INTERVIEW WITH

Tim P. Vos

Journalism studies in perspective: a conversation about life, history and changes in the field with Tim P. Vos

Presentation

He often jokes that he is not very good at remembering the names of the people he meets on his countless trips to congresses and conferences. However, his name is always remembered as one of the most cited authors in journalism research around the world. The fact that he does not easily remember names does not mean that he forgets people or does not care about their stories. On the contrary. Even though he is a prominent scholar – certainly one of the most recognized in the field of journalism studies today – our interviewee still demonstrates great humility, typical of a young journalist who grew up in a working class family of Calvinist tradition – the first generation to go to university – in a small town in Iowa, in the United States. "My parents believed in and modeled hard work, personal responsibility, and humility," he remembers from his childhood. It's no coincidence that, decades later, when hailed as one of the world's great mentors in journalism studies by his peers and former students, Timothy Paul Vos – or only Tim P. Vos, as he is best known – still shows discomfort with the laudatory tone used to refer to his career. "To be perfectly honest, I'm somewhat uncomfortable when people praise my scholarship," he admits.

Current director of the School of Journalism at Michigan State University and former president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), having received dozens of international awards and honors for his work as a researcher and professor, Tim P. Vos is as great a scholar as he is a great person. He graduated from small Dordt College in Iowa with a bachelor's degree in communication in 1984 and a master's degree from the University of Iowa a decade later. In 2015, he received a PhD from Syracuse University in upstate New York, supervised by his mentor, Prof. Pamela Shoemaker, also a great human being.

Along the way, he met and worked with remarkable leaders in journalism research, until he himself became a reference and mentor to many other talents around the world. Tim P. Vos is the author and editor of important books such as *Gatekeeping Theory* (with Pamela Shoemaker, 2009), *Gatekeeping in Transition* (with

François Heinderyckx, 2015), *Media scholarship in a transitional age: Research in honor of Pamela J. Shoemaker* (with Carol Liebler, 2018) and *International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies* (with Folker Hanusch, 2019). He has also published dozens of articles in leading academic journals.

In this interview, which was conducted by email but was based on many conversations during the year that the interviewer worked as a visiting researcher with him at Michigan State University in 2022, Tim P. Vos offers important reflections on his career and on emerging themes in international journalism studies. He talks about journalism as a social institution, and how important it is to understand the history of journalism and the history of the theories behind it to understand the disruptive changes in the field today. He also shares his views on the current state of international research and on the significance of new epistemologies and actors emerging against traditional approaches. "It's about gaining knowledge, but even gaining knowledge only works by discovering our ignorance," he insists.

With his usual kindness and modesty, Tim P. Vos found time in his busy schedule to talk to *Sur Le Journalisme / About Journalism / Sobre Jornalismo* and thus provide important insights into the past and the future of journalism research.

Entrevista

Os estudos em jornalismo em perspectiva: uma conversa sobre vida, história e mudanças no campo com Tim P. Vos

Apresentação

Ele costuma brincar que não é bom para guardar nomes das pessoas que conhece ao longo de suas inúmeras viagens para congressos e conferências. Seu nome, porém, é sempre lembrado como um dos autores mais citados na pesquisa em jornalismo ao redor do mundo. O fato de não guardar nomes com facilidade, porém, não significa que ele esquece das pessoas ou que não possui consideração por suas histórias. Pelo contrário! Mesmo como um grande pesquisador - certamente um dos mais reconhecidos no campo dos estudos em jornalismo na atualidade -, nosso entrevistado ainda demonstra grande humildade, típica de um jovem jornalista que cresceu em uma família de classe trabalhadora de tradição calvinista - a primeira geração a ir para a universidade - em uma pequena cidade de Iowa, nos Estados Unidos. "Os meus pais acreditavam no trabalho árduo, na responsabilidade pessoal e na humildade, e eram um exemplo disso", recorda de sua infância. Não por acaso, décadas mais tarde, ao ser destacado como um dos grandes mentores na pesquisa em jornalismo ao redor do mundo por seus pares e ex-estudantes, Timothy Paul Vos – ou simplesmente

Tim P. Vos, como é mais conhecido – ainda demonstra incômodo com o tom laudatório sobre sua carreira. "Para ser sincero, sinto-me um pouco desconfortável quando as pessoas elogiam a minha carreira de pesquisador", ressalta.

