, you know context is everything.

When we saw a 15-year-old girl being shot by the police for looting, calling her a “looter” in my first sort of report didn’t mean to suggest that she was the wrongdoer and the police were the victim, right?

And some of these scenes were so...you know there were people who were going to get food but there were people who were just grabbing boxes of whatever not knowing what’s inside it and they were stabbing each other to take it away from each other as well. So the person who takes it, are they a looter or a scavenger? And then the person who then takes it from them, are they looting or scavenging or stealing? Are they any more or less desperate than the person who took it to begin with? So I found that...on Twitter I would just tell people this - I’m just going to use looter because, first of all it’s fewer letters and then I did think about it once I got wind of that debate and I did think about it a bit more for the newspaper copy. When it was a frenzied scene, it was looting to me. To me that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t have been doing it – it’s just that’s what it was. (Smith 2010)

For the focus of this chapter, however, one can safely conclude that there was no orchestrated or even random violence from Haitians against journalists in the aftermath of the earthquake, a fact quickly appreciated by the CBC’s Paul Hunter:

We went down with security guards, right? We went with flak jackets and helmets and big beefy, highly trained security guards to look out for our own personal safety. They immediately became mules to carry equipment

because it became evident on our first day in Port-au-Prince that there was no harm going to come to us. This is a place where every political and humanitarian and natural disaster has happened in the last couple of centuries and they were the most welcoming, polite, generous, kind people I have come across ever. It was incredible and I think that's one of the reasons it has stayed with me. (Hunter 2011)

The Montreal *Gazette's* Sue Montgomery was equally affected by the response she met, "I can't get over how moved and how touched I was by the generosity of the Haitians in their own suffering, how they reached out to me and helped me ... it has blown me away."

The journalists of this study were therefore mostly encouraged and trusted by the Haitian survivors and by their editors and producers back in Canada. They were allowed virtual free reign in what stories they decided to report from the earthquake as they were "completely un-embedded, completely alone, completely away from the pack - we hardly ever saw any other journalists while we were there - and we were producing good work, so they just said, 'Go for it'" (Smith 2010).

For CTV photographer George Papadionysiou, more accustomed to engaging in elbow crunching scrums with fellow shooters in Ottawa, "The thing with Haiti is that because it was such a widespread event, there wasn't a time where I'm shooting something and there was another group of cameras there," he remembered, "Because it's *everywhere*, everyone sort of has an exclusive type of thing."

What was also clear was that the trust and experience of veteran reporters included understanding how things work; i.e., knowing how and when to take advantage of circumstances, as the CBC's Paul Hunter noted slyly, "It didn't hurt that communications with Toronto were complicated," before he burst into laughter. "In fairness to the dreaded desk," he continued, "there was faith in Toronto ... a recognition that this was an incredible story and whatever I find is going to make the *National* news that night and they were comfortable not hearing from me for many hours and there was effectively no guidance from Toronto other than the 'big picture' guidance of who will be out there and things like that. But we decided everything ourselves in the field" (Hunter 2011).

Finally, apart from the umbilical connection with the desk, there was a more informal mechanism that arose to regulate the behavior of journalists in Haiti. It was a self-enforced system that constructed a new ethos attuned to the chaotic conditions. It made itself felt mainly through the subtle reinforcements or exclusions of peer pressure.

CTV reporter Tom Walters was derisively nicknamed the "the Savior of Haiti" by colleagues for his tendency to inject himself into his stories. In one that featured desperate Haitians scrambling for life-saving bottled water from the back of a truck, Walters became an obstacle to the relief effort by positioning himself on-camera directly behind the truck. The visual attraction in television of such a shot is undeniable but, as the CTV cameraman concluded, "When you've been around awhile, you can tell the prima donnas and the people who don't care ... " (Papadionysiou 2010).

Like the goalie in hockey who enjoys a uniquely wide perspective on the game, it is perhaps because shooters are able to watch everything on location that they are in the best position to recognize this informal code of conduct. On another intense day, Papadionysiou remembered going to a hotel where an American was pulled from the rubble:

They had to amputate two of his legs to get the guy out. And it was funny because there was a guy from CNN. He got there and his reporter is there and we're sitting down, we're waiting and I could just tell that he had this new, sort of young, hotshot type reporter who just had this attitude. And I went up to him and I said, I go, 'I don't mean to be sort of off base but is the reporter as much of a dick as I think he is?'

And he just gave me this really big smile. He actually sort of put his arm around me, 'Thank-you. It's that obvious?' (Papadionysiou 2010)

The journalistic routine that took shape in the aftermath of the earthquake then was supported by three factors; the freedom to explore, the negotiated "rubber band" relationship with the desk and, finally, the informal peer pressures exerted on location. It was a routine not without disagreements and unique challenges but, upon analysis, these proved to be ultimately and relatively minor in the grander scheme of the flexible and adaptable process that produced, in Paul Hunter's estimation, "journalism in its original physical - best - form. How satisfying (and different) is that!"

As satisfying and different as the reporting from the Haitian earthquake proved to be for the journalists in this study, each acknowledged the emotional and moral challenges generated by witnessing the human drama on the streets of Port-au-Prince that, at times, was made even more poignant by responses from a newly engaged and active audience. It is now time to examine the impact of these unique factors on their work.

Chapter 4 – The Impact of Reporting From a Disaster

I did ease my way out of it. My first day back the hill was having a big fundraiser called “The Hill Helps Haiti” and they’d asked me a few days earlier if I would say a few words. And I said listen, ‘I have no idea what shape I’m going to be in’ and so it was extremely overwhelming to be back in Ottawa for just a few hours and walk in to a giant cocktail party of 500 people and all these politicians and get up to speak. One of the things I did talk about was my job being to pass on the message of the Haitians. So I think it would have been hard to go right back to work obviously but it also would have been hard to just completely stop right away. (Smith 2010)

The changes in the daily routine of newsgathering in Haiti centered mainly on the behavior and professional habits of journalists who operate at all times, but perhaps especially in a disaster, within an interactional context. The experiences of the journalists in Haiti underlined the practical reality that the construction of “news” requires exchange, mutuality.

This chapter concentrates on exploring the potent role in a disaster of a uniquely engaged group of readers and viewers as well as documenting the power of the journalists’ personal responses to the work.

If a *community* is “a psychologically potent entity,” (Schudson 1995, 15) indicating “a feeling of fellowship on the basis of interaction (even if it is mediated or imagined interaction)” (Schudson 2003, 68), then the large Haitian expatriate

community in Montreal, with its collective memory and common history, was poised to play a critical interactional role in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Journalists tapped into this and found a community ready to try to mobilize a relief effort encompassing social, political, economic, and cultural elements. “I was, like, answering emails from Montreal from people desperate to find their relatives,” recalls the *Gazette’s* Sue Montgomery, “I would go and find them...dead or alive, whatever...at least they would have an answer.”

In retrospect, the following two examples of messages from viewers and readers provided a compelling snapshot of the anguished days following the earthquake and illustrated the kinds of additional demands placed upon the journalists.

To: Daniele Hamamdjian Sent: Sat Jan 16 17:22:12 2010 Subject: missing relative.

Hi, Daniele. Great work down there. I actually wish I could be there with you, because a relative of ours is missing. Her name is Denise Pierre. She lives at Carrefour Mahotiere 75, Ruelle Couchet #46 in Port-au-Prince. Her home number in Haiti is [0115093 874 6145](tel:01150938746145). The last seven digits are local. If there's any chance you can check out that corner, or contact someone who can, our number is [514-578-5931](tel:5145785931). Thanks, and stay safe. Brian

3:15 pm Subject: Re: missing relative

Brian, Only today was I able to get to Carrefour. On a tight deadline but made a detour to look for her. The address is not easy to find. We're given mixed directions, until we had to go. I'm so sorry I wasn't more help. D”

Thanks for your help, Daniele.

We found out that Denise is alive, as is her entire family.

Someone saw a picture we posted on CNN, and Denise called to say that she's OK.

Brian”

Date: Tue, 19 Jan 2010 09:00:09 -0600 Subject: Help at Hotel Montana

Hello Sue: Hope all is well.

I was hoping you can help us get information from Hotel Montana. My nephew Alexandre Bitton, 36 years old, living in Montreal travelled to Haiti for the first time Tuesday late afternoon and checked in the Hotel Montana. He was last seen in the lobby or may have been proceeding to his room when the earthquake hit.

He has been missing and believed to be under the rubble at Hotel Montana . His boss Martin Turgeon managed to escape because he was waiting by the pool for cocktails with Alexandre. He is back in Montreal. We have very little news as to what is going on at Hotel Montana or plans to rescue or recover more than 200 people still buried under the rubble. He is listed on the Red Cross list and with Foreign Affairs. He is married and has a 2 year old. He was there on business for an IT consultant firm.

Any news about Hotel Montana would be greatly appreciated. We understand you were able to connect and track Mr. Jeffrey Freedman's wife there.

Be well. Simon Bitton

Montgomery confirmed that Andrew was one of the dead at the Hotel Montana.

