International Journal of Communication 14(2020), 2887–2904 1932–8036/20200005

Evaluative Practices in a Broadcasting Newsroom Archive: Culture, Context, and Understanding in Practice

ASEN O. IVANOV
University of Guelph, Canada

Seeking to contribute to practice theory debates on the nature of culture and cognition, this article draws on work in cultural sociology to present an approach for analyzing the cultural processes supporting what practice theorists describe as "understanding in practice." Specifically, the article draws on the influential toolkit theory of culture, and its subsequent elaboration in the literature on evaluative repertoires, to develop a model for analyzing how cultural structures support situated cognition in organizational contexts of practice. The article then demonstrates the import of this model for media studies by examining the evaluative repertoires that newsroom archivists draw on when selecting and acquiring news broadcasting materials for archival preservation. The analysis is based on fieldwork and interview data collected at the digital news broadcasting archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Keywords: practice theory, culture, evaluation, broadcasting news, news archives, understanding in practice, newsroom ethnography

Exploring social reality in terms of if its relational dynamics has become a mainstay of theoretical innovation in the social sciences (Emirbayer, 1997). Practice theory contributes to this research agenda by providing an analytical lens for tracing the relational associations between aspects of social reality that were previously thought to belong to separate ontological levels. This is perhaps most succinctly captured in Schatzki's (2001a) definition of practice as "embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding" (p. 11). This definition suggests that studying social phenomena as practice entails examining them across three interconnected dimensions: the social, the material, and the cultural (Schatzki, 2001a).

In empirical research, these three dimensions are typically studied by combining concepts from a range of theoretical approaches (Nicolini, 2012). Contributions from symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology and the frameworks of actor-network theory and activity theory have been widely used as lenses for analyzing the social and material dimensions of practice. In comparison, how to analyze the cultural dimension of practice has been less debated. Current methodological advice suggests that the cultural dimension of practice could be studied through either poststructuralist theories of discourse or theories of situated learning (Nicolini, 2012). Largely missing from this discussion is what cultural sociology

Asen O. Ivanov: asen.ivanov@mail.utoronto.ca
Date submitted 2019–08–19

has offered to practice theory. This absence is conspicuous, given the range of insights on the nature of culture and cognition in practice that cultural sociology has developed (Sewell, 1999).

This article presents an approach for studying the cultural dimension of practice—what, following the work of Schatzki (2001a), practice theorists call *understanding in practice*. Doing so is worthwhile because although understanding in practice is primarily thought of as a form of situated cognition embodied in routine activities, it has also been argued that it does not emerge entirely in-situ (in the context of practice), but also in relation to cultural systems located outside the practice (Swidler, 2001). As such, understanding in practice remains somehow suspended between "the body on the one side and the social world on the other" (Schatzki, 2001a, p.18). To offer a perspective on how cultural systems and cognitive processes collectively constitute understanding in practice, this article takes a cue from a recent contribution by Welch and Warde (2017), suggesting that the nature of understanding in practice can be clarified through the theoretical apparatus of cultural sociology. In response, the article develops a perspective on the nature of understanding in practice with recourse to work in cultural sociology. It then applies this theoretical perspective to the analysis of selection and acquisition practices at the digital news archive of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

The theoretical discussion in this article could be useful to media scholars interested in the intersection of culture and cognition in media practices. Beyond that, the article empirically contributes to the literature on news production: While the first and second wave of newsroom ethnography (e.g., Cottle, 2000; Klinenberg, 2005) and more recent socio-material contributions (e.g., Boczkowski, 2015; Usher, 2014) have advanced our knowledge of journalistic practices, less is known about other aspects of the broader complex of news production practices and, in particular, about newsroom archiving.

Understanding in Practice

According to Schatzki (2005) the cultural dimension of practice is governed by "understandings, rules, ends, projects, and even emotions" (p. 481). In this view,

> what organizes action into a practice is a complex of memes: (1) a pool of understandings, e.g., abilities to carry out, recognize, react to the actions concerned; (2) an array of rules (understood as explicit instructions, remonstrations, and directives), and (3) [what Schatzki calls] teleoaffective structure (a spectrum of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks to a varying extents allied with normativized emotions and feelings). (Schatzki, 2001b, p. 351)

The concepts of understanding, rules, and teleoaffective structures in this account are attributed different contextual and causal characteristics. Understanding does not causally influence practice, but instead provides the horizon of intelligibility in which the practice makes sense to all parties involved. Understanding, as such, is context dependent; as Schatzki (2001b) argues, "which elements of culture activity expresses, and hence which elements of culture govern activity in the sense of articulating its intelligibility, depend, inter alia, on the social context in which the activity transpires" (p. 350). This definition is similar to the definition of culture in symbolic anthropology, where culture is seen as "not a power,

something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described" (Geertz, 1978, p. 14).

In contrast, rules and teleoaffective structures are conceptualized by Schatzki (2001b) as "normativized and hierarchically ordered" (p. 351) forces causally influencing practice. In this respect, the concepts are similar to the concepts of values and norms in the normativist functionalist perspective on culture in sociology championed by Talcott Parsons. Parsons saw social actors as agents moving through society by calculating possible courses of action in pursuit of desired ends. What motivates and organizes these pursuits, according to Parsons, is values and norms. He thus maintained that "the social world is almost always an ordered one because human action is fundamentally molded by common norms and values" (Joas & Knöbl, 2009, p. 38).

