Quality in Journalism As Seen by Newspeople

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Introduction – Quality in journalism

The many studies of quality journalism made in Europe and North America alike are evidence of the definite concern surrounding this issue. These studies include Merrill's groundbreaking work on the elite press,[1] as well as studies by Durand on quality on television[2] and by Picard on the complexities of measuring quality.[3] Interest in this subject is quite keen, since quality appears to be profitable; many analyses, most of them done in the United States, show that journalistic quality can have positive economic impacts. Pertilla and Belt[4] assert that local television stations that emphasize quality attract larger and more

1. Merrill, John C., *The Elite Press: Great Newspapers of the World*, New York, Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1968.
2. Durand, Jacques, *La qualité des programmes de télévision : Concepts et mesures*, Dossiers de l'audiovisuel n° 43, Aubervilliers, La Documentation française – Institut national de l'audiovisuel, 1992.
3. Picard, Robert G., "Measuring Quality by Journalistic Activity," in Picard, Robert G. (ed.), *Measuring Media Content, Quality and Diversity: approaches and issues in content research*, Turku, Business Research and Development Centre, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, 2000, p. 97-103.
4. Partilla, Atiba and Belt, Todd, "How strong is the case for quality?", *Columbia Journalism Review*, Nov.-Dec. 2002, p. 91-95.

loyal audiences. Rosenstiel[5] for his part states that small and mid-sized newspapers that invest in their newsrooms improve their revenues. More generally, Thorson,[6] after analyzing 35 years of research on journalistic quality and its economic impacts, argues that the whole body of research seems to point in the same direction: the costs that quality involves (additional personnel and time dedicated to journalistic work, efforts to produce original content, analyses, etc.) do indeed pay off.

Moreover, these studies on the economic impacts of journalistic quality are not restricted to the so-called quality or prestige media. The researchers cited above considered the impact of quality on all media, and above all considered quality as it is defined by a majority of the industry's players (journalists and executives alike) and the general public. To spark a discussion of journalism as a whole, we shall continue in this vein, preferring to consider *quality in all forms of journalism* rather than the *journalism of quality media.*

Changing quality criteria

The practice of journalism is constantly evolving, so it is difficult to pin down the concept of journalistic quality: depending on how it is practiced, different factors shape the way it is defined. Journalism in North America has changed profoundly over the past 20 years or so. The publics and the conditions in which journalism is practiced have changed radically as a result of sweeping technological, economic and cultural change. The news media are now often owned by corporations focused on the bottom line; their audiences – and therefore their revenues – are fragmenting as a result of the exploding supply; the public's concerns are changing; all-news networks and the Internet constitute not only new competitors for the traditional news media,

5. Rosenstiel, Tom, *Good News for Editors: small, medium papers that invested in newsrooms see higher revenue*, www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=29036, 2003 (consulted January 13, 2005).
6. Thorson, Esther, *What 35 Years of Academic Research Tells Us: On news content quality, newsroom expenditures, circulation/penetration, and revenues*, www.poynter.org/content_view.asp?id=29033, 2003 (consulted January 13, 2005).

but also new sources of information – and even occasionally models – for them.

As a result, the definition of journalistic quality may change and evolve, since it varies with eras, countries and cultures. What was considered quality at the start of the 20th century was not necessarily regarded as such in 1950, and is even less likely to be so regarded today. Similarly, what French journalists consider quality journalism does not necessarily correspond to their North American colleagues' concept of it.

Given the relative nature of the concept, we deemed it important to clarify what constitutes quality journalism, here and now. To provide a current, local definition of quality journalism, we examined statements by journalists, as well as executives and managers, from Quebec's news media. We wanted to define, through interviews, what these two groups of actors mean by quality journalism, in other words, what they consider good journalism. More specifically, we are interested in subjects that journalists consider priorities, the formats for newscasts or public affairs programs they consider preferable and the type of journalism they like to see and want to see more of. As well, we examined the principles and standards underlying the practice of journalism and the objectives – large and small – that journalists adopt, as well as their models and influences.

Details of methodology

We have limited our study to journalists and executives working for newspapers and television stations, the two media identified by Quebecers as their most frequent sources of news.[7] The interviewees were selected at random from nine prominent English- and French-language generalist media in Montreal: *Le Devoir*, *Le Journal de Montréal*, *La Presse* and the *Gazette* for the

7. The proportion is 83% according to a Leger Marketing survey conducted for FPJQ (*Étude auprès de la population québécoise*, 2002).

print media, and Radio-Canada, TQS, TVA, CBC and CTV for television.[8]

The interviews lasted slightly more than an hour and were semidirected, since the exploratory nature of the research made it essential to give the interviewees free rein, within certain limitations. We conducted 66 conversations. With the francophones, we had 36 conversations with journalists and 13 conversations with executives. As for the anglophones, we had 12 conversations with journalists and five with executives.

The interviewees were selected at random from employee lists provided by the media, according to various preselection criteria. The journalists had to be employed on a full-time basis. Moreover, to obtain comparable results, certain types of journalist were eliminated, mainly highly specialized journalists, such as scientific journalists, who are not found in all the media analyzed; members of editorial boards were kept, however. In the case of television, personnel working for public affairs programs, as well as producers and newsreaders, were included in the sample. We also ensured balanced representation of men and women, as well as of all age groups.

As for the executives interviewed, they correspond to news "managers": they are, for example, news directors or editors-in-chief. The distinction between a "journalist" and an "executive" was made on a case-by-case basis for each medium: for example, an assignment editor can be considered an executive in one medium, but a journalist in another, since the designation depends on factors such as the company's hierarchical structure, as well as the person's degree of latitude and supervision of other employees.

8. The study is limited to Montreal media because they are flagship stations and newspapers that have an influence on most regional media and even other types of medium, such as radio and magazines. Moreover, their newsrooms have a much larger staff than those of the regional media. Global was excluded because its Montreal newsroom is too small for the purposes of this study.

Confidentiality of interviewees

To ensure confidentiality, the interviewees are identified only by a number and a prefix: "t" is used for those from television and "p" for those from the print media.[9] So that the reader can identify the executives, their identifying number is preceded by the letter "E." Thus:

- Interviewees 1 to 18 correspond to francophone television journalists and are identified as "1t," "2t," etc.;
- Interviewees 19 to 36 correspond to francophone journalists from the print media are identified as "19p," "20p," etc.;
- Interviewees 37 to 43 correspond to television executives and are identified as "E37t," "E38t," etc.;
- Interviewees 44 to 49 correspond to executives from the print media and are identified as "E44p," "E45p," etc.

Moreover, to ensure the confidentiality of the anglophone interviewees, they are not identified by the type of medium – television or print media – that employs them; we merely distinguish between executives and journalists. Since the journalists from the *Gazette* are the only anglophone journalists from the print media, they might be easy to identify if their employer were given, which we obviously want to avoid. The same holds true for the executives interviewed, since the number of anglophone executives in the Montreal media is limited. Thus:

- Interviewees 50 to 61 correspond to anglophone journalists and are identified as "50," "51," etc.
- Interviewees 62 to 66 correspond to anglophone executives and are identified as "E62," "E63," etc.

9. To ensure the confidentiality of the interviewees more effectively, only the masculine is used in the text.

1

General comments

We shall begin our presentation of the findings with a few general comments. First, we should like to point out several difficulties encountered in the analysis of the survey information. We shall see that it proved difficult for the journalists and the executives to discuss their concept of good journalism, and that, generally speaking, their statements on quality are quite diverse. It soon became apparent that media practitioners do not have a clear idea of journalistic quality, and that their concerns in this regard, without necessarily being contradictory, often involve very different issues. That is already an interesting finding, but we shall have to measure its ins and outs, define the related issues and then see how to remedy this analytical difficulty. We shall now describe this process.

1.1 Journalists' difficulty in discussing their field

Generally speaking, journalists and executives alike had difficulty discussing their field. They had trouble determining the subjects they consider preferable, talking about their influences or models and describing the principles they strive to abide by. "I'm not very self-reflective"[52] said one journalist, echoing the opinion expressed by many colleagues. In fact, a number of the journalists had difficulty going beyond a simple description of their daily work in their answers. The situation is quite normal:

journalism relies on *savoir-faire*, a practice that is highly internalized and difficult for its practitioners to objectify, and therefore difficult to describe.

It is hard for journalists to step back from their daily work, since the actions they take are instinctive, and they regard them as natural. "The sum of the knowledge acquired"(2t) by journalists, their experience, "news judgment,"(53) flair and "instinct"(E48p) are so important in their daily work that they have the impression they don't select the subjects they cover: they discern so well what is important in the flow of news that subjects worthy of coverage impose themselves. "As a result of doing it naturally," said one journalist, "we don't break a decision down into its parts."(2t)[1] Similarly, an executive said that the selection of subjects covered depends on "highly subjective judgment. We don't have a grid, […] written standards that say a certain subject is important." (E45p) Journalists handle news instinctively, choosing the point of view they think is best, or "the right angle."(50) In brief, for the journalists and the executives interviewed, "there is no formula for good reporting"(E40t) and there are no clear rules that can be put into words and communicated to observers of journalism.

The statements made by the journalists and the executives were often limited to what they themselves recognize as obvious. Essentially, journalistic quality could be summed up as "making what is important interesting." Quality journalism must also be thorough and "get to the bottom of things"(E48p) without "cutting corners."(18t) It must be based on accurate, verified information, "present things in a way that is simple but not simplistic,"(26p) "speak plainly but intelligently"(E40t) in clear, intelligible language with "well-structured sentences"(7t) and generally do so in a way that is respectful of sources and honest toward the public. At the same time, quality journalism must emphasize news that serves the public interest, any information that "deserves" to be news, that is "newsworthy" and that the public is entitled to have.

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1. The same journalist added, "Rarely do we have to choose between two subjects and eliminate one of them: the pace means we decide pretty quickly."(2t) Yet the choices are theoretically almost unlimited. Journalists' instinctive selection criteria are apparently quite widespread: "Experience shows that, without talking to one another, the media often choose the same leads." (2t)

All these principles, rules and prescriptions are shared unanimously: no journalist or executive argued that good information can be incomplete, based on hearsay, approximate, dishonest or poorly expressed. The consensus among journalists and executives regarding "the obvious" provides a definition of journalistic quality, but its scope is quite restricted and not especially helpful to the observer. In fact, the principles, rules and prescriptions that journalists use most often to describe quality journalism are not really useful except to the initiated: although they ring bells in a newsroom and are obvious to journalists, and even to observers of journalism, it appears to be difficult, for journalists as for us, to explain in more detail other than tautologically, by explaining, for example, that "not cutting corners" means you have to "be thorough" and "get to the bottom of things."

In addition, as confirmation of their difficulty in defining journalistic quality, it was almost impossible for the journalists and the executives to determine the boundaries of quality, which, for example, must make room for catchy elements that interest the public, but without being too catchy. News has to be "punchy without being sensationalist,"(32p) said one journalist, although he could not identify exactly where sensationalism starts.

This last example is a fine illustration of the situation of journalists, who have to take into account the technical constraints inherent to their jobs, while trying to satisfy their personal and professional aspirations, as well as the public's desires. Given the nature of their business, journalists have to be both interesting and relevant. They have to convey often-complex information while holding the public's attention; they usually have to provide coverage that is short but in-depth, and incisive, but not too incisive. In the absence of clearly defined boundaries, journalists say they have to defend the public interest, without having the public consider them upholders of the law or lawyers whose services can be had free of charge. They must also detach themselves from events while enabling the public to experience the atmosphere of the place and the emotions of the people involved. In short, journalists need strong versatility and a keen sense of balance. In our opinion, journalistic quality may be located in the very small space where all these aspects come together.

So it seems journalists are generally unable to provide their recipes, even though they manage to cook a meal each day. In this report, we therefore cannot expect them to update their recipes for creating quality or to provide a clear definition summarizing in a few points what journalistic quality is for practitioners of journalism. Instead, we discuss certain elements we consider especially relevant, as well as journalists' thoughts and opinions about journalistic quality, but also their concerns.

We should also point out that, although the journalists have trouble talking about journalistic quality, we must not conclude they do not believe in it or are unconcerned by it. On the contrary, we should like to make it clear from the outset that the journalists believe in and aspire to quality journalism; they believe all journalism *must* be a quality product. By even though all the journalists believe in quality journalism, virtually each has his own concept of it. The objectives of some are more modest than those of others, one journalist's "good story" is "useless" to another and each sets the quality bar at the height he deems appropriate.

1.2 Diverse opinions affected by many variables

The discussion of journalistic quality, beyond the common core we have described, remains generally diverse: the journalists rarely speak in a single voice when they talk about quality journalism. For example, all agreed that quality journalism must emphasize news serving the public interest, but none gave the same definition of the public interest. Considered as a whole, the statements made by the journalists sometimes appear downright contradictory: some abhor *faits divers*[2] while others consider them essential; some consider "today's" journalism futile and irrelevant in comparison with "the old days," which makes others smile, since they believe current journalistic practices are an

2. There is no simple English translation of *faits divers*. The term refers to short news items about crime, accidents, scandals, oddities, etc., that are generally considered frivolous or non-serious news. Still, some events covered as *faits divers* (spousal abuse, for example, or sexual assault) may well involve important social issues. Thus we shall use the French expression *faits divers* throughout the paper.

improvement over the old ones; some laud the journalism practiced in English-speaking Canada for its thoroughness and objectivity, whereas others consider it more biased than the journalism coming out of French-speaking Quebec.

These diverging opinions are due to a number of variables. First, there are different types of journalist, each with specific concerns. It is normal that generalists and those who specialize in legal, political or economic matters, for example, will make statements based on concerns or constraints specific to their area and that their opinions will diverge. Similarly, being an anchor, a columnist or an assignment editor shapes one's attitude toward the practice of journalism.

More broadly, the type of medium, namely the print media or television in the case of this study, also has a definite influence on several aspects of the interviewees' concept of quality journalism: the journalists' statements naturally reflect the various technical and material constraints specific to each medium. Most of the television reporters are generalists who describe themselves as "firefighters"(14t) who rush from one event to the next, going wherever their assignment editors send them. On a daily basis, these journalists do not really have any choice about the events they cover. It is therefore understandable that they place less importance on the criteria used to select the news. That does not mean that the television reporters don't care about news selection, or that the assignment editors don't care about how it is covered. Rather, it simply means that it is normal and understandable that television reporters have less to say about news selection than an assignment editor or a news editor. Of the many disparities related to the constraints of practicing journalism, we are especially interested in those pertaining to the type of medium; in presenting the various aspects of journalistic quality discussed by the journalists, we shall point out those pertaining specifically to television journalism or print journalism.

Still, working for a specific news organization (TQS, TVA, *Le Devoir*, *Le Journal de Montréal*, etc.) does not really seem to influence the journalists' comments (for example, the comments made by the journalist from *Le Devoir* were not very different from those of the journalist from *Le Journal de Montréal*). The situation is different, however, for the executives – a matter we

shall return to. We did not observe that language group, age or experience had any significant effect on the interviewees' comments. We must point out, however, that the purpose of our research was not to do a comparative analysis, namely to discern distinctions between anglophones and francophones, or between journalists from the various media companies, since the size of the samples does not permit such analysis. Thus the fact that we did not observe such differences in our research does not mean they do not exist.[3]

What the journalists' comments do show is a clear distinction between two opposing concepts of journalism, namely their positive or negative perception of the changes currently affecting the practice of their profession, which we referred to in the introduction to this report. Thus, on the part of the journalists, there is an alignment of, or a discrepancy between, their concept of what journalism should be and the journalism that they actually practice. In this report, we qualify as "traditionalists" those journalists who believe that journalism as it is now practiced is a failure, and as "innovators" those who believe journalism's new practices are superior to the old ones.

It should be noted that the terms "traditionalist" and "innovator" are used without any pejorative or approving connotations. Moreover, these two types are part of an interpretive approach rather than a research finding. The innovator-traditionalist typology is based on the work of Jean Charron and Jean de Bonville

3. Other studies, however, arrive at different conclusions on other aspects of the practice of journalism (for instance, with respect to Canada, see David Pritchard and Florian Sauvageau, *Les journalistes canadiens : un portrait de fin de siècle*. Quebec City, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1999).
Moreover, to ensure confidentiality, we could not have drawn comparisons between the journalists and the executives from the various media companies. To eliminate self-censorship as much as possible, we assured the journalists that they would be quoted only as journalists or executives from a print medium or television, and not as a journalist from TVA, TQS, etc.; quotations that would have made it possible to identify the person's medium have been excluded or changed to ensure confidentiality. Moreover, the most notable differences we could have emphasized would have created problems related to specific individuals or companies that we would have had to name to ensure a proper understanding.

on changes in journalism.[4] We don't claim to have discovered these two trends. They are used here to dissect and analyze the journalists' comments. Before we undertake this analysis, is important to define what is meant by "innovator" and "traditionalist," since these terms will generally guide the analysis.

We should state at the outset that the use of a typology does not imply that each journalist can be labelled with certainty and definitively. In fact, most of them are *generally speaking* innovators or traditionalists, but a journalist who is generally traditionalist may *occasionally* sound like an innovator *and* vice versa. The purpose of any typology is precisely to amplify trends, and not to correspond faithfully and exactly to reality. The innovator and traditionalist categories constitute the two extremes of an axis, and we find the overwhelming majority of the interviewees somewhere *between* these extremes, on a continuous axis, rather than in two radically opposed camps. To point up the differences, we shall over-represent certain journalists and executives who illustrate more clearly than the others the innovator and traditionalist categories. As a result, some interviewees are quoted more often than the others.[5]

1.3 The innovator-traditionalist axis

In the eyes of the traditionalist journalists, today's journalism is superficial, emphasizes form over substance and too often takes on the trappings of entertainment. A television journalist opined that "television journalism is no longer news; it has become a news show."(11t) The traditionalists also condemn the excessive use of *faits divers* and sentimentality in the news media. One traditionalist dismissed *faits divers* as "mere appetizers,"(14t)

4. Regarding the typology, see "*Le paradigme du journalisme de communication : essai de définition,*" *Communication*, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 60-62.
5. Moreover, certain interviewees are more talkative than others and some express more clearly or concisely what many others think but express with less facility. For demonstration purposes, and to ensure clarity and concision, we tend to quote the more talkative and concise interviewees. But the reader should not conclude that this report is based on the opinions of only a few individuals. Rather, it uses statements that are clearly representative of all the interviewees or of the group of interviewees as a whole.

deplored the "exploitation of human drama in the newscasts of private television stations"(14t) and concluded that "emotion and human interest are baloney."(14t) Another traditionalist journalist believes that newscasts are half made up of "eye-catching or superficial"(3t) subjects that exploit the "trendy flavour-of-the-month"(3t) instead of "fundamental issues."(3t) Another deplores that his bosses considered the landing of the space shuttle, for example, "as being the most important and the sexiest story of the day."(54)

The traditionalists believe journalism has many important social responsibilities. They often refer to the fourth estate when talking about journalistic quality and they give pride of place to political journalism. The tone of their comments is often alarmist, since they believe there is an urgent need to save journalism, and at the same time to preserve the democratic health of our society. The most traditionalist see things as black and white: one of them states that one cannot have journalism "of quality"(14t) and journalism of "lesser quality"(14t) since "journalism has to be of quality. If there is no quality, there's no journalism, just mercantilism [...], it's yellow journalism, spin or public relations, but it's not journalism."(14t) But, despite their negative assessment of the new journalistic practices, the traditionalists do not want to go back to the 1950s, not wanting "to be boring," to use their expression.