Beyond seeking information about lost or missing friends and family still in Haiti, these viewers and readers, through their unusual engagement with journalists, led reporters to compelling stories. As Hamamdjian remembered, “we had gotten emails from Montrealers trying to get in touch with their families and I

said to Tom [Clark] I got this email from Montreal, why don't you go try to find that person?"

Clark failed to acknowledge the lead from Hamamdjian. But "as it turned out," he recounts, "I did find the woman and it created a lovely moment. But then they said, 'But we want you to see something else' and they took me around the corner and there was the orphanage where 70 orphans were killed and 80 were sitting out on the street" (Clark 2010).

This "orphan" story was one of the most memorable from that first week's coverage of the Haitian earthquake and while Clark now says it happened "by sheer accident," the fact is he found the orphans because of the reaching out and involvement of Montreal's Haitian community.

Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the journalist in Haiti was communicating on a couple of levels. First, there was the *general* Canadian news audience interested in the relay of basic information from the streets of Port-au-Prince, essentially Carey's transmission model of communication. But the reporters were also *listening* and speaking to the audience of those whose loved ones had been in Haiti at the time of the earthquake. This largely expatriate audience was sustained by the "shared beliefs" of Carey's ritual model of communication.

As long as its members were active and interacting, the Haitian expatriate community in Montreal and journalists worked together productively in the aftermath of the earthquake. But when the attention of its members faded and the beam of Lippmann's media "roving searchlight" was inevitably drawn to another event, this imagined community flickered into darkness.

It is in a natural disaster, especially one that destroyed the infrastructure of communication systems, that the journalist was most often *not* speaking to the people in his or her stories. This may seem like a small point for those who study journalism. But it is not for those who practice it.

The awareness that the work will not be judged by those whose stories are being told is at once a liberating but also a demanding reality for the journalist. It is liberating in the sense of restoring to the reporter the function of acting quite literally as the eyes and ears for a distant audience in contrast to feeling, in the 'normal' routine, like a press release ventriloquist. On a deeper level, the journalist in disaster feels the demands of history through the obligation to provide accurate information for the "official record" of the event.

Often in Haiti, this combination of a sense of responsibility to history as well as to the audience came from being the only journalist at a particular location, as noted previously by Papadionysiou. Although the CBC's Paul Hunter has returned to the island four times since his initial visit in January 2010, his spirited recollections are still sharply informed by the survivors he met and the viewers his reporting touched in the immediate aftermath of the quake:

We went five times which helps I think probably drive it into the memory. But you know, the day we left on that first visit, the last words are...the fixer says to me, 'Don't forget about us.' And she was savvy enough to know about news cycles and the memories of journalists being notoriously poor. And in a weird way, that cemented it for me, I think. I can still see her face when she's

saying that. It doesn't hurt that every time I go back to Canada *that* is the one story people come up and talk to me about, which is satisfying for me because it tells me that the stories had an impact on people and I'm not going to pretend that it was simply my touch that made that happen because it's the people in the stories that touched people at home. But man oh man, it's like....*if* people in Canada still have vivid memories of seeing it on TV, I'm telling you that it has never left me having lived it for the those first days and the subsequent visits. (Hunter 2011)

The usual challenge for journalists is to seize the attention of “a bored, fickle public, ever ready to turn the page or change the channel” (Schudson 2003, 173). But dramatic disasters, on the scale of the Haitian earthquake, have the inherent ability to rivet public attention. Without the need to ‘grab’ an audience, the coverage from Haiti was unquestionably different from the normal news flow.

Reaching the readers and viewers in Canada, distanced virtually in every way from the realities of the disaster, was a powerful motivator for the journalists who were, first, stunned by what they were seeing in Haiti and, second, encouraged and overwhelmed, and at least once angered, by the response from Canadians to their work, as Montgomery remembers:

I definitely had more feedback from readers. Like I had lots and lots of emails from people saying that ... there's a couple that have ... they're paying the rent for five Haitian families for six months here [Montreal] and they said it

was because of my stories that they're doing that. Other people said that too ... that every morning they'd read the *Gazette* and they cried and they felt that my stories were the ones that touched them the most because they were so personal rather than the Big Picture. It amazed me actually because I really, again, I didn't even see where my stories went. I didn't see them in print which I don't really care because I don't read my stuff in the paper anyway because I get so pissed off about the editing. But people would send me very supportive emails ... except this one woman who wrote to correct my grammar. So I said, 'Maybe you could come down and teach at the schools here. Oh, wait a second. There are no schools.' (Montgomery 2010)

This example makes clear that the Haitian experience for journalists revived the relationship with the reader or viewer in a particularly persuasive way. The aftermath of the earthquake created uniquely a direct emotional connection between the news producer and consumer, a two-way link that drove the efforts of the CBC's Paul Hunter:

I wanted to shock people because this was shocking and that's what I mean about the truth. This was brutal so I wanted to brutalize the audience. This was upsetting so I wanted to upset the audience. I felt I was pushing the line sometimes ... when we got to that medical clinic where they were running out of anesthetic and where I thought I wasn't going to get through a phoner

[telephone interview] because it was so upsetting and it was on that day that I realized, 'I don't give a shit.' It feels like advocacy journalism to put this stuff out there but I thought I want to push the envelope here and put bluntly brutal imagery and sounds and almost opinions on what is going on out here because it's crazy! And if people don't see that it's crazy they're going to forget about it. The truth is messed up and you wanted to raise your voice because that's the truth. (Hunter 2011)

Another unique feature of the reporting from Haiti was that by responding – either through financial donations or with text and email messages to individual journalists - the Canadian audience not only inspired and encouraged the journalists on the ground but also even affected the *construction* of news stories.

To appreciate how exceptional this is, it first has to be understood that, as the place where critical editorial decisions are made through the framing and positioning of texts, the edit suite, like the infamous sausage factory, is guarded by journalists as precious territory best left off limits to the prying eyes of 'civilian' observers.

But in Haiti, the extraordinary influence of the audience reached even this journalistically 'sacred' location. Hunter's reporting from that medical clinic, where a child was being operated on without anesthetic, revealed his determination to pierce, with her screams, what he worried might be the complacency of Canadian viewers.

“When we edited that piece – and we edited it ourselves in Port-au-Prince – and the standard TV way, I guess, would be to have a two second sound-up and then bring in the voice and I pushed the editor,” he remembers, “I said, ‘No, let it go, let it go a ridiculously long time because these kids are in ridiculous pain and this city is in a ridiculous mess. And so push it, push it longer. Let it go.’ And to Toronto’s credit it aired that way.”

CTV’s veteran reporter Paul Workman acknowledged that viewers play a more significant and dynamic role than usual in the reporting from a disaster when, “you’re dealing with human misery, with death and destruction... it certainly makes it more dramatic,” Workman said, “I think you feel that the story you’re telling has much more impact because you see it, you feel it, you send it out and you know that your viewer is going to get pretty much the same kind of impact that it had on you, it will then have on them.”

Beyond the usefulness of such feedback, and there’s no question that it drove some of the coverage from Haiti, there was a more profound impact on the journalist. The medical clinic story, for the CBC’s Paul Hunter, not only produced the desired reaction but it also reinforced the sense of why he had chosen journalism as a profession:

That is the one story, of all the stories, that people talk about. This isn’t the 1950s anymore, right? People have seen a lot of stuff on their computer screens and TV screens and movie screens. It takes a lot to shock people and that shocked people. And the satisfying part for me was that, by seeing that

story, I know for a fact that it prompted people to act. And quite famously, Air Canada brought a whole shipment of stuff because the COO of Air Canada saw that story and was moved by it. Could there be anything more satisfying as a journalist than that? (Hunter 2011)

This reinvigorated relationship between the journalist and the news consumer was defined, essentially, by circularity – the reporting touched and helped shape the audience and then was driven, in part, by the responses from those viewers and readers. As the following email messages demonstrated, it wasn't only those searching for family members who became part of this exceptional interaction with reporters:

Date: Tue, 26 Jan 2010 09:27:17 -0600

Dear Sue, I'm just an ordinary Gazette reader from the West Island. I've been so moved and impressed by your daily reporting of the situation in Haiti. I send you my sincere congratulations on your articles. Your detailed and heart-wrenching reporting amidst awful conditions is incredibly moving, so descriptive...You have made us, your readers, aware in a special way, of the tragic misfortunes of the poor Haitians.

Simple messages of support like this from readers and viewers had a direct impact on reporters in two ways. First, as Paul Workman remarked, it made the work “much more satisfying, absolutely” but secondly, it effectively gave reporters permission to “use” the victims, in the harsh judgment of Upton Sinclair, to “take the

fair body of truth and sell it in the market place, [to] betray the virgin hopes of mankind into the loathsome brothel of Big Business” (Sinclair 2002, 116).