Schatzki's conceptualization of understanding, rules, and teleoaffective structures is integrative of contrasting ideas on the nature of culture and cognition in anthropology and sociology. It is far from settled, however. Recently, Schatzki and others have begun problematizing this topic by asking questions about the relational associations between broader cultural systems (e.g., discourse, language, and power) and understanding in practice. In a recent contribution, on which the argument in this article pivots, Welch and Warde (2017) note that Schatzki (2002) has revised his views on understanding by subdividing it into two categories: *practical understanding* and *general understanding*. Practical understanding is the tacit, prereflexive understanding emerging in the situated context of practice, whereas general understanding is contingent on "border cultural conceptions"; "concepts, values, and categories"; and other "ideational elements" (Welch & Warde, 2017, pp. 183–184). The main difference between the two is that practical understanding is a context-dependent, tacit knowledge, whereas general understating is publicly shared knowledge that transgresses the boundaries of a specific situation.

Building on this idea, Welch and Warde (2017) propose that two questions needing further clarification are "where, external to the focal practice, does the general understanding lie, or rather, come from"? (p. 185) and what is the "the relationship between general understandings and configurations of practice"? (p. 188). Consequently, they identify the influential *toolkit theory of culture* in cultural sociology as offering a promising theoretical model for examining these questions (Welch & Warde, 2017). This indeed may be a substantive direction for future research because the toolkit theory has integrated insights from symbolic anthropology and normativist functionalism to develop a theoretical perspective on culture and cognition in practice.

Understanding in Practice Through the Lens of Toolkit Theory

The toolkit theory of culture, originally formulated by Ann Swidler (1986), builds on the insights of symbolic anthropology in that it views culture as composed of discourse, language, stories, rituals, symbols, and myths. But unlike symbolic anthropology, it is not concerned only with how these cultural elements constitute the context of social action. Comparable to the analytical agenda of normativist functionalism, the toolkit theory also articulates a model of how culture and cognition, as both "system and practice," are causally related to the organization of social action (Sewell, 1999). Yet, the toolkit theory differs in important ways from normativist functionalism and was formulated explicitly as a rejoinder to Parsons' ideas (Swidler,

1986). Whereas Parsons saw the association between culture and action as a hierarchical arrangement in which values and norms set the goals and ends toward which social action is oriented, Swidler conceptualized this association as a dynamic, unfolding relation. In her account, culture is defined as a collection of cultural resources that provide premade cultural "tools" for social action, "which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). This conceptualization is predicated on a view of the association between culture and action in which people learn, master, and selectively deploy cultural resources, "toolkits," to solve pragmatic problems in their environment. Predicated on this view, Swidler (1986) argued that culture causally influences social action not in providing the norms and values toward which action is oriented—as Parsons has argued—but "in providing the cultural components that are used to construct strategies of action" (p. 273).

Central to the toolkit theory is the argument that culture is experienced at the level of situated cognition "more like a style or a set of skills and habits than a set of preferences or wants" (Swidler, 1986, p. 275). Another argument is that although culture is used to solve practical problems, culture does not motivate the problems it solves. Swidler saw the motivations for using culture as being set by institutionally defined problems. She thus argued that "as institutions constrict discretion, they reduce the need for cultural elaboration" and that consequently, culture flourishes in the gaps left open by institutions, "where people must put together lines of action in relation to established institutional options" (Swidler, 2003, p. 133).

The toolkit theory has been criticized for lacking a motivational account of action and having an unclear position on where cultural resources are located—in the mind or in the external environment (Vaisey, 2008, 2009). Swidler's response to the former criticism is that the use of culture is motivated by institutionally defined problems. Her response to the latter criticism is that cultural resources are encoded in "codes, contexts, and institutions" (Swidler, 2001, 2003, 2008). Both of these arguments are consistent with work in cognitive psychology, which similarly indicates that culture is "offloaded" into the external environment (Lizardo & Strand, 2010) and that cultural elaborations are "situationally cued" by the environment in which they unfold (DiMaggio, 1997).

Following its initial introduction by Swidler (1986), the toolkit theory's tenets were further developed in cultural sociology. Rather than the term *cultural toolkits*, this latter work opted for the term *cultural repertoires*, but retained the overall theoretical premises of the approach (cf. Lareau, 2011; Rivera, 2016; Velthuis, 2013). Within this literature, particularly relevant to the present analysis is work on the concept of *evaluative repertoires*. Lamont and Thévenot (2000) define evaluative repertoires as "cultural tools that are unevenly available across situations and national contexts" (p. 1) and provide support in elaborating strategies for action in evaluation. Evaluative repertoires are manifested as "institutionalized cultural models and practices" that in turn provide "grammars of available cultural positions" for action (p. 4); and while evaluative repertoires can be "available across situations" and "pre-exist individuals . . . they are transformed and made salient by individuals" in the social and material context of practice (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000, pp. 5–6). Subsequent work in this direction has examined evaluative repertoires in the contexts of practices such as peer review and arts journalism (Chong, 2013, 2017; Lamont, 2009) and has formulated a program for research on evaluative practices in the field of cultural production (Beljean, Chong, & Lamont, 2016).

Selection and Acquisition in Broadcasting Archives

Prior studies of selection and acquisition in broadcasting archives have focused on defining coherent evaluation criteria. Many of these contributions are written by broadcasting archivists. This section summarizes debates in this literature, beginning with a review of two contributions written by doyen Canadian archivists with insider knowledge of the CBC (Bergeron, 1986; Dick, 1991).