In contrast, the innovative journalists are enthusiastic about the most recent developments in their business. Unlike the traditionalists, they believe that journalism now serves the public interest better than it did "before." They believe the older ways of presenting the news are austere and uninteresting for most of the public and are ultimately reserved for a certain elite. The innovators are more likely than the traditionalists to accept the requirements of technology and they argue that there are different ways of practicing journalism, each adapted to the medium in question.

Thus the innovators who work in television are not merely involved in journalism, but are also involved more broadly in

"television."[6] "The unfortunate reality with television is it's not just about the news. You're also a performer. […] It's something journalism students will fight. They don't want to feel that they're giving in to what they consider to be, I guess, the superficialities of the medium. But it's just a reality. If my hair is out of place, it's gonna distract people from what I say."(61)

According to the innovators, it is up to journalism to adapt to the specific requirements of the different media, since, without them, journalism's message cannot reach the public. The innovators are also more willing than the traditionalists to accept the economic constraints that are part of the media universe: they approve of attempts to increase circulation or audience share with an "eye-catching" visual presentation, a "jazzy" writing style or a human-interest angle, provided that it enables them to reach a broader audience and therefore to do a better job for more people. The most traditionalist journalists often consider such practices subservience to commercialism. On television, the "news industry" aspect is not necessarily as distasteful to the innovators: one journalist said, albeit without much enthusiasm, "McDonalds turns out hamburgers; we turn out news."(15t)

At the same time, the innovators are much more appreciative of the performance aspect of their work and are more willing than the traditionalists to condone the celebrity that goes along with their profession: such conditions simply go hand-in-hand with the job. Television journalism, according to one participant, "is also a matter of ego – there's no getting around it –, otherwise we'd be construction workers or lawyers."(17t) The innovators look kindly on the marriage of information and entertainment, at least the practice of lightening the presentation of the news to make its content "tolerable." One journalist argued that, because "people have less and less time to entertain themselves and inform themselves, they want to do both at once. But it isn't always possible. It depends on the subject. Programs like *Enjeux* and *JE* [are] not only informative, but they're also entertaining

6. The strongest innovators would almost say that they are involved in television first and journalism second. One journalist said of his newscast, "We do a television program above all."(9t)

[in the sense that they spark viewers' interest, not that they make them laugh]."(19p)[7]

The executives, who tend to have more of an innovative attitude than the average innovator journalist, especially in the case of television, take this reasoning even further. One of the television executives said: "[a newscast] is a show and it will always be a show."(E41t) Similarly, another television executive said: "I'm talking about a show, not a newscast, because that's really the way I see it, because you have to really interest people, captivate them."(E37t) A television journalist made a similar comment: "We do television! The most sincere people will tell you: 'It's still a show.' When I hear that, it doesn't shock me; I think it's true."(9t) Another stressed the need to cover the most important stories, but added that to produce good journalism is "also to have some fun. This is not Soviet television: we call our program a 'show' for a reason. [It has] entertainment value too."(E63)

Generally speaking, the innovative journalists are more conciliatory than their traditionalist colleagues when it comes to the commercial requirements of the practice of journalism. In fact, because the innovators consider the various constraints inevitable, they tend to accept them more willingly. Thus, although the traditionalists generally denounce the fact that a lack of resources or means obliges them to practice mediocre journalism, the innovators are more inclined to be flexible and to consider such working conditions part of the normal scheme of things, even though they would prefer better and more advantageous conditions. As one innovator put it: "I have everything. It's up to me to do the job with the tools I'm given." (30p)

On the traditionalist-innovator axis, it should be noted that the journalists' comments generally place them closer to the innovator end than to the traditionalist end, without placing them at its extreme. Thus most of the journalists we interviewed are "moderate" innovators, and we shall be examining their comments above all in this report. This moderately innovative stance will be shaded and clarified by the comments of the

7. We shall occasionally summarize between brackets interview segments that are too long to be reproduced verbatim; occasionally, the passages between brackets also ensure the participants' confidentiality.

traditionalists, which makes it possible to define it by its opposite, and by those of the staunchest innovators, which amplify and provide a better understanding of specific traits. Unless otherwise stated, when we talk about journalists, we mean "moderate innovators."

We must also point out that the comments made by the group we qualify as innovators do not in all respects constitute a strictly innovative or new attitude toward journalism. Thus, if, as we have stated, we present above all the comments of a majority that is generally innovative in its outlook, we must not be surprised that these interviewees make statements that have long been made about journalism. Still, the degree to which the innovative majority embraces principles and rules that are not especially new perhaps tends to be more pronounced than it was "before." In other words, the innovators take even further the so-called old principles of journalism, such as the importance of the image on television or the importance of affecting the public.[8]

1.4 News media executives

The executives we interviewed almost all fall into the innovator camp, and more markedly so than the journalists as a whole. In fact, the executives' comments on quality most often tried to legitimize the new journalistic practices, as the executives defended their interests. Many of the executives made comments one would expect from any business executive: they talked about markets, costs and strategies, and often referred to their news-

8. We should also reiterate, as we have already seen, that working for a specific company, as well as age or experience, does not seem to have a clear influence on the journalists' comments. In our sample, the "dyed-in-the-wool" traditionalists are not found only at Radio-Canada and *Le Devoir*, and the innovators are not found exclusively at TQS and *Le Journal de Montréal*, even though these media tend to be in the traditionalist and innovator camps, respectively. Moreover, the traditionalists are not necessarily the oldest or the most experienced journalists, and the innovators are not all young. But, once again, the relatively small size of the sample means we cannot state that there is no correlation; we are simply saying that the reader must not assume that the traditionalists we quote are "old" journalists from *Le Devoir*, for instance, and that the comments of the innovators were made by "young" journalists from TQS.

paper or newscast as a product. While this entrepreneurial attitude can be considered an interesting finding of our study, it presents a major inconvenience as regards the purpose of the study. In protecting their interests and legitimizing their product, the executives believe everything their medium does is of the utmost quality. When asked about the characteristics of good journalism, the executives first described how their newsroom operates and then said that the news it produced was of very high quality. In many cases, we could almost have described the journalism practiced by TQS, SRC, *Le Devoir*, etc. to determine the opinion of their executives on quality journalism.

It is also interesting to note that the executives, more so than the journalists, believe that the Quebec media, including their competitor(s), are doing an excellent job, in that each fulfills a specific mandate that sets it apart. In fact, the executives have almost nothing negative to say about their own companies or the work of the other companies, and are quite uncritical of the news disseminated in Quebec. In this sense, the attitude of the executives is decidedly in the innovator camp: they describe new ways of doing things, while legitimizing them. And since the innovators make up the majority of the sample, the journalists and their bosses are rarely in profound disagreement. The executives' comments usually shed light on or complemented those of the journalists, but did not contradict them.[9]

So we cannot say that, on the one hand, we have the executives' comments and, on the other hand, the journalists' comments. Rather, we have comments by the traditionalists opposing those of the innovators, be they journalists or executives. As a result, we shall consider the comments of the innovator journalists and executives to be a cohesive whole. But that does not mean that the two groups are in complete agreement; as we have stated, the dichotomy is not between journalists and bosses but between innovators and traditionalists. Still, in the report, we shall point out a few isolated but significant differences between

9. Certain executives, however, hold opinions similar to those of the journalists. They are the executives who are lower in the hierarchy. In addition, even though all the executives decidedly consider themselves journalists, it did not seem to us that the journalists consider the executives as such, although we did not address this matter directly.

the innovative journalists and executives. We must also bear in mind that the executives are more innovative in their outlook than the average journalist. The distinctions we draw regarding the innovators will therefore be especially valid for the executives.

1.5 The relative nature of quality: quality that cannot be divorced from its context

As we have already pointed out, practitioners of journalism find it difficult to discuss their work and to describe an article or report of typical quality. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the innovators, especially, have very few strict criteria with which to determine quality, since they do not see quality as an absolute, universal value: on the contrary, their comments reveal a definite relativism in the definition of journalistic quality.

For example, they assert that certain types of news are appropriate for a lunchtime newscast, others are more appropriate for a dinner-hour newscast and still others for the late news. A lunchtime newscast, according to one journalist, is more appropriate than the late news for "*Paris Match*-type" stories.(9t) But the late newscast isn't just for the most serious events; in fact, it is no longer regarded as a summary of the day's most important events: "That no longer exists. We don't summarize anymore, because everything is constantly changing. Nothing stops."(E42t) The late-night newscast, like the others, picks up where the previous newscast left off.

The television innovators see themselves more broadly as working in a "news universe,"(E43t) where some stories are more suitable for TVA, others are "TQS-type" news and still others are more "for Radio-Canada," etc. The same logic seems to apply to the various newspapers, as one journalist showed by comparing Montreal's two large generalist dailies, *La Presse* and *Le Journal de Montréal*:

> The quality varies. […] *Le Journal de Montréal* does very good work, but with a different mission; it zeroes in on different news. So, it depends on what you're looking for. There are people who don't like to read *La Presse*: they find it "boring."

> They'll tell you *Le Journal de Montréal* is better. It's relative. […] *Le Journal de Montréal*, like *La Presse*, is informative, [but] it aims for information that is more popular or even populist. […] And when they cover general news and *faits divers*, they do it much better than *La Presse*. They do much better work because they're good at it: it's their mission. It's also a matter of what people want to read. If people didn't read *Le Journal de Montréal*, it wouldn't keep doing what it does. Ultimately, all the media are businesses whose purpose is to make money. […] If people aren't reading you, then you have to change.(29p)

Even more broadly, television and the print media do not necessarily cover the same terrain; rather, they complement each other. For many, the role of television is to make the public aware of events quickly, whereas the print media are meant to cover in greater depth the news reported by television and other sources.[10] One television executive said the strength of the print media lies in its "analysis"(E37t) and ability to "delve deeper into the news"(E37t) and in so doing justified the fact that his network "doesn't do lengthy analysis."(E37t)

Conversely, in emphasizing that "TV complements the print media,"(E41t) another television executive stressed that "TV can [also] cover a story that was already in the newspaper that morning; the important thing is to give it television treatment."(E41t) He added, "It's the newspaper's job to provide the maximum amount of information. As for me, I provide colour, […] but without being too dramatic (with blood and severed heads)."(E41t) One interviewee spoke at length about the complementary nature of the print media and television:

> People often say, "Television is sensationalist." Of course, it's sensationalist. The very principle of TV is to be sensationalist. It's all about the image. […] Television is terribly powerful because we show things: people can form an idea quickly,

10. Here again, the comments made by the innovators are not new: the complementary nature of the various media was not discovered yesterday. The traditionalists, moreover, would not contradict the general spirit of this comment. The innovators' logic, however, would prefer a more systematic difference between the mandates of print and television.

> just from one image. And it isn't true that TV has to do what newspapers do. TV isn't there to provide in-depth news; that's what newspapers are for. If you really want to know the ins and outs of a story, you read the paper, [you don't watch] TV. The purpose of television, I'd say, is to provide an overview of what's going on. And you can be sure that TV will emphasize visual stories, because that's the very basis of what it does, that's the medium: we start from the image. Obviously, television is less interested in press conferences, because a press conference is just plain boring: you have people sitting behind a table, and the only image you can show is a reaction shot, with the camera shooting them from the side, and then it goes behind the person who's talking and films the cameras filming the press conference. Press conferences are deadly dull. So it's normal that we don't cover the same things as newspapers or radio. And that's good […]. People who are interested in a story that they've seen on TV can just wait until the next day and read the newspaper for the details and the sidelines of the story. It's normal, because they have more time to explain things: it's easy when you explain something for the reader to read it, to think about it, to read the same sentence twice. On TV, you can't do that. On TV you have a minute and 45 seconds to summarize the story. Essentially, it's a summary of the story.(1t)

Television therefore discards news for which it has no pictures: "[without pictures] that might be a great story for the newspapers, but that's not for TV."(52) It also avoids "news that is too complicated for TV."(6t) In both cases, the decision to cast aside certain subjects is based on the assumption that the print media will always take over. Increasingly, however, the print media-television tag team must take into account another player: the Internet, which confuses the issue somewhat. As a result, even the television journalists also feel the need to provide more than the bare facts. We shall look at this matter when we discuss the "value added" to the news.

Journalistic quality has never been conceived of or considered in a vacuum: journalists and their bosses position themselves in a news universe, constantly taking into account the multiplicity of media and their specific traits. In this spirit, one journalist

said, "At the end of the day, I think that, collectively, the media are trying to do a good job of informing the reader in their specific niche. […] In my opinion, there isn't *one* medium, there are *many*, from many categories, for many publics."(29p)

In other words, in the minds of the innovators, the different television stations and the different newspapers do not compete with one another: instead, the various media form a "complementary universe,"(E43t) to use the words of one executive. Ultimately, quality news is found "in the multiplicity of news sources."(36p) "I can't do it alone. At *La Presse*, they can't do it alone. […] Radio-Canada can't do it alone. What is important is that everyone do his part. […] Diversity and multiplicity will get us closest to the kind of news that is capable of serving democracy. Because, ultimately, that's what we're striving to do."(36p)

This relativism explains the difficulty that the journalists generally have when they try to define quality journalism. The definition of quality is plural: rather than *one* universal type of quality, there are *various* types. More specifically, the definition of journalistic quality is *circumstantial*: the various types of quality depend on the type of medium (television, print media or the Internet), or the "personality"(E47p) or the "brand"(17t) of each news organization; they also depend on the various publics, as well as the viewing conditions, which favour the late news over earlier news, since people watch the earlier newscast while preparing or eating dinner. Thus some news is more suitable for noontime, while other news is more appropriate for the late evening; some news is better suited to TQS while other news is more suited to Radio-Canada; similarly, some news is better covered by the print media than by television; one subject may be ideal for the consumer section of a newspaper, but not the first section.

This relativism in the definition of quality does not mean that political news is reserved for *Le Devoir* or *Le téléjournal* at the end of the evening, or conversely that *faits divers* are the province of *TVA midi* or *Le Journal de Montréal*. Far from it: not everything depends on the type of medium or when the news is disseminated. There is no golden rule. We shall see that many other factors determine news quality in parallel – and often more significantly. But it is important to bear in mind that journalists

and executives work in an environment where the media are numerous, where the supply of information is exploding and where each, within this diversity, has its strengths and weaknesses.

As a logical continuation of this comprehensive view of the media system, journalists are always mindful of the competitive and, more broadly, the economic aspect of their work. In fact, the journalists, and obviously the executives even more so, are fully aware of the structural and fundamental nature of the business aspect of what they do: they work for media *businesses*, whose ratings, circulation and advertising revenues are vital. The survival of the large news media in their current form is not guaranteed over the long term – or even the medium term –, precisely because nothing assures their financial survival.

Finally, it should be noted that the relativist concept of quality is generally held by the innovators: the more a journalist is a traditionalist, the more he rejects it and, conversely, the more he defines quality with criteria that are firm, specific and even inflexible. Above all, the criteria used by the traditionalists to define quality are universal: they apply uniformly to all news and all media. Thus, to a traditionalist, an important piece of news is important in and of itself, regardless of the time of the newscast that covers it, regardless of the network or the newspaper that conveys it, regardless of whether it is in the print media or on television. The traditionalists tend to say, for example, that consumer matters and *faits divers* are generally poor subjects, and that newspapers and newscasts should limit them. That leads us to specify the traditionalist concept of quality news and use it to define more precisely that of the innovators.

2

The kind of news that ensures quality journalism

The matter of quality journalism necessarily requires a definition of news that can be deemed to be of quality, news that is considered useful, relevant and preferable to other news. In this respect, as we shall see, the answer is far from easy to pin down from the journalists' comments, since the usual categories, such as "political news" or "international news," are not very helpful. Indeed, for the journalists these types of news are not *a priori* representative of quality: political news can be good or mediocre, just as *faits divers* can be good or mediocre. Moreover, political news is not necessarily intrinsically better than *faits divers*. In fact, to determine the value of a piece of news, the journalists say that quality news has to serve the "public interest," or that it must "affect" the public in one way or another, or that it must have an "impact" on it (or ideally all three at once). Still, the traditionalists, as we shall see, do not quite share this opinion.

2.1 News quality and "hardness": equivalent concepts?

Generally speaking, the traditionalists believe that news concerning, for instance, parliamentary debates has greater value than news on the lives of celebrities from the world of entertainment. Journalists have traditionally distinguished between hard

news and soft news. Hard news includes political, economic and social news, which concerns the functioning of society as a whole, from the macroscopic point of view, as opposed to soft news, which includes *faits divers*, arts and entertainment, sports, etc.

According to this concept of quality, politicians' speeches, the price of oil and conflicts in the Middle East constitute priority news. Conversely, highway accidents, fires, car thefts and reviews of stage shows appear to be less essential news and a lesser priority, and therefore should be saved for the end of the newscast or the last pages of the newspaper.

As a general rule – but not without reservations, it should be stressed – the traditionalists espouse the principle of the primacy of hard news over soft news: to them, the quality of a piece of news depends on its hardness. They are partial to "important social topics (health care, education, the ageing of the population, poverty and housing)"(14t) and political and economic news in general. The traditionalists' favourite media confirm this predilection: the PBS program *Frontline*, the *New Yorker*, the *Financial Times* and the *New York Times* all tend to emphasize news that is generally harder than that of the other news media. Moreover, the traditionalists' disdain for *faits divers* and utilitarian news confirms their predilection for hard news: one traditionalist said he was "disgusted"(14t) by television and its "junk information"(14t) and "news-appetizers approach."(14t)

The innovators do not share the concept of journalistic quality espoused by the traditionalists. But the innovative concept of quality journalism is not the reverse of the traditionalist concept: the innovators have not replaced the traditionalist concept with its opposite, preferring soft news to hard news. In fact, the innovators simply do not use news categories when they talk about quality.

2.2 The end of hard news … and soft news

The innovator journalists and the executives do not categorize quality news: they do not say that political news is good and represents quality, and that *faits divers* are bad and don't represent quality. Political news and *faits divers* both have the potential

to be quality news: there is no bias for either category. A *fait divers* can have value that is equal to or greater than that of business or political news. As one journalist put it: "a good story […] can be a *fait divers*, politics, business, health. It can really be any subject, it's just that it's something that stirs things up [and that may improve society]."(10t)

In other words, according to the innovators, categories such as political, business and social news aren't necessarily good, as is normally the case for the traditionalists; they are only *potentially* good. The same logic prevails when it comes to *faits divers* and cultural news, which may or may not be of quality. Quality journalism is therefore not restricted to a specific type of news: it is neither inherently hard nor soft, but potentially involves both types of news.[1]

Ultimately, the innovative concept of journalism renders moot the traditional distinction between hard and soft news: the journalists simply believe there is "good" news and "bad" news, without needing other, more specific categories to determine the value of a piece of news. For some, categorizing news is more or less necessary: "I find the expression '*fait divers*' to be a poor expression," said one journalist. "I think we should talk about whether news is in the public interest or not: is there public-interest news or [isn't there]? Take, for instance, a case of spousal violence: it's of public interest. It's a very important social phenomenon. It's an epidemic. There are many battered women in Quebec, perhaps more than before."(35p) Similarly, an executive asserted that "quality news can be international, national, provincial, regional or municipal."(E43t) National or international news isn't of better quality than local news, and quality journalism

1. The description of the blog of journalist Marie-Claude Lortie of *La Presse* speaks volumes. She writes [translation]:
"I'm a girl who loves to talk about the latest trend in shoes as much as women judges on the Supreme Court.
"What will I do with this blog? If you want to share recipes, that's fine. Or good places to shop, that's also fine. But you can also expect me to comment on the crisis in health care or the under-representation of women in politics. And you can count on me to talk about hair-coloring problems and the crisis in the Middle East, in the same conversation. (http://blogues.cyberpresse.ca/lortie/?p=6, consulted Thursday, May 10, 2007)

therefore does not necessarily mean national or international news; there is no priority or necessity in this area.