Sinclair’s florid language doesn’t leave much room for the role of the readers and viewers in his scathing attack on the profession. But, the news audience in the wake of the Haitian earthquake, became a crucial component that helped construct and sustain the coverage, as Paul Hunter remembered:

We all had these moments where it became overwhelming personally. I was on hold for Newsworld to do a phoner [phone interview] having just come from where these kids were and I was overwhelmed. And I thought please let it be one more commercial because I’m not ready to talk just yet. But then when we saw that people were paying attention to these things and they were acting as a result, I think it helped us all stay sane. It empowered us to go out the next day and see more of this stuff and tell more of those stories because it was having an impact back home and we knew it. (Hunter 2011)

The awareness of the impact of their reporting from Haiti positions the work on the continuum of journalism’s evolution in a specific and intriguing spot. On the one hand, Haiti returned the journalists of this study to the most elemental skills of reporting; i.e., digging for information, verifying facts, following one’s curiosity and intuition, while on the other hand, the disaster harnessed the power of new technologies to involve readers, viewers, survivors, reporters and relief officials in unparalleled ways.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, for example, the *New York Times* hosted an online event it called “Social Media and the Haiti Disaster,” following the earthquake. Among other panelists was Jason Cone, the communications director for the group Medecins Sans Frontiere (MSF) as well as Ann Curry from *NBC News*. When MSF could not land a plane filled with medical supplies at the Haitian airport, Cone went on Twitter to ask why this was happening.

Curry picked up the message and at 7:55 a.m., January 17th, 2010, sent a tweet to the U.S. Air Force, controlling the airport: “Find a way to let Doctors Without Borders planes land in Haiti THE most effective at this.” While Curry acknowledges that lobbying for MSF was “outside the box of journalism,” it worked and the MSF plane was permitted to land.

It is clear from the experiences of the journalists in this study that a disaster gave them, like Curry, an excuse to advocate and fight for the subjects of their stories.

Social media is not only enlarging “the box of journalism,” but the lesson, at least for MSF, was crystal clear. “This event has really been for us in many ways a game changer in the way we think about social networks and its application for the work that *Doctors Without Borders* does,” says Cone. “We had a thousand followers before this crisis, now 10,000 on Twitter. We jumped from 70,000 fans on Facebook to 220,000 today ... in a matter of two weeks. So there has been exponential growth. This will very quickly outstrip the type of visibility we have through our own website and in many ways will be the most important place we interact with the public” (Cone, 2010).

Further study is required to assess the enduring impact of sites like Facebook and Twitter on the practice of journalism given that, by March 2011, Twitter's own estimates were that 140 million messages a day were being sent and research has found, "by 2010 all but one of the top 198 newspapers and TV stations in the US had an official Twitter account" (Hermida 2010, 674).

While there's no guarantee that these accounts are actually producing *journalism*, it is hard to imagine how social media like Twitter and Facebook will not increasingly have an impact on the way journalists tell stories. In fact, Joanna Smith now says she has "become something of a Twitter 'evangelist' since returning from Haiti" and that her writing on Twitter has turned into "something more powerful than the average news story." She offers two examples:

Fugitives from prison caught looting, taken from police, beaten, dragged thru street, died slowly and set on fire in pile of garbage.

Woman shrieking, piercing screams, 'Maman! Papa! Jesus! as dressing on her wounded heel is changed outside clinic. No painkillers. (Smith 2011)

A recurring theme from the Haitian earthquake, regardless of how their work was distributed, not to mention the initial absence of any organized relief effort, is that journalists by default became symbols and messengers of hope for the survivors. "We *are* exploiting people. We're exploiting their misery," Workman offers, "we're exploiting their situation to show pictures on television of what trauma they've gone through yet at the same time...our greater impact is being the messenger in hoping that some people will come to their rescue."

But journalists in this disaster also became role models for their peers and was actually more nuanced than Schudson's observation that, "Not only are other reporters more likely than the general audience to read stories, they are more likely to respond" (Schudson 2003, 173).

These exchanges were acts of confirmation that, informally, identify and support the professional ideals and common values that are highlighted and intensified in the crucible of disaster. Jack Todd is a columnist at the *Montreal Gazette*:

Date: Sat, 23 Jan 2010 07:21:02 -0600 To: "Montgomery, Sue (Montreal Gazette)" Subject: courage

I have no idea when you will be able to read this but I wanted to express my appreciation for your courage, resourcefulness and talent. It must strain everything you have to the utmost but you are fulfilling the highest ideals we could have for a journalist and I have boundless admiration for the work you are producing on a daily basis. Jack Todd

The messages Montgomery received also took the form of empathetic support from competitors. As evidenced by the following email from a television anchor in Montreal, soon to leave CTV for the CBC in the city, the unique conditions of disaster revealed the cooperation and bonds of the usually invisible journalistic community:

Date: Wed, 20 Jan 2010 20:41:41 -0600 RE; Thank you for your reporting

I don't normally write fellow reporters about their stories, but I felt compelled to do so today. You have captured the emotion, the tragedy and the triumphs. Your writing has a sensitivity to it that I admire and respect. My colleague and friend Daniele Hamamdjian, just arrived home from Haiti safely last night. She'd been doing some amazing reporting too.

Best, Debra Arbec

In addition to eliciting this kind of valuable nourishment from colleagues, the Haitian earthquake challenged journalists on a personal level to think about their role and the contribution they could make with their work. "I really, really had to believe in journalism when I was down there," stated the *Toronto Star's* Joanna Smith, "and it was hard because it feels abstract but I just had to keep telling myself that, you know, 'Listen, I'm not an aid worker. If I went down there to distribute water I would fail at it miserably. This is what I'm trained to do. This is my job and my life's passion and that's why I'm here and I'm helping out the best way I can.'"

This desire to help, as well as to inform, was a goal shared by veteran journalists who are *not* new to the challenges of reporting from war and destruction. But CTV producer Pat Skinner pointed out that, while veterans may have more practical experience, they grappled just as fiercely as young reporters with the enduring questions of journalism, posed most sharply in the intense environment of a disaster:

You know you might be frightened by what might happen and the other part of it is just getting really emotionally connected to the story. For me, I can't

allow myself to do that until I come home. You know you're seeing some horrific things and if you were just there as a regular person, you would want to try to help everybody that you saw. But you really have to pull yourself back from that and say, 'Ok, I can't help all these people but in just telling their story I'm helping them.' It's a fine balance because you can't be so disconnected that you don't tell the story well or that you don't feel some kind of sympathy and empathy for these people but at the same time I have to draw myself back a little bit. But it's something that I question now that I'm back here and living a life of comfort. It's something that I do question a lot. And you kind of...you have to...to a certain degree, I mean short of quitting what I'm doing and going to work for the U.N. or Save the Children or World Vision or the Red Cross, at a certain point you think, well, as long as I've chosen this career and this work, is this the best job that I can do at what I've chosen to do? And I hope it is. I think that you don't help anybody by questioning too, too deeply. (Skinner 2010)

So the Haitian experience tells us that journalists found professional comfort in the role of messenger believing that relief assistance arrived because of the reporting. But there was a *personal* price to pay for the freedom to explore and the greater access one enjoyed.

Compared to the 'normal' controlled routine, the chaotic 'in-your-face' conditions of disaster made it more difficult for a journalist to compartmentalize emotions. This "emotional public sphere," while "a constant accompaniment to the

traditional public sphere of debate and contestation,” when intensified in the conditions of a disaster “may be of decisive importance ...” (Sclater and Jones 2009, 59).

Therefore, the emotional responses of the journalists in the pandemonium following the Haitian earthquake are critical to interpreting professional patterns of behavior. For the *Gazette’s* Sue Montgomery:

What I noticed in Haiti was after a few days, I thought, ‘What is wrong with me?’ I was worried that I wasn’t upset. And I thought, ‘OK, what’s going on?’ And by about day 3 or 4, I would say, I started feeling the tension in my chest and my heart and I thought, ‘Ok I’ve got to get this out.’ And then I don’t know what triggered it but I was at the Canadian Embassy and just this sea of people, of destitute people, you know, looking like zombies and I just started crying. And I sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. It was like throwing up and then you go back to work. So I did that probably every few days...I would have something like that and then I would just get back to work.

(Montgomery 2010)

This study revealed that individual reporters absorbed the realities of a disaster based on their own emotional make-up and previous life experiences. Although this was the first disaster for CTV’s Daniele Hamamdjian, for example, her reporting reflected her unique life experience.

“I think coming from Egypt which ... Cairo is more populated and dirtier,” she says, “... to me I had always associated poverty with Islam. So being in a poor country without that religious aspect was kind of refreshing, that I could wear a short-sleeved shirt and not be whispered about, you know, or whistled at or whatever, that was refreshing for me and that wasn’t at all shocking” (Hamamdjian 2010).