Atual Diretor da Escola de Jornalismo da Michigan State University, nos Estados Unidos, e ex-presidente da Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), tendo recebido dezenas de prêmios e homenagens internacionais por seu trabalho como pesquisador e professor, Tim P. Vos é um grande estudioso e uma grande pessoa. Ele graduou-se em Comunicação em 1984 na pequena Dordt University, em Iowa, e uma década depois concluiu seu mestrado na University of Iowa. Outra década se passou e, em 2005, doutorou-se pela Syracuse University, no norte do estado de Nova Iorque, tendo como mentora Pamela Shoemaker, também um grande ser humano.

Nesse percurso, conheceu e trabalhou com grandes lideranças da pesquisa em jornalismo até tornar-se ele próprio uma referência e mentor de tantos outros talentos mundo afora. Não se trata, portanto, de um discurso laudatório; seu currículo fala por si. Tim P. Vos é autor e editor de obras importantes, como "Gatekeeping Theory" (com Pamela Shoemaker, 2009), "Gatekeeping in Transition" (com François Heinderyckx, 2015), "Media scholarship in a transitional age: Research in honor of Pamela J. Shoemaker" (com Carol Liebler, 2018) e "International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies" (com Folker Hanusch, 2019), além de autor de dezenas de artigos publicados em periódicos científicos de referência.

Nesta entrevista, realizada por e-mail, mas baseada em inúmeras conversas durante o ano em que o entrevistador trabalhou com ele como pesquisador visitante na Michigan State University, em 2022, Tim P. Vos oferece reflexões importantes sobre sua carreira e sobre temas emergentes nos estudos internacionais de jornalismo. Especialista na interpretação do jornalismo como instituição social, o pesquisador fala sobre a importância da história do jornalismo e da própria história das teorias do jornalismo para a compreensão contemporânea das transformações disruptivas no campo. Também oferece reflexões significativas sobre o atual estágio da pesquisa internacional e sobre o significado da emergência de novas epistemologias e de novos atores nos tensionamentos das abordagens tradicionais. "Trata-se da aquisição de conhecimento, mas mesmo adquirir conhecimento só funciona se descobrirmos a nossa ignorância", frisa.

Com a gentileza e a humildade de sempre, Tim Vos encontrou tempo em sua ocupada rotina para conversar com a *Sur Le Journalisme / About Journalism / Sobre Jornalismo* nesta entrevista que apresenta importantes insights para pensar de onde vem e para onde vai a pesquisa em jornalismo na contemporaneidade.

Interview

Mettre les journalism studies en perspective : un entretien avec Tim P. Vos sur la vie, l'histoire et les évolutions du champ

Presentation

Tim P. Vos plaisante souvent sur sa difficulté à retenir les noms des personnes rencontrées lors de ses innombrables déplacements dans les congrès et conférences. Pourtant, son propre nom figure parmi les plus cités dans la recherche internationale en journalisme. Sa difficulté à mémoriser les noms ne signifie nullement un désintérêt pour les individus ni pour leurs parcours. Bien au contraire. Bien qu'il soit aujourd'hui un chercheur de premier plan – sans doute l'un des plus reconnus dans le champ des *journalism studies* –, notre interlocuteur fait toujours preuve d'une grande humilité, digne d'un jeune journaliste issu d'une famille ouvrière de tradition calviniste, dans une petite ville de l'Iowa, aux États-Unis. Il est le premier de sa lignée à avoir fréquenté l'université. « Mes parents valorisaient et incarnaient le travail assidu, la responsabilité personnelle et l'humilité », se souvient-il. Ce n'est donc pas un hasard si, plusieurs décennies plus tard, malgré les nombreuses distinctions et la reconnaissance de ses pairs et de ses ancien·nes étudiant·es, Timothy Paul Vos, que l'on connaît mieux sous le nom de Tim P. Vos, continue d'éprouver un certain malaise face au ton élogieux employé pour qualifier sa carrière. « Pour être tout à fait honnête, je ne suis pas très à l'aise quand on encense mes travaux », confie-t-il.