Thus, for the innovators, there is no ratio of news types to be respected. It is not necessary, for example, to present a minimum amount of international news or business news, or more political news than *faits divers*. Similarly, it is not necessary to present a certain type of news first and another type second, with international news coming before local news, for instance. Quality journalism, for most of the journalists, is that which presents "good stories." Ultimately, it matters very little whether the stories are soft or hard, whether they involve a *fait divers* or a political event, whether they come from inside or outside the country. But what determines the potential quality of news for the journalists, from the innovator standpoint? We shall answer this question first by returning to the concept of public interest. Quality news is necessarily news in the public interest, according to the innovators and the traditionalists alike. The definition of public interest, however, varies considerably from the one group to the other.

2.3 News on public interest topics

The concept of public interest is as frequent as it is vague in the journalists' comments: almost all the journalists use it, but each defines it differently. Most of the journalists, innovators and traditionalists alike, have difficulty defining it and, when they manage to do so, their definitions are rarely explicit. The public interest is "what is important for the public,"(E49p) what is "important to report in the public debate,"(2t) what "the public should know [and] what can serve the public,"(E48p) "what helps to understand the news,"(24p) "what is new and teaches people something,"(12t) what affects public figures(27p) and "something [...] that contributes to progress and provides food for thought."(22p)

Generally speaking, we can say that, for the traditionalists and the innovators alike, news in the public interest is grist for the mill, which contributes to discussion and makes a significant and useful contribution to public life. It is "a subject that will change things and provoke discussion and debate."(35p) Under-

stood in this way, news in the public interest is the opposite of news that is inconsequential: drug use by a Cabinet minister, for example, is news of public interest, whereas drug use by an entertainer is not.

For the traditionalists, the definition of public interest relates more or less directly to that of hard news, which we have already discussed; public interest therefore involves public affairs and society as a whole, rather than individuals or individual interests. The range of what can be in the public interest is, however, much broader for the innovators. For example, one journalist believes that a subject of public interest is just as much something "that reflects an important trend in society"(19p) as it is a subject that "will have a direct impact on people's daily lives,"(19p) that "makes people think,(19p) or that deals with "public bodies or governments (it's important to sort of be the watchdogs of those people)"(19p) or public funds.(19p) According to the same journalist – and this is what makes him an innovator, because a traditionalist would not make such comments – a subject of public interest

> may also not seem important: arts and entertainment, for example. Arts and entertainment are of public interest, in that they're important to people. Performers are important to people, just as hockey players are important to people. They're often our heroes, our sources of inspiration, people we often identify with. In this sense, I feel that talking about them serves the public interest: it contributes tremendously to society, to social morale and social well-being.(19p)

What is central to the innovators' definition of public interest is in fact *the public* itself, far more than the *public arena* or *public affairs*. Thus the interest *of* the public is at stake for the innovators and what is in *its* interest, as the public defines it. Moreover, what is of interest for the public is sometimes reduced, in the journalists' minds, to what is of interest for a specific group, namely the audience of a single station or the readers of a single newspaper.

One executive said that what determines the importance of a piece of news is "not the public interest but the public's interest, namely 'what do our readers want to know?'"(E49p) According to the same reasoning, the public interest may concern only a

portion of the population: it can be a "small public interest"(4t) as opposed to a "large public interest"(4t) that concerns the entire population. The innovators also sometimes define the public interest as the public's interests, namely what is of interest or concern to people. One executive stressed the importance of being "attuned to what is of concern to people. For example, three or four years ago, we didn't pay much attention to [the practice of wearing a kirpan at school], until our readers let us know it was important to them."(E45p) [2] "We offer responses to people's concerns," (E43t) said one executive.

Still, the innovative journalists, like the traditionalists, believe that changes in interest rates, election campaigns and the latest government budgets are in the public interest: they are automatically covered "because [they] affect everyone."(2t) But such events are not always of immediate interest to the public: it's up to the journalist to show the public how these events affect them, how they are involved in them, why it is in their interest to know this news. Journalists must always ensure that the connection between the events and the public is clear; they must show how this public-interest news "affects [people's] daily life."(15t) One journalist said: "I like people who can take big subjects and bring them to you, to show you how they can affect your daily life, because that's always the key thing. You can go on all you want about Jean Charest's new energy policy, but if you can't tell your readers how it will affect them, it's just a big, cold, impersonal subject they won't be interested in."(31p)

In the same vein, discussing the concept of getting the public interested in subjects that don't necessarily attract them right away, one journalist recounted how he had asked his boss: "Why don't we cover more city council meetings; why don't we go to city hall? He told me: 'Because it's boring, visually speaking it's boring.' I admit that a room full of people who talk for four or

2. For some, the public interest can even go hand in hand with the public's curiosity, if not voyeurism. One journalist believes that people are just as interested in health, education, money and sex: "[w]hat interests people in the Norbourg affair isn't the financial scandal, it's how Vincent Lacroix managed to scam everybody."(17t) In these cases, however, even if the journalists include such examples in the concept of public interest, they don't argue that they represent quality.

five hours isn't always interesting, but the strength of journalism is precisely to make it interesting and to go out and find what's essential."(10t) One executive commented: "We ask why the public is becoming cynical about politicians. It's because we show them so much stuff that is unimportant and banal. I find there are too many political analysts who spend their time evaluating politics as if it were a hockey game, instead of evaluating its impact on people."(E44p)

It's up to journalists to report the news to the public, not only by *conveying* the news, but above all ensuring it is *brought home* to the public. One journalist said journalists have to tell "people how it all [the events reported] can change things *for them.*(15t) It is therefore necessary to "personalize the message."(15t) Once again, the traditionalists are not against the principle that journalism has to get people interested in news that is in the public interest. The innovators, however, are far more concerned than the traditionalists with the need to grab and to hang onto the public's attention. As we shall soon see, they are prepared to go further than the traditionalists in this regard.

2.4 A matter of proximity that is not geographic

As defined by the innovator journalists, the concept of "public interest" is therefore based on the principle that the public has to be involved in the news. In other words, people must feel that the news speaks to them and concerns them specifically. The journalists constantly said that the news had to "affect" the public: "[A good story] is gonna resonate with people."(55) "People, when it doesn't concern them, when it doesn't affect them, they don't watch or at the very least they watch less,"(10t) said one journalist, adding right away: "a good story is something that affects people at home: my mother, my father, your father, your uncle. Something that ensures that as many people as possible will be interested."(10t) To another journalist, a good story is "any event, be it political or cultural, that's affecting people in Montreal or in Canada […]. [It's something that is not only a report on events, a summary of events – although there are times when that's important. […] [A good story] can be as small as somebody helping another person, and as big as an overall [assessment]

of the way the government provides a certain service, [such as] education."(52)

Quality news has to have an impact on people's lives, on the material, concrete level (by informing them they will pay more or less income tax next year or that they should put their snow tires on by the weekend, for example) as well as on the political and social levels (by helping them vote in an enlightened way by disclosing the ethics of the previous government, or by helping them understand the cultural and religious customs of their immigrant neighbours, for instance).[3]

It should be noted that the traditionalists are not indifferent to the need to "affect the public," but that they espouse the principle less strongly. In fact, they do not measure the relevance of the news by its affective potential. Rather, once the news has been selected, the traditionalists will try to ensure it affects the public, so as to attract it more effectively and keep its attention. But, to the innovators, the inherent potential of a piece of news that can affect the public already constitutes a criterion of quality.

The comments of one executive show how the relevance of the news is determined from the standpoint of the audience. This executive said that "if the news were assessed on the basis of volume […], we could [make do with] airing a monster quantity of news [from news agencies]"(E42t); but that, according to the executive, would have "no relevance."(E42t) He believes that instead we have to provide news for Quebecers, news about "their community, their province, but also on the local or international level, but always relating it to what they're experiencing, the questions people are asking themselves (because they do ask such questions)."(E42t) To make the news relevant, journalism has to involve the public in its handling of the news and use proximity: the news has to make it possible to build bridges and make enlightening connections, to ensure a better understanding not necessarily of the events themselves, but above all of their implications, to the extent that they are likely to affect the public.

3. The same reasoning holds when journalism plays on the public's emotions: people become involved emotionally, often by proxy (people gain a better understanding of the problem of drinking and driving by sharing the pain of parents who have lost a child in such circumstances, for example).

We would like to digress here to stress that the matter of language brings out a special sensitivity regarding the concept of community on the part of the journalists and executives from Montreal's English-language media: "Basically […], good journalism is to cover the stories which we believe are important to our community […]. There are challenges: this market [Montreal] is not like Edmonton or Toronto or Vancouver, because generally our audience is made up of English-speaking Quebecers, [who are] in a minority position. We have to do stories which are important to them in terms of the Quebec question."(E63) The relatively small size and the isolation of Montreal's anglophone community – one journalist even spoke of a "community under siege"(61) – give its journalists a keen sense of the concept of community. We cannot determine from the interviews, however, the degree to which this element has a structural effect on the journalism practiced by Montreal's English-language media. (End of digression.)

By looking for a degree of proximity, by trying to get "close to people,"(4t) journalism isn't turning to populism. One journalist said he appreciated the work of CTV because of its "habit of doing features based on proximity, reports that directly affect people's lives, such as health care and medical research, but without taking *faits divers* and making them into features."(2t) He added: "there's a great deal of snobbery in my business regarding the formulas that work, and I think it's a mistake. But that doesn't mean that everything that [is popular is good]."(2t)

Striving for proximity doesn't mean that journalism relies on local news: as we have already pointed out, neither international nor local news is synonymous with quality according to the innovator journalists (or the traditionalists, for that matter). They each represent quality to the extent that they create connections between the public and the event, between an issue that concerns one public and a similar issue that concerns another (whether it's an immediate neighbour or a foreign country). That is why the innovators refer to "proximity" without necessarily meaning "local news": the proximity they seek is not strictly geographic: it is just as much emotional, social and cultural.

Quality international news is therefore news that creates connections between the near and the far, "to draw parallels with what is happening here."(15t) One journalist noted approvingly that *La Presse*, *Le Journal de Montréal* and the TVA network now send journalists all over the world, deploring the fact that previously only Radio-Canada and the news agencies covered international news:

> It was high time. […] The large local [media] companies are finally assuming their international mission. […] [It] takes us out of our reality and shows us that there are very compatible things in the human experience as it is being lived in the four corners of the world, and that at the same time there's inequality and fundamental differences between certain cultures, between our culture [and other cultures]. We have to draw comparisons to appreciate what we do, what we have here[4]. […] in recent years, we have removed our typically Quebec-style blinkers.(21p)

Quality international news must therefore create connections to the situation of the target public: the public must gain a better understanding of its own situation through international news. According to the innovators, the quality of international news therefore does not lie in its universal nature, its ability to reach the viewer or the reader as a citizen of the world or as an inhabitant of the global village. On the contrary, "good" international news, for the innovators, is above all that which relates to the situation in Quebec, the daily life of Quebecers, that which allows them to identify with others and to draw parallels, be it on a one-time or a sustainable basis. Ultimately, in their handling of international news, the innovators appear to be striving not, for instance, to show that a parent is a parent anywhere in the world, but to enlighten and even to help parents and members of the public here with their role, by showing them the parenting experience elsewhere in the world.

4. This journalist cited as an example the coverage of the debate over the role of private health care in Quebec. Many media responded by taking a look at the situation in countries where mixed systems have already been established.

Still, certain events that occur in the international arena, such as the flooding in New Orleans or the war in Iraq,[5] do not necessarily resonate with the public immediately – even though, in both cases, the public is in fact already involved as a result of such factors as climate change or the rising price of gasoline. In fact, in the case of such "automatic-coverage" events and "stories you can't skip,"(E64) quality involves not simply covering them but covering them *yourself* to create proximity, since international news, as such, does not constitute quality news.[6] Quality stems, among other things, from the decision to send a reporter to the scene: quality reporting enables us to experience, with help from a journalist known to the public, the daily reality in the affected area, since he will try to help us see or experience the event *as if we were there.*

Proximity, as we can see, is always appropriate. The journalists believe that sending a correspondent to the scene of an event generally ensures a better understanding, provided that he presents the event and places it in context for the public here and explains it by using common reference points. Rather than using wire copy,[7] according to one executive, "we send our own journalists, [to] get a Montreal or a Quebec perspective on events."(E48p) As for the anglophone journalists, in the same spirit, one stressed the need to find "the Canadian angle [of the story]."(54)

When you watch televised news in particular, you may have the impression that geographic proximity is the only thing journalists look for. As a result of economic constraints (travel is costly) and technical constraints (in the case of television, an

5. These events were in the news when we conducted the interviews.
6. A good number of journalists would like to see a better "sense of priority" in news reporting: "It would be a very, very big accomplishment if journalists could help to make people understand that if a thousand people die in a catastrophe in [a foreign country], it's actually bigger news than if a huge TV star breaks her fingernail in Montreal. Right now, journalism does not reflect that."(60)
7. Using an in-house journalist also seems to ensure better control over the "quality of the source"(E38t) and better credibility: one executive prefers to have one of his journalists cover international news, instead of "using wire copy written by an obscure journalist we don't know, nor do we know the calibre of the reporting."(E48p) Even so, neither the journalists nor the executives denigrated the quality of wire copy.

entire team has to be dispatched), local events receive more coverage than other geographic areas. But, fundamentally, quality is based on proximity: local news is good only if it reports a phenomenon that affects the general public. One executive, explaining that his newspaper leaves municipal and local news to the neighbourhood weeklies, said: "It doesn't bother us to do a local story, but it has to have broad interest, it has to interest all our readers, not just the ones in Pointe-aux-Trembles, if we're talking about Pointe-aux-Trembles."(E48p) This last example shows that the journalists usually aim for the broadest swath of society: "It has to affect the largest common denominator,"(E42t) said one executive.

Even so, many journalists are critical of the geographic selection of news by the large Montreal media, above all the "Montreal-centric" aspect of the news:

> There are two things driving journalism these days: ratings and money. If it's too expensive to send a journalist to cover a story, we don't go. It's scandalous. Because, there are stories that are worth the trip; they deserve the time and they should be covered. Why do we never hear about what's going on in Abitibi-Témiscaminque or the Lower St. Lawrence? Does nothing ever happen in Matane? Why don't we hear anything about what's taking place in Ottawa? The only ones that cover Ottawa are Radio-Canada and occasionally TVA, but TQS doesn't at all. Why? It all comes down to money.(10t)

2.5 Seeking impact

The broad definition of public interest used by the journalists is reflected in their definition of journalism's "social role." All the journalists agree that news media have a certain social responsibility, that they must, more or less actively, make sure everything is in good order and keep an eye on improvements to society and the proper functioning of democracy. From this standpoint, as we have pointed out, the journalists often value news that leads to public debate; more specifically, the journalists, like the executives, look above all for news that will have an "impact," a concept that came up frequently in their comments.

Still, journalists aim for the small impact just as much as the big impact, and "journalism's large objectives" are also accompanied by more pragmatic objectives. A print media executive expressed the two-fold aspect of journalism's social function: he believes it is vital to be "guardians of democracy"(E48p) but added that it's also necessary to be "guardians of consumers."(E48p) "We have a social role to play from all standpoints,"(E48p) he concluded. The same executive believes journalism must cover political news, just as it has to tell the public, for example, not to "spend fifty dollars on a certain show because it's not very good, or 'Go ahead, it's money well spent.'"(E48p) Another executive said in the same vein that "our only objective"(E49p) is "to spark a discussion in the kitchen *or* in society."(E49p) The role of journalism seems broader if the one function is not replaced by the other: to use the words of the last executive quoted, according to the innovators' reasoning, journalism doesn't aim to spark kitchen-table discussion first and public discussion second; instead, it aims for both at once.

This last comment should be qualified, however, since the impact sought by the journalists often involves an immediate "effect" or "reaction" on the part of the public. In the journalists' opinion, quality news makes waves and shakes up the public sphere. The public's strong reaction to a piece of news is itself a sign of quality: numerous telephone calls, e-mails or letters from the public to a station or a newspaper or, more broadly, the fact that "everyone is talking about it," indicates a "good" piece of news. One journalist(33p) says he looks for news "that will get people talking the next day, that will interest people, that will spark […] discussion and advance [things].(33p) Another journalist said he looks for a "powerful [subject that] will start discussions and provoke reactions."(19p)

One executive(E49p) believes news quality can be measured by the extent of the debate it causes: the better the subject, the more it will spark a reaction, and the more people will talk about it. Many of the executives judge the quality of a piece of news by the reaction it generates – more so, perhaps, than the real change it brings about. On this point, a journalist from the print media criticized his bosses for placing a great deal of emphasis on *faits divers* on the grounds that "readers like that sort of thing [, and

that it provokes] considerable reaction."(24p) Another journalist was critical of the following situation:

> Trying to outdo everyone else has become the thing [, with the result that journalists seem to be focusing only on the effect, on the creation or amplification of controversy]. I think that right now it's very dangerous, this chasing after an effect; it's very, very dangerous when it comes to the news. People talk about how the journalistic genres are mixed up. I don't think [that's the problem]. I think [rather] that striving for an effect is dangerous. […] I don't think just anything can start a debate, and I don't think everyone can start a debate on any subject. I think we can keep things in proportion. There are things that have to be kept in proportion.(36p) [8]

Moreover, the impact sought by the journalists and their desire to respond to the public's tastes and needs – as we have seen regarding their definition of the public interest – are both related to *defence* of the public's interests. For the journalists and their bosses alike, "the journalistic principle of defending citizens' interests is important."(E44p) They want to "defend citizens [from all standpoints, from taxation to the environment]."(E44p) Fundamentally, the public needs journalism:

> Journalism means digging up a hidden story that people want to know about but that they would otherwise never learn about if it weren't for journalists. […] People rely on the media to ensure that democracy functions properly. Democracy means the government, which is increasingly equipping itself with public relations agents, in order to frustrate the media. […] The public relies on us to hound the government, to see that it spends their money properly, that it doesn't waste it, but invests it in the right places. And determining the right places often involves public debate […].(E49p)

8. The same journalist criticized the "provocative approach"(36p) taken by some of his colleagues, who distort or exaggerate what they think simply to get a reaction.