While reporter Paul Hunter’s and producer Pat Skinner’s backgrounds did not afford them Hamamdjian’s unique perspective, their work history allowed both to be humbled, in a way, by what they found in Haiti:

The scope of Haiti's disaster was and is still almost unfathomable. One of the difficulties in reporting on it was that notion of 'going micro' to have impact, and yet, it was the big picture (so much harder to express on TV) that was equally if not more moving. I still remember taking a helicopter ride from Port-au-Prince to Jacmel and flying over the Haitian countryside and seeing flattened villages dotting the landscape and thinking 'Oh my god - it's everywhere' even though intellectually I knew that already. It really shook me seeing the swath from above. (Hunter 2011)

I’d certainly never seen anything like that before. I’ve done hurricanes and things like that, I’ve done the San Francisco earthquake years ago but it was nothing like that. So this was different for me because, I mean, the level of physical destruction of the buildings and the infrastructure in Port-au-Prince

and Léogane and some of the other towns was just *incredible*, really difficult to believe. You'd be looking at this thing and it was just like hard to take it all in. And the *number* of people that were affected by it was just quite overwhelming, really. (Skinner 2010)

A coping mechanism to handle the overwhelming experiences that journalists confront in a single disaster seems to involve a blending of images and sounds from previous events. For a Reuter's reporter on his way out of Haiti, the chaos and human drama mix together as "images of past assignments in Iraq, Somalia and Peru floated in and out of a sleepy and stressed mind. Hurricanes, conflicts, plane crashes, mudslides and bombings merged with the harrowing sights and smells of Port-au-Prince" (Cawthorne, 2010).

As strange as it might sound, this kaleidoscopic effect suggests that knowledge of the 'host' country of a disaster is irrelevant. The recollections of the veteran journalists in Haiti indicated that *all* disasters become a kind of virtual 'country' that, regardless of location, ultimately share a very particular kind of 'language' and 'culture' that help journalists navigate from event to event.

And it is the harsh, often self-flagellating reflections, perhaps more accurately described as *confessions*, of journalists who have been through similar tragedies that became no less significant than the impact of scholarly criticism on journalistic practice.

That's because a criticism from within one's own profession has the sharper and more penetrating qualities of an insight. The tempting and too easy dismissal of

scholarly criticism by journalists on the basis of “They just don’t get it” vanishes when a respected colleague takes aim.

“It was on my second trip to Lebanon,” respected foreign correspondent Patrick Brown recalls, “during the Israeli invasion of 1982 and the ensuing siege of West Beirut, that I really found the voice of the person I wanted to pretend to be. That voice had the weary swagger of someone pushing beyond normal limits, living life on the edge, saddened by the violence around him, but somehow rising above it all to send dispatches from the belly of the beast” (Brown 2008, 50).

Scorching descriptions of journalists *by* journalists as “members of the vulture brigades” paint an unflattering portrait of the reporter as a roving cynic, most interested in ego gratification and professional advancement. “The situation I was talking about became a backdrop,” Brown confesses, “and the people became extras in a narrative designed, not to make the audience understand what was happening, but to admire the reporter who dared to be there. The most important words were the sign-off, ‘Patrick Brown, Beirut’” (Oliver 2011, 156; Brown 2008, 56).

Despite this kind of criticism, there was at least one truth that survived. And that is that dealing with the profound circumstances of life and death were outside the normal experiences and routines of journalists.

It is especially when reporters are ‘dropped’ into these intense environments, when the helpless meet the comfortable, that questions about exploitation are posed. The selection of stories, as Tuchman noted, naturally depends on the subjects who make themselves available to the news gathering

process. In disaster, there was an enormous power differential and in this sense, reporters *used* the survivors of the Haitian earthquake who were desperate and in shock, and were, in critical ways, profoundly at the mercy of those journalists.

“Like a lot of people, armchair critics sort of go on and on about journalists covering tragedy,” said *Toronto Star* reporter Joanna Smith, “For every one person who slams the door in your face, there’s another ten who welcome you inside because they want to talk. People do like to tell their story and whether or not it’s anonymously or on a camera, there were so few people who turned away from us.”

When the subjects of a story welcome you to witness what they’ve been through, at least partially because they understand how aid is generated, the role of the reporter, according to Paul Workman, was transformed from being a supplier of information to acting as an important link in the chain of disaster relief efforts:

The people that you’re dealing with on the streets, those who’ve been directly affected by it, are often very grateful that you’re there and are willing to be involved because they’re suffering. For instance at the field hospitals that were set up in the middle of Port-au-Prince, very few people said, ‘Go away, don’t talk to me.’ They all had a story to tell and they thought that if they could tell the story, then maybe there would be more help, maybe it would have an impact on the situation that they were involved in. (Workman 2010)

The understanding that the people suffering around you wanted, even, in a psychological sense, *needed* you to tell their story helped alleviate, but didn't erase entirely, the personal awkwardness felt by journalists in disaster. This was especially true for television reporters like Paul Hunter who, with all the necessary equipment of the medium, found it even harder to blend in:

So here's this white, Western, first-world big city news crew coming around the corner in their shiny, clean clothes and blah, blah, blah...and there's a huge crowd around this area that had been slightly cordoned off by the LA Fire/Rescue people – obviously Haitians – and we are here...'Hello everyone, we're here to take pictures of this misery and put it on TV. Do you mind if we go through here?'

This is what you're thinking. It's so idiotic and you feel like an ass.

But we didn't say anything. What happened was...people in the crowd saw us and they opened up and they said, 'Take these pictures. You must see this. Tell the world.' Because they knew that if aid was going to come down here, people were going to be motivated to donate things they desperately needed, then this had to get out. That allowed us to, I think, ethically, emotionally, however you want to measure it, allowed us to go in there and quote unquote exploit this stuff because people there said, 'We need you to do this' and that allowed us to. (Hunter 2011)

Just as Haiti was bound to offer enduring lessons for the 'rookie' reporters that will alter their approach to future practice, Hunter's sensitivity to this issue developed, he remembered, from *his* earliest days as a journalist with the CBC in Saskatoon:

There was a bus crash in Swift Current that had a bunch of junior hockey players killed. One of them had family in Saskatoon and it fell to me to call the family to see if they wanted to talk. You've got to be kidding me. And I sat...I guess this is what it is, 'welcome to the real world.' And I have never forgotten sitting at my desk for like twenty minutes staring at the telephone thinking, 'what am I going to say to them?' They will know that I'm an asshole as soon as I identify myself. 'I want to exploit your misery for our ratings.' So what I decided to do as a twenty-three year-old was, I had to blurt out everything immediately. I had to obviously identify who I am and what I said was, 'There's a bunch of reasons why you might want to talk to us and a bunch of reasons why you might not want to talk to us. Here's why you might want to talk to us...' And I thought I made a pretty good case – sensitive and fair – and here's why you might not. And I thought I made a pretty good case why they might not want to talk to me. And I said, 'why don't we hang up and I'm going to call you in another fifteen, twenty minutes and let's see. And they agreed to do it and we did a really, I thought, nice story and I've held that as a kind of M.O. ever since. I think sadly many of us in this profession don't do it that way and we are all maligned as a result.

When asked what might have happened to his journalistic “M.O.” had that grieving family opted not to speak with him years ago, Hunter offered what he called a “simple” answer:

There’s no way of knowing, but I would LIKE to think that would have been accepted and that there’d have been no issue with my work. I am happy to report that the fact that I consciously anticipated what I would have had to say to my editor (had the family turned me down) but that I gave the family that option regardless has enabled me to approach other people in dire circumstances without ethical qualms knowing I have everyone’s true best interests in mind. I don’t mean to sound goofy here, but integrity pays off. Rare has been the instance where I’ve been turned down. (Hunter 2011)

In wrestling with this question of exploitation, the reporters in Haiti offered a rare glimpse behind their carefully constructed public persona to discuss their approach and the ‘deals’ or compromises they were and are prepared to make. Sue Montgomery doesn’t understand how a journalist can remain aloof from such compelling stories:

You know, I find it hard *not* to get involved with stories emotionally. If I didn’t have a family, I would be in Haiti right now. But I can’t and I’m having real issues with my 14-year-old daughter who’s terrified she’s going to lose

me to Haiti and so, if she keeps up her bitchiness, she may just! Since I've been back, I've given I don't know how many talks. I've raised over \$10,000. I think if everybody does their bit, it helps. But obviously it puts me in a position wherever whomever I help I can't then turn around and write about. But that's OK. There are lots of people to write about. (Montgomery 2010)

Arguably all journalism involves some degree of advocacy, whether directly through the choice of stories and the people to be featured in them or more indirectly through layout choices and camera angles and editing. This tension between advocating and reporting is complex and involves a collision of competing values. But it gets to the heart of a journalist's motivations, especially in disaster as a veteran like Paul Workman understood:

It's funny we were having a discussion with one of my friends last night, who's also a journalist, about this very thing and she still firmly believes that she's in the business to help. Every story she does, she believes she can somehow move people or correct an injustice. I guess I'm a little more cynical than that but in the case of Haiti, certainly I felt a huge sense of reward that I was able to do these kinds of stories. I did feel that I was helping there and that what I was doing had some purpose, and had some meaning...not as an advocate but simply as a witness. (Workman 2010)

The traditional journalist's role as a "professional observer," theoretically without vested interest or bias, imagines, if one is to remain faithful to the profession, a line

that is never to be crossed. Following this traditional view, CTV's Tom Clark argued that:

Once we cross that line and once we start advocating for causes or for people, we've given up a huge amount of real estate that we've owned for a very long time. And I don't think we should be doing that. Places like *City TV* [a Toronto television station], has actively been promoting the idea that to be a really good journalist, you've got to advocate...you've got to be for the environment or you've got to be for whales or God knows whatever you're supposed to be for and so then they come into a situation like Haiti and they decide they're going to be for the victims. Well, of course everybody is for the victims. I mean I can't imagine anybody walking in there and sniffing and saying 'I'm not going to help these people.' But the problem is there are lots of advocacy organizations out there. The world doesn't need another advocacy organization. What it needs is a group that at least has enough detachment that they can always be skeptical about what's going on...you know, once you're involved in a story like that, I think you lose the right to report it.