Actuel directeur de l'École de journalisme de la Michigan State University et ancien président de l'Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Tim P. Vos a reçu de nombreuses distinctions internationales pour son travail de chercheur et d'enseignant. Il a débuté son parcours universitaire au Dordt College, une petite institution de l'Iowa, où il obtient un diplôme en communication en 1984, puis un master à l'Université de l'Iowa dix ans plus tard. Il soutient sa thèse de doctorat en 2015 à l'Université de Syracuse, dans l'État de New York, sous la direction de sa mentore, la professeure Pamela Shoemaker, elle-même figure respectée du champ.

Tout au long de son parcours, il a côtoyé et collaboré avec des figures majeures de la recherche sur le journalisme, jusqu'à devenir lui-même une référence et un mentor pour de nombreux·ses jeunes chercheur·ses à travers le monde. Tim P. Vos est l'auteur et l'éditeur de plusieurs ouvrages de référence, parmi lesquels *Gatekeeping Theory* (avec Pamela Shoemaker, 2009), *Gatekeeping in Transition* (avec François Heinderyckx, 2015), *Media Scholarship in a Transitional Age: Research in Honor of Pamela J. Shoemaker*

(avec Carol Liebler, 2018), ou encore *International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies* (avec Folker Hanusch, 2019). Il a également publié des dizaines d'articles dans les principales revues académiques du domaine.

Dans cet entretien, réalisé par courrier électronique mais nourri de nombreuses conversations menées au cours de l'année que l'intervieweur a passée en tant que chercheur invité à ses côtés à Michigan State University en 2022, Tim P. Vos revient sur son parcours et sur les grandes questions qui traversent aujourd'hui les *journalism studies* à l'échelle internationale. Il y aborde le journalisme en tant qu'institution sociale, soulignant l'importance de connaître son histoire et celle des théories qui l'éclairent pour mieux saisir les mutations contemporaines. Il partage également sa vision de l'état actuel de la recherche internationale, et l'intérêt croissant pour de nouvelles épistémologies ainsi que pour l'émergence d'acteur·rices et de perspectives en rupture avec les approches traditionnelles. « Il s'agit d'acquérir des connaissances, mais acquérir des connaissances ne fonctionne qu'en découvrant notre propre ignorance », insiste-t-il.

Avec sa bienveillance coutumière et sa modestie intacte, Tim P. Vos a accepté de consacrer un peu de son temps à *Sur le journalisme / About Journalism / Sobre Jornalismo*, livrant ainsi de précieuses réflexions sur le passé et l'avenir de la recherche en journalisme.

Entrevista

Los estudios sobre periodismo en perspectiva: una conversación sobre la vida, la historia y las transformaciones del campo con Tim P. Vos

Presentación

Tim P. Vos suele bromear con que no es especialmente hábil para recordar los nombres de las personas que conoce en sus numerosos viajes a congresos y conferencias. Sin embargo, su propio nombre figura entre los más citados en el ámbito de la investigación sobre periodismo a nivel internacional. Su dificultad para retener nombres no implica, ni mucho menos, que olvide a las personas o que no se interese por sus trayectorias. Todo lo contrario. A pesar de ser una figura destacada – sin duda, una de las más reconocidas actualmente en el campo de los estudios sobre periodismo, nuestro entrevistado sigue mostrando una humildad profunda, propia de aquel joven periodista que creció en una familia trabajadora de tradición calvinista – la primera generación universitaria – en una pequeña localidad de Iowa, en Estados Unidos. "Mis padres creían en el trabajo duro, la responsabilidad individual y la humildad, y fueron ejemplo de todo ello", recuerda.