Another executive made a similar comment:

> Right now, perhaps more so today than before, [our role] is to be a resource, to [help] the population find its way in a society that is moving faster and faster, and where guideposts are becoming scarcer. It's going so fast. […] [we have to] provide guideposts, provide the essentials and, like the four basic food groups, [give] the four or five pieces of news that you have to know, that's our role. […] My objective isn't to influence them, but to give them minimal, primary, basic information so that they can understand what is happening, so that ultimately they can exercise their right to vote and function in society.(E42t)

This last executive, commenting on the newscasts produced fifteen or twenty years ago, said that it was "another world," (E42t) which was "so boring."(E42t) To this executive, this "dullness" was due to the fact that in those days journalism usually involved relaying speeches made at press conferences and in a sense was too close to institutions, at the public's expense:

> [Newscasts] were official bulletins: [journalists] were invited by labour unions, chambers of commerce, employers' organizations and the government. It was official, and it was your summary of the day's [news]. It's not like that anymore. There's still the official stuff, but [also] features on consumer matters, reports on health, lots of things that concern us every day. I think a report on home heating or the price of gasoline will probably affect more Quebecers than an official report on a government department. […] You try to report what you see, what you experience, what your neighbours are experiencing. […] I often look at and listen to my neighbours [and I say to myself:] "That's where reality is. Don't go looking anywhere else."E42t)

Another, more "dramatic" executive stressed the need for journalists to be "human"(E39t) and to have a good relationship with the public, as well as the fact that the public "suffers"(E39t) and is often the "victim of the machine and institutions."(E39t) The journalism that this executive advocates should be "close to the public, […] close to people, [and should] affect them. […] Our news is very human, to the extent possible. We try to humanize almost all subjects, in other words to see things

from the standpoint of individuals rather than that of institutions."(E39t)

2.6 News with public usefulness

In line with their broad and "open" definition of news in the public interest, the journalists, with the exception of the traditionalists, include in quality journalism news that they described as "utilitarian," "useful" or "news you can use"(1t) – news, we would suggest, that has "public usefulness." To the innovator journalists, quality journalism is not limited to "current events," "news" and events that recently occurred in the public sphere. "News isn't just reporting,"(E37t) said one executive; journalism also has to make it possible "to learn about things beyond current events [, such as health]."(E47p) Another executive stressed the need to present "stories that are relevant to people in their daily lives, stories that [...] help people make decisions about everything from consumerism, personal finance to public trends. There are so many things that go into it [quality journalism]."(E63)

In the same spirit, another executive said that he had to offer people "everything they won't get from RDI, LCN and the Internet."(E46p) One journalist said that a "newscast isn't a sequence of news reports [...]: we should pay more attention to people, to useful news."(1t) The same journalist added that newscasts are more interesting now than they were ten or fifteen years ago because of factors that include columnists and specialized guests, who give practical advice, refer viewers to organizations and provide telephone numbers to call in an emergency, etc. In the same spirit, one executive said that a report on frozen food, "which isn't hard news, [...] will give the viewer something just the same. [...] That's what I call useful, relevant journalism."(E37t)

The innovators and, *a fortiori*, the executives look favourably on the inclusion in newscasts or newspapers of columns on consumer matters, fashion trends and culture in general. Once again, this positive assessment is related to the journalists' desire to respond to the public's interests:

> We don't try to educate the reader, because I don't think that's our responsibility. [Instead, we have to] meet the

> [public's] need for information; human beings need information. We often talk about the public's right to information; it's true, but there's also the public's need for information. When you get up in the morning, you're curious. There are things you want to find out about, and they're not always of vital importance.(E44p)

The executive quoted above went on to say that people need the weather report to decide what to wear and restaurant reviews to help them choose where to eat, just as they need to know about the different political parties and what they "have to say."(E44p) For this executive, the "right to the news" and the "need for the news" are principles of equal importance, and both determine equally the fundamentals of journalism. Ultimately, according to this executive's reasoning, political news has to be given to the public to meet one of these needs for information, which coexists with its need to know the weather forecast.

Even so, the "magazine" approach that is increasingly popular with newspapers and newscasts irritates a large number of journalists, particularly the traditionalists, who seem to despise this aspect of journalism. In fact, many journalists object to seeing "straight" news side by side with "utilitarian" news; or they say, for example, that too much time and space are given to the arts and entertainment section of a newspaper or a newscast. One traditionalist levelled his criticism directly at the consumer sections of newspapers, especially *Votre Vie* in *Le Journal de Montréal* and the *Actuel* section of *La Presse*, which he qualified as "a bunch of insignificant rubbish."(34p) He added that:

> [this] dumbing-down is the equivalent of infotainment on radio and TV. It comes from the same reasoning, [namely the] logic of the marketplace. […] [In the print media, we offer] a product so broad that we're mixing up the categories, we're mixing the function of a newspaper with that of other types of publication. There's a difference between putting out a newspaper and putting out a home decor magazine. They're two different things.(34p)

Another traditionalist railed against the prescriptive aspect of specialized columns (health, nutrition, etc.): "I find it literally […] idiotic, because with these columns we spend our time

telling […] people how to eat and how to sleep, […] do this, don't do that."(25p)

2.7 Clarifying the concept of public interest

We must now return to certain elements already discussed, so as to specify certain aspects and clarify the interpretation of them. First, we must note that the definition of public interest proposed by the innovators breaks with what many consider one of the canons of journalism, namely the separation of the *public interest* and the *public's interest* (or the public's curiosity). It is widely agreed and taught at journalism schools that journalism must emphasize "what the public *has to* know" rather than "what the public *wants* to know." News has to *serve* the public interest, rather than *respond to* the interests of the public, especially its less "worthy" interests (such as curiosity and voyeurism).

In an article on "the journalistic ideal,"[9] Marc-François Bernier takes a broad look at this matter, citing, among others, Pierre Sormany, [translation] "who reiterates […] a distinction that has become standard, […] not to 'confuse […] the public's interest in a piece of news with the concept of public interest! The sensationalist press often crosses the line between something with anecdotal interest and something significant.'"[10] Bernier also quotes André Pratte, the chief editorialist at *La Presse*, who stresses that [translation] "there is a […] contradiction between the public interest and what spontaneously interests the public. The public interest requires that the news expand the population's horizons to enable it to gain perspective and a better understanding of the world and the society where it lives. But news that tries only to attract new customers constantly sends them back to themselves, to the way society has shaped them."[11]

As we have presented it, the definition of public interest provided by the journalists and the executives profoundly rede-

9. Marc-François Bernier, "*L'idéal journalistique : comment des prescripteurs définissent le 'bon' message journalistique*," *Les cahiers du journalisme*, no. 16, fall 2006, p. 8-45.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

fines this concept. Still, there is no reversal in their redefinition of public interest: rather, this new definition involves a widening that includes *both* the "canonical" definition of public interest and what is seen as opposed to it, namely, the public's interests. The redefinition of public interest by the innovator journalists does not imply submission to everything that sparks the public's curiosity; it does not include "trashy" news designed to pander to a supposedly voyeuristic public. In fact, many journalists, whether innovators or traditionalists, were critical of journalism's "slippage into *faits divers*"(1t) and said there are "far, far, far too many *faits divers*."(1t)

Despite these nuances, which are germane, we must conclude that the innovators believe that what doesn't interest the public or, more precisely, what doesn't have the potential to interest the public can be considered quality journalism only with difficulty. In fact, according to the principle that journalism does not exist without the public, journalists cannot apply the word "quality" to journalism unless it has at least a minimal readership or audience. And since the media universe is "exploding," or at least is in a state of upheaval as a result of the public's news-consumption habits, the journalists and, even more so, the executives have difficulty considering journalistic quality in isolation from its production context; more specifically, they have difficulty conceiving of journalistic quality without considering that the survival of the news media is constantly threatened.

In this sense, for the innovators, journalistic quality does not correspond entirely or at least not completely to an *ideal*; it does not lie so much in what they *would like* to do as what they *must* do. The innovators are very pragmatic in this respect. Thus to them journalistic quality also includes what generates revenue, what pleases the public and what enables the media "to stay alive." In this way, we can understand why, and the extent to which, demand on the part of the public is a fundamental variable in the definition of quality according to the innovators' reasoning.

The comments of one journalist clearly illustrate this logic: "If we realize at the end of the year that we've lost half of our audience, we're doing something wrong."(9t) One television executive, who is an especially enthusiastic innovator, gave a fine

example of the "extreme" version of the innovative approach: "As much as possible, we give people the things they want to know. We're a commercial company: we won't stuff anything down their throat, telling them, 'This is what we want you to watch.' It's not possible. The public will just zap us. So we give people what we think they want to know."(E39t) To varying degrees, the innovators agree with such statements; at least, they support the spirit of them: "That's the way it is. We have no choice. Otherwise, we'll be out of business." The innovators believe they can't disregard the public's "need for information," to use the words of a previously quoted executive, regardless of their real opinion on the matter.

Even though the innovators consider themselves to be in "survival mode," they don't conceive of quality from a commercial standpoint: if they try, in part, to satisfy the interests of the public, they definitely do so to be seen or read, in short to be useful, but not to make more profits. Similarly, if quality presupposes an audience, it does not necessarily require the largest possible audience. Moreover, with respect to media company profits, we must point out that the innovators and especially the executives see no conflict between "serving the interests of the public" and "serving the interests of the company." The two go hand in hand: normally, what serves the interests of the public will sooner or later benefit the company in one way or another.

We asked the journalists whether they thought they served the interests of the public "as much as," "less than" or "more than" those of their company. In this regard, the traditionalists are categorical: they don't care about the interests of their company because they first serve the interests of the public, which they do not define, it will be recalled, in same way as the innovators; so much the better or so much the worse if this approach serves their company or not. Serving corporate interests is necessarily somewhat "suspect" for the traditionalists, who see themselves as being in perpetual conflict with their bosses and in constant conflict with their requests, which threaten the quality of the news provided to the public.

The innovator journalists, on the contrary, made comments similar to those of their bosses, generally saying that what is good for the public is necessarily good for the business. One

journalist said that he doesn't try to serve the interests of his bosses, but that, "like any employee who wants to produce the best possible product,"(26p) what serves the public serves his company just as much. One executive agreed: "I personally don't see any contradiction between the two [the interests of the public and those of the company]. I've never sensed any conflict between the two, at least at the companies where I've worked."(E45p) Ultimately, to the extent that the company necessarily wins by serving the public, the innovators don't have to be concerned about the interests of their bosses, but only to serve those of the public: quality journalism, journalism practiced specifically for the public, will almost automatically increase circulation or audience share.

Still, do the journalists believe the quality label can be affixed to "useful" news or more broadly any news that meets the public's "need for the news," as one executive put it? Do the innovators say the weather forecast can be considered quality journalism? Can a column on the latest DVD releases bear the stamp of quality? What emerges from the innovators' comments is that the weather forecast is not in and of itself quality news. But it is one *component* of quality journalism. The journalists assess the *overall* quality of a newspaper or a newscast, just as they situate themselves in a "news universe," and they always consider the news media as a whole, namely by taking into account everything the media offer. From this standpoint, a weather forecast, taken alone, is not necessarily considered quality news; but it is one component of a quality newspaper or newscast: useful news is therefore not perceived by the journalists as quality news itself, but they believe it contributes to quality news in a general way.

Finally, when defining journalistic quality, the traditionalists are more idealistic than the innovators. The traditionalists do not deny that certain economic imperatives go hand in hand with journalism. Unlike the innovators, however, they are not inclined – or only somewhat inclined – to subject journalistic quality to these imperatives. In fact, the traditionalists believe that fundamentally the news, despite certain economic imperatives that it cannot completely free itself of, "isn't a product like

any other."(25p)[12] Thus journalism *cannot* completely obey the laws of the marketplace; if it subjects itself to them (too much), it will no longer be journalism.

A traditionalist stressed that it was necessary not to put too much emphasis on ratings: "you can't fall into the trap of thinking that because the public likes it, it's what you have to do"; [...] [you mustn't] distort your line of work to please the public."(13t) Another traditionalist made a similar comment to the effect that you shouldn't give in to the conclusions of market research or focus groups that try to provide an update on the news the public wants: he added that journalists must not "dumb down the masses [by giving them what they want]."(5t)

12. We are not saying that the innovators do not share this concept of the news; but the fact remains that they are far less insistent on its importance.

3

Quality journalism has to be interesting

The journalists we interviewed clearly feel a great deal of pressure related to the essentially economic imperatives of the context in which the media now operate. News sources are proliferating (the Internet especially, with its abundant and above all free news, continues to expand), financing the traditional media seems to be more difficult, the audience is fragmenting and so on. The pressure created by increasingly intense competition forces journalists to perform a multitude of parallel tasks: journalism has to be relevant, interesting, useful, entertaining, short, in-depth and more. Above all, the journalists emphasized two changes related to the new media imperatives and their impact on journalistic quality. First, journalism now always has to make the news more *interesting* for the public:

> I think the public expects […] something interesting: it's entertainment. We [the newspaper] have to compete with [the television show] *Virginie*: people often read the newspaper when they get home from work [they have a choice between the newspaper and *Virginie*], and they'll go for what's more interesting. It they find the newspaper boring, they won't read it. So they expect it to be interesting, to serve the public interest, to make them react, to teach them things and to be relevant. They expect that.[35p]

Second, in addition to the need to make the news interesting, journalism has to make it increasingly analytical, contextualized, searching and explanatory. One journalist put into perspective how *Le téléjournal* is regarded in the new media context: *Le téléjournal* "is [no longer] the only place I go for news during the day. In fact, it repeats what I've seen all day long because I'm plugged into the Internet, I listen to the radio while I drive home […], I read lots of papers during the day, I read blogs […]. So, at the end of the day, not much in the news surprises me. That's why I look more for analysis and interviews."(31p)

Give this abundance of news, journalism cannot merely report the events; it must delve deeper and provide more analysis to set itself apart: "[by the morning,] people probably know a large part of what [the papers] say, if [the papers] haven't made the effort to push it forward."(E64) We shall discuss this second change related to the new media imperatives in the next section, after scrutinizing the first change, regarded as one of two ways to ensure quality journalism.

3.1 The need for a degree of entertainment

Of course, journalism is not only information; it is also mediation of this information: it is both substance and form. Reporting the news implies formatting it and adapting it to the mould of a medium, according to certain constraints and procedures. As the journalists often said, they have to "make what is important interesting": the quality of the news is therefore inseparable from the *format* of the news.

On this point, a significant distinction between the innovators and the traditionalists became apparent in the interviews. The traditionalists see selection and processing of the news as two separate stages: quality journalism insists, first, on selecting the most important events possible and, second, on formatting them properly.

For the innovators, however, the "interesting aspect" of the news is even more important than it is for the traditionalists. Specifically, an event's ability to attract the reader's attention – even before it is covered by a journalist – and its potential for

an interesting news format, are *already* selection criteria. A piece of news, no matter how important, is not quality news if it is impossible to make it interesting. In this sense, the more innovative the journalist's approach, the more the selection of news is related to how it will be formatted and the more the quality of a piece of news depends, along with its importance, on its potential to interest the public. Thus, for the innovators, quality news is created just as much as it is found, if not more so.[1]

According to the innovators, a piece of news, regardless of its importance, cannot be considered to be of quality if the journalist covering it does not have arresting images or a punchy statement from one of the event's protagonists. This rule applies even more in the case of television: according to one executive, on television "[the visual aspect] counts for a lot, even if it sometimes counts for too much."(E40t) On television, the "visual aspect" predominates to such an extent, according to the same executive that, "without visuals, we don't use a piece of news. […] The visual aspect predominates, that's where the news is. We do TV." (E40t) Another television executive, who also stressed that he "does TV,"(E41t) said television requires a less "standard" approach(E41t): "it has to be a little livelier,"(E41t) "it has to move, it can't be static on television"(E41t) and the journalist can't be "immobile"(E41t) on the screen.

Many television journalists said they felt somewhat uncomfortable covering government budgets, which they know are highly important and essential to cover, but which generate very few good images and are hard to present effectively:

> A budget is drab but it's important to know about it. It's important news. [In fact,] the budget is the best example of news that is extremely important but drab and hard to put into images. […] People want to know whether their income taxes will go down, whether their daycare costs will go up, whether they'll get a tax credit for their kids. These

1. During a presentation to a university conference ("*Les mises en scène du discours médiatique,*" Université Laval, Quebec City, June 2007), one television executive said [translation] "the container was as important as the content, if not more important." This statement effectively shows one dimension of the concept of quality that obtains when the innovator approach is taken to an extreme.

> are all important things but they aren't necessarily interesting from the televisual standpoint.(4t)

In the same spirit, a television executive said: "[there are stories that] we have to do because they're important news stories. But we don't do them particularly well, like the provincial budget. It's a tough story to do, but we have to do it anyway."(E63)

A television journalist made an insightful comment about this need for images: it is because of its ability to create a powerful impact that the image is a primary consideration when news is selected. The journalist said that "a piece of news with no impact won't make it onto a newscast."(18t) And what gives the news its impact is the images that portray it, because the public, said the journalist, recalls the image more than the words associated with the news. Thus he concludes, "the stronger your image, the more impact it will have."(18t)

He also stressed that radio and the print media have an advantage over television in that they don't have to "tag along after an image and the need to have an image"(18t) and they are less encumbered by the significant technical difficulties that television faces. He added, however, that despite it all, "given the power of the image, the impact of a television report can be far greater than an article in the print media."(18t) Another journalist talked about the "primary impact" (52) of an image: "what people are watching is pictures, […] [which are] far more powerful than any words you can say. […] [So we have to] let the pictures do the talking."(52)

A print media executive doesn't quite agree with this distinction between television and the print media: "the strength of the written word is in description; TV is raw, the images are powerful and the impact is powerful. But a written description also has a great deal of power, an impact we don't exploit enough, unfortunately. For all sorts of reasons, in Quebec our style tends to be a bit boring [in this respect]."(E47p)

Despite what this executive's comments may imply, on television it is not enough to simply show images to the public; the image isn't self-sufficient. Rather, "to tell a story on television, there has to be a relationship between your words and your

image. If there's no relationship, the viewer will tune out because he won't understand; there's a disconnection. To be able to weave the story, with the visuals and also the sound bites you have […], everything has to be cohesive, understandable, summarized."(18t) A television executive(E40t) also insisted on this principle, saying that the image always has to correspond to the words, and vice versa.

The major importance that the "interesting aspect" of journalism assumes, for the innovators, comes essentially from the fact that they believe – as do certain traditionalists, albeit to a lesser degree – that the end justifies the means: by making the news interesting, they can transmit it better and reach a public that otherwise would not read it or watch it. One journalist stressed the importance of choosing "the most potent audiovisual elements [, so that the report] is interesting [enough] that people will watch it from start to finish and understand something."(14t) Another also considers good journalism to be "the ability to entertain people enough, while you're informing them, so that you don't lose them. Because an awful lot of people do need to have a reason to pick up a paper or watch the TV news. [They're] […] not as obsessed about the news as the rest of us in journalism. […] You've got to pull them in."(60)

The print media are not exempt from this logic: effective graphic design or a good page layout, said a print media executive, "means the news is conveyed more easily."(E44p) One journalist said he doesn't object to a "certain soliciting of the public to get them to […] watch [the media]"(8t): "If putting a babe on the front page [sells more papers and increases the chances that readers will read] an article on the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, so much the better."(8t) One journalist concurred, saying that a degree of "sensationalism" can be used to introduce more "substantial" news: thus there appears to be "[a type of] sensationalism that is almost essential, namely sensationalism that prompts one category of the population to read things that they normally wouldn't. So news can be sensationalist but in the public interest. […] To me, sensationalism isn't necessarily a bad thing."(19p) In the same way, attracted by an amusing article, a reader may be drawn to a second, harder article.

Thus quality news is not incompatible with *a degree of* entertainment; above all, news and entertainment are not only compatible, they are complementary. This complementary nature is based on a concept of quality that links it closely to the powerful ability to attract the public's attention. According to the innovators, the spectacular, shocking or entertaining side of the news is one component of quality, and not, as is the case for the traditionalists, its opposite. Again, it is not so much that the innovators invert or completely reject the traditionalists' priorities, but that they *combine* the traditionalist priorities and the new priorities. As the interviews show clearly, the innovators say they can exploit *all these priorities at once*.