(Clark 2010)

But in the life and death realities of a catastrophic event, can a journalist remain, morally, ethically, and responsibly, just an observer? Veteran reporter Craig Oliver of CTV, in El Salvador with his crew, came upon a young man who had been shot and left lying in the street, "Here was a painful moral dilemma that we had no

time to resolve,” Oliver writes. “By the time we returned, the young man had bled to death. In this awful moment we could only repeat to ourselves the mantra that in the midst of death and calamity, reporters are doomed to be observers – that we cannot do our own jobs if we become involved. It was no comfort” (Oliver 2011, 168).

This disturbing confession stands in stark contrast to the approach taken by reporters in Haiti and the critical role played by the readers and viewers in shaping and driving the journalism. Paul Hunter acknowledged the treacherous terrain and the power of the responses from viewers to justify the decisions he made:

There are so many stories that aren't going to make it on the *National* news but I can get them online because I felt I had to...so there I am, we turn a corner and there's a body on fire, that they're burning because they're worried about cholera or disease. And I think I have to take a picture. We'll decide later what we do with it. And I'm thinking, 'that's not quite the best angle. Maybe if I move over here...get a little bit closer...ah, there's the skull and oh, the hand and the skull in the same shot makes it recognizable.' And I'm thinking what is going on? I'm trying to get the best angle on a burning dead body after the earthquake. What's wrong with this picture? What will I do with it? I can't remember if I published that one but I don't know what the right answer is for those things. But I know that you want to push the envelope. It helped when we heard the impact these stories were having to

justify, I guess, what we were showing. But I don't know where the line is.
(Hunter 2011)

If each reporter can define where that line is, depending on circumstances, then, arguably, the decision-making has all the credibility of a subjective justification. Clark defined his reporting on that group of abandoned orphans in Haiti and his subsequent lobbying of the Canadian military to provide assistance for them, not as advocacy but as an acceptable example of "telling the story passionately."

Is it not the case that both Clark's "passion" and Workman's "witnessing" represent a kind of semantic sleight of hand that has more to do with preserving the traditional notion of their role as journalists than in reflecting the reality of the work they have produced from Haiti and other disaster zones?

The answer was revealed when, in one breath, Workman asserted, "I think I guard myself and I think we all do to a certain degree from getting too emotionally caught up in the trauma and the misery and everything that goes on because if you do, then you should go as a social worker and not as a journalist, I think. It's one thing to care," he states, "and we all care deeply about what people are going through, but you just can't become involved every time."

In the next breath, sounding uncomfortable with the subject matter, Workman related how:

After the earthquake in northern Pakistan, I'd done a little story on a little girl in a village who was singing in a makeshift school and we used her as sort of a personality in this story. And then I think I went back 3, 4 or 5 months later to do another story. And we went looking for this little girl again because she really, for me, sort of represented kind of people working to get their lives back in order again. In this chaos, here's this sweet little voice singing a happy song about her country. So we went back to find her and met her family and saw that their house had been destroyed. This girl had no school and so I sort of thought, 'Gee, it would be nice to do something for her so I went...I organized a whole bunch of my friends from CBC and CTV and she's now going to a private school, has been for about 4 or 5 years and speaks English extremely well now and has a bit of a future and said that she wanted to be a doctor. So...I don't usually do that but in this case I was touched by this little girl and her family and her situation and so I did. But otherwise, you kind of have to leave it behind. (Workman 2010)

What then is to be taken from this? Perhaps it reveals nothing more than the emotional strains and pressures on journalists in disaster and the difficult decisions that must be made.

However, Workman's comment that "you just can't become involved *every time*," might be interpreted as evidence that the survivors in a disaster become a kind of terrible buffet of human agonies from which a journalist, somehow remaining above the fray, simply selects whom to care about and whom to help

depending, not on any professional standard or ethic, but on their own emotional whims and appetites of the moment.

There is likely a terrible truth in that accusation.

Workman's "little girl," singing in northern Pakistan, becomes Hunter's "little girl" screaming in the medical clinic in Haiti and each child, arguably, becomes a symbol that is more easily grasped than the totality of a disaster.

The fact that some reporters get involved and do advocate on behalf of some victims of disaster is seen here as probably not helpful in a public relations frame for the profession but also, ultimately, is not particularly injurious to the practice of journalism.

Oliver's blunt and unsettling statement about the doomed observer's lack of comfort *does* hint, however, at "the fiction good journalists hold themselves aloof from life. They cannot do this and also truly understand the people and events they cover" (Lynn 1965, 249). Haiti, then, represented an opportunity for journalists to escape the sterility of their 'normal' routine by more intimately interacting with the subjects of their stories.

This kind of unusual exposure to the pain of others exacted a toll, as CTV cameraman George Papadionysiou came to understand, "You know it's going to ... if you don't do something, you know it's going to come out at some point. If you think, 'I'm tough enough. I don't need this.' Bullshit," he declares. "My wife is great you know. We talk about everything and she said, 'I don't care how bad it is, tell me.' And when we got home, we had a big chat and I actually broke down with her...you're realizing, 'Oh my God ... what did I just witness?'"

Importantly, the Haitian experiences also demonstrated that there are substantial rewards conducting this kind of reporting. “It really redeemed my interest again in what I do and what I’ve done for so many years,” declared Paul Workman. “I felt, really, a great reward personally, that I had just been able to get out and cover an event like that and hope that the stories I was telling would make somewhat of a difference. It made a difference to me.”

The reporters in Haiti experienced a wide range of memories and emotions when they returned to their newsrooms and homes. “I really wanted to be with my family,” Sue Montgomery offers, “and my kids needed a lot of TLC. I really needed to reconnect with them. I was having a lot of nightmares the first few nights where I’d wake up and scream that we had to get out of the building. Like it really freaked me out to be inside.”

Joanna Smith, covering her first disaster, had heard and read about the possible emotional impact on journalists. With characteristic honesty and humor, she said it turned out to be the *threat*, more than the reality, of a nightmare that she faced when she returned home:

I mean it’s funny because you read about these things...you know, post traumatic stress disorder...and I think, my first night back it was strange. I was at my parent’s house and everyone was happy to see me and chatting and everything. And I did feel strange but I think it was more I was anxious that I would have problems rather than actually having problems. So I remember there were images going through my head as I was about to go to sleep and I remember thinking, ‘Oh

God, am I going to have a nightmare? I don't want to have a nightmare.' And I didn't. I didn't. But I was worried that I would because I had heard all these things. (Smith 2010)

For others though, like George Papadionysiou, the nightmares *were* real:

The last day we were there we were at an outdoor morgue and there were babies there, rotting in the sun and like, you know, it's a sight you'll never forget, a smell you'll never forget and I'm walking around in human glue, human oil that's just covered all over the place and you know all you want to do is get home and hug your child, be with your wife and everything. It's so far removed from your reality to be there and then you come home, you have this weird sense of guilt that I'm leaving people behind and I'm going back to my comfy little thing.

There were times I felt like I was breaking down. (Papadionysiou 2010)

Powerful moments from Haiti touched each journalist personally. For Daniele Hamamdjian, thoughts of her own family were paramount:

I didn't cry there. The only time I cried – it had nothing to do with the bodies, nothing to do with death – it was outside the U.N. logistics base and there were hundreds of young men with their diplomas in hand waiting to ask for a job. And that killed me because maybe it reminded me of my father when he

didn't have a job but that's what got to me. All he wanted was a job. And then I told Jed Kahane [CTV Montreal News Director] this and Jed told me that when he was covering Katrina, everybody was able to hold it together. I mean the bodies floating, the animals floating ... everybody was tough as nails until the very end when they saw this old woman in the middle of the street, sweeping the street and they went up to her to ask what she was doing. And she said, 'Maybe if it's cleaner, help will come.' And everybody just broke down. (Hamamdjian 2010)

It was these images and situations from a disaster like the Haitian earthquake, and Katrina before it, that restored the journalists' faith in the profession, even for a veteran like Tom Clark:

There was a family in a tent city with three little kids. And the father just very casually told me, he said, 'Well, I suppose we will die now.' And then he went over and patted one of his kid's heads. And, I mean, he wasn't being psychotic. He was just being absolutely honest. There are those things that never leave you about a story because it defines it for you. It reminds you that it really does matter. And that it is important and that, if ... you know, not to sound too lofty... but if you're a journalist, this is why you got into the business. (Clark 2010)

Having to make decisions quickly in the random chaos in Haiti after the earthquake also summoned, up to that precise moment, all the experiences and judgments that had shaped and defined, for Paul Hunter, his core principles as a journalist:

There's a rumor of the mass graves just further east. Let's see if we can find it. And we did. But we weren't sure. This looked like a mass grave but there was nothing happening right where we were. I walked a little further in and there was a pile of bodies that they had forgotten to put underground. And it was like, 'You've got to be fucking kidding me.' Now, I have to make this into TV? It comes back to the question of what do you show and by the way, you've got to decide now. Again, it was approaching that sort of point of being overwhelmed. And making these very difficult but important decisions on the fly and that's when, to me, it came back to...and you don't articulate this to yourself at the time...to your principles. And you can only rely on those to be, I guess, a good guy, a forthright person and a smart journalist. 'And you've been doing this job now Paul for twenty-five years. What have you learned? Put it all into play right now.' And then you do what you think is the right, best thing. (Hunter 2011)

The veteran journalist has these kinds of experiences to fall back on for confidence and support in trying moments. On the other hand, the "rookie" disaster reporter had only fellow journalists to provide this guidance. While finding her way

through the aftermath of the earthquake, the *Toronto Star's* Smith kept reminding herself of practical advice she had read from another journalist's experiences in disaster.

