INTRODUCTION

Photojournalism and Citizen Journalism

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In the aftermath of the South Asian tsunami of 26 December 2004, the term "citizen journalism" quickly gained currency with news organisations finding themselves in the awkward position of being largely dependent on "amateur content" to tell the story of what had transpired on the ground that day in the most severely affected areas. Despite its ambiguities, the term was widely perceived to capture something of the countervailing ethos of the ordinary person's capacity to bear witness, thereby providing commentators with a useful label to characterise an ostensibly new genre of reportage. While "eyewitness" testimony has long featured in news coverage, the remarkable range of first-person accounts by those who happened to be on the scene (Western holidaymakers, in many instances) appearing in online journals or "weblogs" on personal webpages, together with harrowing imagery recorded via digital cameras or video camcorders, was widely prized for making a vital contribution to mainstream news media coverage. One newspaper headline after the next declared citizen journalism to be yet another startling upheaval, if not outright revolution, ushered into view by internet technology. "Your readers and viewers were also your correspondents. Your ability to be in touch was digital as well as conventional," Peter Preston (2005) of the Observer maintained one week later. "That is a quantum shift, however you phrase it: the world shrinks in an instant.

And foreign news desks, maybe, will never be the same again." In the months to follow "citizen journalism" secured its place in the news professional's lexicon, effectively affirming the rapidly forming consensus that what counted as journalism – and who could lay claim to being a journalist – was being decisively recast.

The recent ten-year anniversary of the tsunami afforded a vantage point from which to pause and reassess what lessons were learned from "the deadliest tsunami in recorded history," as it was widely described in the press, particularly with regard to co-ordinating the logistics of emergency disaster relief and crisis communication. Some experts warned the passage of time meant disaster preparation was in a state of decline; memories were gradually fading. "Disaster amnesia," as the UN's Margareta Wahlstroem called it, threatened to lower defences. "You relax, and that's dangerous," she pointed out. "One of the big challenges in reducing disaster-risk is to keep alive this understanding" (cited in Jha and Promyamyai 2014). Playing their part in this regard, several news organisations turned the anniversary into a news peg, reminding today's publics in frequently heart-rending detail about the human devastation left in the tsunami's wake. "Ten years have elapsed," T. Ahmad Dadek (2014) wrote in a guest column for The Jakarta Post, but it remained fresh in his mind "how, on that fateful day, hysteria, screams and panic overwhelmed me and other people around the mosque on which we pinned all our hopes, as an earthquake and tsunami not only engulfed us but also overturned our reason and logic." Survivor testimony was similarly used to powerful effect in news reports and features, providing acute insights into what was seen, heard, felt – and ten years on – remembered.

No less poignant were the recollections of journalists, not least those frustrated in their efforts to adequately document what they were experiencing that day. "Horror is often an overused word in the aftermath of conflict or tragedy," Australian journalist Charles Miranda (2014) affirmed, "but in this instance the word somehow felt diluted in capturing the scene that lay before me in that stifling Pacific heat." Baltimore Sun photojournalist Karl Merton Ferron (2014), dispatched to the Indonesia at the time, shared his memories on the Sun's website with accompanying images:

> The bodies left in piles along muddy streets did not bother me as much as the ghosts of the people no longer there. I photographed an open, abandoned suitcase sitting alone on a wave-scoured landscape two miles from shore. I imagined a businessman, possibly staying miles away in a seashore hotel, scrambling to escape the inescapable surge of ocean. That was my moment of helplessness, felt while standing among complete destruction, all the while unable to capture an image that expressed the result of his possible fate (Ferron 2014).

Difficulties in overcoming the limitations of imagery were a recurrent theme in such reflections. Mark Furler (2014) of APN similarly recalled struggling to communicate the scale of a catastrophe that all but eluded visual representation. "Television images, powerful as they were, did nothing to convey the sensation of driving three hours from Colombo to Galle and seeing nothing but concrete, clothes, fragments of furniture and hundreds of scattered school books," he

wrote. CNN's Paula Hancocks (2014) also believed that it was "impossible to capture the extent of the devastation on camera," a point she underscored by quoting the words of a US doctor who had volunteered to help. He told her he would never forget "the victims, dead-eyed in their hospital beds, lying there, staring at us, wondering what their stories were, how they'll ever learn to cope with this, what they've seen, what they've lost" (cited in Hancocks 2014).

