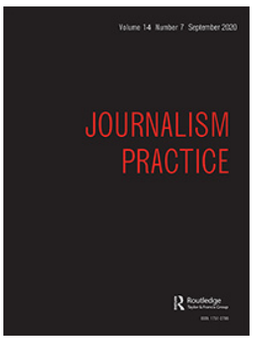

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Practice

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjop20

Beyond "Woodstein": Narratives of Investigative Journalism

Sandford Borins & Beth Herst

To cite this article: Sandford Borins & Beth Herst (2020) Beyond "Woodstein": Narratives of Investigative Journalism, Journalism Practice, 14:7, 769-790, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2019.1664927

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1664927

JOURNALISM PRACTICE
2020, VOL. 14, NO. 7, 769–790
https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1664927

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Beyond "Woodstein": Narratives of Investigative Journalism

Sandford Borins[a] and Beth Herst[b]

[a]Department of Management, University of Toronto Scarborough, Toronto, Canada; [b]Independent Scholar

ABSTRACT

Using a methodology inspired by structural narratology and by James Hamilton's [2016. *Democracy's Detectives: The Economics of Investigative Journalism*. Cambridge: Harvard] economic analysis of investigative journalism, this paper identifies a set of 14 recurring structural and formal elements (plot events, character types and functions, visual iconography) that constitute a fable about investigative journalism. The fable structure is applied to analyze six diverse films about investigative journalism produced in the US in the last 40 years. The films include two instantiations of successful investigative journalism (*All the President's Men*, *Spotlight*), two cases where conflict between journalists and corporate managers diminished the impact of the investigation (*Good Night and Good Luck*, *The Insider*), and two instances of a counter-fable of failed investigative journalism (*Truth, Kill the Messenger*). The paper argues that the films' representation of investigative journalism influences public perceptions of investigative journalism. It also speculates about the factors that will influence investigative journalism and its representations in the current political context in the US.

KEYWORDS

Investigative journalism; transactions costs; commercial media; fable; counter-fable; narrative; sub-genre

Introduction

A new generation of film and television scholars has been challenging traditional scholarship on "genre" for some years now, questioning both the construct itself and its associated taxonomies.[1] If a consensus has not yet been reached, there is agreement that assumptions about genre continue to operate powerfully across domains of film and television production, distribution, consumption, and reception. As cultural categories, genres matter, however contested their boundaries may be. There is further agreement on the importance of *situating* genres, asking, as Jason Mittell (2004, 5) does in his study *Genre and Television*, "how a given genre has accrued particular meanings in a historically specific instance." The focus of this paper is a small sample of a film subgenre that has acquired an urgent new salience in our current historically specific instance: a set of six American docudramas dealing with investigative journalism, spanning a forty-year period from 1976 (*All the President's Men*) to 2015 (*Spotlight*, *Truth*).[2] Using a methodology inspired by structuralist narratology, and developed in previous studies of public and private sector narratives (Borins 2011; Borins and Herst 2018), this paper identifies recurring structural and formal elements (plot events, character types and functions, visual

CONTACT Sandford Borins borins@utsc.utoronto.ca

iconography) and considers the different ways they are configured within specific film narratives and what those differences might signify.

All serious journalists claim a public service rationale for their activities as members of the fourth estate. Investigative reporting, however, represents both a special case and a distinctive practice. Compared to breaking news reporting, it is significantly more time and resource intensive, typically requiring months or even years of work and collaborative teams of reporters and researchers. But it is not merely a question of process. For its practitioners and advocates, investigative reporting has a unique "moral force," a mission to "expose abuses of power and betrayals of public trust by government, business, and other institutions." The phrases are taken from the website of the non-profit, independent investigative news organization ProPublica. The organization Investigative Reporters and Editors (2018) adds to this, with exemplary understatement, "In many cases, the subjects of the reporting wish the matters under scrutiny to remain undisclosed." Successful investigative journalism is intended to produce more than a front-page story. Its goals are exposure *and* change, goals which typically result in what the economist James Hamilton calls "a desire by institutional actors [being investigated] to impose transaction costs on discovery" (2016, 288).[3] The six movies considered here all dramatize the work of investigative reporters employed by commercial media companies. A recurring question this paper will consider is the extent to which the structure of their narratives is shaped by the inevitable tension between the moral force of the investigative enterprise and the transaction costs of discovery.

From well before the release of the original version of *The Front Page* (1931), reporters have been frequent protagonists of mainstream American cinema. The movie that established the narrative archetype for the investigative subgenre within the contemporary cultural imagination, however, dates from decades later: Alan J. Pakula's *All the President's Men* (*ATPM*). Its cinematic accomplishments revealed new narrative possibilities in the journalism genre for screenwriters and directors (Leva 2006), while the gritty glamor of its visual storytelling and performances inspired several generations of aspiring journalists (Brennen 2003, 117; Feldstein 2004). *ATPM*'s chronicle of two dogged, "hungry" young reporters following the money to uncover corruption at the highest levels, bringing down a presidency, defending the first amendment, and rescuing democracy in the process, effectively created a cinematic template.[4] But though *Spotlight* (2015) clearly instantiates many of that template's core narrative structures, *The Insider* (1999) and *Good Night and Good Luck* (2005) significantly complicate the professional and narrative dynamics encompassing their reporter-protagonists, while *Kill the Messenger* (2014) and *Truth* (2015) invert the narrative's trajectory with representations of botched or derailed investigations, discredited discoveries, and institutional powers apparently triumphant.

Literature Review

Critical studies of the journalism film genre tend to divide between taxonomic/descriptive and more theoretical/analytical approaches. The former focuses on assembling comprehensive filmographies of the period under review and disaggregating the catalogue into subgenres, while the latter explores social, historical, and cultural implications of the generic features identified. In a chapter on journalism in Rollins's *Columbia Companion to American History on Film*, Baird (2003) lists 70 films which he classifies by medium

(newspapers, radio, television, new media), offering brief comments on recurring plot lines and themes for each. Langman (1998) catalogues a staggering 1025 American films between 1900 and 1996 whose primary theme is journalism. He provides short definitions of subgenres, employing a range of potentially overlapping criteria including protagonists ("newshounds," "sob sisters," and "crusaders"), setting (rural press), and story type ("newspaper crime drama," "newspaper social drama," or simply, "newspaper comedy"), detailing what he considers to be noteworthy examples of each. The rest of the book consists of plot summaries. McNair (2010) lists 71 feature films about journalism released in the decade from 1997 to 2008. He then defines seven subgenres within this set based on the identities/functions of the protagonists ("watchdogs," "witnesses," "fabricators," "kingmakers"). His chapter about "watchdogs" centers on investigative journalism, with the bulk of the discussion devoted to *ATPM, Good Night and Good Luck,* and *The Insider* (2010, 57–74). McNair's analysis encompasses cinematic technique, critical reaction, cultural influence (especially for *ATPM*) as well as speculation regarding creators' intentions. (He posits *Good Night and Good Luck* as an implicit critique of Fox News's enthusiastic support for the G.W. Bush Administration's "War on Terror"). Ehrlich and Saltzman's *Heroes and Scoundrels: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture* (2015, 5) pursues a different project, reflecting on journalism "as a practice and institution" through analysis of its representation across a range of cultural media (television, radio, and print as well as film). In earlier articles and books, Ehrlich's focus is more narrowly on recurring features of journalism films (1997, 2004, 2006). *Journalism in the Movies* (2004) adapts the structuralist approach outlined by Rick Altman in his influential 1987 analysis of American movie musicals, defining a set of four semantic or stock elements—reporter, editor, story, and love interest—interacting in predictable ways to generate a basic syntax (2004, 10–11). The book is organized chronologically, focusing on the movies Ehrlich defines as most important in each era. *ATPM* is central to his analysis of the preoccupation with conspiracies and the role of journalists in exposing them which he identifies as characteristic of American journalism films of the 1970s.