This reporter had been talking about how he sometimes had to be callous in order to be empathetic...as in, people are going to want to show you things and they're going to want to tell their story and sometimes, you can't waste your time. You just have to say 'no' and move on and sometimes you have to be really rude and abrupt about it just to get them to stop. But just to be able to keep the sort of bigger goal in mind and so I thought about that a lot because sometimes it was very in-your-face and you did feel kind of helpless but you just had to really believe in what you were doing. And I did. (Smith 2010)

It has been well documented that the political and economic realities of contemporary newsrooms have been corrosive forces on the practice of journalism. And so the value, the unique opportunity represented by the Haitian earthquake, was perhaps even clearer for the veteran, Paul Workman:

It redeemed my belief in the profession. I was getting a little cynical about am I ever going to get out again? I'm stuck in Washington. It's this political gerbil wheel. I hadn't traveled, hadn't really been in touch with people very much and I was beginning to get quite depressed about it, quite upset. This was

hugely satisfying to be able to get out and witness again and talk to people, convey what experience and knowledge I had from other situations and relate it to what was going on in Haiti – that was really important for me. (Workman 2010)

What is emerging is the translucent reality that journalists rediscovered their passion for the profession in the chaos of Haiti. “Maybe it was the drug of true, red-blooded journalism that is so satisfying when you do it,” suggests Hunter, “it is what we all got in this business for” (Hunter 2011).

Sue Montgomery is back at her desk in Montreal with a renewed sense of the work. “I still get very emotional about it. You know I’ve had to get some therapy,” she says, “I don’t think I will ever leave journalism as long as I can continue to do those kinds of stories.”

Her colleague, Joanna Smith, concluded, “Yea, it was hard,” she said about how she and her photographer coped, “We would kind of just hang out together and talk about what we’d seen that day or whatever. I can’t imagine a single place that would have been worse. I couldn’t think of anywhere else that needed this less.”

Finally, the advantage of being able to look back at a momentous event, rather than trying to digest it all in the chaos of the immediate moment, was to have the rare opportunity to contemplate a deeper understanding of one’s actions. The result of this reflection was satisfying for the journalists of this study, perhaps felt most keenly by the CBC’s Paul Hunter:

I think I hit the right tone, I think I pushed it far enough to make people care, I don't think I exploited anyone's misery. I think when I got close to that line, I was aware of it. I thought about it and sometimes...nobody's perfect, you try to do your best and that's all that you can really hope for. And to me, that's the principle at play – you try to do the right thing with a goal toward informing people who see this so that they can make smart decisions about what to do with their lives, about this issue and about other issues. It sounds so altruistic and airy-fairy but I believe that stuff. (Hunter 2011)

Chapter 5 – The Haitian Earthquake and the Practice of Journalism: Summary & Conclusions

If I know anything it is this: we need the revelations that come from our apocalypses – and never so much as we do now. Without this knowledge how can we ever hope to take responsibility for the social practices that bring on our disasters? And how can we ever hope to take responsibility for the collective response that will be needed to alleviate the misery? (Diaz 2011)

Disaster scholarship in 2012 continues to expand its range opening the doors to intriguing exploration and interdisciplinary cooperation. For example, the Japanese earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, and the meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, involved subjects from nuclear physics to meteorology to engineering to emergency management to international relations and to the legal, social and cultural issues informing the construction of coherent public policy.

There are those, from a sociological perspective, who describe disaster as “a door back into paradise” where communities rediscover an apparently inherent goodness and caring and some who characterize a tragedy like the 1984 chemical leak in Bhopal, India as “an example of a new cultural myth in the making, a myth of mass extinction and individual helplessness ...” (Solnit 2009, 3; Wilkins 1986, 24).

It is the journalists who are among the first to leave their normal routine to enter the often horrific conditions of a disaster and to begin to weave what will become the mythic event. Any larger understanding of the realities of the human

suffering in chaos is achieved through their eyewitness reporting. Their considerable efforts, not without a measure of courage, help the world understand what has happened. *That's* why it is important to examine how journalists go about their work in this changed environment.

If Underwood (1993), Tuchman (1978), Schudson (1978, 1995), among other scholars, have demonstrated that a journalist depends on routine and the structure of hierarchical decision-making to shape, support and justify news gathering methods and conventions, then the fundamental impact of a disaster is the disruption of this 'regular' routine.

In so doing, the unique circumstances of a disaster reshape our expectations as well as our assumptions and understanding of daily journalism.

It was a disruption that also produced new roles for the journalist in Haiti as well as a fresh view of the profession, informed, in part, by the interaction with an unconventional audience that was born from the event itself. This study demonstrates the power of the Haitian expatriate community to both influence the work of journalists on the ground (from searching for lost family members to the actual editing of stories) but also, importantly, to contribute to the critical sense for the journalist that he or she was providing vital and meaningful information in the escape from the press release culture of daily routine. It was this recapturing of an ideal that, for the reporters in this study, led to a renewed faith and belief in the possibilities of journalism.

In the changed atmosphere of a disaster, some argue for the reporter as "first responder" and others as a figure of reassurance for survivors in need of healing

(Simpson and Cote 2006, 263; Kitch and Hume 2008, 246). No one has suggested that a journalist also act as a midwife but in the unique conditions of Haiti, that didn't stop the *Gazette's* Sue Montgomery:

Well, I walk into this camp and they said, 'There's a woman over there having a baby.' And I ran over and she's lying on this board or door or whatever and it just popped right out. And there were Dominicans there who were helping who seemed to know more what to do but I was just like, 'Oh fuck!' And then the other one was with a bunch of medics who had come in from the States and they just said, 'Sue, you've got to take care of this woman. She's in labour.' And I was like, 'Please don't. Please don't deliver your baby. Please don't.' And finally in the end, they put her in a truck and took her to a hospital in case she had complications. (Montgomery 2010)

The emotional intensity of life, death and even the occasional birth in disaster raised for journalists the fundamental ethical questions posed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum, in her study of the intelligence of emotions, "what is worth caring about? How should I live?" (Nussbaum 2001, 149).

There are also questions that take on a new emphasis in the context of the Haitian earthquake: "What does a reporter report – and how? To whom does a reporter report? What is the reporter's objective? What does this imply for the inner life of the person who is a journalist? What does the prominence of reporting in contemporary life imply for all of us?" (Schudson 1988, 231).

Part of the key to this renewed hope in the profession found in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake was that it offered reporters a refreshing freedom from the “management systems within their own newsroom” but also from the “battle with the bureaucrats, the politicians, and the public relations wizards on the outside” (Underwood 1993, 170). This thesis confirms that that “which is most worthwhile journalistically” emerges “from the active involvement of the journalist in the news-gathering process” (Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman 1976, 115).

At a minimum, this study clearly shows, without equivocation, that veteran and rookie journalists alike are acutely aware that something is very wrong with the routine they are following in daily practice. If news consumers tend to express a disappointment with the product of contemporary journalism, so too do those caught in a system that feels like a betrayal of their original intention and passion for the profession.

The grim portrait of the daily newsroom that emerged suggests that journalists have become oddly separated from the final product in some critical ways. They rarely get to choose stories and don’t enjoy the ‘luxury’ of being able to spend time on a story if they don’t know how and, more importantly, *when* it will end. The institutional concerns of news production, informed by the business value of economic efficiency above any other, has come to dominate the routine of newsrooms.

In this sense, journalism has become an act of aggregation more than one of discovery. That sense of exploration driven by genuine curiosity is simply no longer a significant part of the contemporary journalistic experience. In the environment of

today's corporate newsroom, it is not beyond the imagination to suspect that Woodward and Bernstein would be told to stop wasting time on an insignificant, third-rate weekend burglary that almost no one knew or cared about.

That reality, brought into sharp contrast by the work in Haiti, is deeply unsatisfying for journalists. This study proves that being able to act like a journalist; i.e., searching for the best available story on any given day, was what the Haitian earthquake importantly restored to the reporters on the ground.

A related conclusion has to do with the relevance of the work. To a person, each reporter mentioned the impact their work had on readers and viewers and how each was inspired by the responses from that audience. This has more to do with feeling like part of a consequential conversation than it does with the usual temptations of ego. The sights, sounds and smells of a disaster zone like Port-au-Prince were so powerful, bordering on being overwhelming as shown in this study, that the work itself assumed a degree of importance that diminished the 'normal' concerns of daily practice.