In a discussion of broadcasting selection and acquisition in Canada, Rosemary Bergeron (1986) identifies news materials as archival records of the largest "potential significance of any type of television production" because of the rich representation of Canadian life they provide, as well as their ability to stand as evidence of "the style and practice of television journalism" (p. 45) at that historical time. Similarly, Ernest Dick—a former chief archivist at the CBC—considers broadcasting materials' archival value as representational and evidential, writing that selection and acquisition require the evaluation of the social, cultural, and political value and the "distinctive information and perspective of particular news and current affairs program series" (Dick, 1991, p. 261). Bergeron (1986) and Dick (1991) also identify reuse value as important criterion in selection and acquisition, with Bergeron (1986) observing that

> television news producers and others in the broadcasting industry are increasingly recognizing the value of television programs as production resources for rebroadcast in whole or in part, for research in the preparation of new programs, and for sale to other television organizations. (p. 43)

Jointly, Bergeron (1986) and Dick (1991) highlight three types of value associated with broadcasting materials. These are broadcasting materials' *representational* value (as a historical and sociological source of knowledge about the past), *evidential* value (as a public record of the CBC's programming at that time), and *commercial* value (for reuse). These views are consistent with established value typologies guiding the selection and acquisition of business, administrative, and community archives, a practice known within the archival profession as *archival appraisal* (Foscarini, 2017).

Broadcasting archivists in the United States have advanced similar views. For instance, seeking to develop a comprehensive model for appraisal of public broadcasting materials, Connors (2000) proposes a "simplified evaluation scheme" for public broadcasting that seeks to combine "archival appraisal considerations, the special concerns of moving image archivists, and the concerns of public television professionals" (p. 168). The scheme includes the following evaluative criteria: *provenance* (whether the material belongs to the organization); *cost of retention* (processing and preservation costs); *implications of the selection decision* (the potential cultural and political ramification of not acquiring the material); *reference potential* (as a source for historical research); and *critical values* (including production quality, popularity, and overall social, cultural, and political impact; Connors, 2000, p. 168). Ide and Weisse (2003) propose a similar evaluation model that considers what they call the *value of information*, *costs of retention*, *implications of the selection decision*, and *reuse values*.

Collectively, this literature provides a coherent set of evaluation criteria; moreover, those criteria, as the analysis that follows will show, underpin the organizational policy guiding selection and acquisition at the

CBC news archive. What this literature does not provide, however, is analyses of how the selection and acquisition of broadcasting news unfold as a practice. The focus of the archival literature thus has been on developing criteria that should underpin selection and acquisition rather than on studying how these criteria are applied in practice. Shifting the focus on the practice of evaluation of broadcasting materials is what the analysis that follows seeks to achieve. This is warranted because the archival literature provides evidence suggesting that selection and acquisition are far from routine and mechanical practices. Specifically, prior studies on archival appraisal describe the process as "circumscribed—bounded—by the appraiser's ability and experience, shaped by the specific constraints in his or her working realities, and reflecting, inevitably and naturally, the norms shared by archivists" (Craig, 2007, p. 6). Similar views are implicit in the work of other archival scholars, who describe archival appraisal as a "craft practised to achieve certain ends with suitable criteria or guidelines to meet these ends" (Harrison, 1997, p. 131) and, more metaphorically, as "alchemy" (Cox, 2004).

Approach, Data, and Methods

The analysis that follows draws on the ideas discussed in the previous sections to examine the evaluative practice and repertoires used by newsroom archivist at the CBC news archive. While the analytical focus is on evaluative repertoires, the analysis also accounts for the institutional rules of evaluation, the technologies used in evaluation, and the self-conception of evaluators at the CBC news archive in keeping with the research agenda outlined by Beljean and colleagues (2016). The CBC was selected as a case study because of the complexity of its newsroom archival practices as the largest digital broadcasting archive in Canada, with more than 500,000 hours of digital archival holdings. While the findings of a single case study cannot claim generalizability, the findings reported here are analytically significant as an example of an "extreme" case of selection and acquisition practices in a broadcasting news archive (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Seven participants enrolled in the study. All participants hold senior operation management roles at the CBC news archive. Interviewing managers is a recognized approach in sociological research on organizations, where it is used to garner both processual and interpretive insights on organizational practices and culture (Trinczek, 2009). Data were collected through participant observation and interview methods. Participant observation data were collected through biweekly site visits at the CBC news archive for the duration of three months. The observations consisted of job shadowing and, in some instances, receiving elements of corporate onboarding. The interview data were collected through two in-depth interviews with each of the research participants. The goal of the interviews was to empirically reveal not only "what people thought, but the range of things people could think" in this particular context (Lamont & Swidler, 2014, p. 161). Specifically, my interview guide consisted, first, of open-ended questions asking the research participants to elaborate on what they consider to be valuable and authentic archival news materials and correspondingly valueless and inauthentic archival news materials. These contrastive questions aimed to solicit reflections that will reveal empirically the boundaries of categorization schemes used in evaluative practice. In addition, I also asked questions about the processual dynamics of selection and acquisition. Last, I presented the research participants with examples of actual and hypothetical news materials and asked them to evaluate them, using this interview technique as means to gather further "insight on the criteria used by members to judge the appropriateness of the situated activity" under discussion (Nicolini, 2009, p. 196).

The data analyzed in this article are primarily from observations and interviews conducted at the CBC acquisition department. Other evidence, however, is referenced when relevant (Denzin, 1970). The data were inductively coded using elemental and thematic coding techniques (Saldaña, 2013). The analysis and findings are presented as a narrative account by constructing "a detailed story from the raw data" (Langley, 1999, p. 695). Last, the term *media librarians* is used to refer to the research participants, because this is their official job title at the CBC.