Methodology

Brennen (2003, 115, 119) identifies Woodward and Bernstein's *All the President's Men* (the printed text, not the film adaptation) as an "ur-text" which functioned to codify "an ideology of journalism which has framed the understanding of the role of the press … since the 1970s," specifically what she calls "the social responsibility function of the press." Drawing on the work of the Marxist cultural critic Raymond Williams, she traces the enduring influence of the constructs of "Woodstein" and "Watergate" in both the teaching and the practice of American journalism.[5] Considering the movie *All the President's Men*, rather than its source material, this paper takes as its premise that the film defined a *fable* that exerted, and continues to exert, a shaping influence on the subgenre of investigative journalism movies and the cultural discourse it generates. *Fable*, in this context, denotes a set of structural elements—character functions, plot events, and thematic tropes—recurring across multiple narratives.[6] The paper begins by identifying core elements of a heroic investigative journalism fable articulated by *ATPM* and largely reproduced by *Spotlight*, but also noting the ways in which the seeds of a more problematic counter-fable are embedded within both.

It then explores how the four other films engage with (revise, subvert) the heroic template *ATPM* defines.

It is an approach that draws inspiration from classical narratological theory, in particular the distinction between recurring structural elements and their instantiation in a unique narrative text.[7] A more direct influence on this paper, however, is James Hamilton's admirable recent book *Democracy's Detectives: The Economics of Investigative Journalism* (2016). Using a data base of recent winners of Pulitzer prizes for investigative journalism and applicants to the various awards competitions run by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Hamilton performed statistical analyses to identify patterns within his set. His analytic categories included the subject of the reporting, time needed to complete the work, cost, and resulting impacts such as policy change or legislative response. Hamilton also measured the characteristics of the news organizations generating the reporting, the age and professional experience of the journalists, the average size of the reporting teams, and the impact of winning awards on the journalists' careers. The awards applications and prize citations Hamilton analyzes constitute one type of narrative about investigative journalism, yielding important insights into necessary conditions for, and structural features of, a successful investigative process. Hamilton (2016, 44) recognizes that "by definition, journalism award winners are outliers" and his data base doesn't include mediocre cases or outright failures (in our terminology, instances of a counter-fable).

This paper looks at a different type of journalism narrative, analyzing how the investigative process, its institutional settings and conditions, and its practitioners are *represented* in widely circulating popular culture texts (movies). Such texts may inspire or recruit a new generation of journalists, but they also do something more fundamental. "Screen stories," to use film scholar Carl Plantinga's (2018) term, that dramatize the process of investigative reporting are making visible, and therefore salient, a practice the public rarely ever sees. Of necessity, much of the work of investigative journalism is done out of public view, with the average consumer of its results having little or no insight into how they were achieved. How many viewers of the six films discussed here would ever encounter an investigative reporter (or indeed a reporter of any kind), let alone have any specific sense of what such a reporter does in the exercise of her profession, or of the institutional dynamics and economic pressures that structure it? And there is more at work here than the simple transmission of information. There is an extensive, and growing, body of interdisciplinary scholarship on the potential of narrative texts—particularly audiovisual narrative texts—to "transfer beliefs about the fictional world to beliefs about the actual world," implanting patterns of response and ways of thinking that function as "sociopolitical templates" (Plantinga 2018, 9, 173).

Researchers within the fields of communication studies, media studies, political science, cognitive science, and film studies, typically using survey-based methodologies, have tracked the effects of narrative texts on cognitive responses such as "source coding" (Johnson, Hashroudi, and Lindsay 1993) and "belief change" (Green and Brock 2000), including what subjects recall as fact (Gilbert, Krull, and Malone 1990), what they attribute to direct personal experience (Green 2004), their views on current matters of social and political policy for example abortion and health care (Mulligan and Habel 2011; Adkins and Castle 2014), their attitudes to specific professional and demographic groups (Brock, Green, and Strange 2002), and even their intentions

in relation to actions within the public sphere like voting or registering as an organ donor (Elliott and Schenck-Hamlin 1979; Morgan, Movius, and Cody 2009). Whether they label the phenomenon influence, impact, or transfer, the conclusion of all these scholars is that narratives clearly do have the power to shape viewers ways of feeling/thinking.[8] This article does not claim to prove the influence (impact, transfer) of the six films it analyzes. Rather, it takes their potential to elicit such response as an initial premise and proposes that, given this potential, it is important to look more closely at the ways these films represent investigative reporters, their practice, and that practice's institutional and economic structures.

Drawing on Hamilton's categories, with modifications and additions generated through recursive, inductive analysis of the movies, the authors created a table that lists 14 key structural elements of a heroic investigative journalism fable (Table 1) first instantiated by *All the President's Men*.[9] The presence, or absence, of these elements provides a convenient means of representing *structural* variations among the five successor texts. How those variations are articulated by each movie, and the thematic significance they bear, is the focus of the analysis that follows. What Table 1 makes clear is the extent to which all six of the films are shaped by *process*-related elements (tradecraft, necessary institutional supports and, conversely, inevitable constraints) defined cinematically by *ATPM* and quantitatively by Hamilton.[10] This emphasis on the process by which investigative journalism is conducted should be of particular relevance to the readers of this journal.

Table 1. Components of the investigative journalism fable.

	Component	ATPM (1976)	Spotlight (2015)	GNGL (2005)	Insider (1999)	Truth (2015)	KM (2014)
1.	Team of journalists	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	One person
2.	Time to do research	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (deadline)	Yes
3.	Support from editor and publisher	Yes	Yes	Yes, then no	Yes, then no	Yes, then no	Yes, then no
4.	Interview victims of scandal	NN	Yes	Yes	NN	NN	NN
5.	Interview perpetrators of scandal	Yes	Some	Yes[a]	No	Yes	Yes
6.	Interview other sources	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
7.	Documentary research	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
8.	Opposition from perpetrators	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Competition with other media	Yes	Fear of	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Journalist(s)' personal lives	NA	1 single, 3 supportive spouses	NA	Bergman's supportive spouse	NA	divorce
11	Story withstands scrutiny	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
12	Individual recognition	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
13	Institutional recognition	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
14.	Social benefit, social change	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Some

Acronyms: ATPM = All the President's Men; GNGL = Good Night and Good Luck; KM = Kill the Messenger.
[a]Senator Joseph McCarthy was invited to present his views on Murrow's television program *See it Now*.
NA = not ascertained from the text; NN = not necessary to the investigation.
Source: coding performed by authors.

"We're Going after the System": *All the President's Men, Spotlight* and the Heroic Investigative Fable[11]

It begins with an anomaly. A "routine" story turns up an unexpected angle or source. One of the burglars arrested breaking into the DNC national headquarters formerly worked for the CIA and a young city reporter pursues the connection. The newly appointed editor of *The Boston Globe* wonders about the scant two story "follow" on a lawyer's claims that he has documents proving Cardinal Law was aware that a priest in the diocese had abused more than 80 children over the course of 30 years. An investigation begins and it becomes evident there is a real story here, possibly a very important one. The investigation will have to expand. It is too complex and multi-faceted to be covered by one journalist: "Woodstein" and the Spotlight investigative team are given the assignment (1, 2).[12] The story needs an organizational champion, typically an editor (3), to allocate resources, assemble the necessary team, provide guidance, authorization, and encouragement.[13] As the scope and implications of the story become clearer, other institutional actors are drawn in: the managing editor, the publisher. They must now consider the larger costs involved in pursuing the story: crippling lawsuits, injunctions, loss of advertisers, pressure or retaliation from the powerful interests who are increasingly revealed to be involved. And it is here that the tension at the heart of for-profit investigative journalism receives structural expression in a recurring plot element. As the team pursues the story farther, the potential costs to the organization mount, generating scenes of confrontation between reporter and editor, or editor and publisher, in which journalistic mission must be weighed against corporate survival. This also heightens the risks associated with any misstep or failure of process.

The team continues to follow the story. Recurring plot elements here include *the paper trail*; *interviews with victims, perpetrators, or interested observers*; *the race to be first*; and *the omission/mistake*. All of these are present in *ATPM* and they recur in markedly similar form, including visual form, in *Spotlight*. Both films have extended montage sequences of reporters knocking on doors, seeking interviews, and being turned away (4, 5). Both also feature extended two-hander scenes with key sources which dramatize turning points in the investigation (6): Woodward and Deep Throat, Bernstein and the Bookkeeper in *ATPM,* the reporter Rezendes and Mitchell Garebedian, the lawyer representing abuse victims, in *Spotlight* ("Mitch, are you telling me that the Catholic church removed legal documents from that courthouse?"). Both employ visual representations of the mountains of documents the reporters must comb through (the Library of Congress sequence in *ATPM*, the hunt through the dusty subterranean shelves of diocesan records in *Spotlight*) to dramatize the painstaking nature of the investigative process (7). Both employ architecture as a synecdoche for the institutional forces the journalists are battling, whether the monumental public buildings of D.C. that loom over Woodward and Bernstein as they move through the city, or the ubiquitous church spires that feature in virtually every external shot in *Spotlight* (8).