As "no reporter is a blank slate but an uneven terrain in which some information will settle and some will not be absorbed at all" (Schudson 1988, 238), the argument here is not only that Haiti, with all its grim realities, had an impact on individual reporters. It is that each reporter, with his or her own unique life and professional experiences "in the great blooming, buzzing of the outer world" was vulnerable in equally unique ways to "what our culture has already defined for us" as "we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (Lippmann 1922, 31).

The perspective from a young reporter in this study, working in her first disaster zone, stands in stark and revealing contrast to the view of one of her more experienced colleagues and exposed how corrosive stereotypes are to the practice of journalism.

CTV's Daniele Hamamdjian was careful and restrained in her reporting of the supposed dangers following the earthquake whereas it appeared that her colleague, Tom Clark, was influenced by the prosaic accounts of Haiti even before setting foot on the island or producing a second of reporting. The difference between the two reporters confirmed, in my view, Lippmann's statement that "for the most part, we do not see first, and then define, we define first and then see" (Lippmann 1922, 31).

Clark's description of reportorial activity after the quake as a "hunt" raises troubling images of domination, violent death and preying. He also described Haiti as a "wretched place," parts of which were "too dangerous for the army," asking himself at one point, "Do I really want to go into Cite Soleil? [an impoverished section of Port-au-Prince]. And the answer is, 'No, that would be a bad idea. You'd go in but you wouldn't come out'" (Clark 2010).

Particularly in the context of Haiti, Clark's approach painted a portrait of "a mighty and superior people descending with fascination and disgust into a primitive place on the globe" (Lule 2001, 170). Now, Clark is a gregarious, immensely likeable and convivial individual and there was a degree of self-importance and, even understandably, the journalistic appetite and inclination for drama at work here.

But more profoundly, this classic portrayal of a treacherous Haiti "as a primitive land, filled with danger and chaos ..." (Ibid.) supports an enduring myth,

feeding the news machine as it “thrives on the ritual repetition of stories” that tell us “not only what happened yesterday – but what has always happened” (Ibid., 18).

In this study, Clark alone seemed to retain a considerable ego and personal ambition while the other journalists appeared to accept their roles as links in the chain of information that might provide assistance to the desperate survivors of the earthquake. Of course, the act of any kind of journalism requires a healthy ego. But it is the unique power of a disaster zone like Haiti that was able to lessen, if not erase for most, this constant element of a journalist’s work.

This study also underscores the corrosive nature of the “melts” in the contemporary newsroom. These are the television stories where the interviews and video is supplied by an external organization and the reporter merely adds his or her voice. While the CBC’s Paul Hunter called the work in Haiti the “gravy” that makes the meat and potatoes of his ‘regular’ Washington beat survivable, his defense of the “melts” and the stories where he acts as little more than a stenographer was not entirely convincing.

When he said that doing a “melt” is “survivable” because he understands the distinction between “today I’m telling a story. But next week I’m doing journalism,” he inadvertently underlined the promise of public broadcasting that sees news and information as a community *service* and not primarily as a *commodity* to be sold in the marketplace like a box of cereal.

This study finds that these melts “done” by reporters, while metaphorically holding their editorial noses, in fact, are nothing like meat and potatoes, which, after all, do supply *real* sustenance. These stories that both private and public journalists

only narrate represent a form of “mock” nourishment that is slowly and quietly but steadily starving the body and spirit of the profession while also feeding an emaciated news audience a phony diet from a severely restricted menu. But, according to veteran reporter Tom Clark, it doesn’t have to be this way:

I mean the great thing about productivity is that with the invention of stuff that makes it easier to do your job, your costs go down and so therefore you can get to Haiti and instead of having the old four man crew you can do it quite effectively now even with just one person and the cameraman/editor. So you’ve cut your costs in half from the old days. But you’ve got to have news organizations, news management, ultimately corporate management or in the case of the CBC institutional management, that sees that as a necessity. Because I think a lot of this is being black lined on budgets not because they can’t afford it but because they’re saying, ‘We don’t need to do it. You can just sit in the pit in Toronto and do it.’ I think that journalists have to start advocating for themselves by basically trying to educate owners and managers to say, ‘No, no. This is actually important that we do this.’ (Clark 2010)

The trivialization of the important, of what matters to the human experience hasn’t just dampened the enthusiasm of journalists. It has also significantly hurt journalism’s reputation.

While the daily routine shrinks the agency of the reporter, the scholarship investigating disaster continues to grow. Driven by the work of *The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma*, based at the University of Washington, and the *Disaster Research Center* at the University of Delaware, there is no shortage of guidelines and lists of best practices to help journalists minimize the impact of their work on those who have been traumatized by an extraordinary event.

But often these guidelines are so vague and general, they become almost meaningless. A good example is from the Dart Center: “Do not assume that these, or any other guidelines or policies, will save anyone from agonizing about what to show and not show. They will not and perhaps should not” (Simpson and Cote 2006, 154). Other guidelines concern the notification of next of kin and the need to tell the whole story; i.e., “the before, during and after – of what happened to the human being involved, not just the death ...” (Ibid.).

As this study has documented, there was no way for journalists to even know the names of most of the victims in Haiti making notification of next of kin impossible. The exceptions were the requests from Haitian family members in Montreal. But given the magnitude of the death and destruction, there was virtually no chance for any journalist in this study to tell the full life story of a victim.

The concentration by scholars and interested groups on the impact of trauma has produced very little practical advice to prepare journalists for the intensity of disaster; i.e., how to report amidst the dramatic stories and situations they will confront in catastrophic events. Further research exploring the consequences of

randomness on journalistic practice is recommended here to help prepare more useful guidelines.

This study begins to address this concern. The first instruction for journalists heading into a disaster zone should underline that *changing* circumstances on the ground will demand a professional flexibility and a willingness, bordering on a kind of surrendering to what one finds in the chaos. There is no choice but to welcome the challenges to the “knowledge and routines that reporters and editors take for granted” (Tuchman 1978: 59).

This “surrender” is neither a fault in the practice of journalism in disaster nor is it easy to achieve. For the reporter to fully grasp the human drama unfolding in the event, it must be recognized that there are important qualities possessed by effective storytellers that extend beyond the ‘normal’ journalistic ideals of appearing credible and authoritative.

These qualities of the profession should not be abandoned of course but to be more vulnerable and open to the unpredictability of a disaster is to put oneself in a position to more fully embrace the opportunities it offers and the altered routine it produces.

This research concludes that a more useful set of guidelines for journalists would focus on the *stability* offered by basic routine even, and perhaps especially, in chaos. The argument that “even when faced with non-routine news, newswriters were able to accomplish their work in a more or less routine fashion” means that the journalist should enter a disaster zone aware and ready to negotiate and improvise

to “adapt work routines to the particulars of the news situation” (Berkowitz 1997, 373).

It has been demonstrated that a deeper appreciation of the journalistic *structure* that produces this stability gave reporters confidence and balance when both were challenged by the circumstances.

Despite the growing influence of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter during the crisis, what were in fact most useful in a disaster zone were the tried and tested, good old-fashioned methods of on-the-ground, eyewitness reporting. The key lesson for those concerned with the practice and study of journalism is that there is no substitute for the value of human interaction in the newsgathering process.

Further to this conclusion, it has been argued that, “the frantic haste with which we bolt everything we take, seconded by the eager wish of the journalist not to be a day behind his competitor, abolishes deliberation from judgment and sound digestion from our mental constitutions. We have no time to go below surfaces, and as a general thing no disposition” (Stillman 1891, 694).

The point is this argument was made well over a century ago in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine. What it underlines is the constant concern through the ages whenever a new piece of technology is introduced, that somehow journalism will suffer or be diminished as a result.

The existence of Twitter and its perceived threat to traditional journalism methods and expression is no exception. This study of the Haitian earthquake revealed the 24/7 connection to material and to the various audiences created by

disaster, as a symptom of what has been called “ambient” journalism. This is a journalism that “has become omnipresent, like the air we breathe, due to the emergence and uptake of social awareness communication systems” (Hermida 2010, 673).

As the CBC’s Paul Hunter experienced:

We’re multi-platform now so I’m taking still photos while my cameraman is taking video, and thumbing blog entries on my Blackberry to get at stories that aren’t going to make the National. A typical day back in the real world involves a full 10 to 12 hours finding, researching, setting up, shooting, screening, writing, editing, transmitting and airing a two minute news item. They were long days (despite the ease with which we found our stories) and, of course, emotionally intense. We were all exhausted. Professionally satisfied, but exhausted. I spent the flight home reading and responding to emails from people who'd seen our work and were thankful for it. (Hunter 2011)

The experiences of the journalists in Haiti tells us, as clearly as anything else, that the change in the routine of news production altered not only the *kinds* of stories they produce but also, at least as significantly, their perception of the profession. Enjoying virtually unlimited access in the no “spin” environment in the week following the earthquake resulted in a rare personal and professional satisfaction, confirming Lynn’s proposition made almost half a century ago, that

“like applause to an actor, the chance to develop his own story makes everything else worthwhile” (Lynn 1965, 257).