The significance of the anniversary prompted some news organisations to re-examine their own reportorial priorities, not least with regard to how the tsunami transformed the way they related to members of the public who, unintentionally finding themselves in the wrong place at the right time, retained the presence of mind to bear witness. Time and again, ordinary citizens garnered praise for documenting its ravages in the absence of journalists at the scene. The BBC's Sally Taft (2014) observed that while the Corporation had "always encouraged audience participation, from reading out letters on the wireless to the early days of radio phone-ins, it was the tsunami on 26 December 2004 which led to a significant shift in the way we dealt with these contributions." Eyewitness accounts, relayed through thousands of emails, "told the story where we did not have correspondents on the ground," she added. Spurred into action, the BBC launched a user-generated content (UGC) hub as a three-month pilot project, recognising – along with its commercial rivals – the pressing need to expand reportorial boundaries to find new ways to facilitate citizen involvement in newsmaking. Viewed from a current perspective, the contention made by Steve Outing (2005) of Poynter.org at the time that "news organizations should consider the tsunami story as the seminal marker for introducing citizen journalism into the hallowed space that is professional journalism" has proven

remarkably prescient.

Refocusing News Photography

Situated in relation to this backdrop, the rationale for the theme "Photojournalism and Citizen Journalism: Co-operation, collaboration and connectivity" shared across special issues of <u>Digital Journalism</u> and <u>Journalism Practice</u> is cast in sharp relief. In marked contrast with how amateur photographs and video footage of the 2004 tsunami were heralded for their transformative impact on professional news photography, today we readily recognise the extent to which citizen journalism has been effectively normalised where breaking news is concerned.

Increasingly it is the case that the person first on the scene of a newsworthy event with a camera will be an ordinary citizen, thanks in no small part to the growing ubiquity of cheaper, easier to handle digital devices, as well as the ease with which ensuing imagery can be uploaded and shared across social networking sites. Not surprisingly, a corresponding shift in public perceptions has taken place over this past decade, where the spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment contributions of citizens who happen to be present have become so commonplace as to be almost expected (indeed, explanations for the absence of such material would likely be noted in subsequent news reports). For varied reasons, priorities and motivations, so-called "accidental photojournalists" – be they victims, bystanders, first-responders, officials, law enforcement, combatants, activists or the like – feel compelled to bear witness with their cameras, actively engaging in diverse forms of photo-reportage to capture and relay what they see unfold before them. Here the resources of sites such as

Twitter, Facebook, Path, Flickr, Instagram, Tumblr, Reddit and YouTube are regularly mobilised to considerable journalistic advantage, much to the alarm of some professionals. "Traditional photojournalists have most to fear from mobile photographers," Richard Gray (2012) observed in <u>The Guardian</u>. "If something dramatic happens on the street ... sorry, someone's already there taking a photo of it." Speaking as a professional photographer himself, he knew the act of witnessing was critical: "Your average citizen photojournalist won't compose as well as a professional, but they will be on the spot to capture the moment and be able to publish immediately" (see also Allan 2013).

In striving to de-familiarise the familiar tenets of these dynamics redefining the nature of news photography, our attention turns to consider how wider factors, particularly economic ones, are recasting news organisations" commitments to photojournalism. Searching questions are being asked within multimedia newsrooms about how best to re-profile their visual news provision within this climate of uncertainty. A telling case in point was the sudden announcement made by managers at the Chicago <u>Sun-Times</u> in May 2013 that the newspaper would be eliminating its entire photography department, thereby terminating the employment of 28 photographers and photo editors. The day of the announcement, <u>Sun-Times</u> reporters received a memo from Managing Editor Craig Newman (2013) informing them that they would be undergoing "mandatory" training in "iPhone photography basics" in order to supplement the work of freelance photographers (and, it was presumed, contributions from members of the public, as well) wherever possible. "In the coming days and weeks," he stated, "we'll be working with all editorial employees to train and outfit you as much as possible to produce the content we need."

The Sun-Times's "knee-jerk reaction" to financial difficulties, as it was characterised by some critics, appears to be consistent with a growing pattern to "outsource" photographic responsibilities in order to better ensure the viability of news organisations under threat of closure by anxious investors. "It's not common, but it's not unprecedented either," Kenny Irby of the Poynter Institute maintained at the time. "This is part of an ongoing trend that has been happening for the last 10 years or so in American newsrooms, with the downsizing and devaluing of professional photojournalism" (cited in Marek 2013). The price such organisations are paying is proving to be considerable, not least with regard to sustaining a reputation – or "brand" in managerial discourse – based upon public trust to inspire loyalty amongst readers. "While our reporters are doing the best they can to take photos with their iPhones and still trying to deliver quality stories, visually, the story has taken a big hit," Beth Kramer of Chicago's Newspaper Guild told ABC News two months after the Sun-Times decision. In Pulitzer Prize winner John H. White's case, it was a 35-year career on the Sun-Times that came to an abrupt end. "It was as if they pushed a button and deleted a whole culture of photojournalism," he surmised. "Humanity is being robbed," he added, "by people with money on their minds" (cited in Irby 2013).