Unlike other subgenres of journalism films, the heroic investigative fable makes little use of romantic/personal sub or parallel plots, one of the key semantic elements identified by Ehrlich. And this omission functions to underline the protagonists' professional dedication and, therefore, heroic narrative status. Either the reporters are singularly focused on the investigation or their private lives are assumed to be non-existent (Woodward and

Bernstein, Rezendes, Marty Baron) or their supportive spouses function to validate the importance of the work they are doing and the personal toll it is taking (10).[14] As the resistance to the investigation increases, the extent of the harm done grows more apparent, and the reporters become still more driven. It is at this point that the narrative (temporarily) complicates its protagonists' professional/personal heroism through an omission or misstep. For "Woodstein," it is a rush to publication that leads to the misreporting of crucial Grand Jury testimony. Since it quickly emerges that the substance of the allegation the story reports is true, the incident allows *ATPM* to dramatize the risks inherent in the investigative process, how easily it can be derailed and reporters' credibility and, by extension, careers destroyed, without materially undermining Woodward's and Bernstein's journalistic, or narrative, status. Furiously reproached by Deep Throat—"You put the investigation back months,"—Woodward responds "We know that. And if we were wrong, we're resigning. Were we wrong?" The answer, of course, is no, and the scene ends with Deep Throat telling Woodward "Get out your notebook. There's more." (11) The journalists of *Truth* and *Kill the Messenger* will be less fortunate, both professionally and narratively.

The error revealed in *Spotlight* is more ambiguous and thus more closely related to the debacles of these latter films. At a key point in the unfolding of the abuse story, "Robbie" Robinson, the editor in charge of the Spotlight investigative unit at the *Globe*, confronts a lawyer whose practice has profited from negotiating out-of-court settlements to silence victims of clerical abuse. But the confrontation forces Robinson to remember that during his tenure as city editor he "buried" the initial story revealing the accusations against a priest who, it would emerge, had been transferred from parish to parish by a hierarchy that was aware of his crimes, even though the lawyer himself had revealed details of the allegations to the paper: "I sent you guys a list of names and you buried it … Check your goddamn clippings, Robbie." Robinson, the local boy on first-name terms with most of the key players in a city one of them refers to as "our town," and, by extension, his (local) newspaper were complicit in the conspiracy of silence that protected the priests for so long. They were a part of the cover-up.[15] A lawyer for the diocese, and Robinson's old friend, makes the charge explicit: "You were right, Robbie. We all knew something was going on. So, where were you? What took you so long?" Robinson's only answer is "I don't know, Jim." For Woodstein, the sin was one of tradecraft. For Robinson, it was a failure of allegiance to the "moral force" or "social responsibility function" that defines the investigative enterprise.

All the President's Men and *Spotlight* close with scenes carrying a markedly similar cinematic valence depicting the initial steps in the process of social change (14). The bombshell disclosures have been published and the reporters are back at work, that work given visual form through sustained sequences of the journalists at their desks. Woodward and Bernstein type steadily as an initially empty newsroom fills with reporters. The camera moves from a desktop television playing news footage of Nixon taking the oath of office at his second inauguration, to the two reporters at their typewriters, followed by a dissolve to a teletype machine printing a succession of *Washington Post* wire stories recording the guilty pleas and sentences of various Watergate players. The only soundtrack is the furious clack of the teletype keys. The frame freezes on the dateline 9 August 1974 and the black text on a white page that reads simply: "Nixon resigns. Gerald Ford to become 38th President at noon

today." Silence. Fade to black. *Spotlight*'s closing sequence marshals some of the oldest visual tropes of the journalism film genre: presses whirling as the morning edition rolls out, stacks of newspapers bundled for delivery, *Boston Globe* trucks in the empty streets literally bearing the news as the dawn breaks. The movie ends, however, in the Spotlight office with every phone ringing as the team fields calls in response to their front-page story. "They're almost all victims, Robbie," the incredulous editor is told as he, too, picks up a phone. The soundtrack is punctuated with the incessant ringing of the telephones and the voices of the reporters as they answer: "This is Spotlight." Cut to black and a series of accumulating columns of white text identifying the scores of locations around the world where clerical abuse has been documented since the publication of the first *Globe* story.[16]

In his analysis of prize-winning investigative journalism Hamilton includes markers of outcomes like prestigious awards, career recognition/advancement, and social benefits in the form of legislative action or other remediation of the social wrongs uncovered (12,13,14). While the investigations dramatized in *All the President's Men* and *Spotlight* clearly produced significant social benefits—the exposure of corruption at the highest levels of the American government, more than 600 stories documenting the role of the church hierarchy in the cover up of sexual abuse—the films exclude much of this from their narrative frames. Within their diegesis publication is the most important outcome. By bringing the investigative process to its proper conclusion in a series of fully sourced, denial-proof stories, the necessary changes will follow.[17]

ATPM glances at the professional ambition of Woodward and Bernstein, at least initially competitors for the Watergate story and grudging collaborators, as well as the ongoing rivalry between the *Post* and the "newspaper of record" (9). In an early scene, local news editor Harry Rosenfeld wryly describes Woodward and Bernstein's first Watergate story as "A good solid piece of American journalism that *The New York Times* doesn't have." When a highly caffeinated Bernstein recounts his interview with the Bookkeeper, in which the existence of a secret "slush fund" to finance activities like the break-in is revealed, he tells Woodward "At one point, I suddenly wondered how high up this thing goes and then her paranoia got to me. I thought what we had was so hot, any minute CBS or NBC were gonna come in the window." To which Woodward replies: "You're both paranoid. She's afraid of John Mitchell. And you're afraid of Walter Cronkite." While *Spotlight* alludes to fears of other newspapers (specifically, *The Herald*) accessing the court documents the *Globe* has successfully sued to be unsealed and beating the Spotlight team to print, it devotes more narrative time to the personal toll the victims' stories take on the reporters who are interviewing them, as well as the loss of religious faith some experience. Yet these aspects of the material are plainly secondary to the narratives' focus on the journalistic process itself. Mitchell Garebedian's final words to the reporter Rezendes, as he turns from reading an advance copy of the front-page story to interview two more child victims who are his latest clients, speak for both narratives: "Just keep doing your work, Mr. Rezendes." The consequences of investigative projects that *fail* receive much more narrative attention, as we will see when we examine the counter-fable instantiated by *Truth* and *Kill the Messenger*.

"Corporate Will not Interfere with Editorial": The Transaction Costs of Discovery in *Good Night and Good Luck* and *The Insider*[18]

Good Night and Good Luck (*GNGL*) and *The Insider* are narratives of broadcast journalism, not print. Although they deploy some of the structural elements that characterize the investigative fable instantiated by *ATPM* and *Spotlight*, the change of medium results in a significant change in narrative focus, plot structure, and perhaps most significantly in the characterization of the journalist-protagonist(s). For Woodstein and the Spotlight team the primary obstacles to their work of discovery and exposure are external: the reluctance and/or fear of potential sources to go on the record; the lies, disinformation, and retaliatory actions of the powerful interests the reporters' stories threaten. While the films suggest possible financial consequences for their newspapers, there is never any question that these, any more than political pressure, will constrain the journalists. Robards/Bradlee (standing in for *Washington Post* owner/publisher Katherine Graham who has no role in the film's narrative) has numerous scenes in which he defies the Nixon administration's threats and denunciations with characteristic insouciance: "Run that baby." "Okay, we go with it." "Fuck it. Let's stand by the boys." In an early scene in *Spotlight* between the *Globe's* publisher Richard Gilman and its newly appointed editor, Marty Baron reveals his plans to file a motion to lift a protective court order sealing documents relating to the abuse allegations. Gilman asks for clarification: "You want to sue the Catholic Church?" When Baron says yes, Gilman observes that the Church will obviously fight the paper very hard, "which won't go unnoticed by our subscriber base. 53 percent of them are Catholics." Baron, with un-Bradlee-like understatement replies, "I think they'll be interested." And the paper proceeds to file the motion and pursue the story which will ultimately be featured on the front page of its Sunday edition, delivered in time for its subscribers to read when they get home from church.