The CBC News Archive: Context, Rules, and Institutions

The CBC is Canada's national public broadcaster, operating two television channels and two news channels (in English and French), as well as specialty channels, radio stations, and websites. The CBC news archive oversees the management of both production and archival news materials. The CBC's digital broadcasting collection is preserved on a Linear Tape-Open (LTO) data storage system known internally as the *deep archive*, which holds more than 500,000 hours of television materials dating back to the 1950s. All archival materials are preserved in the deep archive but are processed at a second level of the information systems architecture on the faster system AVID ISIS 5500. The ISIS system has a total capacity of 141 terabytes. A total of 65 terabytes on the ISIS servers are used for the ingestion and processing of archival materials. Because media files are data intensive, these 65 terabytes must be deleted weekly to free up space for incoming media during what is internally referred to as the *weekly purge cycle.* There are three classes of materials that media librarians acquire: *full programs, items, and stox*. All three types of material are uploaded in the CBC servers with descriptive metadata supplied by camera crews and journalists, reflecting on the people, places, and events depicted in the footage. Media librarians consult these metadata to inform their evaluations.

Specifically, full programs are news programs acquired and preserved in full as they air on TV. They are preserved as mixed-track files and are unsuitable for editing and reuse. Full programs are assembled from preproduced *news items*. This second class of materials, items, includes news stories shot in the field, news stories delivered by the news anchor over background images, and expert panels and interviews. Items are, on average, 2–3 minutes long and are preserved as split-track files to facilitate their reuse. The third category is stox (i.e., stock footage). Stox are created by selecting additional footage shot in the production of news items or by selecting footage from digitized, legacy film and videotape archival holdings. Stox are made exclusively from materials whose copyright the CBC owns and are also preserved as split-track files.

The CBC recognizes the cultural and historical value of its archival news holdings, but it also categorizes them as commercial assets for reuse or sale. This dual conception of the value of news materials as equal parts cultural heritage and commercial assets is formulated in the CBC news archive's policy. The policy designates three general evaluation criteria for selection and acquisition, without providing further elaboration on how they should be interpreted and applied. The criteria are:

- Potential for reuse
- Canadian content
- Uniqueness to the collection

The distinction between cultural heritage and commercial assets in this policy aligns with the CBC's status as a media organization in the public broadcasting sector. The public broadcasting sector, in recent years, has been placed in a precarious economic situation as a result of the combination of dwindling financial support and competition by broadband streaming (Hills & Michalis, 2000; Raboy & Taras, 2007). The business continuity of the CBC thus depends on its organizational ability to both optimize production resources and produce unique content of relevance to Canadians. The reuse of archival news materials facilitates those goals by significantly lowering news production costs and by serving to differentiate the CBC's news content from that of its local and global competitors. What archival materials add to the content of news thus is production cost savings, but also, as media librarians tell me, the ability to "add meat to the story"; "put things into context"; and provide a "richer experience."

Another external factor explaining this dualistic conception of the CBC archival holdings is the corporation's social and political role in Canadian society. Canadian media scholars frequently describe the CBC as a political instrument for establishing a shared sense of Canadian national identity (Collins, 1990; Raboy, 1990), a view that is also supported by the historical scholarship on the CBC (Peers, 1969; Vipond, 1992). This historical, political, and economic role has molded the corporation's institutional identity as divided between the *logic of the media market* and the *logic of public service*. My data point to a similar distinction in how media librarians understand the professional and ethical obligations of their work. When asked to conceptualize the users for whom they keep archives, all media librarians I interviewed described two sets of actors, one real and one imagined. Specifically, in the first instance, they described internal organizational actors, such as journalists and editors, and in the second instance, a loosely defined set of external actors, described vaguely as future scholars and historians and the Canadian public at large.

Evaluative Practice and Repertoires

Three full-time media librarians work at the CBC acquisition department. One of them holds the role of a library coordinator. In this capacity, he oversees the operations of the department, sets priorities, and delegates tasks, but he nonetheless partakes daily in selection and acquisition practices. The library coordinator is largely autonomous in running the department and has authority over internal staffing decisions. In making staffing recommendations, he places a premium on media librarians' prior experience at the organization. But another important factor for him is a familiarity with the codes and conventions of broadcasting journalism, as he explains:

> [When recommending people to join the department] I want to know that they have some kind of stox background or have an editing background, where they understand what we mean by reuse . . . If you don't think like an editor and you don't have an editor's eye there is no point making stox.

Being cognizant of the codes and conventions of broadcasting news production is seen as tacit knowledge acquired in practice. The library coordinator refers to these skills as "something deeply personal that cannot be taught"—nor can it be defined conceptually, only recognized in the quality of one's work and metaphorically described as having an "editor's eye." Similar views are held by the other media librarians I

interviewed, one of whom tells me that the practice of selecting news materials "is a judgment and the thought process [behind it] is a real art."

Procedurally, the selection and acquisition of news materials is delegated thus: One media librarian is responsible for the acquisition of full programs and one for the acquisition of items. The library coordinator has a supporting role in both tasks. All three members of the acquisition department select and acquire stox (typically in the afternoon). The work pace in the department is incessant. Acquisition decisions must be promptly made because materials that are not acquired will be automatically deleted from the CBC servers in the weekly purge cycle. And because large volumes of incoming news materials are ingested in the servers daily, the acquisition department must review and decide on its acquisition within 24–36 hours to avoid a backlog.

Hundreds of hours of content are ingested in the CBC servers as both recently shot content and digitized legacy materials. To process this media glut within a tight time frame, evaluative practices at the acquisition department are organized around four evaluative repertoires: (1) public record value; (2) cultural-historical value; (3) corporate-memory value; and (4) reuse value. These evaluative repertoires align with criteria identified in archival literature reviewed earlier. My analysis further indicates that more than one repertoire can inform evaluation across the three classes of news materials and that the four evaluative repertoires vary in terms of the cognitive complexity and cultural elaborations they require in evaluative practice, as discussed next.