A television executive illustrated in his own way how journalism combines priorities: he says the nature and constraints of television news involve a marriage of "journalistic principles" and "entertainment principles,"(E43t) which doesn't mean that televised news is "just entertainment."(E43t) Another executive states: "You can do both: you can cover a story in depth and make it interesting. [But] it doesn't mean you dumb down your whole approach. [The public] are intelligent people who pay income tax, […] work hard and earn their money. They understand the system […]. So we can talk to them intelligently."(E37t) One journalist also stressed that:

> There's room for innovation in the way reports are presented, without everyone having to put on a clown nose to do it. It's TV, and I don't think we exploit this enough […] Without saying this spitefully, there are a lot of journalists on TV who are from radio and have simply imported their ways of doing things; in other words, they write their text but they don't give a damn about the image that will go with it.(1t)

In terms of "entertainment", the innovators do not try to soften hard news, but to preserve its hardness while making it interesting to the public, which facilitates an understanding of it. Such treatment, for the innovators, is not detrimental to the news and does not sacrifice the scope of its content. The expression "news show," used by certain executives to designate newscasts, reflects the perfectly reconcilable nature of news and entertainment in the comments of the most ardent innovators (a reconcilable nature that is also found in the print media, even

if the examples cited concern television above all). The innovators believe it is possible and even desirable to treat "super-serious or historical stuff […] in a relaxed manner."(1t)

In precisely this context, the Gomery Commission was cited many times by the journalists as an example of a subject that lends itself to quality journalism.[2] The Gomery Commission had both a great deal of hard content (financing of political parties, Canadian unity, misspending of public funds) and a lot of spectacular elements, good visuals, personal drama, suspense and good "characters."(6t)[3] Another journalist commented similarly that the Commission "affected many people, […] had an impact on the lives of many people, affected political power [and a certain manipulation of political opinion in Quebec]. But, in addition, at the heart of the story were colourful characters: [Judge Gomery was an] excellent character. Without such characters, [the Commission] might have had less impact."(7t) During the Commission, the same journalist also noted subplots and episodes that were "amusing, sometimes shocking."(7t) It was even suspenseful: "it became a kind of soap opera" (7t) with abundant twists and turns.[4]

Making the news interesting also means keeping it short. One journalist states: "you can do short and very complete reports, [especially as] we usually don't talk about subjects for only one day."(26p) What counts, is that over all, at the end of a week, for example, the quality of the news is good, even if an article taken in isolation may not be complete. This "imperfection" does not harm the quality of the article. In fact, the innovators say that short features and articles increase the chances of holding the public's attention until the end; moreover, "the public has less and less time"(26p) to stay informed.

2. The interviews were conducted during the hearings of the Gomery Commission, so it is not surprising that the journalists refer frequently to them.
3. Some television journalists stressed the need for good "casting"(8t, 9t) in televised news and for "people who burst through the screen,"(4t) as another journalist put it.
4. Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans is another example often cited by the journalists, since the event involved climate change, government inaction, touching personal accounts, celebrities (Zachary Richard and Céline Dion) and cultural and linguistic proximity.

A print media executive strives for an effect similar to that of a web page, namely news that is more concise, easier to read and to digest, because "all the news is there just the same."(E49p) The innovators don't go so far as to say, for example, that a 500-word article necessarily has the same analytical depth as a 1,000-word article. Still, they argue that a short article can be complete. Conversely, for the journalists with the most traditionalist views, a two-minute feature is rarely enough, and the news desk always asks for articles that are too short. Thus all the journalists tend to deplore the fact that they don't have enough space for the news, but the innovators tend to adapt to or find advantages in these constraints.

Humour also sometimes has its place in the news. One journalist says that "we shouldn't take ourselves too seriously and think we're going to find a Gomery Commission or a Watergate on every street corner. There are trivial things in journalism just as there are in the life of an accountant or a teacher."(17t) A print media executive said a newspaper needs a "playful" side(E46p): it's essential to "make it enjoyable to read the newspaper"(E46p) with "useful articles and humorous articles."(E46p)

According to another executive, in a newspaper or on a newscast, "[there's] at least a couple of stories […] that are there because they're interesting […] [and because] you know people are gonna read or watch them. […] That's not stories that *need* to go in the [media], but I think it's the sort of story that you do get in the [media], because it's of interest. It doesn't affect a lot of people: their lives will go on if they don't hear about it […] It's newsworthy but not necessary."(E64) In other words, as one journalist summed it up, "the occasional entertaining story does no harm."(32p)

One print-media journalist said in similar fashion that, even if "the number one criterion [in journalism] is the public interest," a newspaper "has a duty to be interesting. […] We mustn't look down on entertainment and the pleasure of reading," he says. "People have to have *fun* reading the newspaper. Today, with the Internet, all-news television and free newspapers (*24 heures* and *Métro*), it's easy to be informed without reading the newspaper. We have so much competition. If we're not interesting, no one will read us. I think five years from now we'll have

to be even better, even more interesting."(35p) Ultimately, he added, "it has to be fun to read the newspaper. If it's boring, no one will read it. I want to be interesting. I don't want to write for nothing. I want people to read me."(35p)

In the same spirit of adding "external components" to the news, a print media executive pointed out that journalism can transmit more than the news to readers, sparking emotions in them.(E44p) This executive said he was partial to a certain "sensationalism," which he defined as "news that causes a sensation in people. A sensation can be an emotion (anger, sorrow, compassion or surprise)."(E44p) And, he added, "if for [the modest price of a newspaper], I make you laugh twice, I surprise you once, I frustrate your because I inform you of something important, it doesn't cost much to have all these emotions."(E44p)

More broadly, like entertainment, emotion is one component of a quality report: "it has to have emotion and liveliness,"(4t) said a journalist who justified his comment by stating that, "with the personal account of a human who talks about his experience, you can interest someone on the other side of the screen."(4t) From this standpoint, the "human side"(4t) of a piece of news is important; it's essential to "find subjects close to people,"(4t) according to the same journalist. To be "close to people," he continued, journalism has to flesh out the news, and the "best way to convey news [on television] is to flesh it out,"(4t) in other words to show concretely its impact on the average citizen, by showing, for instance, the budget's impact on a typical family of four.

As for the anglophones, human interest and storytelling seem at first glance to be more deeply rooted, even in the harder news categories. One executive said that traditionally "business journalism is about people making money, losing money or stealing money. But within those parameters, there's a lot of interesting stories to be told, there's a lot of drama. [So business journalism should have] more feature writing and more human interest stories."(E66)

In this regard, another executive drew a distinction between the Anglo-Saxon approach and the francophone approach: "We [anglophones] tell stories from the ground up. We pick an individual and tell the story from the person's perspective. And that, presumably, takes us to a larger universal truth. […] The

French tradition will be to talk about the issue, and then insert the individuals somewhere in there."(E62)

We aren't fully in agreement with this executive, however: even if, traditionally, the distinction is probably valid, it remains to be demonstrated as regards Quebec at the start of the 21st century. In fact, as we shall see, the francophones also attach a great deal of importance to storytelling based on experience to illustrate a more universal phenomenon. At least, from the interviews, which constitute a dialogue on the practice and not an exact reflection of the practice, it is difficult to pinpoint the difference.

Fleshing out the news also responds to the imperative that "there has to be emotion and liveliness."(4t) One journalist said that emotion is "very important,"(8t) that "lots of things involve emotion"(8t) and that, through it, the public "thinks about things."(8t) According to this journalist, given the abundance of news, the public could become insensitive to even the most important news. So journalism has to "call out to people. And emotion calls out."(8t) Even certain traditionalists agree on the need for a modicum of emotion: one of them conceded that "a news report, you have to put a bit of emotion into it – [just] not the journalist's."(20p)

3.2 Interesting people by telling stories

The innovators often stressed that it isn't enough to find good news and good stories: you also have to *recount* them. News is "like a joke. You can have the best story, but if you don't know how to tell it, [it falls flat]."(10t)[5] Another journalist stressed that "one of the first things we learn about being a journalist is 'Tell us a story,' almost like 'Once upon a time.' You take your reader by the hand, take him along with you and show him something, make him smile, give him warmth. I like that."(30p) The "story" has to be "well scripted,"(E37t) you have to do "casting"(9t) and "find

5. The TQS network, and Jean-Luc Mongrain in particular, appear to have had a strong impact on Quebec journalism in this regard, according to the journalist quoted.(10t)

characters who will carry the subject,"(8t) dig up good images, take care over the "narrative."(6t)

To another journalist, "[a good story is] something that has a beginning, a middle and an end, [something] that is told like a story, with big characters, and that is not just a report."(55) A journalist who tells a story can enable people to experience an event better and can "affect" them. One television executive, for example, "directs" his newscasters by telling them "[when I watch the news,] I almost want to feel as if you're in the living room next to me, telling me about [the event]."(E42t) Here, the approach is not merely to format the news, but to arrange it as if it were on stage. One journalist said that television is a "medium that lends itself a little more to staging."(1t) But the print media are not to be outdone. According to a print media journalist, you must:

> [write] an article that reads like a little novel, a little story. […] We write to be read, so [we have to] make the text as readable as possible, and make all the stylistic and structural effort to see that the reader enters the article and stays there. Just as a writer does when writing a book […]. [You have to] make the article a living thing, […] succeed in creating impetus in the article, structure, continuity and progression, so that people can read the text. […] When everyone has reported a piece of news, and it's the subject of the day, what's left to say? You have to pull the reader in and tell him the same thing, or almost, ultimately, but in such a way that he'll read the story until the end, […] give it a twist that no one else has found. […] You have to have the inspiration to hold your reader until the end, so he doesn't put you down. So you're obliged to create a script, structure your story, compose it. You can't string together quotations because it will sound like a panel discussion, or address the subject by themes. You have to create an imaginary theatre for your reader, and it depends a great deal on style and structure. (21p)

But many journalists – traditionalists, but also quite a few innovators – accuse the news media, above all television, of only telling tales, of only seeking current events that already appear

as stories, or of being partial to "anecdotes" and "anecdotal stories that don't lead anywhere."(E48p)

3.3 Making it interesting, but not too interesting

The journalists say they are aware of the need for a degree of entertainment, emotion or eye-catching elements, but they are afraid of excess; "making it interesting" has its limits, limits that the great majority of the journalists, including the innovators, say are crossed too often. The journalists – and the traditionalists with greater vehemence – criticize the fact that, increasingly, the news media exaggerate, that they play the emotion and entertainment cards too often and too vigorously, that they use *faits divers* too often to capture and maintain the public's attention and that they strive for an "effect" at any price.

One journalist stressed, for example, that there are two "concepts of sensationalism"(19p): the first type of sensationalism may be a good thing, since, as we have seen, it draws a certain public to the news and focuses attention on certain subjects, but there is a second type of sensationalism that "gets out of hand"(19p) in relation to the objectives of the first. This second type of sensationalism is "purely commercial, […] in other words, shocking people just to be shocking, creating a commotion just for the sake of commotion, just to sell papers."(19p) Another journalist similarly criticized:

> the transformation of the news into entertainment. With infotainment, there's a mixing of genres that gets on my nerves. It sometimes contributes to the public debate, but more often it descends into insignificance, without contributing to the public debate, and all we do is bombard the public. […] [Regarding the trend to debates on newscasts,] there are subjects that are important, that have to be covered, that have to be debated, but often it descends into caricature. I find it deplorable, because we're not informing people. Debates are fine, but the people doing the debating have to be articulate and know their subject. […] It's rather deplorable, this slide toward entertainment news that is widespread in all the media.(34p)

One journalist has seen a gradual increase in the spectacularization of the news since he started in the business twenty years ago: "there's an entertainment dimension that has been added to this business. […] Everyone is affected by the news-as-entertainment thing, both the electronic and print media, everyone is a victim, and everyone is being swept away by this wave. It sometimes leads to content that I find debatable."(29pt) Another journalist believes "the media tend to scare people or take them for idiots by showing the very dark side of things."(1t)

In short, many accuse the news media of embracing excessive sensationalism: sensationalism, as denounced by the journalists, "is taking an inconsequential little fact, or an anecdote, and making it into a mountain [by playing with] people's sensitivities."(23p)[6] It's "overplaying something that isn't worth the trouble, […] showing blood, […] going overboard with people's misfortunes"(32p) or "making a big splash with a trite story."(20p) To one executive, "sensationalism [is to] take a big story (or what is considered as a big story) […] and beat it to death. […] But we all do it, all news outlets do it. And the reason they do it is because it works. A perfect example is the coverage of [the] Dawson [College shooting][…]. Of course, it's a huge story, and, of course, it's gonna just devour everybody's attention when it happens. But the fact is that by the third day, for me […], I'm sick of it. I don't want to hear it anymore. There's no more news."(E66)

One journalist used the expression "infotainment,"(29p) in other words "news that gets people talking and creates disagreement and controversy, but whose scope or importance is sometimes limited. I have nothing against controversy per se, but the problem is that sometimes we make a big splash with events that have limited scope."(29p) Infotainment also means turning the news into "entertainment," pushing debate and commentary with "supposed experts who often aren't even that"(20p) and "arguing for the sake of arguing."(10t) In brief, if there is "good"

6. One journalist(23p) cited as an example the coverage of the sentencing of talent manager Guy Cloutier for sexually assaulting the singer Nathalie Simard, as well as the coverage of Karla Homolka's release from prison.

sensationalism, which is useful and relevant, if there is a "way of doing it well,"(13t) sensationalism, in and of itself, doesn't lead anywhere: one journalist said he didn't see the point of stand-up reporting in a storm "to show that the wind is blowing. We know it's blowing!"(13t)

Moreover, the journalists from the print media often criticized television for aggravating the situation.[7] One of them summed up their comments well when he said that the visual aspect of the electronic media "biases"(29p) the entire business by emphasizing the "dramatic elements"(29p) and "drama."(29p) On television, he added, "they like to see people crying, they like to see blood."(29p) And because the print media are in "survival mode [many people are predicting their imminent demise], it has an impact on [the print media]: people are afraid and they're saying 'We can't lose [readers, so] we have to play the game.'"(29p) One journalist summed up the situation this way: "they put on a good show [and] the print media [also] feel obliged to put on a good show."(29p)

3.4 A fault line between journalists and executives

The journalists' various criticisms of the way journalism is practiced today, which we have just presented, bring to light what we believe is the most important fault line between the journalists and the executives: the matter of "sensationalism." The journalists, including the overwhelming majority of the innovator journalists, believe that their bosses play the image, spectacle and emotion cards too much (it should be noted that this situation seems to affect television above all).

One journalist criticized the media for too often reporting the news by going over the top with emotions stirred up in any way possible: "[to go and knock on a door next to a home where a misfortune has occurred doesn't add anything to the report], we already know it's sad! […] [But the bosses] push for it because we like to see people howling or in shock."(1t) The journalist

7. Although the practitioners from the print media did not always have kind words for televised news, the television journalists did not make disparaging comments about the print media.

continued: "The bosses are more interested in a report that is banal but spectacularly presented, with sensational images, than a report that is perfectly balanced and manages to paint an understandable picture of a story in two minutes."(1t)

Another journalist commented: "Nowadays, what's important to our bosses isn't content; it's filling up the holes between commercials with good punchy stories done by a handsome guy or a good-looking girl. That does the job."(10t) But, ultimately, he added, "the public is poorly served."(10t) Generally speaking, the journalists criticize the executives for using the news only to increase audience share or readership, in other words for thinking only in terms of money: "Why are soft subjects [on television]? Because the bosses don't want to pay a journalist to spend a day or two working on a story that will air the following week. They want a story to be done in the morning and on the air in the evening, and the next day they want a new one."(10t)

4

The concept of value added

In addition to combining priorities – making it short but in-depth, covering hard news but in an interesting way –, journalistic quality involves increasing value of the news, giving it "value added," in the parlance of the journalists. Although they disagree on how to go about it, the traditionalists and innovators agree on the importance of the value that is added to the news by quality journalism. As we have pointed out, mainly in response to strong competition in the media world, the news media are trying to stand out, not only from competing media, namely other newscasts and newspapers, but also from the Internet, all-news networks, radio and free newspapers (*Métro* and *24 heures* in the case of Montreal).

In this situation, the journalists feel somewhat "threatened" and react accordingly; they fully understand that the "pressures of the market" have prompted them to provide more analysis of the news they report. "I think it's increasingly a part of our reality, if we want to stand out from the Internet, the wire services and the press agencies, whose first objective is to deliver raw news. Value added is vital, and it's perhaps increasingly what we have to do, namely deliver greater understanding of a piece of news that has already been hashed over. Readers don't have time to read everything in the morning and come to their own understanding of it."[(23p)] It seems clear that, for all the journalists and managers interviewed, the value added to the news is more than

a condition for survival; it is a path to take toward quality journalism, if not *the* path.

4.1 Going beyond raw news

The journalists interviewed believe they have little to teach the public in terms of "raw facts": they situate themselves and their public in a news universe and they assume the public is aware of events even before opening the newspaper or sitting down in front of the television to watch the news. So quality journalism, as the journalists told us, has to go beyond presenting "raw news"(8t) or simply relaying news already broken by other media. One journalist said: "My role isn't to do a review of the press; I'm a reporter."12t) A print media executive said: "People often say that newspapers are boring, that they just repeat the news covered on television the day before. When that's the case, it's true that we've blown it." (E48p) Another executive was just as direct: "We can't sell news that everyone already knows."(E49p)

It appears more broadly that original content is almost an obsession for the innovator journalists, and even more so for their bosses. Beyond the logic of the scoop, the principle is that a medium absolutely must stand out by offering something different, perhaps more so than something new – since it is often difficult to find news that a competitor doesn't already have. Thus the originality of the angle or the analysis predominates: the news is reported from the standpoint of the victims, from the standpoint of the repercussions, from the standpoint of History, etc. One journalist considers it important to ensure the public doesn't have the impression of "redundancy." He says you have to "find different angles so you don't [create] the impression that you're always repeating the same things, so the public won't say 'We're sick and tired of hearing about that.'"(7t) Another journalist, who rejects the lead based on the traditional five Ws, believes that "when the news has been covered by everyone, I like the American-style lead with a twist that no one else has come up with."(21p)

Ultimately, this striving for originality means a piece of news that everyone is already aware of doesn't constitute quality news. This exclusion adds a significant nuance to the principle whereby

journalism has to present the "important" news: it is not enough for an event to be important for it to be reported; if it's not new, there has to be something new to say about it. Thus events that have already "done the rounds" are no longer covered by the journalists, even if they are deemed important (for example, emergencies are still rife in Quebec but the media have for the most part stopped reporting them).