While Ed Murrow in *GNGL* and *60 Minutes* producer Lowell Bergman and host Mike Wallace in *The Insider* are clearly taking on powerful interests (Senator Joe McCarthy, Big Tobacco), their narratives center far more on the internal conflict they experience with the representatives of their own network's corporate hierarchy. The tradecraft that structured the print news narratives is primarily represented here through issues of loss of sponsorship, audience ratings, internal censorship, and, in the case of *The Insider*, the jeopardizing of a possible sale of the network. *GNGL* makes effective use of its period television studio sets, shrouded in a fog of cigarette smoke and full of young men with patent-leather hair, white shirts and dark ties, uttering rapid-fire technicalese. But the actual work of investigation that Murrow's *See It Now* team engaged in receives relatively short shrift. A show that highlights the case of Air Force Reserve Lieutenant Milo Radulovich, deprived of due process and dismissed from the service as a threat to national security for refusing to denounce his relatives' political sympathies, marks the beginning of Murrow's on-air campaign against McCarthy's anti-Communist witch hunt. The material is so sensitive, CBS News Director Sig Mickelson cannot secure a sponsor, leading Murrow and his producer Fred Friendly to put up the money themselves. Yet the film's narrative speeds through the team's preparation for the show, emphasizing the frenzied rush to air, rather than the presumably essential groundwork, investigation, and source-checking that precede it.

Much of the critical and audience response to *GNGL* inevitably focused on Murrow's showdown with McCarthy. David Strathairn's intense and intelligent portrayal, indeed

the film as a whole, with its impeccable period details, luminous black-and-white cinematography, and evocative soundtrack, was framed as a timely—and necessary—reminder of the true mission of journalism, with Murrow its icon.[19] But McCarthy features in the film only through relatively brief archival footage (including an excerpt from the famous 9 March 1954 episode of *See It Now,* "A Report on Joseph R. McCarthy," and rival network ABC's broadcast of the Army-McCarthy hearings that finally destroyed McCarthy's credibility). Murrow's true antagonist within the narrative's dramatic economy is CBS Chairman Bill Paley, played with an intelligence and gravitas to match Strathairn's by a sonorous Frank Langella. The climax of the film is not McCarthy's pivotal public humiliation at the hands of lawyer Joseph Welch, but an extended confrontation between the network chairman and his star broadcaster in Paley's office.

Tradecraft re-emerges here in very different form as Paley tells Murrow that *See It Now* has lost its corporate sponsor, Alcoa, and that affiliate stations are unhappy: "I've got Tuesday night programming that's number one. People want to enjoy themselves. They don't want a civics lesson." Producer Fred Friendly notes that the McCarthy episode cost 50 thousand dollars to make and the previous week's episode even less. Paley counters: "64 Thousand Dollar Question brings in 80 thousand in sponsors and costs one-third of what you do." The scene looks set to pit Paley's revenue-driven entertainment against Murrow's truth-to-power reporting, with audience identification clearly aligned on Murrow's side. When Paley reminds Murrow of the support he has extended, how he has enabled Murrow to continue doing what he does—

> I never censored a single program. I hold on to affiliates who wanted entertainment from us. I fight to keep the license with the very politicians that you are bringing down. And I never, never said no to you. Never.—

Murrow has a tight-lipped rebuttal at the ready, spoken with ubiquitous cigarette smoldering: "I would argue that this network is defined by what the news department has accomplished. And I would also argue that never saying no is not the same as not censoring." But it is not Murrow who is given the final word. Rather it is Paley who challenges Murrow on his own moral high ground:

> Let me ask you this. Why didn't you correct McCarthy when he said Alger Hiss was convicted of treason? He was only convicted of perjury. You corrected everything else. Did you not want the appearance of defending a known communist? I would argue that everyone censors, including you.

The narrative gives the unfailingly eloquent journalist nothing to say in reply. Critics of *GNGL* like *Slate*'s Jack Shafer have accused it of hagiography, positioning Murrow as "an unblinking stoic, facing down and defeating evil with solitary courage" (Shafer 2005). But this crucial scene, its length (it is among the longest in the movie) and placement (the penultimate sequence), as well as the casting of an actor of Langella's magnetism and authority in the role of Paley, work to complicate our understanding of Murrow's motives, introducing the suggestion of professional calculation, while giving cinematic, and therefore thematic, weight to Paley's perspective.[20] It thus gives important voice to the inevitable and possibly irresolvable tension that exists for a commercial media company engaging in the sort of crusading reporting that Murrow has made his brand.

It is a tension that escalates into open war in *The Insider*, an exhaustive dramatization of an inglorious later chapter in the history of CBS News. Here, too, the narrative centers on a conflict between loyalty to the story—in this case, a whistle-blower research biologist prepared to expose "Big Tobacco"—and corporate expedience, or perhaps survival. Lowell Bergman, a producer for the network's marquee investigative news magazine *60 Minutes* has promised the former tobacco company scientist Jeffrey Wigand that his interview with Mike Wallace will be aired. The segment will be explosive: Wigand is willing to go on record explaining how company executives knowingly increased the addictive qualities of their products, making them "a delivery mechanism for nicotine." And it will leave the network legally exposed. Wigand had signed confidentiality agreements with his former employers. The legal principle of *tortious interference* could allow those employers to sue CBS for encouraging Wigand to violate the agreements' terms. Since Westinghouse Electric is negotiating to purchase the network, the prospect of lengthy legal battles could be chilling.

Bergman, played with trademark intensity by Al Pacino, is a true believer. A former "radical journalist from *Ramparts Magazine*" (the description is Wigand's), his loyalty is always to the story and the source. He is a walking embodiment of traditional journalistic tradecraft and heroic journalistic values, the two defined narratively as identical. Bergman has numerous set-pieces in which he voices his, and the movie's, creed:

> You pay me to go get guys like Wigand, to draw him out. To get him to trust us, to get him to go on television. I do. I deliver him. He sits. He talks. He violates his own fucking confidentiality agreement. And he's only the key witness in the biggest public health reform issue, maybe the biggest, most-expensive corporate-malfeasance case in U.S. history. And Jeffrey Wigand, who's out on a limb, does he go on television and tell the truth? Yes. Is it newsworthy? Yes. Are we gonna air it? Of course not. Why? Because he's not telling the truth? No. Because he is telling the truth. That's why we're not going to air it. And the more truth he tells, the worse it gets!

But Bergman is a producer, not the on-air interviewer, not the public face of the broadcast journalism enterprise. The public responsibility for the story lies with veteran journalist Mike Wallace. When CBS management orders an edited version of the Wallace-Wigand interview to be aired, Bergman is outraged at the betrayal of both source and story. He refuses to participate in any editing. In fact, he is prepared to enact the heroic investigative fable and expose the network's betrayal of journalistic responsibility, fully expecting his colleague to join him. But Wallace is less enthusiastic about the script Bergman is handing him, asking him rhetorically if *he* would like to end a fifty-year career in journalism "fronting a segment that allowed a tobacco giant to crash this network?" Christopher Plummer, as Wallace, has sly fun with the veteran reporter's vanity and self-importance, ringing the maximum comedy out of the struggle he experiences between self-preservation and journalistic integrity. Furiously denouncing a network lawyer for destroying its most respected show at one moment, he is equally capable of puncturing Bergman's heroics:

> Do me a favor, will you? Spare me. For God's sake, get in the real world. What do you think? I'm going to resign in protest? To force it on the air? The answer's no. I don't plan to spend the end of my days wandering in the wilderness of National Public Radio. That decision I've already made.