Full Programs

The acquisition of full programs is based on their value as public records. The term *public record* takes on a specific meaning in this context—that is, publicly available evidence of the CBC's broadcasting. The evaluation of full programs is simple, requiring only verification that the program is full and complete as it has aired on that day—the reasoning being, "If it is CBC [news show] and aired, we will keep it." Full programs are preserved as mixed-track files, making them unsuitable for reuse. As archival assets, their value is that of cultural and historical evidence and a public accountability record. The only challenge in acquiring full programs is their versioning. For instance, the CBC flagship 9 p.m. newscast, *The National*, is acquired in three versions because it airs three times across Canada's six time zones, sometimes with editorial changes. Media librarians need to evaluate the content of these programs and note any editorial changes. In doing so, they consult program scripts and shot lists and, when necessary, communicate with the editorial desk.

Items

Items are likewise systematically acquired as they air each day. Their selection is more complicated, however, because media librarians need to determine what is the best version to acquire, and such determinations require more complex evaluations. Specifically, what media librarians evaluate when selecting items for acquisition is not their content, but their identity. The reason is that news items could air in different versions in local and national newscasts during the day. The evaluative practice in the acquisition department is thus centered on identifying what is internally referred to as the *last-to-air version*. In the frequent cases when the same item has aired in multiple newscasts, the version acquired is the one

that has aired last on the most highly watched newscast (typically *The National*). Items, like full programs, are in this sense acquired as public records, but they have much higher reuse value as production assets because they are preserved as split-track files and can be easily reused. Furthermore, items representing important Canadian social, cultural, and political events can have cultural-historical and corporate-memory value and, in some instances, could be highly symbolic, taking on an iconic significance in Canadian culture.

When selecting items, media librarians are alert and sensitive to their potential for reuse and their cultural-historical and corporate-memory value, but the latter does not directly influence the acquisition decisions they make because all items will be acquired anyway. Instead, the presence of those values triggers a different strategy for action. Specifically, it triggers the creation of additional metadata descriptions that are meant to signal to the cataloging department that the material should be given careful attention and described in detail; this is because it is potentially valuable beyond its primary public record value as what the CBC went to air with on that day. As such, adding metadata descriptions is the primary way in which the acquisition department signals its evaluation of the item to its colleagues in the cataloging department, where later a media librarian will describe the item in its entirety and highlight the factual or symbolic characteristics of its content that make it valuable as more than a public record.

This strategy for action is not inconsequential for the curation of the archive. Its importance, however, becomes apparent when we follow the evaluative practice beyond the acquisition department and into the cataloging department (Latour, 1987). Doing so reveals that detailed metadata descriptions are consequential because they increase the items' chance of being found and reused. Without cataloging metadata, news items can literally disappear amid the other 500,000 hours of archival footage. Producing cataloging metadata involves subjective interpretations of what the news material is and how and why it is valuable. To an extent, these interpretations occur already at the stage of acquisition, when a media librarian adds metadata to signal the value of the item to his or her colleagues. Still, they are much more consequential within the practices of the cataloging department because the metadata added to a news item define how it will be thematically classified and, subsequently, how it could be found in the archive. As the coordinator of the cataloging departments tells me, when we were discussing a hypothetical example of adding metadata to a news item of a local Toronto politician attending the inauguration of a new industrial plant in the city,

> [The nature of] our content makes it [metadata description] crucial because it is not just a case of adding an author and a title—there would be three different options for [interpreting] this news item, so which one do you want? [For example, is it a story about the relationship between business and politics, the environment, or the City of Toronto?] And then if it is not described properly it becomes a different thing in essence.

Stox

The role of cultural elaborations in evaluation is most evident in the selection and acquisition of stox. The material available for stox selection is large. Only a fraction of this material is acquired for preservation. Deciding what stox to acquire is the sole responsibility of the acquisition department. However, there are no additional guidelines to support their evaluations aside from the three criteria stated in the organizational policy—that is, potential for reuse, Canadian content, and uniqueness to the collection. Media librarians need

to fill in the gaps left open by these institutional rules. In this context, cultural elaborations become a primary tool for evaluation. As a member of the acquisition department explains, "With stox you have to think about it. You shoot hundreds of hours a day, and we are going to keep only maybe an hour to 40 minutes a day."

When media librarians acquire stox for their cultural-historical value, their thinking is that images that today may appear bland and mundane accrue value as time passes. The library coordinator at the acquisition department understands this as a distinction between short- and long-term value. As he explains,

> A bit more of a general idea of what drives the stox selection process, in terms of value. . . . if it doesn't require a shooter and it doesn't require sending cameramen somewhere to get a shot, you've saved the company a whole pile of money. If it is a beautiful shot and the editor loves it, so much the better, that is value added—but value also has the long-term thing: What would historians think 35 years from now when they got to write a history about the urbanization of Toronto in the early 21st century? They might want this shot when the railroad land became a condo tower [in the city], there is no news story [item] at the CBC about that, but there are stox for days and days showing exactly how that happened.

Media librarians recognize that even mundane stox can accrue cultural-historical value over time in some capacity for someone. But they are also aware that recognizing what may be valuable in some capacity for someone 30–40 years from now is not straightforward, and that consequently, their subjective perspectives on what is valuable inevitably filter into the evaluation. This concern recurs consistently in my interview data. Another media librarian describes the cultural-historical value of stox as their quality of being "genuine, honest representations of that [historical] time," but he also sees these values as not being immediately manifested in the present. The central problem that media librarians face when evaluating stox is that without the benefit of hindsight, cultural-historical value can be interpreted in many ways because many topics and subjects in the present may be deemed of potential value for someone in the future. In this case, seemingly for the lack of more universal criteria, personal preferences and taste play a role in deciding what to acquire. As a media librarian reflects, "I see more value in pop culture and celebrity than [my colleague at the acquisition department] does. But then [my other colleague at the acquisition department] likes cats, so [he] will keep a lot of cat things."