Photojournalism's "death spiral" is gaining momentum, several commentators have been warning since, with its status as a professional craft in danger of unravelling. Whilst the Sun Times has quietly re-instated a small number of the photographers it abruptly dismissed, elsewhere other news organisations have invoked similarly drastic cost-cutting measures. In Australia, for example, the Fairfax media company – owner of newspapers, magazines, radio and digital media operating there and in New Zealand – announced in May

2014 that 80 posts would be terminated, initially including three-quarters of the photography staff in Sydney and Melbourne. Despite strong revenue performance for the company overall (it reported net profits after tax of $193 million in February 2014), it was argued that the perceived savings from outsourcing photography to Getty Images, a stock photo agency, would be in the interests of shareholders. Few readers would notice the difference, managers insisted, when defending the "restructure" plan in the face of vocal opposition over professional photographers being made redundant. "These people have put their lives on the line, year in, year out," photojournalist Tamara Dean of the Sydney Morning Herald (a Fairfax title) pointed out. "When so many journalists have to work on the phone these days, the photographers are the eyes, the witnesses to history in the making," she added. "Removing those eyes will mean becoming even less a witness to real news" (cited in ABC News 2014). Evidently Fairfax's new "sourcing model" presumed readers themselves would be relied upon to generate news imagery to complement Getty's efforts, further helping to push costs down. "The age of the camera phone has probably bluffed media management into believing that photojournalism is a luxury," former Fairfax photographer Chris Beck (2014) said at the time. "Blurry amateur phone video and pictures of fights and fires on the news and internet are becoming more pervasive because they are immediate."

While this re-inflection of journalistic values to prioritise economic factors is hardly a new phenomenon, warnings about the impact of outsourcing on standards of quality would seem to be going unheeded in many news organisations around the world. "In an age when we are assaulted by a blizzard of imagery, you need skilful and dedicated professionals to lift your publication

above the ordinary," veteran news photographer Mike Bowers (2014) contends, yet "quality" was "not a word that had much sway with managers" under financial pressure, at least in his experience as a managing editor of photography for daily newspapers. Sharp criticisms of "iPhone-wielding amateurs," and the like, figure conspicuously in grim prognostications of photojournalism's impending demise, while broader structural imperatives – typically framed via discourses of "fiscal responsibility," "economic competitiveness," "global patterns and trends," and so forth – elude sustained attention (Allan 2015). Evidence of public concern is readily apparent, such as in the case of the petition to save the Fairfax photography jobs that garnered more than 11,000 signatures in 48 hours (Bodey 2014), but also on a more regular basis, not least in the comment sections of news sites. Still, sweeping claims about citizen journalism persist, with direct correlations frequently drawn between the rise of the camera-equipped cell or mobile telephones – "everyone is a photojournalist now" – and the fall of professional photojournalism.

Journalism Practice

This special issue of Journalism Practice begins with a backward glance before pushing ahead. Revisiting the gatekeeping model from earlier studies of mass communication, Carol B. Schwalbe, B. William Silcock, and Elizabeth Candello reassess its potential for current investigations into the changing role of the visual journalist and their audiences. This article reports on two studies, the first presenting findings from qualitative elite interviews with key visual decision-makers, and the second discussing an online cross-sectional survey of visual

journalists associated with three leading US news organisations. On the basis of these two studies, the authors propose a new model of visual gatekeeping, one where "gatecheckers" select, verify, and curate visuals, but no longer with the degree of control over their distribution that traditional gatekeepers were able to impose. Maria Nilsson and Ingela Wadbring begin by pointing out that the steadily increasing flow of amateur images of global crises presents both challenges and opportunity for the mainstream news media. Their article's case study examines the relative prominence of amateur content in the online and print editions of four Swedish newspapers, where gatekeeping processes - shaped by the normative judgements of editors making decisions about the relative quality of such images for publication - receive careful scrutiny. Take-up of citizen content is shown to be more circumscribed than what might be otherwise anticipated, with concerns raised about its news value in journalistic terms, as well as scepticism about its relative significance for newspaper readers' interests. Igor Vobič and Illija Tomanić Trivundža's article explores the notion of the "tyranny of the empty frame" within the online provision of two leading Slovenian newspapers, where online journalists – working with little, if any training or experience in photojournalism – are required to provide each news item with at least one photograph for illustrative purposes. Findings from newsroom observations and in-depth interviews with these journalists enable the authors to investigate certain paradoxes associated with this imperative. In considering the challenges amateur contributions engender for the dominant paradigm of press photography, definitional clashes over what counts as "true" journalism are centred for critique.