Moreover, a large number of journalists regret that certain events are shunted aside, even though they deserve longer and closer coverage. One journalist, like many others, suggested more "followups"(52) because without that "there's a hole."(52) He cited the example of coverage of earthquakes in foreign countries: "We rush to a country we would never otherwise go, and we cover the immediate impact. But maybe six months later, or a year, there's great stories about how those people have tried to rebuild their lives. […] [But] in 99.9% [of the cases], we never go back to cover them." (52)

Increasingly, analysis, explanation and context are essential for quality journalism; journalists have to "go below the surface,"(8t) get beyond "the surface story"(52) and find out "what's behind the scene."(52) One journalist gave a fine illustration of this need for "in-depth coverage" when he said that journalism,

> isn't just reporting on "such-and-such an event that happens on such-and-such a day"; these days it requires some analysis. Since the media universe is changing, if a newspaper wants to set itself apart from the Internet or television, it can't simply report the news, because the news will be in the newspaper a day after everyone else has it. […] So, it's the same news [as on the newscast the day before], but with a little more analysis, a little more content, with, above all, different points of view. […] That's good reporting.(26p)

An executive added, "[we have to] report the news in a way that [gives] more context and understanding to the story that we're covering."(E65) In the same spirit, a journalist stressed that "newscast aren't just reports."(2t) In his opinion, "We have to provide all the news"(2t) not just report the raw facts; we have to explain "why,"(2t) "make connections"(2t) and show how two positions diverge or converge.(2t) Ultimately, according to this

journalist, the explanatory, analytical approach to the news enables the public to judge things in a more nuanced fashion. The same journalist continued:

> How do we cover the news? It's the most important question we ask all day long, because there are literally a thousand ways to cover a story. But I try to make the angles clear, I try not to just give a report (he said this, she said that). I try […] to tell myself: first let's explain and go beyond the words, explain the subtext of political discourse and choose the most accurate angle possible. You have to make connections between things. And by making connections, you explain, you provide context and therefore you analyze. You don't editorialize; you analyze.(2t)

The journalist later talked about how journalism has changed over the past twenty years:

> [Ten years ago, journalists were content to be] conveyer belts [relaying what the Premier and the opposition said]. You should see the features we did fifteen or twenty years ago: "Mr. Bourassa said that," "Mr. Lévesque answered this", and then the conclusion, very solemn, with the microphone, and the people looked like pillars of salt or lead soldiers. It wasn't very good! It was good for the time, but we've changed… for the better. I'm not nostalgic at all about it […]

In fact,

> traditionally, parliamentary journalists placed a great deal of importance on question period, parliamentary life and its turbulence, and [the] about-faces of the MPs. I'm not saying we don't do that, but the emphasis is more on the government's decisions (Why lower the GST? Why give $1,200 to families?), and thus on reality checks and testing facts. […] Looking at the impacts [of the government's action] on the actual lives of citizens. So it's not press conferences or events that occur; it's journalistic work on the facts and the actions a government takes. I think that's number one on the public interest list […]. So you have to dissect things, ensure the audience understands and, above all,

> ensure they understand the impact of the government's decisions, far more than all the parliamentary drama.(2t)

In brief, for this journalist, it is necessary to convey the Prime Minister's most important statements, but, above all, "at the same time, in the same report where you present what the Prime Minister said, you have to explain the motivations behind the words. And not wait two years, one year or two days."(2t) In other words, one of the challenges of journalism is to provide immediate analysis.

As another journalist expressed it in similar fashion, the challenge for journalists is "to keep your distance despite the pressure, the workload, the constant output asked of you, to maintain a critical eye, a journalist's eye, and not to be a conveyor belt."(8t) Thus journalism that merely reports the information provided by public relations agents, without processing it, is poor journalism: "everybody needs to guard against the tendency to become a stenographer."(E64)

Moreover, a few journalists and executives expressed reservations about the quality of the news on all-news networks. Their news, according to one executive, "isn't thought out; it's almost not processed; […] [they just] regurgitate wire copy."(E40t) In their criticism of all-news networks, the journalists seem to be saying that this isn't the route to quality journalism: "often, they just repeat things in a loop, and the questions are often truly insignificant, because they're too close to the news. […] You'll have a journalist standing in front of a house where a triple murder has just occurred, asking how the family is feeling. […] They're feeling bad, OK?! Can you move on to something else?"(30p) [1]

1. Another journalist commented, regarding all-news networks, especially the coverage of the Dawson College shootings, "where everybody was going live for hours": "Rather than repeating something you know all the time, you tend to [say]: 'It's unconfirmed, but we hear that there might be three or four gunmen.' How many times did I hear that? […] Is that good journalism? I don't think so"(51) (the journalist is referring to the fact that there was only one gunman at Dawson).

4.2 The importance of investigative reporting

Journalists have to avoid "reaction" mode(E38t); instead, they must "investigate," "dig" and "discover."(E38t) For the journalists and the executives alike, quality news involves research and investigation, obviously to get the news out, but above all "to go beyond the official message."(27p) The journalists are unanimous in their praise of the virtues of the investigative approach, which they consider a *sine qua non* of quality journalism. Investigative journalism, which depends less on current events, is thus a route to take, perhaps even more so for the print media than for television: "before, we [the print media] created the news. Today, we arrive 24 hours after everyone else [, essentially because of] the constant availability of news. Newspapers have had to adapt to that. That's why we look for [more] exclusive stories […] and emphasize investigative reporting to provide something different."(27p)

Most of the print-media practitioners believe that investigative journalism is getting better; because of the intense competition among paid dailies, the budgets for investigative reporting seem to have gone up substantially, since this approach is seen as a way to find scoops and produce exclusive content "that sells." For the people from the print media, competition therefore increases quality.[2] For many of the interviewees, whether they work for the print media or television, this intense competition generally means that information is checked more often and is more reliable, with each competitor on the lookout for the others' mistakes.[3] If this last principle also holds for television, its journalists are not convinced that competition has as positive an impact on their output as it does on the print media: on television, competition seems on the contrary to lead to "spectacularization" of the news.

2. Similarly, as a result of competition, considerable effort seems to have been made to improve layout and print quality; these changes, according to the people from the print media, seem to have contributed to the quality of the press.
3. The principle did not give rise to unanimity, however: "Journalism in Quebec is very competitive. I think the competition can lead to excellent work. […] But maybe the downside of competitiveness is that you do tend to see stories that are broken without being fully verified."(E64)

The traditionalists, however, are more critical of investigative journalism as it is practiced in Quebec, where they see "widespread apathy"(14t): moreover, they do not share their colleagues' impression that investigative journalism is practiced more these days. Still, all the journalists stressed the need for research and investigation; but all of them also state that they aren't able to do enough of it or aren't able to do it at all. But investigative journalism is not the journalists' first priority, and few of them practice it. The journalists emphasize more broadly the importance of "doing research," namely checking sources, trying to find an unusual angle, using new personal accounts, etc. In this sense, the research done by the journalists depends essentially on the time at their disposal. But, as they all pointed out, they never have enough time.

4.3 Analyzing without lapsing into commentary

One journalist stressed that if journalism relies too much on value added, analysis, explanation and context, it risks "creating confusion between the genres."(23p) The journalists are bound and determined to avoid such confusion. From all the interviews, it is clear that news must not turn into commentary; separation of the two is vital. They should be used separately and in the appropriate places: editorials and columns are reserved for commentary, with all else being straight news. In other words, apart from a few exceptions, the executives and the journalists, whether they are innovators or traditionalists, agree that the news must not tell people "what to think" of events, that journalists must not pass judgment or draw conclusions for the public, that an article or report must not suggest a single valid interpretation of events.

As one journalist put it: "It's not my place to tell readers what to think. To me, that's very important. […] but it is up to me to give them the tools to form their own opinions. It's not up to the journalist to impose his ideas"(25p) because "people are

capable of making up their own minds,"(36p) says one journalist.[4] Journalism has to "offer people the opportunity to make up their own minds rather than provide opinionated reports."(1t)[5] One journalist sees the role of journalism as ensuring independent judgment on the part of the public: "[the role] of journalism is to be a witness that clarifies information, that [then] transmits it to the pubic, so that the public can look at the news and form its own ideas – and not tell the public what to think about the news."(6t)

When commentary is not involved, the journalist's subjectivity has to be completely erased. The journalist has to be a "detached observer"(23p) and not a "player"(23p) who "is part of the event"(23p) or "places himself in the foreground"(20p) or "doesn't step aside."(30p) "[A journalist must] stay away from personal opinion,"(54) says another. One journalist was critical of journalists who write in the first person, a "harmful"(25p) practice whereby the journalist "steps onto the stage"(25p) and "reveals [his] prejudices."(25p) He defines this practice as "baloney in a can […]. It becomes […] ideological. You can literally see the slant, the bias."(25p)

The journalists rarely use the term "objectivity," preferring terms such as "honesty" or "fairness" One of the journalists believes that "objectivity is an illusion. […] I think that what makes for the best news is to report personal accounts as honestly as possible. […] I think that when you start from respect and honesty, […] you get as close as possible, by multiplying the sources of news, to real news that you can offer the public."(36p)

Another journalist opined: "I don't think there's such a thing as objectivity, but respect for the facts and the need to report all the facts is necessary."(14t) Yet another journalist made a similar, qualified statement: "There's no such thing as objectivity; it's a pious wish. But we have to strive for it." Finally, one journalist

4. This journalist criticized "big-mouth"(36p) journalists who never doubt, who have clear-cut opinions and who don't nuance their comments, serving only the purpose of "entertainment."(36p)
5. One journalist from the print media criticized, for example, the use of music in television reports: "there is a manipulation of emotions that isn't very journalistic." (22p)

believes more in honesty than in objectivity, "honesty, not in the sense that 'we don't do anything,' but rather in the sense of 'being fair' [and of conveying accurate information and not distorting] the story."(2t)6

The journalists prefer the concept of honesty to that of objectivity, because they see the latter as being related to the "we don't do anything" formulated by the journalist quoted above, to inertia and inaction in the face of events, which appears to give rise to "bland" news. In other words, to be "totally objective" would be the equivalent, for the journalists, of not doing their work. We must insist on the fact that, for the innovators and the traditionalists alike, separation of news from commentary and avoidance of unequivocal statements do not absolutely imply setting aside the critical function of journalism.

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6. A few journalists are more openly committed than the average journalist. For example:
"I still believe in this type of mission, not only of informing the population but taking a position. I don't believe in objective journalism. I've never believed in it. […] I don't believe much [in objective news], because we're always biased when we do our reports. As soon as we select a portion of an interview, we're making a choice. The editing is a choice, and the effects are a choice. Definitely we have to strive for a degree of objectivity, but I think it's fairness above all that is important]. But […] for sure I like to do and to watch reports where there's a bit of – I don't like to use the expression – 'upholder of the law.' Even in the news. No doubt the journalist makes himself into a bit of a star, but I like a journalist who [presents himself as] the defender of a social cause: I think journalists have to serve that purpose, instead of covering press conferences on corporate annual reports [since in that way journalism is involved in promoting the financial success of a company]. Sometimes I think that's what is missing [the upholding-of-the-law aspect]."(12t)
Conversely, other journalists have a far more detached attitude toward the issues they report. One of them said, for example:
"I don't want to stir anything up because I can see, from experience, that an article, or articles, change things very little. The situation you denounce may be absolutely dreadful, but possibly people don't care or it will have very little impact. […] Once the news has been delivered, people will do [what they want with it]. It's their choice at that point. […] My job as a journalist is to give readers as much news as possible. Whether they approve or disapprove, whether they're pleased or displeased, it's their problem, not mine. My [work] is to deliver as much news as possible to the reader so that our citizens can decide according to their values: it's their decision. It's their choice; my work is [to give them] as much news as possible."(27p)
These two examples, however, do not reflect, in the first case, the dominant innovative perspective, and, in the second, a traditionalist viewpoint.

For the journalists, it's essential "not to be afraid of discriminating with the facts"(8t) or "doing an analysis [, but without drawing the line between good and bad]."(8t) One journalist asserts that "you have to know how to be critical, […] to step back from what people say […], not simply report people's statements."(32p) In fact, the news preferred by the journalists does have a certain "bite to it," according to one journalist.(8t) Many journalists appreciate political commentary that is rather incisive or "slightly ironical."(8t) One said he likes journalists with an "irreverent streak."(10t)

Another has not liked the U.S. press for about ten years, precisely because he preferred it when it was "more searching, more aggressive, more stinging and more offensive."(14t) One executive, likes journalism that is "a bit irreverent in the British style."(E44p) Lastly, one journalist stressed that sometimes it's necessary to change the angle of the news, "to rattle the cage […], so people are disturbed a bit by what they see. [Thus] you can provoke thought perhaps more easily than when you create a comfortable situation."(22p) He added, however, that it's a "slightly dangerous game."(22p)

In brief, once again it is impossible to determine precisely from the journalists' comments the boundary of quality, namely the line that is not to be crossed between news and commentary. One thing is certain: the journalists don't want to cross that line. The journalists, even those whose job is to provide opinion, insist there is too much commentary in the Quebec media. The executives, however, disagree.

One journalist talked about "slippage [from news into commentary]: increasingly there's overlap between the two types of practice."(34p) Another journalist said: "the way they do the news now – commentary news and opinion news – it bugs me!"(33p) The same journalist criticized the media for not letting people form their own opinion more and for telling the public: "We're going to tell you what to think."(33p) Another interviewee described as exaggerated "the fashion for opinion: you can't find a newscast where they explain things [the newscaster always has to tell us what he thinks]. It's a trend that is starting to get on my nerves."(1t) And finally one journalist(33p) criticized the newscasts of the TVA and TQS networks, where all the news goes

through the same "channel," namely the anchor, who constantly mixes commentary with news.

4.4 Diversification of viewpoints

Following on this criticism of the excessive amount of commentary in the Quebec media, most of the journalists, innovators and traditionalists alike, criticized the overuse of columnists in the various media, and, moreover, the poor quality of the (new) columnists. The journalists criticize these columnists, who have no experience, for passing judgment on everything and nothing. One journalist said that "[there are] far too many young journalists who lack experience but have the status of columnists. I think it's an aberration. It takes a minimum amount of experience […] to play this role."(34p) One journalist says he doesn't like first-person columns[7] "because there are so many of them. But you have to have talent to do it, and you have to be able to convey news through [this kind of] column. [The proliferation of these columns,] irritates me no end."(30p) The personal-diary or impressionistic nature of columns and vignettes is also irritating:

> What I hate the absolute most is columnists who focus on themselves, on their own lives. I can't stand it […] I think they quickly descend into insignificance, and I don't see any public interest in it. I think it's a waste of time and energy. It's not our function to have a personal diary in the pages of a newspaper. […] Unfortunately, I see this [trend everywhere]. It bothers me. I don't like it. It's not journalism. They should have become writers instead. (34p)

Another journalist said that "[in the Quebec media, there's] an overuse of opinion pieces and columns. […] I think it's harmful to the news. We have to have a base of news so that certain people can react. But [we can't have] everyone starting to react and speak out, and give their opinions right, left and centre [as] is the case in [the print and electronic media in Quebec generally]."(36p) He also was critical of the use of columns and

7. In French, the journalist uses the expression *billets d'humeur*, but there is no precise translation for this kind of column.

analysis for everything and nothing: "We don't have to explain everything. […] At a certain point, we can't say anything more. We're not writing a novel. It's the news. It's only journalism. So we can't say more than what we have."(36p) He added that certain subjects, such as elections and sports, should be reserved for specialists, to avoid having everyone saying everything and nothing, and to "avoid going off in all directions."(36p)

Quality, seen once again in the overall supply of news, nevertheless goes hand-in-hand with a wide and rich diversity of viewpoints and analytical angles: "you have to have different points of view to stimulate debate."(E47p) In this specific sense, columnists and other commentators on current events are welcome. Despite (or in parallel with) the criticism we have just described, many innovators, especially the executives, believe that quality news involves presenting all points of view.

For example, journalists must present to the public the viewpoints of the left as much as those of the right, the views of sovereigntists as well as those of federalists. Each commentator, editorialist or columnist does not have to be individually objective or to remain neutral; what counts, above all, is to present different "biased" points of view on the same subject, positions that are staked out but reflect diversity. Thus the journalists, especially the executives, are not too concerned about biased positions: the important thing is to present many, diversified positions.[8]

The executives say they prefer to offer many points of view that are openly biased, rather than very few points of view that are potentially biased but presented as objective. For instance, one executive stressed that by presenting only the views of the left, "we turn our back [on a whole segment of society (and we do likewise if we aim only for the elite as our public)]."(E44p) The same executive finds it "pretentious"(E44p) for "a mass medium"(E44p) to assume the right to decide for the public.

8. The various columnists in *Le Journal de Montréal* would be a good example: Joseph Facal, Lise Payette, Sheila Copps and Nathalie Elgrably (of the Institut économique de Montréal).

5

Journalism in Quebec

Thus far we have seen how the journalists and the executives define quality journalism. Now we shall look at their opinion of their own work. On the basis of the various criteria, principles and objectives they use to define quality, do Quebec's journalists believe that the journalism practiced in Quebec deserves to be called *quality*? The answer obviously is not unanimous, simple or without nuance.

5.1 Quality journalism … in the circumstances

Most often, the journalists do not state straight out that Quebec journalism is a quality product. In fact, although the majority of them deem the journalism practiced in Quebec to be of good or very good quality, they are generally clear about putting this judgment into perspective, with a caveat that is anything but negligible: Quebec journalism is quality journalism *in the circumstances*,[1] namely *in light of* the technical constraints, time constraints and the demands by the public that it must cope with. Thus, to the extent that it corresponds to what the public asks for and to the extent also that journalists do not have all

1. The executives do not generally add this nuance, finding, as we have seen, very little to criticize about Quebec journalism, either their own media or competing media.

the time or the means they would like to have to practice it, journalism is deemed to be of quality. In other words, the journalists would often like to practice a better or another type of journalism, but cannot because of the constraints imposed on them.

One journalist said that the time constraints that limit news gathering and that prevent journalists from asking all the questions they would like to – and because of which journalists don't necessarily "really cover the matter thoroughly or convey it well to viewers"(4t) – don't, "however, imply bad journalism"(4t): what is conveyed, the journalist is implying, may be suitable and may be "fine" in the circumstances imposed by production constraints.

The rapid pace of production is of particular concern to the journalists. They are almost unanimous in wanting more time, since they say that they "don't have the time to think about what they do."(1t) "It's too fast! We no longer have the time to do research and get precise information; [we can no longer] take the time to be well informed."(18t) The same journalist added: "there's intense pressure [to get the news out fast. And] with the new technologies and the pressure, we say anything and everything."(18t)

Thus the journalists see the need to "dig," to check or to delve deeper for information, but all of them, especially the television journalists, insisted on how difficult it is for them to perform these tasks. One journalist said: "what helps us [with the critical spirit] is to talk to a variety of people with different opinions […], who help us form an enlightened judgment."(32p) According to this journalist, it is necessary to gather many personal accounts and points of view, to avoid simply reproducing the thoughts of only one person.(32p) After making this comment, he added, however, that he usually has insufficient or even no time to ensure this diversification of views.(32p)

A large number of the journalists, especially – but not only – the television journalists, talked about pressure from their bosses (assignment editors, desk editors and executives), who want the news to be reported quickly and even accept that facts will be checked – and corrected as necessary – afterwards. Their bosses' enthusiasm for "breaking the news"(11t) appears to mean

that, according to one journalist, "you break a story or a rumour and you correct it as you go along."(3t) "We say that 'the news evolves,'"(3t) he added with a modicum of irony.