In the end, it is Bergman who forces the network's hand by leaking the story of the edited interview, and of a smear campaign against Wigand the tobacco companies have orchestrated, to *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. In an attempt to limit the damage to its journalistic brand, CBS airs the original interview, with all its explosive details intact. Bergman, however, resigns from the network, explaining to a conciliatory Wallace that a fundamental tenet of his (heroic) reporter's creed has been violated: "What do I tell my source for the next tough story, huh? 'Hang in with us, you'll be ok maybe'? No. What got broken here doesn't go back together." And it is Bergman, not Wallace, a closing text screen informs viewers, who ends his days in something akin to the "wilderness of National Public Radio," teaching journalism and producing for PBS's *Frontline*.

In the course of his debate with Murrow at the close of *GNGL,* Paley remarks in exasperation "You should teach journalism. You and Mr. Friendly." Like *The Insider*'s Mike Wallace in the scenes just described, Paley recognizes the force of the journalistic ethos Murrow is intoning, relegating it to the realm of the theoretical, to the classroom or, in Wallace's case, to the realm of unreal (cinematic?) fantasy. [21] Bergman will, in fact, end up in the classroom, albeit as Distinguished Chair in Investigative Reporting at the Graduate School of Journalism UC Berkeley. What both Paley and Wallace give voice to, though in different narrative registers, is the inherent paradox of for-profit investigative journalism: if you are successful your journalistic rigor becomes your brand, but it might also, ultimately, threaten or destroy your enterprise. And while print journalism is clearly not immune to such pressures—newspapers depend on advertising revenue as well as their subscriber base—it is in the broadcast journalism narratives that it functions as a structuring conflict. It is a conflict encapsulated in Paley's angry reminder: "I fight to keep the license with the very politicians you are bringing down." And it is present, too, in Wallace's legitimate fear of "crashing this network." In the real world of broadcast journalism, corporate does interfere with editorial while providing it with the resources and the platform to continue doing its work, a reality reflected in the movies' narrative structures and in the pyrrhic victories both narratives grant their journalist-heroes.

"You become the Story": Inverting the Fable in *Truth* and *Kill the Messenger*[22]

For the investigative journalist protagonists of the final two films considered here the transaction costs of discovery prove enormous and personal: public vilification, loss of career, and in the case of *Kill the Messenger*'s Gary Webb, suicide. Both narratives center on investigations whose stakes are as high as those of Watergate. *Truth* is adapted from Emmy and Peabody award-winning *60 Minutes II* producer Mary Mapes's 2005 memoir *Truth: The Press, The President, and the Privilege of Power*. It details her career-ending investigation into the National Guard service record of President George W. Bush and the corporate lynching to which CBS subjected her. It was an episode that also ended the CBS career of venerated Evening News anchor Dan Rather (played in the film by Robert Redford), who broke the story on air. *Kill the Messenger* is a highly sympathetic recounting of the debacle of *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb's 1996 "Dark Alliance" newspaper series. Webb's reporting broke the story of the role of the Nicaraguan Contras in the

US crack cocaine epidemic, using the profits of drug smuggling to finance their insurgency with what Webb and his sources claimed was the CIA's knowledge and acquiescence.[23]

Cinematically, the movies work in different registers. *Truth* is set in the high-gloss world of a major television network and features two indisputable Hollywood stars in its key roles (Cate Blanchett plays Mapes). *Kill the Messenger* unfolds largely in the grittier zones of a small market newspaper far from the centers of political or media influence. The movie's cast, headed by a tightly wound Jeremy Renner as Webb, is full of notable "character" actors (Oliver Platt, Ray Liotta, Michael Sheen), but no "A-List" stars.[24] What the two films share, however, is a markedly similar narrative structure: an initial movement that traces the standard arc of the heroic investigative fable, followed by a reversal that dominates the second half. It is a reversal that pits the journalist against the institutions of his/her profession as much, or more, than the powerful interests his/her story would expose. Ultimately, both movies will define their reporter-protagonists' heroic status precisely through their rejection of, or ejection from, mainstream investigative news reporting. The Gallup (2019) "Confidence in Institutions" surveys for the years the movies were released (2014 and 2015) report between 60 and 70 percent of respondents had either "some" or "very little" confidence in newspapers and television news, while only 10 percent reported having "a great deal," two data points in a years' long declining trend. Without implying a directly causal relationship, it is possible to see in *Truth* and *Kill the Messenger*'s narrative strategy a means of preserving the individual journalist's heroic status, and thus a defining feature of the cinematic subgenre, while giving voice to a declining trust in media *institutions* specifically, and corporations more generally.[25]

Both films begin by drawing on the now familiar tradecraft tropes: the lead that begs to be followed, editorial support for a story that promises to be "the big one," the sources that won't speak or won't go on record, the paper chase, the final piece—the document, the source—that falls into place. But there are warning signs too. The documents Mapes and her team are basing their story on have a doubtful provenance, and Mapes fails to follow up on their supposed origins. The materials themselves are copies, the originals purportedly having been destroyed to protect the source that supplied them. This means the paper and ink cannot be authenticated and the document and handwriting experts are not unanimous in their findings. Unlike Mapes, who assembles "a crack team" of investigators, Webb is working entirely unsupported on a far-reaching investigation for which his paper is, by its own admission, under-resourced and out of its depth. Faced with what Webb tells him is "the biggest story the *Merc* has ever had," *San Jose Mercury News* editor Jerry Ceppos responds, "I know. That's what's worrying me. Lot of blind spots. We don't know Washington. And we don't do international." Webb goes to Nicaragua to interview a key source entirely alone with no one to corroborate the encounter and, early in his investigation, must convince his editor to reimburse him for a trip to D.C. to cultivate a National Security Council contact who might be willing to talk. Though fully resourced, Mapes must rush her story to air in order to secure the only broadcast slot available to her before the 2004 presidential election, and she is forced to make crucial cuts to expert testimony to meet her program's running time, cuts that create an impression of certitude when the story is proposing probability.

Mapes's story goes to air, its revelations marked by a succession of images of "ordinary" Americans motionless in the blue light of their tv screens, mesmerized by its disclosures. Webb's "Dark Alliance" goes up on the newspaper's website and he and his paper are

flooded by calls from media around the globe. It is here that the heroic journalism fable typically ends: the story has been made public and the reporters get back to "doing their jobs," leaving text screens to document the aftermath. Instead, the foreshadowed cracks begin to appear. Stories circulate on the Internet that the key CBS documents are forgeries, charges *Truth* goes to some lengths to disprove. The source who provided the documents is revealed to have lied about their origins. Other sources retract their original statements. And there are questions as to whether Mapes was in contact with, or even acted in concert with, John Kerry's campaign. (This dimension of the scandal is confusingly and hurriedly addressed.) CBS Director of News Andrew Heyward demands that Rather retract the original story on air and apologize for its misleading claims regarding the authentication of its documentary evidence. He also commissions an internal investigation by a panel composed of Republican Party loyalists and headed by former Attorney General (in the George H.W. Bush Administration) Richard Thornburgh. The narrative clearly positions this as a rigged exercise intended to appease the Bush administration and protect CBS's corporate parent from regulatory reprisal. Unsurprisingly, the panel's findings are unfavorable: Mapes is fired as are the rest of her "crack" investigative team, while Rather resigns from CBS after more than two decades as anchor.

For Webb the consequences are still worse. The CIA determines to destroy his credibility, enlisting T*he L.A. Times* and *The Washington Post* to discredit him. The film depicts a *Post* editorial meeting settling what their paper's story will be: "That Webb doesn't have any legitimate sources. That the CIA would never use these low-lifes and in fact denies it unequivocally. That basically he's a fraud." This despite a report from the stringer they dispatched to Nicaragua that the story "checks out." Webb's editors refuse to stand by him. "Corporate" is pressuring them and they need to consider "the big picture." The paper prints an open letter acknowledging "mistakes were made" and Webb is exiled to the *Mercury's* outpost in Cupertino, where he covers stories on the health of the local police horses. His obsession with the story deepens. His marriage dissolves. Holed up in a hotel room, surrounded by the paper trail of his investigation, he is contacted by a source who he believes will go on the record, but it is too late. His editors will not let him near the story. The film ends with Webb accepting an award as Bay Area Journalist of the Year with a bitter speech of disillusion: "I thought my job was to tell the public the truth … This was all I ever wanted to do. And for a while, for a long while, it was a great honor." He then hands his resignation letter to the *Mercury* editors seated at the table with him and walks away. A text screen notes that "Gary Webb was never able to earn a living as a journalist again." It is followed by text documenting his suicide, ten years to the day after his resignation. *Truth* also ends with text that notes, first, that CBS won a Peabody Award for Mapes's reporting on Abu Ghraib *after* she was fired, that the story is considered "one of the most important pieces of journalism of the decade," and finally that "Mary Mapes has not worked in television news since 2004."