Cultural elaborations are also prominent when media librarians evaluate the corporate-memory value of stox, but this process takes on different dynamics. In such instances, media librarians are specifically interested in footage that stands as a representation of the history of the CBC. Virtually every piece of footage that represents what the CBC is could be acquired as stox of corporate-memory value. A notable strategy that media librarians use to circumvent this ambiguity and narrow their evaluations is to acquire material that represents the careers of CBC news anchors and reporters. As one media librarian tells me,

> We will keep an eye on Margaret Evans [CBC journalist] in the field in Aleppo or when Adrienne Arsenault [CBC journalist] went to Cuba to cover the funeral of [Fidel] Castro. That is a historic event, but it is important for them career-wise. If we are ever doing a retrospective of their careers, it is important to keep these unique things.

Media librarians, however, do not simply acquire material that represents the career arch of news anchors and reporters; they also curate these representations. As the same media librarian just cited tells me at a different point in our interview,

> I would not acquire the parts that reflect poorly on someone's work. You know sometimes you get shots in which they goof around, they swear, and I see that stuff, and I am: I can keep it, but that will benefit no one. But you keep interesting things—like if they shoot themselves where you can see them at work.

When selecting such images, the media librarians think about how they fit in the overall representation of the careers of the reporters and news anchors, but they also see those images as proxy representations of what the CBC was in that historical point in time. As one of them tells me, the potential future user they envision for whom this material eventually will be of value "almost becomes the CBC as a cultural institution."

Last, evaluation for reuse value exhibits different strategies than those discussed so far. The evaluation of cultural-historical and corporate-memory value hinges primarily on the symbolic and representational content of news materials, with their look and feel being of secondary significance. The evaluation of reuse value, on the other hand, is primarily associated with news materials' formal and aesthetic characteristics as well as their relevance to either iconic or ongoing news events. In this context, the codes and conventions of broadcasting journalism play a central role in the selection process, but cultural elaborations likewise play a role. Specifically, reuse value is primarily determined in relation to five criteria: (1) aesthetic quality, (2) uniqueness, (3) cost, (4) specificity, and (5) malleability.

Aesthetic quality plays an important role in evaluating news materials' fit for reuse. Broadcasting production must adhere to some basic quality conventions, and moving images that do not fit these conventions are rarely seen as valuable. As a media librarian puts it, "If it is technically done poorly, I am not going to keep it." Importantly, aesthetic quality does not exclusively correlate with pristine, professionally shot images that are visually enticing. Sometimes, moving image materials can be just as aesthetically valuable for reuse precisely because of their unassuming look and feel. As one of the media librarians tells me, most of the time, journalist and news editors want stox that convey a sense of "excitement and tension." At other times, however, they will be interested in drab, gloomy-looking images shot with a shaky camera and poor framing. As the media librarian reasons, "There are different types, different genres, that people are looking for [in the archive]." Taste and personal preferences play a role in the evaluation of aesthetic quality because media librarians must fill the gaps left open by the codes and conventions of broadcasting journalism in order to anticipate the full range of different aesthetic genres that future users of the archives may want to find and reuse.

Two other characteristics of evaluating the reuse value of stox are uniqueness and cost, which are best described as a pair. Media librarians will consider how unique the images are relative to other materials in the archive and how much they cost to produce. Furthermore, uniqueness is an important factor in evaluation irrespective of the cost. But when the cost of obtaining the material is high, uniqueness will be a secondary consideration in the acquisition decision. Specificity and malleability are also best understood as a pair. The specificity of stox refers to their relation to news stories that are either of high social and cultural

importance or currently ongoing (e.g., natural disasters, political scandals, court trials, elections). Because it is plausible to assume that there will be future reporting on these stories, any related stox are more likely to be reused. The malleability of stox refers to the opposite. In this case, the generic qualities of stox are seen as valuable. The malleability of stox thus refers to what media librarians describe as stox's ability to be used as "wallpaper." In the case of specificity, therefore, the acquisition decision is informed by the broader CBC news agenda. The media librarians evaluate whether this is a story that will be reported on again in the future. In the case of malleability, on the other hand, the evaluation appears to be contingent on sensitivity to the general codes and conventions of broadcasting journalism, and taste and personal preferences in determining what types of generic images can be used as wallpaper to illustrate recurring news stories. Examples include stories about the economy (industrial plants and electrical towers), politics (government buildings and civil servants), and municipal services (garbage collectors and street cleaners at work).

Discussion: Implications for the Study of Evaluative Practices

The preceding analysis supports several conclusions that connect to previous findings in the literature on evaluative practices. Specifically, the analysis indicates that at the CBC news archive, evaluation is guided by an understanding that archival materials are both cultural heritage and commercial assets. These two logics influence how media librarians conceive of their role as being simultaneously organizational stakeholders striving to maximize resources, and custodians of Canadian cultural heritage. The question of whether this understanding in practice is idiosyncratic to the single case analyzed here or extends across other news production contexts and institutions could be clarified further through comparative studies (Lamont, 2012). Such studies would be empirically and theoretically fruitful because they can demonstrate in further detail how newsroom archivists manage the conflicting demands of divergent institutional logics and, subsequently, how institutional logics shape the constitution of news archives.