Many television journalists also say they have to leave press conferences and court rooms even before the end of the event and cannot collect all the news, because they have to report live. Others admit that they learn about the facts they report at the same time as the audience they announce them to, which prevents them from taking a critical stance. "We sometimes have to deliver the news without completely mastering the subject, for lack of time,"(16t) said one journalist. The same journalist then admitted that he regularly went on the air without rereading his notes and conveyed only what he remembered; he said that, for three live reports out of four, he didn't have time to think about what to say or to step back to get some perspective.(16t)

The journalists pointed out that the situation has got worse in recent years, partially because of the increasing number of live reports on all-news networks and longer newscasts, but also because of the larger amounts of news to be produced. The executives concede that the situation is difficult: "It's important that journalists do what they have to do, and that they're not spokesmen or mouthpieces. […] And it's a big challenge today, especially in the electronic media because of the advent of instant coverage."(E38t)

Another executive stressed in similar fashion that all-news networks have a negative impact on the depth of the news: "it gives them less time. […] The deadlines are tight, the journalists are very busy, […] they do far more things: before, journalists would just file a report, but today they file a report, they do appearances on all-news networks, maybe they write a blog and they do debriefs [during newscasts]."(E37t) As a result, the television journalists insisted more strongly than did the journalists from the print media on the concept of truthfulness, or more broadly on the importance of fact checking: clearly, they believe the truthfulness and accuracy of facts are undermined or threatened by the pressure of going live and the "race to get the news."

5.2 Quality journalism on the whole

Despite certain aspects of their work that they deplore, such as the excessive speed at which the news is produced, the journalists generally believe that the quality of the journalism practised in Quebec is very good, and the executives even find it excellent. We must bear in mind, as we have already seen, that the journalists are looking at journalism generally and evaluating its overall quality or the sum of its parts. From this standpoint, the journalists and the executives believe that the *overall supply* of news is of good quality and that each type of public is well served by its news medium, which produces good journalism for its public.

The journalists and the executives believe that, in the Quebec media universe, each medium plays its role well; each medium is therefore of good quality from this standpoint; and the news is of good quality in that there is something for each segment of the public in the overall supply. In other words, the journalists and the executives evaluate the quality of a medium from the standpoint of the public that uses it, and not from their own point of view or from a general point of view that would use universal evaluation criteria. To put it another way, the journalists believe you don't criticize a film by Fellini on the same basis as a Hollywood romantic comedy. For the two different publics, there are two evaluation grids. In addition, the journalists, especially the executives, will always have a positive assessment of journalism that is in good health in terms of its audience; a medium without an audience cannot be a quality product, since it will inevitably disappear.

Thus even if they personally have reservations about a few aspects of certain media, they do not really take them into account in passing judgment on the overall quality of the news media. In fact, they do not necessarily use their personal criteria to evaluate the quality of the news in Quebec. One executive expressed this concept well by comparing *La Presse* and *Le Journal de Montréal*: "The newspapers in Quebec are quality newspapers that have their own target clienteles: *La Presse* is a family newspaper; *Le Journal de Montréal* is a more working-class paper. [The people at *Le Journal de Montréal*] do their job well. […]

They do honest work, which I respect a great deal. It reflects great deal of concision, but just the same it's news in good quantity and of good quality."(E46p)

The diversity of the news is in this sense the first guarantee of quality journalism.[2] Even if several elements of Quebec journalism leave something to be desired or are of lesser quality, the overall quality compensates:

> Generally speaking, I would say [we have quality journalism]. Like many other people, I'm very critical: when I read the newspapers in the morning or when I watch the news, I can't stop saying "That's not right; that's not the way it should be done," and so on. But at the same time I think the amount of news available to anybody who wants to be well informed is phenomenal, especially in Quebec. [So] there's a great deal of variety [contrary to what some people say]. [The ideological and political spectrum (left-right) is also well served.] […] I think the quantity of news, and the quality and diversity of the news is quite exceptional, despite all the criticism that can be levelled at the media culture, which isn't specific to Quebec but affects the entire North American culture.(18t)

Another journalist added in the same spirit that "in fact, the public continues to believe what is published and conveyed by the media. So, despite a few failures […], we're doing a good job."(27p)

Many journalists are not only of the opinion that "there really is good journalism in Quebec,"(E49p) but they also believe that "the quality of the news has improved considerably"(E49p) in recent years. One journalist said that in Quebec, "[despite a few problems,] quality journalism is being produced, in fact more than ever."(21p) Another said "without hesitation"(2t) that "there is quality journalism in Quebec"(2t) and that "over the past ten years the quality has definitely increased."(2t) "On TV, it's undeniable,"(2t) he added. He attributes this increase in the quality of television

2. Many interviewees pointed out the diversity of the print media available in Montreal: "I like the fact that there is so much press, here [in Quebec]. I love the fact that I have six newspapers to go through every morning."(E62)

journalism to the fact that TVA has dedicated more resources to the news in recent years, which has "raised the level,"(2t) to better training of journalists, who are now "more aware of globalization and [various] trends,"(2t) to technological improvements – "[for example, editing] is now far easier"(2t) – and to the advent of the Internet, an "extraordinary"(2t) information-gathering tool.

According to many of the interviewees, the journalism practiced in Quebec compares well with journalism elsewhere. One executive said, "[In Quebec,] content still matters, compared to a lot of American newscasts."(E63) One journalist summed up the opinion of many innovators: "We often say, 'When we look at ourselves we get discouraged, but when we look others we're encouraged.' That's sort of what it's like [in Quebec journalism]."(24p)

Some expressed more reservations, however, and were hesitant to state that journalistic quality had improved in recent years. A television journalist said:

> There's a fine balance between opinion and fact-based journalism. […] We do our job fairly well in Quebec. The newspapers and newscasts are well done, interesting and credible. […] There's more space than ever before for the news on television. But there's also a lot more filler: there's three times as much air time as there was ten years ago, but we don't have three times as many journalists. That's a problem. We've filled time with [new formulas] and columnists, but we also should have increased the number of journalists in the newsrooms.(1t)

As for the traditionalists, as we have seen throughout this report, they do not believe that Quebec has quality journalism. In fact, the traditionalists are not only "convinced that the public is poorly served"(10t) in terms of the news, but also believe the situation is getting worse: "we have less and less quality journalism,"(10t) said one journalist, summarizing the traditionalist position. "In journalism, money talks, more and more,"(10t) he continued, before adding: "I don't know where it will end."(10t) In fact, the more traditionalist the journalist, the less quality he sees in journalism and the less he condones journalism as it is

practiced nowadays, with the innovator journalists believing the opposite.[3]

5.3 The public's responsibility for quality news

The journalists and the executives also qualified their generally positive assessment of Quebec journalism: it is a quality product only to the extent that *the public does its part*, to the extent, more precisely, that the public itself looks for "its" news by using many sources of information, points of view and analysis. In Quebec, the news is therefore of quality only to the extent that the public gives itself quality news or creates its own quality. The journalists' position on this matter requires some explanation.

The journalists often insist that each type of news is covered well by the most appropriate medium. For international news, people watch Radio-Canada, whereas to follow the unfolding of a shooting (such as the one at Dawson College), they may watch LCN. Each type of news and each news niche therefore has its own medium par excellence: Radio-Canada does its job well, TQS does its, etc. The relative aspect once again comes into play in the journalists' comments.

Ultimately, this reasoning means, however, that the international news on TQS, for example, is of "lesser" quality. The journalists and the executives appear to agree with this statement – even if they would probably say that the international news on TQS may be a quality product *for its target public*. Each news medium, for the journalists, therefore has its strong points and weak points (and even political and ideological biases). The public appears to be well aware of the specific characteristics of each medium:

> People distinguish very well the whys and wherefores and the positives of the press organizations, whichever they may be. They know very well when they buy *Le Journal de Montréal* why they are buying it; they know very well that when they buy the *Globe and Mail*, they'll get something else. It's the same thing

3. This is not surprising; it is in fact due to the typology itself, which as we have stated is based on the alignment of or the discrepancy between the journalism being practiced and that which should be practiced, according to the players.

> on television, whether they tune in to TQS, TVA, Radio-Canada, LCN or RDI. There isn't much confusion: people are well aware of the values conveyed by your products. What you broadcast is what you are. It's very transparent.(E38t)

Apart from the defects and the merits of each press company, each type of medium, whether print medium or television, has strong and weak points. We have already discussed this aspect of the journalists' comments. With television, the principle often goes further: television alone does not provide adequate news; in other words, newscasts alone do not represent quality. A television executive put it explicitly:

> [If] 80% of people get their information from newscasts, then it's their first source of news *[but it doesn't mean they're] well informed because they watch television. […] You can't stop at [television news because] you won't be well informed* […]: you have to read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television and read magazines, because it's a news universe. […] television news is not an end in itself: [it doesn't provide enough news]. […] The purpose, the nature, the function of television is not to be more intelligent than newspapers [or to replace them].(E43t)

In the same spirit, one journalist, deploring the influence of TVA and TQS on Radio-Canada's *Téléjournal*, added that, since Radio-Canada was no longer the only source of news, the negative aspects of the *Téléjournal* were now less important. In other words, the public can make up for the shortcomings of the *Téléjournal* by turning to other news sources. Similarly, the fact that articles in the print media are more or less complete is not deplorable per se, because the public can round out its information. When asked whether short articles did a disservice to the public, one journalist answered:

> More so before, than now. Now I think that, with the range [of news sources], with the Internet and with the multiplicity of news channels, the news is far more accessible than it was before. So it's true that sometimes we have to take shortcuts because of limited space, but ultimately anyone who wants complete information can go on the Internet and download a complete 200-page report and read all the details.(34p)

According to the journalists and the executives, it is up to the members of the public to seek, on an "à la carte basis," news about subjects that interest or concern them and to create their own "best of" the news. The verdict of most of the interviewees on Quebec journalism is: "yes, the quality is fairly good, but you have to make the effort to go and get it, to look for texts that make less of a stir than a column by so and so."(24p) The potential for quality news therefore exists, but it is virtual and has to be constituted by the public.[4]

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4. Because he summarizes the position of many journalists, we are quoting a post from the blog of *La Presse* journalist Patrick Lagacé, called "*S'informer ou attendre d'être informé*" [informing yourself or waiting to be informed]:
"[…] A reader […] made this comment recently on my blog: 'The journalism we now have in Quebec has replaced the cranky old busybodies on the steps of the church. They provoke and feed ill-will with all sorts of who-cares stuff. There's way too many interviews and sensationalism about obscure and uninteresting subjects. I think I'm very poorly informed and unfortunately that helps keep me in ignorance. Sorry, Patrick, but your profession needs a good kick in the butt. The lack of ethics is becoming endemic.'
"Bozappa [another reader] replied: 'You have to know how pick your news source and not judge whether it suits you or not. In 2007, we have choice. Ten years ago, it would take six months for an international press report from France to reach us. Today, we get the same at report simultaneously on the Internet, with lots of commentary from everywhere under the sun. I have the right and privilege of informing myself, therefore I am.'
"I tend to agree with Bozappa. I said so during a panel discussion at the Institut du Nouveau Monde, in August, to a participant who felt she was poorly informed by the media, especially about international current events: 'It's because you inform yourself poorly.' Because today, in 2007, I'm sorry but we have thousands of sources. We're no longer held captive by the six o'clock news and the morning newspaper.
"Today, we can consult, in real time, sources that are well regarded, diversified, targeted and customized to our interests and tastes. The BBC, AFP, the *New York Times*, *El Pais*, *Le Monde*, Al-Jazeera, *whatever*, you can pick and choose. Everything is available on line. Are you turned on by Africa? I'm sure there's something, somewhere, to enlighten you.
"It's the same thing here, in Quebec. If a subject interests you, there are ways of diversifying your news sources, comparing, weighing, going further. Obviously, if you buy ONE newspaper or you watch ONE show in the morning, or you watch RDI for ten minutes, no, you won't be well informed. Same thing with opinion: between *Le Devoir*, *Le Soleil*, the *J de M*, *La Presse*, the *Gazette*, the *Globe* and all the others, there's variety. You just crack me up when you say the opposite.
"As Bozappa said: I have the right and the privilege of informing myself. I would add: the responsibility. But in 2007 you can be informed. You don't have to wait to be informed." (Posted Sunday, November 25, 2007, http://blogues.cyberpresse.ca/lagace/?p=70720647, consulted November 25, 2007).

We should offer some clarification of the public's responsibility for journalistic quality. First, it derives essentially from an innovative concept: as we have said regarding the relative nature of the definition of quality, the traditionalists use criteria that are firmer and more universal when speaking of quality. Each medium should therefore essentially offer the same news, or at least should accommodate the various publics.

We then see that the innovator journalists justify some of the shortcomings of journalism by citing the target public: if the public is responsible for journalistic quality, it is just as responsible for mediocre journalism. Indeed, the journalists often point out a "slightly voyeuristic streak or [a] slightly exhibitionist streak [on the part of the public]."(23p) The innovators cite it to justify journalism as it is practiced. It appears that the innovators see themselves as part of a system where demand at least partially determines the type of news produced; the public is strongly attracted by sensationalist news and seeks it out, thereby justifying its existence.

Certain journalists believe the public's responsibility completely frees journalism from its own responsibility to itself. "Ultimately, it's almost a choice that society makes: this [Quebec] journalism, if nobody watched it or read it, it wouldn't exist. It's a reflection of us as a society. But I don't blame journalists for that [because of the pressure of time and competition]. We have the politicians we deserve, but we also have the journalists we deserve."(19p) It's in this sense that the innovators adopt the reasoning of the marketplace, whereby journalism is fundamentally determined by demand. This determinism reflects, if not the natural laws of the marketplace, then at least the "general scheme of things," to use the expression of one innovator:

> People always tell us we report bad news. It's true. But what is news? I always say that someone who comes home from work with three pieces of news to announce to his (or her) spouse, [namely] 1 – his boss cut the grass last night, 2 – somebody won $25,000 and 3 – someone killed his wife and hanged himself in the closet, [well] he'll no doubt start with the worst. *People criticize us for it, but that's how it works, it operates like that, it's the way things are.*(30p)

The innovators also cite certain (supposed) characteristics of the public to explain television journalism's emphasis on shocking effects and even the superficiality of some of its coverage. For example, a television journalist deplores the frantic pace imposed by television and the "industrial" aspect of news production, because journalists "can't stop any more to think"(15t) and can no longer explain things properly or "delve deeply into anything"(15t); but the journalist immediately justifies the situation by concluding that, if journalism isn't practiced this way, "the public will zap you."(15t) He added that the public "wants everything too fast"(15t) and has a short attention span that "wanders after two minutes."(15t)[5] We shall return in our conclusion to the matter of the public, specifically the journalists' relationship with it. But first we must discuss the journalists' concerns about the future of journalism.

5.4 A matter of concern: journalism's loss of credibility

The journalists' verdict on Quebec journalism is generally positive, but many of them expressed concern about the credibility of their profession, which they consider threatened. The threat is especially serious in that the quality of journalism goes hand in hand with its credibility, which is for the journalists a necessary condition of their business and therefore essential for quality journalism. Credibility, according to the journalists, is "the first means of conveying the news"(5t) and thus "the most valuable thing for journalists."(3t)[6]

To support their concerns, many journalists cited opinion polls showing that, in terms of trust, the public ranks journalists on the same level as politicians and car salesmen – namely at the

5. Discussing the need for a certain "dynami[sm]"(10t) and a "punchy, quick impact,"(10t) one journalist added that he believes advertising has created the need to capture the public's attention. "That's the way it is. The longer it is, the less punchy it is and the less people tend to watch. They're less captives of television than they were before. You have to hook them. It takes something to hook them."(10t)
6. Credibility extends to all aspects of journalism: the general look of a medium is vital to its credibility: "if the news is presented as in a low-level student newspaper, no one will read it. It [won't be considered] credible."(35p)

bottom of the scale.[7] The journalists' attitudes toward such findings (whether accurate or exaggerated) range from incomprehension to disillusionment to anguish. One journalist said that "the public has less and less trust [in journalists]," (10t) that "the [public's] trust has perhaps been undermined," (10t) and that for about ten years "journalism's star has been growing dim in Quebec … but also in the United States and elsewhere in the world." (10t) Another journalist concluded: "I think that, generally speaking, if journalists rank as low as car salesmen, it's because people find that what we're doing isn't quite what we should be doing." (1t) Such polls clearly offend journalists.

Many journalists believe their profession's loss of credibility is related to the fact that they do not have the time to check their information. The frantic work pace means that journalists "are increasingly vulnerable, but [also] less and less credible [to the public]. And I think it's because people know that we'll say anything, and that the thoroughness that was the prerogative of news services ten or fifteen years ago [has declined]." (18t)

If the journalists as a group do not necessarily agree that today's journalism has a credibility problem, that is not the case for the future. Specifically, almost all of the journalists are worried about the abuse of certain "winning formulas" used by journalism. Throughout this report, we have noted criticism by journalists who cited a surfeit of opinion in the media, abusive "spectacularization," excessive use of columnists and undue

7. The journalists are probably referring to the Profession Barometer by Leger Marketing, an annual survey that measures public perception of the trustworthiness of various occupations (http://legermarketing.com/documents/spclm/05032lfr.pdf). According to this survey, however, about one person out of two trusts journalists, versus one out of five for car salesmen. The journalists may be referring to other surveys, however. A survey by the Canadian Media Research Consortium, for example, found that almost 80% of Canadians think that journalists' prejudices occasionally or frequently influence the news, and that two-thirds of Canadians believe that the news is often not fair and impartial (francophone Quebecers have a slightly more favourable opinion of journalists) (*Examining Credibility in Canadian Journalism: a national study of public attitudes about news*, 2004, www.cmrcccrm.ca/francais/recherche-2004.html). It is also possible that the journalists are referring to in-house surveys to which we do not have access. But regardless of the poll(s) that the journalists are referring to, the fact remains that many journalists believe the public does not trust their profession.

diversification of content (the overdone "magazine" approach of newscasts and newspapers). Even though a diversity of viewpoints and content, as well as the "interesting" aspect of the news, contributes to quality journalism, it appears that taking these elements too far may detract from the profession's credibility. But the problem, as the journalists point out, is that the survival of journalism inevitably depends on news that is increasingly interesting or presents more points of view. The journalists are therefore concerned about an increased risk of "slippage" in the future.

At the same time, the journalists fear that the credibility of journalists as a group will be undermined by the excesses of a few media or journalists: they are concerned that a contagion effect can destroy their credibility and they fear that the public will make generalizations based on isolated cases: "today, journalists do not understand that their individual actions [have] an impact on the group as a whole."(22p)

Many journalists are also concerned about confusion over the role of the journalist. In fact, the journalists pointed out the vagueness surrounding their role. "There's confusion over the various categories," stated one journalist: "anchors, journalists, commentators [are lumped together in the mind of the public]."(33p) The confusion over roles could also stem from the use of "external" and "specialized" contributors who appear regularly in the media. As we have noted, the journalists rarely welcome the use of such commentators, who, they believe, have their own interests to defend. One journalist called them "supposed experts who often aren't."(20p) Another journalist is critical of the fact that "TV show hosts become journalists [and vice-versa]"(22p) and even pointed out that people in the street believe that the variety show host Véronique Cloutier is a journalist.(22p)

One journalist, deploring the lack of a professional order of journalists, said that "almost anyone can just decide to call themselves a journalist one day. The danger is there,"(1t) he concluded. He is also critical of certain journalists who "clearly present themselves as militants."(22p). This militant approach misleads the public: "people who call [the station] have the impression that we [journalists] are a sort of [free] lawyer or upholder of

the law or mouthpiece who is there to defend their interests."(11t)

Convergence and, more broadly, the question of media ownership also appear to detract from journalists' credibility. Once again, the issue is confusion over roles and conflict of interest. One journalist deplores the fact that Quebecor "concentrates on show business, the *Star Académie* type of thing," (10t) which is practically equivalent to promotion rather than "news."(10t) Another journalist is critical of the conflicts of interest inherent in the "excessive" coverage(33p) of *Star Académie*.[8] In such cases, the journalists are concerned about confusion in the mind of the public, which may associate journalists with promoters of cultural content. Another journalist said that "convergence isn't in the public interest. It isn't necessarily a winning situation for the reader. We have to think of the reader. The reader doesn't necessarily know that Quebecor produces *Star Académie* and sells the records."(35p) As one journalist summed it up, "convergence creates doubts in the mind of the public about the quality of news."(27p)

Similarly, for another journalist, the fact that *La Presse* belongs to Power Corporation, a company seen as close to the Liberal Party, undermines the newspaper's credibility, whether or not this "complicity" has a real impact on the newspaper's content: "there's the appearance of a conflict of interest, and the appearance is as serious as a conflict of interest [itself]."(35p) Another journalist said the public has a similar perception of complicity when it comes to *Le Devoir* and the Parti québécois.