Bonnie Brennen and J. Scott Brennen share the findings of their qualitative research project exploring the specific ways in which twelve traditional television, print and internet news organisations in the United States integrated user-generated visual content into news coverage over the course of an ordinary week in 2014. The discovery that citizen contributions constituted a minimal part of the ensuing coverage leads them to suggest, in turn, that such narrow, selective uses were intended to maintain organisational influence and power, not least by reinforcing more traditional notions of what constitutes accurate, responsible and relevant journalism. Mette Mortensen, in her article, examines eyewitness images in relation to what she terms "conflictual media events." Building on previous studies of media events from the pre-web era, she proceeds to elaborate an approach that recognises how the proliferation of cameraphones has transformed an "online public sphere" in important ways. Taking as her case study the bombing of the Boston Marathon in April 2013, she shows how the circulation of eyewitness images eroded established boundaries between experts and laypersons across multiple domains, inviting new questions about the distribution of power where contests over news imagery are concerned. Andrea Pogliano's article revolves around an empirical case study conducted with young people in Italy that examines issues concerning questions of trust in news photographs. Using a photo-elicitation technique to draw out individuals' perceptions of images related to global crisis events, the study identifies several points of tension between their views about the relative truth-value of citizen and professional news photography, respectively. "Knowing the photographer's role in the event being depicted redefines the terms of the

discourse," she argues, "and shifts the moral borderlines that the publics draw between different images and different media for their distribution."

In assessing the defining characteristics of citizen photojournalism as a genre, Louise Grayson devotes particular attention to the narrative or "story telling" role of the visual image. More specifically, she adopts an "action genre" approach (Lemke 1995) to examine how it has emerged in and through recognisable patterns of activity in three key phases of photographic production processes, and how these processes are shaped by technical, cultural, economic and institutional factors. In so doing, she elucidates what she terms "the narrative potential of photography," which is to say the potential of certain images to be considered legitimate, convincing and authoritative accounts of reality. Kathrin Schmieder's article introduces the concept of the "visual quote" to show how news media workers will choose to either accommodate or distance themselves from amateur content under certain circumstances. More specifically, she employs the concept to identify how, when and why they strive to maintain their professional authority over amateur photographs, drawing on interview evidence and observations collected at the Australian Leader Community Newspaper chain, as well as through interviews conducted with representatives from a further 14 media institutions in Australia, Germany and the UK. Turning to a Brazilian context in the final article for this special issue of Journalism Practice, Alice Baroni undertakes a comparative study of how photographers from Rio de Janeiro's community and mainstream media organisations capture the complex realities of the city's favelas (or slums). "While mainstream photojournalists typically report on favelas from outside to inside, denouncing wrongdoings and human rights abuses," she writes,

"community photographers do it from the opposite direction, from inside to outside, presenting images of the everyday life of favela communities." In exploring why this is the case, Baroni draws on theoretical insights from Foucault and Bourdieu in order to delve into the working practices, identities, and discourses of the photographers themselves.

Co-operation, collaboration and connectivity

To close, it is hoped that the special issues of <u>Digital Journalism</u> and <u>Journalism Practice</u> will facilitate future investigations into this important area of scholarly and professional enquiry. Disputes over what counts as photojournalism, and thereby who qualifies to be a photojournalist, have profound implications, as we shall see vividly illuminated in the pages ahead. Such tensions have long reverberated in discussions about the rise of portable, user-friendly cameras (from at least as far back as the Kodak Brownie camera of 1900), and differing views regarding their perceived impact – both celebratory and condemnatory alike - on the reportorial world.

Looking beyond the horizon, however, it quickly becomes apparent that to make good the subtitle for the special issues - Co-operation, collaboration and connectivity" – will require reimagining news photography anew. News organisations willing to be sufficiently bold to make the most of this remarkable potential to forge reciprocal relationships between professionals and their citizen counterparts stand to secure opportunities to rethink its forms, practices and epistemologies at a time of considerable scepticism about viable prospects. Partnerships demand mutual respect through open dialogue, encouraging innovation through experimentation in fashioning new modes of digital photo-

reportage. Much easier said than done, for certain. Still, while idealised, self-romanticising configurations of the "citizen photojournalist" will not withstand closer scrutiny, nor will sweeping dismissals of the individuals involved using folk devil-like stereotypes. In seeking to move debates about how best to enliven photojournalism's future beyond the soaring rhetoric of advocates and critics alike, then, the importance of developing this co-operative, collaborative ethos of connectivity becomes evermore urgent.

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