Furthermore, as revealed, the CBC systematically acquires all news programs airing on TV. The content of these full programs is not evaluated. They are acquired simply by virtue of their value as public records. Items are subjected to more complex evaluations. They are also acquired systematically, but because they exist in multiple versions, their content is evaluated to determine the best version for archival preservation. Doing so, however, can be verified objectively and calls for little in terms of elaborating cultural strategies for action. The evaluation of stox is the most complex evaluative practice in that it most frequently necessitates the use of personal preferences and taste (i.e., subjectivity) to elaborate strategies for filling the gaps left open by the institutional rules for evaluation and the codes and conventions of broadcasting journalism. These findings are consistent with previous work on evaluative practices indicating that subjectivity becomes a primary tool for evaluation in the absence of objective rules and criteria for evaluation (Chong, 2013, 2017).

The findings also suggest that evaluation unfolds throughout the life cycle of the archival news materials, traversing across several departments at the CBC. As discussed earlier, this is particularly evident in the evaluation of news items that are deemed valuable beyond their status as public records. In such instances, media librarians at the acquisition department signal their evaluations of the cultural-historical, corporate-memory, or reuse value of items to their colleagues in the cataloging department, who then further evaluate the items and produce objective statements of their value (in the form of cataloging metadata), thus

shaping the way items could be found and reused. Evaluation at the CBC news archive, as such, appears to be a distributed organizational practice, each stage of which enhances the value of archival news materials. On those terms, evaluative practices can be conceptualized as mechanisms through which the value of news materials is continually documented and enhanced as news materials transition between the status of reporting on current events to that of archival records. Such an account supports two themes previously identified in the literature on evaluation. First, they support the argument that "value both as an idea and as existence depends upon judgment on what to do" and as such is best understood as an outcome (product) of evaluation (Dewey, 1915, p. 516, as cited in Muniesa, 2012, p. 26). Second, they are consistent with previous observations that evaluative practices within knowledge organizations unfold as a "genuinely social—that is interactional—micro-political process of decision making" (Lamont, 2009, p. 246) through which subjective judgments of value at the individual level are negotiated and consequently transformed into intersubjective agreements on value at the organizational level (see also Hirschauer, 2010).

Conclusion

Practice theorists have begun problematizing the role of understanding in practice. This article contributes to the debate by showing how ideas from cultural sociology can be used to study media practices as not only social and material but also cultural phenomena. Doing so is worthwhile because of the current interest in clarifying the nature of understanding in practice, but also for expanding the methodological toolkit of newsroom ethnography. The analysis presented here reveals that understanding in practice is located in the codes, context, and institutions within which the practice is situated, a finding consistent with the tenets of the toolkit theory. The analysis further suggests that understanding in practice plays a vital role in the configuration of selection and acquisition practices, where it is manifested as the relational articulation between tacit and cultural forms of knowledge—that is, between practical understanding and general understanding. This articulation is salient within a practice when established cultural and institutional rules and conventions cannot provide clear guidance on what course of action a social actor should pursue. In such situations, cultural elaborations and subjective taste and preferences provide strategies for action. Thus, in focusing on understanding in practice, the article makes a case for using the cultural dimension of media practices as an analytical vector for analyzing other structured, organizational media practices (e.g., journalistic practices) and less structured, heterogeneous media practices (e.g., news consumption). In addition, the article focuses attention on one specific type of understanding in practice that media and journalism studies could examine further—subjectivity in the evaluation of news. Beyond that, the article had the more pragmatic objective of contributing to the empirical literature on news production by offering an account of selection and acquisition practices in a newsroom archive. As the analysis reveals, these practices are neither routine nor mechanical and rely heavily on the combination of tacit and cultural forms of knowledge. As such, they deserve closer analytical attention in media and journalism studies: first, because they shape a body of visual resources continuously used and reused in news production to various ends, and second, and perhaps more consequentially, because they shape the cultural and historical record of what news was.

References

Beljean, S., Chong, P., & Lamont, M. (2016). A post-Bourdieusian sociology of valuation and evaluation for the field of cultural production. In L. Hanquinet & M. Savage (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of the sociology of art and culture* (pp. 38–48). New York, NY: Routledge.

Bergeron, R. (1986). The selection of television productions for archival preservation. *Archivaria, 23*, 41–53.

Boczkowski, P. (2015). The material turn in the study of journalism: Some hopeful and cautionary remarks from an early explorer. *Journalism*, *16*(1), 65–68. doi:10.1177/1464884914545734

Chong, P. (2013). Legitimate judgment in art, the scientific world reversed? Maintaining critical distance in evaluation. *Social Studies of Science*, *43*(2), 265–281. doi:10.1177/0306312712475256

Chong, P. (2017). Valuing subjectivity in journalism: Bias, emotions, and self-interest as tools in arts reporting. *Journalism 20*(3), 427–443. doi:10.1177/1464884917722453

Collins, R. (1990). *Culture, communication, and national identity: The case of Canadian television*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Connors, T. (2000). Appraising public television programs: Toward an interpretive and comparative evaluation model. *The American Archivist*, *63*(1), 152–174. doi:10.17723/aarc.63.1.242683617n40849g

Cottle, S. (2000). New(s) times: Towards a "second wave" of news ethnography. *Communications*, *25*(1), 19–42. doi:10.1515/comm.2000.25.1.19

Cox, R. J. (2004). Archival appraisal alchemy. In R. J. Cox, *No innocent deposits: Forming archives by rethinking appraisal* (pp. 259–294). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Craig, B. (2007). Doing archival appraisal in Canada: Results from a postal survey of practitioners experience, practices, and opinions. *Archivaria*, *64,* 1–45.