5.5 A few ways to improve quality

We have presented the "good" and the "less good" aspects of Quebec journalism, as seen by the journalists. Now we shall look at how they believe journalism could go farther down the path toward quality, or how it could offset the obstacles to journalistic

8. When the interviews were done, the blanket coverage of the TVA television program *Star Académie* by *Le Journal de Montréal*, which belongs to the Quebecor group, the same group that produces and broadcasts the program, was a major issue for the journalists at *Le Journal de Montréal*, as it was for the others.

quality. We must stress, from the outset, that the innovator journalists generally have a great deal of difficulty seeing how journalism could improve. As we have said, the journalists, and the executives to an even greater extent, are in general not very critical of the news media; it is only normal that they would have difficulty seeing how to improve something they already find satisfactory or of good quality.

We asked the journalists and executives what they would improve in their work if they were given carte blanche: most of the innovators didn't know what they would do with this latitude or how they could improve on what they are already doing. Moreover, the innovators, as we have already noted, tend to consider the most negative aspects of their job part of the general scheme of things and therefore impossible to change. Even so, the journalists, and some of the executives, agreed on one point: the "race for the news," which they deem inevitable, is excessive. Almost all the interviewees said it was necessary to slow the pace of the news, to reduce journalists' workload and to give them enough time to check their sources. They believe that the work of gathering the news should once again become a priority and that, on television, the presentation of news by journalists (the many live reports and debriefs) should be de-emphasized somewhat.

Other ways suggested by the journalists to improve journalistic quality have been presented throughout this report. First, the journalists identified the components of quality journalism; it goes without saying that greater emphasis on them would enhance the quality of journalism. Foremost is the value added to the news, which appears to be the key to enhanced journalistic quality. At the same time, making the news more interesting, finding more news in the public interest, ensuring texts are clear, etc., are all ways of improving the quality of journalism. We shall not return to these various elements, which have already been discussed, and which for some are obvious.

Other solutions were proposed. For instance, frequently the journalists, as well as a few executives, wanted greater emphasis on specialized journalism, or beats. "The beat is the way to find

good news,"(E47p) opined one executive.[9] The beat, according to another journalist, "is the only way to really get a handle on issues and delve deeper, but also [the only way] to develop contacts that [supply the journalist] so [he] isn't dependent on press conferences."(7t) "If you've got a beat," added another journalist, "you tend to do better. It's hard to compete with those [journalists] who are beat guys, because they've got the contacts."(51) It's especially important, continued another journalist, because "without contacts, you're finished as a journalist."(59)

In a universe where public relations agents are increasingly present, the journalists see specialized journalism as an effective way to protect themselves from public relations, and to maintain a keen critical spirit when they do face this phenomenon.(12t) One journalist stressed that specialization enables journalists "to be less naive,"(18t) given the rapid pace at which journalists have to process the news. Another journalist believes that a beat makes it possible to develop credibility in an area of specialization, which facilitates contacts with people in the particular industry.(7t) Specialization also allows people to orient themselves more easily in the fragmented world of the news, since it immediately points out *the* specialist in an area: "when something happens in medicine, it's Mr. X, when something happens in politics, it's so and so, etc."(10t)

The journalists are well aware, however, of the disadvantages of specialization, above all the risks created by a relationship of "complicity" with sources. They also say they are aware that specialization involves the risk that journalists will develop "their own evaluation, their own perspective, their own perception of reality."(18t) If so, such journalists would risk "wanting to convince"(18t) the public, imposing their own evaluations and perceptions, even if "that isn't [their] role."(18t) Another journalist concurred, adding that specialization means a journalist has such a good command of issues that it is difficult to do "objective work [...], to be only an observer and allow the pros and cons to speak for themselves. We become stakeholders in this issue"(23p)

9. One journalist clarified this statement by saying that specialization enables a journalist to be better connected within an industry and have a better network of contacts,(32p) which opens the door to more scoops.

and, moreover, identified as such by people in the industry concerned.(23p)

Many journalists, who deplored the fact that "anyone [can] be a journalist"(22p) and even a journalist and a public relations agent at the same time, suggested that a professional order of journalists be created. They believe the main advantage of such an order would be to halt the loss of the profession's credibility in the eyes of the public. As for the training of journalists, the traditionalists believe better training and a better overall cultural level among journalists are desirable to improve the quality of journalism (although they did not dwell on this subject); the innovators, however, did not really raise it. In addition, the traditionalists are also the only ones who addressed the matter of labour unions, which they see as bulwarks against a decline in quality. The traditionalists also seemed to be the only ones to emphasize better team work, or more exactly a return to collegiality, which disappeared some time ago, according to them: "One of the things that would improve things, would be if we all stopped with this ego thing, and began to realize that we're all in the same business: trying to inform the public."(54)

5.6 Journalists: a uniform socioprofessional group divorced from the public

Finally, regarding journalism's problems and the solutions proposed by the journalists and the executives, many of them deplore the gentrification of journalists. Many journalists consider their socioprofessional group to be "bourgeois bohemians" who, from social, economic and even ideological standpoints, are removed from the public. One executive pointed out: "We, as journalists, are a stratum apart: like any professional group, we have our own culture, our interests, our ways of doing things, etc., which are quite distinct from those of our readers."(E45p)

This situation is often deemed regrettable by the journalists, especially by the innovators, because, according to them, it creates a divide between the journalists and a large portion of the public, and makes it difficult, according to one journalist, to gain a good grasp of the "realities that affect people."(15t) One executive regrets that "journalists aren't grounded enough in

the real world, [because] they don't take the Metro and they live in suburbia."(E49p)

The journalists believe that journalism has to be for "the man in the street,"(E41t) "a guy like me"(E44p): it has to be "close to the people, close to everybody."(E39t) The innovators' comments on the public are devoid of elitism; they believe journalists have to be in sync with their public as much as possible. One journalist made an apt comment on journalism's changing relationship with the public: he distinguishes between the "vertical position" that journalists previously occupied, which placed them above the population, from the "horizontal position" that they now occupy, which places them amongst the population, in the heart of the action they are trying to report on:

> There was a time when [a journalist was a] father figure who told us every evening, on the *Téléjournal*, about what was happening in the world, what was very important, fairly important and something ordinary for a light touch [to end the newscast]. I think there has been a general change of mindset, even within journalism, so that today we place ourselves a little less above the public, and we tell ourselves "There may be a way of reporting the news that is more on everyone's level." [This change of mindset] may also be due to [the abundance of new technologies, especially the Internet]. So people have more news. But are they better informed? I don't know, but they have the means to obtain the news more easily.
>
> The vertical relationship is less true [now] since sometimes we're reporting for people who know more than we do about many subjects. [In my opinion] the trend, among young journalists is to be more at the heart of the action, rather than pretend to be a specialist or to talk about specialists. Even if we still involve specialists, now we try to have witnesses, to give a more human dimension to the news. I think the advent of all-news networks has also changed the way we report the news, because, in doing more, we need to vary things a little more. All that means there are still two trends that [exist side by side in certain media].(9t)

Certain journalists also deplore the ideological, academic and cultural uniformity of journalists. They believe journalism lacks

diversity and alternative perspectives; journalists all seem to have the same background, the same training, the same way of seeing things, the same pace of life and the same consumer habits. One journalist thinks university training in journalism appears to have equipped journalists better, but seems to have "smoothed out the differences"(21p) and created an "ideological concentration,"(21p) which the journalist considers potentially more serious than the concentration of the press:

> How is it that the media are all filled with the same type of journalist, everywhere, the same kind of guys, of similar age, who live in the 'burbs, who drive in to work every morning, who come from a francophone family, who have very few, if any, foreign friends, who have taken two or three trips in their life, like everyone else? […] If we look at the Quebec media, they're full of the same kind of people, the same type of journalist. It's paradoxical, because our line of work is supposed to represent diversity and the plurality of ideas in society, but we ourselves don't reflect that plurality. [The result is] uniformity and ideological concentration. All the media look alike. Everyone is almost in the same niche. Those who go against the grain pay the price in terms of profitability and popularity.(21p)

Another journalist stated: "In the media right now, there's a lot of that, a sort of groupthink, where everyone pulls in the same direction and doesn't dare pull in other directions for fear of standing out from the crowd. It's a shame."(22p) The journalist also said the situation seemed to be far more prejudicial for the traditional media because the public seemed to be switching to "alternative media to get the answers to its questions."(22p) In brief, quality journalism needs not only diverse subjects but also diverse practitioners.

Conclusion

Throughout this report, we have drawn a fundamental distinction between journalists who are innovators and those who are traditionalists. The first endorse journalism as it is now practiced and believe it is generally on the "right track." The journalism they advocate must captivate the public and must regard the container as equally important as its contents, if not more important, because it is the container that enables them to reach the public in the first place. According to the innovators, quality journalism must pay attention to the public's interests and needs. It must also consist just as much of practical advice related to daily life as it does of political news. The innovators espouse a generally relativistic concept of journalistic quality: quality depends on the context in which journalism is received, the various publics, the various types of medium, etc. Their definition of quality is therefore anything but universal or absolute. In brief, they are pragmatists: journalism has to do whatever it takes to be heard and to convey the news to the public; the legitimacy of the processes involved is evaluated only on the basis of the priority objective of reaching the public. The innovators are not afraid to use emotion or a dash of sensationalism to achieve that objective; in this sense, they would probably describe themselves as realists.

The traditionalists, in contrast, believe that journalism is on a long downward slide: it has strayed from its true calling onto the path of entertainment, sensationalism, overdone emotion,

utilitarian information, light subjects and superficial treatment. The traditionalists often adopt a nostalgic attitude, believing that journalism was better "in the old days." Above all, they are intransigent: they have difficulty opening the door to compromise; their quality criteria are stricter, and they are less flexible than the innovators when it comes to the constraints of the various media or the particularities of the different publics. Generally speaking, we consider the traditionalists to be idealists: they understand and judge journalism according to standards and ideals to strive for, and they leave scant room for journalism's technical and above all financial considerations, even though they do not close their eyes to the inevitability of them: "Certainly, we all have to make a profit, but we don't have to be prostitutes,"(54) said one of them, summing up the traditionalist position.

It will be recalled that the innovator and traditionalist positions constitute two extremes, between which lies an axis along which the journalists are ranged. In other words, the group of journalists cannot be divided into two distinct and radically opposed camps, since most of them reflect neither extreme. Rather, the journalists' comments as a whole can be found between the two, but with a clear bias for the innovator end of the range, so that the moderate innovator position is dominant. As for the executives, they are strong innovators.

The "relative pragmatism" of the innovators and the "idealism" of the traditionalists bear examination. We believe that the innovators, unlike the traditionalists, have difficulty distinguishing between the ideal practice of journalism and their actual practice of it. Often, their definition of journalistic quality is based on the journalism they are already engaged in, not because they believe they practice high-quality journalism, but because they have difficulty seeing how they could do things otherwise. Their difficulty in describing the journalism they would practice if they had complete freedom is quite revealing. As we pointed out, because they consider the survival of each news medium to be constantly threatened, the innovators think about journalistic quality in relative and pragmatic terms: they do what they have to do to survive and they justify it after the fact, without looking too hard at what they could do better. In other words, the innovators believe they cannot pick and choose their means. If we deem the innovators pragmatic relativists, it is because they

tend to set the quality bar at a level they *can reach* or, in their opinion, do indeed reach, as opposed to a level that they *could reach*. As for the traditionalists, they systematically place the bar at a level that they *should reach*, in other words at a predetermined level that is often high indeed.

If the innovators have difficulty distinguishing journalism as it is actually practiced from journalism they could qualify as being of better quality, and if quality corresponds to what they are already doing, given the context in which the news is produced, the very concept of quality is almost superfluous to them. Indeed, to the extent that, for a given context, only one type of journalism is possible, namely that which the various constraints dictate, the concept of quality journalism loses its relevance for the innovators, since, for that context, only one type of journalism is possible and only one type is feasible. Quality, as an overall standard or ideal, therefore loses its meaning.-

According to the innovators, the public is often the reason for this limited horizon, since they consider the public partially responsible for state of journalism. One journalist summed it up clearly:

> Changing the rules of journalism would not work, unless you can change how the audience sees the world. Because I think television responds in many ways to what the audience is prepared to see and what they want to see. […] Unless you can change society's views, you can't change what we present. We don't present something that they won't understand: nobody is gonna watch. What I find is, increasingly, in society, you have a highly irrational, emotional society. A society that says "How do you feel" as opposed to "What do you think." […] Television has to respond to that kind of emotional audience. […] If we could change [that], then we could have a far more intellectual and rational newscast. But, until then, I don't see the point in changing anything.(61)

The journalists, except the traditionalists, made this type of comment fairly frequently, as did the executives. For example, one journalist we previously quoted believes "we have the media we deserve." Such comments assign the responsibility for journalistic quality to the public and even include the public as a component of it: since the journalists operate on the basis of a

market-driven logic and believe they have to take the public into account in their work, what the public wants determines their output to a considerable extent. According to this reasoning, the public is responsible for journalism as it is practiced; ultimately the onus for quality is on the public.

In the interviews we conducted, most of the journalists and the executives were not sloughing off their responsibilities; even so, we observed that the argument that the public is ultimately responsible for quality journalism was quite prevalent. In fact, more broadly, the journalists we spoke to believe that the public will have to be more active in the world of news and journalism. Many of them believe the public cannot simply expect to receive, from a single edition of a newspaper or a newscast, all the news and analysis required for an enlightened view of current events. Citizens cannot expect to be well informed with only one source of news; rather, the public has to create quality news by taking it upon itself to consult various sources.

The executives, however, are trying with one medium (their own) to meet all the public's needs, providing everything with the same medium to limit the public's "flitting" from one medium to another. The proliferation of columnists and analysts, the diversification of content in newscasts and dailies – including the trend to a "magazine approach" by both media – confirm that the executives are trying to go in that direction. Generally speaking, the relationship that the journalists and the executives have with the public diverges noticeably; the journalists have an overall vision of the media and see the public as a general entity, whereas the executives have an overall vision of their medium and understand the public essentially to mean their current or potential public.

In an updated edition (2007) of *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel insist on adding a new basic principle to journalism. This addition is symptomatic of the trend to making the public accountable, which we observed: "Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to

the news."[1] By referring to citizens who are active in the creation of their own news, these authors, like the journalists we met with, propose a very different concept of quality journalism: quality is never complete but is always still to be achieved and to be created by the public. According to this concept, quality journalism cannot (or can no longer) be realized in a single self-sufficient newspaper or newscast, to which every good citizen should be exposed every day.

To be effective, however, such a concept of the news has to be based on a relatively clear "agreement" with the public, whereby the public knows that it has to create quality news itself. In this regard, especially with the generalist media, we must ask ourselves how to ensure such an agreement is clearly understood. We also believe that accountability on the part of the public should not be accompanied by less accountability from journalists: the public's accountability must not become an excuse for covering current events less, or less well, on the grounds that others do it better and that the public should look to them. In fact, the principle of the public that creates its own news on an

1. http://www.concernedjournalists.org/what-are-elements-journalism and http://www.journalism.org/node/71. We also quote Kovach and Rosenstiel (*The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*, New York, Crown, 2001) about the other elements of journalism: "[…] the purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing.
"To fulfill this task:
"1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
"2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
"3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
"4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
"5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
"6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
"7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
"8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
"9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience."
The journalists and the executives we met with would certainly not contradict these principles. But they believe that quality journalism cannot be summed up by these principles alone. In fact, the fundamental elements of journalism, as defined by Kovach and Rosenstiel, concentrate on the news and more specifically, in our opinion, on political news and hard news, on the basis of representative democracy ("provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing"). As we have seen, the journalists and executives we met with do not limit quality journalism to this or any other type of news.

à la carte basis opens the door to greater specialization by the media. One medium is better for political news, another is better for environmental news, and so on. Ultimately, the media's function of agenda setting (drawing attention to certain facts deemed more important than others) would be discarded. If this phenomenon becomes widespread, it will be appropriate to assess its implications.

In the same vein, we should take a closer look at the fact that the journalists from the print media, as they said during the interviews, leave it up television to report raw news, whereas they increasingly "add value" to the news, put it in context, discuss issues and so on. Moreover, we believe we should be concerned that the journalists from generalist television made similar comments; they leave it to the all-news networks and the Internet to report raw news, and they assume they have nothing, or almost nothing, new to teach the public in terms of raw news. In short, the journalists from the large generalist media produce the news as if the public were already aware of the facts. Obviously, once again, we should verify the accuracy of the premise underlining this reasoning. Are the members of the public already aware of the news when they open up a newspaper or switch on a newscast? If this practice becomes widespread, we should also ask ourselves who will report raw news and who will check or double-check its accuracy.

It goes without saying that, when it comes to the news, the public has become less passive, and that this trend will become more pronounced. The members of public can now, at their convenience, access the websites of the traditional generalist media, be they local or distant; they can also consult Internet-only sources of news (such as the *Huffington Post*), free encyclopedias (such as Wikipedia) and countless blogs. Moreover, in the era of the so-called Web 2.0, they are both receivers and suppliers of news. They can provide their own interpretation of events in the comment sections of news websites (including those of the traditional generalist media), they can discuss events with other Web users in on-line forums, they can discuss them with friends and acquaintances on various social-networking sites (such as MySpace and Facebook) and they can write their own blogs. In short, the public, especially the young public, which is

more adept at the various technologies, recently acquired important freedom of movement when it comes to the news.

This newly acquired freedom obviously raises its fair share of questions about the future of the traditional news media. Just how essential or inessential will they be to the public? To prevent the public from drifting away from them, a trend that is already well under way, the traditional news media, including their Web platforms, will have to rely on their credibility and more broadly the quality of their news. Moreover, their ability to systematically process large amounts of local news and their perspective on local events will be important assets. Indeed, it is difficult to see how they could be replaced in this respect. It remains to be seen how much the public will continue to want local news and a local view of events taking place outside the country.

More broadly, it will be necessary to examine how the public's greater freedom in relation to the news affects the way our democracies function. Some see in this new freedom on the part of the public a genuine revolution that will ultimately change not only the nature of journalism, but also that of democracy, which in addition to being representative, will become more participatory and more community-minded.[2] Obviously this outcome remains to be seen: democracy involves the exercise of power, and there is more than one step between commenting on an event in a blog – even if millions of people do so – and exercising power. In other words, we must not confuse the possibility of greater *influence of* public opinion with *governance by* public opinion. We have stepped here, however, onto the slippery terrain of the future of the news and the health of democracy. We do not want to go quite so far. But it goes without saying that journalism and, even more so, the quality of journalism will be central to these many questions. Much debate remains.

2. See Alterman, Eric, "Out of Print. The death and life of the American newspaper," *New Yorker*, March 31, 2008.