Both narratives position their reporter-heroes as the true representatives of investigative journalism betrayed by the cowardice and venality that now characterize their profession. The CIA may threaten Webb's family, but it is *The Washington Post* that engages in character assassination. Mapes confronts the kangaroo court her network assembles to judge her by denouncing the critics who, she insists, didn't care about the real story: "Our story was about whether Bush fulfilled his service. Nobody wants to talk about that. They want to talk about fonts and forgeries and conspiracy theories, because

that's what people do these days if they don't like the story." While *Kill the Messenger* consistently maintains its narrative premise, fully endorsing Webb's methods and story, *Truth* can only guarantee Mapes's heroic status by suppressing the very lapses in tradecraft it dramatizes.[26] As her judgment and methods come under attack, Mapes reacts with outrage: "They do not get to do this. They do not get to smack us just for asking the fucking questions." But that is not, in fact, what is being challenged. It is not the questions but the methods by which Mapes and her team derived their answers that are under fire. By the movie's end, its implicit narrative logic proposes that none of Mapes's errors of process matter because there was—or might have been—a genuine story to find. As numerous reviews of the film demonstrated, the presence of Robert Redford in the cast inevitably situated the movie within the crusading journalist tradition of *ATPM,* and not merely cinematically. *Truth* wants to indict the institutions of broadcast journalism while absolving Mapes of any complicity, positioning her as an inheritor of the "Woodstein" mantle. Yet the truth, as *Truth*'s own narrative tensions attest, is more complicated than that.

Conclusion: Screen Stories and News Deserts

In her 2003 analysis of Woodward and Bernstein's print narrative *All the President's Men*, Brennen conclusively justifies the status she accords it as an "ur-text" that continues to shape not just the teaching and practice of investigative journalism but its place within the cultural imagination as well. This article proposes a similar status for the Pakula and Redford film adaptation, though on a much more modest scale, arguing for the continuing influence of the cinematic *fable ATPM* codified on the five succeeding investigative journalism films considered here. The five texts represent a range of narrative outcomes from the cascading international investigations triggered by the Spotlight team's initial local disclosures to the ruined careers and discredited revelations of Webb and Mapes. What they share is a structural emphasis on the process of investigative journalism, representing that process in ways that track very closely with the research conducted by the economist James Hamilton in his study *Democracy's Detectives*. What they also share is a structural and thematic focus on the figure of the heroic reporter or reporting team, a focus which serves to align the viewer with the narratives' informing assumption regarding the importance of the investigative journalist's calling. Even those texts that shape their narrative around the tensions inherent in for-profit investigative journalism (*Good Night and Good Luck*, *The Insider*, *Truth*) clearly endorse its public mission and special moral force.

The former journalism executive Penny Abernathy (2018), under the rubric of the University of North Carolina's School of Media and Journalism's Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, recently published a report titled "The Expanding News Desert." The report notes that since 2004 the US has lost almost 1800 newspapers. More than two thousand of the country's 3143 counties have no daily paper. And "the residents of America's emerging news deserts are often its most vulnerable citizens," being generally "poorer, older and less educated than the average American." The situation is only marginally better in larger, urban centers, since fewer than twelve cities of any size have two competing daily newspapers. This lack of competition typically means less investigative coverage of local and state government with measurable results: "Studies have found that closure of a competing metro daily often leads to governmental inefficiency and

higher costs for city residents." Local television stations are typically cited as a means of addressing the "news desert," but the report notes that television newsrooms currently employ half the number of reporters employed by newspapers a decade ago, while the bulk of television newscasts—as much as 90 percent of total airtime—is given to "soft features" like crime, weather and sports.

Clearly, the structural disruptions generated by the rise of digital media platforms, the consolidation of media ownership, and the demographic shifts in media consumption patterns which have resulted in declining print news readership will not be reversed. Nor are the economics that determine the content of television newscasts likely to alter. Alternative sites for the practice and dissemination of investigative journalism do exist, including public access networks and independent digital-based media initiatives (both for- and not-for-profit). ProPublica, founded in 2007–2008 and winner of five Pulitzer Prizes as well as numerous other awards to date, is one outstanding example of the latter. Screen stories instantiating the heroic fable of investigative journalism will not of themselves call such alternatives into being, but by representing the work of investigative journalists, making that work and its objectives affectively and cognitively salient, they can make a significant contribution to the public's understanding of its role and importance in a democratic society, potentially seeding the ground for financial support and even community activism.

The cut-off date chosen for the films analyzed here was 2015, the year in which both *Spotlight* and *Truth* were released. While there is always an element of arbitrariness to such decisions, we felt that 2016, and more particularly the election of Donald Trump, altered the context for discussions of popular culture representations of journalism and journalists in ways that we cannot yet fully assimilate or evaluate. For some commentators, President Trump's complicated financial and business history (and present dealings), including his continued refusal to release his tax returns and involvement in family-owned enterprises, the equally complicated finances of billionaires in senior positions in his administration, and his administration's sharp policy reversals in areas like trade, the environment, and international cooperation have led to a renaissance of investigative journalism by national media such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* (Sullivan 2017; Manchester 2019). Set against this are the frequent attacks on the media as purveyors of "fake news" and "enemies of the people" and the well-documented phenomenon of information "filter bubbles" and an increasingly fragmented and polarized media landscape.

What form might screen stories about investigative journalism take in this new era? What fable(s) will they instantiate? What narrative allegiances and alignments will they elicit? It is too soon to say if the first mainstream Hollywood film to address investigative journalism after the 2016 election is an indication, but it is surely not coincidental that Steven Spielberg's *The Post*, released in 2017, returns viewers to the journalistic birthplace of Woodstein. This is not Watergate revisited, however, but rather a representation of the newspaper's involvement with the Pentagon Papers in 1971 and the Supreme Court lawsuit that resulted when the Nixon administration secured a lower-court ban against their publication. Publisher Katherine Graham, entirely absent from the movie version of *All the President's Men*, is the narrative center here. Interweaving Graham's personal struggles to claim her authority as publisher with her paper's legal battles against the government gives this instantiation of the heroic journalism fable a particular resonance in the aftermath of Hillary Clinton's 2016 electoral defeat. "People are concerned about having a

woman in charge," Graham is told at a board meeting, "They don't think she has the resolve to make the tough choices."

As in *The Insider* and *Truth*, there is a very specific corporate stake to consider: the paper is on the eve of going public and Graham must weigh the investigative journalistic imperative against the financial security (and therefore continued existence) of the paper. She chooses to defy the ban and is rewarded by the Supreme Court ruling in favor of publication, the majority opinion affirming that the role of the press is to serve "the governed and not the governors." The movie ends with a security guard reporting a possible burglary in progress at the Watergate complex. The narrative's more trenchant dramatic irony, however, at least for some viewers in 2019, might well be Tom Hanks as Ben Bradlee telling Meryl Streep's Graham why the paper must defy the ban: "The way they lied … Those days have to be over." At the time of writing, *The Washington Post*'s feature "Fact Checker" reports that President Trump has made 12,019 "false or misleading statements" since taking office.[27] All six of the screen stories we considered here dramatized the real-world work of dedicated journalists engaged in high-profile, and high stakes, investigative reporting. It seems likely that the next few years will yield sufficient "based on a true story" source material to support a renaissance of the subgenre of investigative journalism movies too.