Denzin, N. (1970). Strategies of multiple triangulation. In N. Denzin*, The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological method* (pp. 297–314). Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Dewey, J. (1915). The logic of judgments of practise (Part I). *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, *12*(19), 505–523. doi:10.2307/2012995

Dick, E. J. (1991). An archival acquisition strategy for the broadcast records of the Canadian broadcasting corporation. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, 11*(3), 253–268.

DiMaggio, P. J. (1997). Culture and cognition. *Annual Review of Sociology, 23*(1), 263–287.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*(4), 532–550. doi:10.2307/258557

Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a relational sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(2), 281–317. doi:10.1086/231209

Foscarini, F. (2017). Archival appraisal in four paradigms. In H. MacNeil & T. Eastwood (Eds.), *Currents of archival thinking* (2nd ed., pp. 107–133). Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.

Geertz, C. (1978). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Harrison, H. P. (1997). Archival appraisal. In H. P. Harrison (Ed.), *Audiovisual archives: A practical reader* (pp. 126–144). Paris, France: UNESCO.

Hills, J., & Michalis, M. (2000). The Internet: A challenge to public service broadcasting. *International Communication Gazette, 62*(6), 477–493. doi:10.1177/0016549200062006002

Hirschauer, S. (2010). Editorial judgments. A praxeology of "voting" in peer review. *Social Studies of Science, 40*(1), 71–103. doi:10.1177/0306312709335405

Ide, M., & Weisse, L. (2003). Developing preservation appraisal criteria for a public broadcasting station. *The Moving Image, 3*(1), 146–157. doi:10.1353/mov.2003.0008

Joas, H., & Knöbl, K. (2009). The classical attempt at synthesis: Talcott Parsons. In H. Joas & K. Knöbl, *Social theory: Twenty introductory lectures* (pp. 20–42). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Klinenberg, E. (2005). Convergence: News production in a digital age. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *597*(1), 48–64.

Lamont, M. (2009). *How professors think: Inside the curious world of academic judgment*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lamont, M. (2012). Toward a comparative sociology of valuation and evaluation. *Annual Review of Sociology, 38*, 201–221. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-120022

Lamont, M., & Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology, 37*(2), 153–171. doi:10.1007/s11133-014-9274-z

Lamont, M., & Thévenot, T. (Eds.). (2000). *Rethinking comparative cultural sociology: Repertoires of evaluation in France and the United States.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review, 24*(4), 691–710. doi:10.2307/259349

Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lizardo, O., & Strand, M. (2010). Skills, toolkits, contexts and institutions: Clarifying the relationship between different approaches to cognition in cultural sociology. *Poetics, 38*(2), 205–228. doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2009.11.003

Muniesa, F. (2012). A flank movement in the understanding of valuation. *The Sociological Review, 59*(2), 24–38. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02056.x

Nicolini, D. (2009). Articulating practice through the interview to the double. *Management Learning, 40*(2), 195–212. doi:10.1177/1350507608101230

Nicolini, D. (2012). *Practice theory, work, and organization: An introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Peers, F. W. (1969). *The politics of Canadian broadcasting, 1920–1951*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Raboy, M. (1990). *Missed opportunities: The story of Canada's broadcasting policy*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Raboy, M., & Taras, D. (2007). On life support: The CBC and the future of public broadcasting in Canada. In D. Taras, M. Bakardjieva, & F. Pannekoek (Eds.), *How Canadians communicate II: Media, globalization and identity* (pp. 83–103). Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press.

Rivera, L. A. (2016). *Pedigree: How elite students get elite jobs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Schatzki, T. R. (2001a). Introduction. In T. R. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina, & E. von Savigny (Eds.), *The practice turn in contemporary theory* (pp. 11–24). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Schatzki, T. R. (2001b). On sociocultural evolution by social selection. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 31*(4), 341–364. doi:10.1111/1468-5914.00164

Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *The site of the social: A philosophical exploration of the constitution of social life and change.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Schatzki, T. R. (2005). Peripheral vision: The sites of organizations. *Organization Studies, 26*(3), 465–484. doi:10.1177/0170840605050876

Sewell, W. J. (1999). The concept(s) of culture. In V. E. Bonnell & L. Hunt (Eds.), *Beyond the cultural turn: New directions in the study of society and culture* (pp. 35–61). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review, 51*(2), 273–286. doi:10.2307/2095521

Swidler, A. (2001). What anchors cultural practices. In T. R. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina, & E. von Savigny (Eds.), *The practice turn in contemporary theory* (pp. 83–101). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Swidler, A. (2003). *Talk of love: How culture matters*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Swidler, A. (2008). Comment on Stephen Vaisey's "Socrates, Skinner, and Aristotle: Three ways of thinking about culture in action." *Sociological Forum, 23*(3), 614–618. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00080.x

Trinczek, R. (2009). How to interview managers? Methodical and methodological aspects of expert interviews as a qualitative method in empirical social research. In A. Bogner, B. Littig, & S. Menz (Eds.), *Interviewing experts* (pp. 203–2016). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Usher, N. (2014). *Making news at The New York Times*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Vaisey, S. (2008). Socrates, Skinner, and Aristotle: Three ways of thinking about culture in action. *Sociological Forum, 23*(3), 603–613. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00079.x

Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and justification: A dual-process model of culture in action. *American Journal of Sociology, 114*(6), 1675–1715. doi:10.1086/597179

Velthuis, O. (2013). *Talking prices: Symbolic meanings of prices on the market for contemporary art*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Vipond, M. (1992). *Listening in: The first decade of Canadian broadcasting, 1922–1932*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Welch, D., & Warde, A. (2017). How should we understand "general understandings"? In A. Hui, T. R. Schatzki, & E. Shove (Eds.), *The nexus of practices: Connections, constellations, practitioners* (pp. 183–196). New York, NY: Routledge.