It may be undeniably true that “the sheer drama of such events makes for great storytelling...” (Davis and Stark 2001, 15), but this research demonstrates that the stories from Haiti, in the absence of press releases and official sources, featured, by necessity, different voices joining the news conversation, telling compelling stories from a unique perspective. The process of story construction in disaster means, “the social world represented in the news expands and changes” (Schudson 2003, 47).

We *know* from this research that a disaster tests the professional capabilities and emotional depth and resilience of the journalist and that the work also confers a privileged status on actors within the journalistic community. And this study also demonstrates that the sharing of disaster stories across generations of reporters is a useful mechanism to sustain the community. But the idea that a reporter is qualified to report from a disaster because she has been to any number of them in the past remains an unsatisfying proposition.

This leads to the reasonable possibility that there are potential practical and scholarly benefits to establishing a closer working relationship between the different communities of academics and journalists. No need in these pages to rehash the historically uneasy relationship between these two worlds or, indeed, to downplay the difficulties of this proposal.

The approach to this rapprochement is that the work on both sides and the potential benefits of joining forces are too important for tired old suspicions to

continue. A respectful dialogue between academics and journalists might lead not only to further important research but to a more relevant and informed set of guidelines to help reporters function more effectively and produce stronger journalism in a disaster.

How is this bridge between the two worlds to be accomplished? To begin, it would serve journalists well to become familiar with the vital, ongoing scholarship on disasters. Equally important, scholars should address the 'blind spot' in the literature and to borrow from Zelizer, they must begin to take journalism *seriously* by recognizing, as worthy of critical thinking, how the practice of journalism is changed by the unique conditions of a disaster.

For example, when Simpson and Cote recommend that, "journalists should be recognized as first responders in violent situations," there is then the need to understand the practical implications of assigning obligations that do not fit comfortably with the journalist, in Carey's description, as "a professional communicator, a broker in symbols" (Simpson and Cote 2006, 263; Carey 1969, 32).

This study concludes that just because it may be an uncomfortable fit with existing definitions, reporters should not automatically dismiss the idea of the journalist as a first responder. Their fears of being seen as advocates or, worse, participants, expressed in this study seem a little hollow. A disaster like the Haitian earthquake forced the journalist to confront this enduring tension of the profession. And this study concludes that the proclamation of professional ethics and responsibilities, essentially the "doomed to be observers" school of thought, is exposed in disaster as more of an exercise in semantics than reality.

Reporters are always *actively* involved in the production of “news” stories. But confessing that one is ‘directed’ by a helpless, little girl screaming in a medical clinic in Haiti is more palatable, professionally and personally, than the hard truth of recognizing the daily manipulation by official sources and press releases. Whether it strikes in the drama of a disaster on the streets of Port-au-Prince or in the sleepwalking monotony of a capital city’s daily news routine, *influence is influence* and the results of this study argue for a more honest acknowledgement of this fact by journalists. Perhaps only then can a more useful discussion take place between reporters and those who study the practice.

For their part, scholars must also reassess their approach to journalists. This study has demonstrated that reporters are quite prepared to engage in thoughtful discussions about the profession but, and it’s a significant ‘but,’ given the kind of occasional criticism from non-reporters, journalists develop an understandable defensiveness that limits the dialogue.

From being called “ruthless, selfish, [and] indifferent ... perpetrators [who] go unpunished [for their] crimes against humanity” to members of the “porcus ex grege diabola – the Devil’s swineherd” (Solnit 2010; Grant 2011), there is no shortage of uninformed criticism.

The first-hand accounts in this study of reporting from the Haitian disaster make a compelling argument that it is *more*, not less, important for scholars to listen to journalists describe their work and experiences. Any methodological frustration pales beside the value of exploring *with the practitioners* the routine of journalism in the difficult and unsettling circumstances of disaster.

The more we can look behind the curtain of journalistic practice and experience in disaster to reveal the intense moments of raw, emotional decision-making, the better chance we have to appreciate the construction of narrative in our lives where “in a modern, wired world, the news provides *pattern recognition* – mythic forms of organizing experience” (Lule 2001, 199).

This need also comes partially from the *qualitative* change in the *kinds* of disasters visited upon human beings. What now begins as a ‘local’ event - Chernobyl, Fukushima - can very quickly become a global concern with the ability to have deadly impact on distant cities and populations. It is this disturbing reality that changes the scope and responsibility of the journalist in a globalized society and calls again for a closer collaboration between journalists and academics. Some scholars, like Stephen Ward and Clifford Christians, have argued for a Kantian-like cosmopolitanism in the reimagining of journalism and the development of the global journalist.

“Cosmopolitanism in journalism implies fundamental changes in self-conception, in how journalists regard their ‘public,’ and in the primacy of basic principles,” argues ethicist Ward, “rather than see themselves as agents of a local public, journalists would see themselves as agents of a global public sphere” (Ward 2008, 145).

Whether the recovered qualities of news work, discovered in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake and described in this study, can be incorporated in the contemporary newsroom routine remains an open question. In terms of the journalists themselves, further research is required to examine any long-term

impact of their Haitian experiences on their subsequent work produced in the more 'normal' daily routine of newsgathering.

Daniele Hamamdjian continues to report for CTV in Ottawa but with a new status. She recognized that her work in Haiti "took pressure off my back that people were still questioning my abilities too...you know, 'She's too young, she's this or she's that' and I proved that I could do it," she says, "Even politicians who were watching now they recognized my face" (Hamamdjian 2010).

Tom Clark is gone from CTV News but is still based in Ottawa, now hosting the "*West Wing*," a program about politics on the Global television network. He sees Haiti now as an example of a "shared experience" and regards it as the chance to look beyond the normal constraints of the newsroom, "I mean it's like being raised as a chicken on a Colonel Saunders ranch," he says, "as far as you know as the chicken, this is what life is really all about. And it's not until you jump over the fence and go into the field that you realize there's something else out there" (Clark 2010).

Paul Hunter remains in Washington reporting for CBC and reflected on his repeated visits to Haiti. "There was continued satisfaction sort of as a human being that we were still doing a service to Haiti, that we hadn't moved on, the news cycle moves every twenty-four hours but here we were again" (Hunter 2011).

Sue Montgomery still works to raise money for Haitians both in Montreal and those recovering from the earthquake in Haiti. Despite a simmering frustration and anger with editors and the newspaper business, her reporting continues to appear in the Montreal *Gazette*. Her conclusion about the work in disaster was that, "You just have to do it. You have to suck up everything and do it. And you're on adrenaline

because you are a journalist and you think, 'Wow this is a huge story, like it's awesome in a way, right, because it's huge. And all you can think of is, 'OK what am I going to write, you know, what am I going to focus on because there are just so many stories'" (Montgomery 2010).

"I've done my fair share of traveling, I've been around the world, I've done two Olympic Games so I've done tons of stuff," said CTV cameraman George Papadionysiou who, it seems, was most emotionally affected by his time in Haiti. He's back shooting press conferences for CTV in Ottawa, "but Haiti was just different, totally different. And when I came back, I just wanted to go with my family. I needed that, you know" (Papadionysiou 2010).

Pat Skinner is with CTV in Ottawa, at least feeling more in control than in the aftermath of the earthquake, "I try to make sure that I've got myself and the people that I'm working with in the best possible situation, support it as best as we can do," she says, "You know, you do all the regular stuff like making sure that people are checking in all the time, that they've got the right communication tools and past that, there are certain things you just can't control" (Skinner 2010).

The veteran Paul Workman is reporting for CTV in Washington and still considering the balance that has to be struck in disaster, "I suppose we could get in a little bit and help and give money to people from time to time, which I've done, but our greater impact," he maintains, "is being the messenger in hoping that some people will come to their rescue" (Workman 2010).

The *Toronto Star's* Joanna Smith is back in the groove of political reporting in Ottawa but she remembers thinking about Haiti *before* getting there that, "this is not

a story that I'm going to risk anything for. I'm going to go down...it's going to be spot news, I'm going to do a good job and come home. And then when I was actually down there, you know I surprised myself with sort of what I wanted to do...surprised by how much I was pushing myself. I had set the bar kind of low" (Smith 2010).

And *that*, when all is said and done, is perhaps *the* critical conclusion of this study; that, in the complicated process of recapturing the ideals of the profession, a disaster offers the journalist the chance to stretch, to experiment and to push oneself as a reporter.

Each journalist left the devastation of Haiti with a conviction that just *being* with people and having access to their stories is a fundamental quality of effective and rewarding journalism. And regardless of previous experience, each reporter in this study left the earthquake zone with indelible impressions they couldn't help but take in.

"My first interaction with an earthquake victim was while tip-toeing through a tent city before dawn, just minutes after we had finally made it to Port-au-Prince," remembers Joanna Smith, "I greeted the first woman who made eye contact with me as she was lying on the ground. She lifted a bundle towards me and said, "Take my baby. Please." I stammered something incoherent, shook my head and left. I will never forget that moment."

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