Notes

1. A small sample of recent work in this area includes Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (2000), Browne, *Refiguring American Film Genres* (1998), as well as works by Mittell and Pribram noted below.
2. Even this small group of films illustrates the complexity of genre classifications, since they can be sorted in at least three ways: as docudramas, as movies about journalism, and as "procedurals". Pribram (2011) offers a useful discussion of the range of ways in which genres are defined and individual films classified within them, see particularly 49–58. See also Laetz and Lopes's entry on "Genre" in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* which notes that genre definitions can be determined by setting (e.g., Westerns), subject (war), affect (comedy), format (musical), and style (film noir) (Livingston and Plantinga 2008, 156). Focusing on *investigative* journalism excludes a number of other mainstream Hollywood films about journalism produced during this period, including *Absence of Malice* (1981) and *Broadcast News* (1987). The six docudramas are American in their subject matter, citizenship of most creators and actors, and jurisdiction in which production companies were domiciled.
3. Hamilton (email to authors, 19 August 2019) uses transaction costs more broadly than purely economic costs to include the time and emotional cost to journalists of investigating individuals and organizations that are fiercely resisting. We also use this definition.
4. This outline is a paraphrase of one of the many scene-stealing speeches delivered by Jason Robards as *Washington Post* editor, Ben Bradlee. He is addressing the chastened Woodward and Bernstein after a rare misstep has almost derailed their investigation:

   > We're under a lot of pressure, you know. And you put us there. Nothing's riding on this. Except the—uh—First Amendment of the Constitution, freedom of the press, and maybe the future of the country. Not that any of that matters. But if you guys fuck up again, I'm gonna get mad.

5. Brennen (2003, 122–4) notes, for example, the "institutionalization" of Woodward and Bernstein's "three source rule" requiring two independent sources to confirm any significant revelation or charge, citing contemporary journalism textbooks to track the rule's trajectory from ad hoc precaution (Woodward and Bernstein were alarmed by the increasingly serious nature of the allegations they were reporting and the aggressive counterattack the Nixon administration was mounting) to standard professional practice.

6. The derivation and implications of the terms "fable," "heroic fable." "dominant fable" and "counter fable" used here are discussed extensively in Borins (2011) and Borins and Herst (2018) in the introductory sections on methodology. Their debt to what is now called "classical" (structuralist) narratology, as well as the influence of more recent work in cognitive narratology are explored fully there. On "classical narratology," and the shift to a focus on "the mind-narrative nexus" or cognitive narratology see, David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (2013).
7. The genealogy of this approach can be traced back to the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp and his influential study *Morphology of the Folktale*, first translated into English in 1968. The Dutch scholar Mieke Bal's standard text *Narratology: An Introduction to the Study of Narrative*, first published in 1985, now in its fourth edition (2017) was an equally important point of departure, especially her theorization of "narrativity" in texts across a range of media.
8. All of the work cited here assumes the embodied nature of cognition and its interdependent relationship with sensory-motor and affective responses. Because screen stories are able to draw on the audiovisual modalities of their form, they are particularly good at cueing both affective and sensory-motor experience. See Plantinga (2009) and Grodal (2009).
9. Thirteen of the 14 structural elements are included in Hamilton's book (Hamilton, email to authors, 19 August 2019). The only one not present is the impact on the personal lives of investigative journalists, though Hamilton notes that his book includes a case study of a career investigative journalist who attests to often working 70 hours weeks (Hamilton 2016, 260).
10. This emphasis on process links the investigative journalism genre to the "procedural," a genre descriptor used most frequently in reference to police/forensic narratives. As the name suggests, "procedurals" derive their structure from the professional practices of their protagonists, typically highlighting both the laborious, step-by-step nature of their work and the technical expertise, esoteric knowledge, or deep wells of experience they bring to it. The French screenwriting website SCENARMag.fr has a very detailed analysis of "*le procedural genre*." Since the site is aimed at aspiring screenwriters, the article is particularly good at laying out the conventions of the genre as it is currently defined in mainstream entertainment forms. http://www.scenarmag.fr/procedural-genre/. Accessed 10 June 2019.
11. The line belongs to *Boston Globe* editor Marty Baron in *Spotlight*. Presented with a story that reveals more than 50 priests within the diocese were credibly accused of sexual abuse and protected by the hierarchy, he presses for the bigger story in a speech that effectively encapsulates the investigative journalist's creed:

    > We need to focus on the institution. Not the individual priests. Practice and policy. Show me the church manipulated the system so that these guys wouldn't have to face charges. Show me they put those same priests back into parishes time and time again. Show me this was systemic. That it came from the top down.

    When Assistant Managing Editor Ben Bradlee Jr. observes "It sounds like we're going after [Cardinal] Law," Baron replies: "We're going after the system."
12. The numbers in parentheses refer to elements in Table 1.
13. Van Syckle's (2019) article in the *New York Times* interviewing members of the paper's investigative team describes a process very like the one charted here.
14. In his discussion of *All the President's Men*, Ehrlich (2004) notes that the director, Alan J. Pakula, rejected early drafts of a script that included a love interest for Bernstein, who was single. Though Woodward was, in fact, married, the movie excises any traces of his wife's presence from the story.
15. It was, of course, Marty Baron, the *Globe's* newly appointed editor—an outsider described to Robinson by the diocesan lawyer as "A not married man of the Jewish faith. Who hates baseball"—who identified the story as "essential to a local paper."
16. The production company, Participant Media, has as its mission producing movies that lead to social change, and often uses extra-diegetic text at the end of movies to generalize the story, draw out its implications, and urge the audience to take action.

17. Film scholars have recently turned their attention to the importance of "paratexts" in analysis of how audiences interpret and respond to movies, the term referring to a range of cultural products (reviews, interviews, trailers, bonus features, online commentary) that surround the narrative artefact itself. In the case of *All the President's Men* and, to a lesser extent, *Spotlight*, those paratexts would establish the institutional and individual recognition that the journalists and their newspapers received, making these part of the experience of consuming the narrative. In fact, the only tag-line on the cover of the DVD of *Spotlight* reads "Based on the Pulitzer Prize-Winning Investigation." On paratexts see Gray, J. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (2010).
18. The line is spoken by Frank Langella as CBS President William Paley to David Strathairn's Ed Murrow early in *GNGL*.
19. There were dissenting views. Jack Shafer, editor at large for the online journal *Slate* published a two-part excoriation "Edward R. Movie: Good night, and Good Luck, and bad history" in which he recapitulates the extensive literature that has debunked the popular view of Murrow as the lone heroic voice who finally "took down" McCarthy. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2005/10/edward-r-movie.html. Accessed 17 June 2019.
20. Murrow's heroism is also questioned in a subplot that concerns Dan Hollenbeck, whose news broadcast aired immediately after *See it Now*. Hollenbeck editorializes in support of Murrow, which results in the Hearst newspapers attacking him. Hollenbeck asks Murrow to speak up in his defense but Murrow refuses, saying that he can't take on both Senator McCarthy and the Hearst newspapers. Hollenbeck, who has a troubled personal life, commits suicide soon after. Murrow is depicted as deeply remorseful, because courage on his part might have saved Hollenbeck.
21. Mike Wallace himself objected very strongly to his characterization in the film, believing (rightly) that it would color his legacy (see Weiner's [2012] obituary). In an interview with, ironically, *The New York Times,* he insisted that he and Bergman had "stood shoulder to shoulder." The film, however, depicted him as "having lost my moral compass, caved in," making Bergman alone the journalist-hero (Applebome 1999). The screenplay for *The Insider* was adapted from a 1996 *Vanity Fair* article by Marie Brenner, "The Man Who Knew Too Much," which recounts the events entirely from Bergman's point of view. In a 1999 interview with *Frontline*, Bergman reiterated the substance of the film's charges against Wallace. (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/smoke/bergman.html (accessed 1 May 2019).
22. The line is part of a warning delivered to Webb by a sympathetic National Security Council source as a campaign of vilification is launched to discredit his reporting.
23. Webb's series remains controversial. A subsequent CIA investigation (in 1998) which found that agents had engaged with Contras involved in drug smuggling is held by Webb's supporters to have vindicated the substance of his charges if not the details of his reporting. Critics still maintain that his claims were overstated and his reporting seriously flawed. Susan Paterno, writing in *American Journalism Review* in 2005 considers that though "much of what Webb wrote was accurate," his editors "failed to hold the story to what he could substantiate" resulting in what she calls "one of the most notorious sagas in American journalism" (21).
24. Judged as cinematic narratives, *Kill the Messenger* is both more coherent and more compelling. *Truth* suffers from inconsistencies in its narrative logic—a point discussed more fully below. Unlike *Kill the Messenger,* its screenplay never makes sense of the cloud of charges and counter-charges swirling around Mapes, particularly the suggestion of cooperation with the Kerry campaign and the role of Viacom's planned restructuring and its regulatory/political implications in CBS's handling of the controversy. (Viacom held a controlling interest in CBS.) These weaknesses are compounded by the film's reliance on stock "journalism movie" imagery and dialogue which is often tired to the point of cliché. When Mapes's story airs she receives a congratulatory phone call from her journalist husband, who informs her: "You're a helluva reporter, babe." It's a line Spencer Tracy might have balked at. *Kill the Messenger* is both more particular in its cinematic languages and far clearer in its narrative premises: Webb's story is accurate and he is the victim of a conspiracy coordinated by the CIA. Webb himself voices the movie's creed early in the film when his son asks him why he

hangs out with "bad guys" so much. "Because the bad guys are usually more honest than the good guys." Webb is that rarity an honest good guy. The media establishment, including the fabled *Washington Post*, in contrast, prove his rule. They are "good guys" who lie.

25. The introductory chapter of Borins and Herst, *Negotiating Business Narratives* (2018) discusses the phenomenon of "evil corporation" movies in relation to film narratives of the information technology, auto, and financial trading industries. The Gallup (2019) numbers for "big business" for the years we are considering track almost perfectly with those of newspapers and television news.
26. At the *L.A. Times* editorial meeting at which the decision is made to "go after" Webb's story, the *Times'* young Sacramento based staff reporter Rich Kline notes that Webb has put all his sources on the newspaper's website. "So?" a hostile colleague asks. "So, no one's ever done that before," is the answer. The interchange functions within the narrative to further buttress the credibility of Webb's tradecraft. This same reporter was earlier shown congratulating Webb on a previous story and seeking career advice. "Don't let the assholes win? I don't know," Webb offers in response as he settles himself to work.
27. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/12/president-trump-has-made-false-or-misleading-claims-over-days/. Accessed 24 August 2019.

Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge the comments of James Hamilton and the research assistance of Cassandra Liu, Adam McGrath, and James Chapman.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Funding was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [grant numbers 410-2011-0436 and 435-2016-0146].

References

Abernathy, Penelope. 2018. *The Expanding News Desert*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media. Accessed August 25, 2019. https://www.cislm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Expanding-News-Desert-10_14-Web.pdf.

Adkins, Todd, and Jeremiah Castle. 2014. "Moving Pictures? Experimental Evidence of Cinematic Influence on Political Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly* 95 (5): 1230–1244.

Applebome, Peter. 1999. "Film Drama Shines a Harsh Light on '60 Minutes' and CBS." *The New York Times*, July 13. Accessed May 1, 2019. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/film/071399sixty-minutes-tobacco-film.html.

Baird, Robert. 2003. "Journalism and the Media." In *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film*, edited by Peter Rollins, 374–382. New York: Columbia.

Bal, Mieke. 2017. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 4th ed. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Borins, Sandford. 2011. *Governing Fables: Learning from Public Sector Narratives*. Durham, NC: Information Age.

Borins, Sandford, and Beth Herst. 2018. *Negotiating Business Narratives: Fables of the Information Technology, Automobile Manufacturing, and Financial Trading Industries*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brennen, Bonnie. 2003. "Sweat not Melodrama." *Journalism* 4 (1): 113–131.

Brenner, Marie. 1996. "The Man Who Knew Too Much." *Vanity Fair*.
Brock, Timothy, Melanie Green, and Jeffrey Strange, eds. 2002. *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations*. New Jersey: L. Erlbaum Associates.
Browne, Nick, ed. 1998. *Refiguring American Film Genres*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Ehrlich, Matthew. 1997. "Journalism in the Movies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14 (2): 267–281.
Ehrlich, Matthew. 2004. *Journalism in the Movies*. Chicago: University of Illinois.
Ehrlich, Matthew. 2006. "Facts, Truth, and Bad Journalists in the Movies." *Journalism* 7 (4): 501–519.
Ehrlich, Matthew, and Joe Saltzman. 2015. *Heroes and Scoundrels; The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.
Elliott, William, and William Schenck-Hamlin. 1979. "Film, Politics, and the Press: The Influence of 'All the President's Men'." *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (3): 546–553.
Feldstein, Mark. 2004. "Watergate Revisited." *American Journalism Review*, August-September. Accessed April 16, 2019. http://ajrarchive.org/article.asp?id=3735.
Gallup Organization. 2019. "Confidence in Institutions." Accessed April 19, 2019. https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx.
Gilbert, Daniel, Douglas Krull, and Patrick Malone. 1990. "Unbelieving the Unbelievable: Some Problems in the Rejection of False Information." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59 (4): 601–613.
Gray, Jonathan. 2010. *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York University Press.
Green, Melanie. 2004. "Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism." *Discourse Processes* 38 (2): 247–266.
Green, Melanie, and Timothy Brock. 2000. "The Role of Transportation in the Persuasiveness of Public Narratives." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79 (5): 701–721.
Grodal, Torben. 2009. *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture and Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hamilton, James. 2016. *Democracy's Detectives: The Economics of Investigative Journalism*. Cambridge: Harvard.
Herman, David. 2013. *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Investigative Reporters and Editors. 2018. "FAQ." Accessed April 16, 2019. https://www.ire.org/awards/ire-awards/faq.
Johnson, Marcia, Shahin Hashroudi, and Stephen Lindsay. 1993. "Source Monitoring." *Psychological Bulletin* 114 (1): 3–28.
Langman, Larry. 1998. *The Media in the Movies: A Catalog of American Journalism Films, 1900-1996*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
Leva, Gary. 2006. "Woodward and Bernstein: Lighting the Fire." Special Feature Accompanying 2006 re-release on DVD of *ATPM*.
Livingston, Paisley, and Carl Plantinga, eds. 2008. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. New York: Routledge.
Manchester, Julia. 2019. "Young Turks Host Says Trump Administration has 'Led to a Revival of Investigative Journalism." *The Hill*, April 29. Accessed August 20, 2019. https://thehill.com/hilltv/rising/441128-young-turks-host-says-trump-administration-has-led-to-a-revival-of.
Mapes, Mary. 2005. *Truth: The Press, the President, and the Privilege of Power*. New York: St. Martin's.
McNair, Brian. 2010. *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Mittell, Jason. 2004. *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York: Routledge.
Morgan, Susan, Lauren Movius, and Michael Cody. 2009. "The Power of Narratives: The Effect of Entertainment Television on Organ Donation Storylines on the Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behaviors of Donors and Nondonors." *Journal of Communication* 59: 135–151.
Mulligan, Kenneth, and Philip Habel. 2011. "An Experimental Test of Fictional Framing on Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly* 92 (1): 79–99.
Neale, Stephen. 2000. *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge.

Paterno, Susan. 2005. "The Sad Saga of Gary Webb." *American Journalism Review*, 21–35. Accessed April 16, 2019. http://ajrarchive.org/Article.asp?id=3874.

Plantinga, Carl. 2009. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Plantinga, Carl. 2018. *Screen Stories: Emotion and the Ethics of Engagement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pribram, E. D. 2011. *Emotions, Genre, Justice in Film and Television: Detecting Feeling*. New York: Routledge.

Propp, Vladimir. 1968. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Shafer, Jack. 2005. "Edward R. Movie: Good Night and Good Luck, and Bad History." *Slate*. Accessed June 17, 2019. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2005/10/edward-r-movie.html.

Sullivan, Margaret. 2017. "Trump and the Watergate Effect." *Columbia Journalism Review* Fall. Accessed August 20, 2019. https://www.cjr.org/special_report/trump-watergate-russia-washington-post.php.

Van Syckle, Katie. 2019. "How the Times Decides What to Investigate." *The New York Times*, March 20, p.A2.

Weiner, Tim. 2012. "Mike Wallace, CBS Pioneer on '60 Minutes' Dies at 93." *The New York Times*, April 9, p.A1. Accessed May 1, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/09/business/media/mike-wallace-cbs-pioneer-of-60-minutes-dead-at-93.html.