Décadas más tarde, tras haber sido reconocido por colegas y ex alumnxs como uno de los grandes mentores de la investigación periodística a nivel global, Vos no deja de manifestar cierta incomodidad frente a los elogios excesivos. "Para ser sincero, me resulta un poco incómodo cuando la gente alaba mi carrera académica", confiesa.

Actualmente dirige la Escuela de Periodismo de la Michigan State University y ha presidido la Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). A lo largo de su carrera, ha recibido decenas de premios y reconocimientos internacionales tanto por su labor investigadora como docente. Se graduó en Comunicación en 1984 en Dordt University, una pequeña institución universitaria en Iowa, obtuvo su máster una década después en la University of Iowa, y culminó su doctorado en 2005 en Syracuse University, en el estado de Nueva York, bajo la tutela de Pamela Shoemaker, también una figura clave en los estudios sobre periodismo.

Durante ese recorrido, trabajó con referentes del campo hasta convertirse él mismo en uno de ellos, mentor de numerosas generaciones de investigadorxs alrededor del mundo. No se trata aquí de hacer un elogio vacío: su trayectoria habla por sí sola. Vos es autor y editor de obras fundamentales como *Gatekeeping Theory* (con Pamela Shoemaker, 2009), *Gatekeeping in Transition* (con François Heinderyckx, 2015), *Media Scholarship in a Transitional Age: Research in Honor of Pamela J. Shoemaker* (con Carol Liebler, 2018) y la *International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies* (con Folker Hanusch, 2019), además de contar con decenas de artículos publicados en revistas científicas de prestigio.

Esta entrevista, realizada por correo electrónico pero nutrida por múltiples intercambios mantenidos durante el año en que el entrevistador trabajó como investigador visitante en Michigan State University, en 2022, ofrece una mirada lúcida sobre su trayectoria y sobre algunos de los principales debates que atraviesan hoy los estudios internacionales sobre periodismo. Especialista en el análisis del periodismo como institución social, Vos insiste en la importancia de comprender la historia del periodismo – y también la historia de sus teorías – para abordar con mayor profundidad las transformaciones actuales del campo. Asimismo, reflexiona sobre el estado de la investigación internacional, sobre la emergencia de nuevas epistemologías y sobre el lugar de nuevos actores que tensionan los marcos tradicionales. "Se trata de generar conocimiento, pero incluso generar conocimiento solo es posible si reconocemos nuestra propia ignorancia", subraya.

Con su habitual gentileza y modestia, Tim P. Vos hizo un espacio en su agenda para dialogar con *Sur le journalisme / About Journalism / Sobre jornalismo* en esta entrevista que ofrece claves valiosas para pensar de dónde venimos y hacia dónde se dirige hoy la investigación sobre periodismo.

You come from a working-class family in Iowa and are part of the first generation in your family to graduate from college. What was your life like before you decided to become a journalist? What were your main motivations?

I was not someone with specific ambitions, and certainly not high ambitions. I liked to write, and was fairly good at it. I liked politics and followed the news. Teachers suggested journalism. But I really never had a career plan and had very little understanding that getting good grades in school had anything to do with getting into college. I was not a diligent student. Thankfully, my grades were okay.

Even though I had little understanding of what a college or university was like or what it demanded, I always knew that I wanted to go to college. Frankly, I don't know why. Almost no one in my immediate circle talked about or pursued higher education. My parents didn't graduate from high school. I did have some very smart classmates, with similar upbringings, and we formed our own support group and checked out colleges together. None of our parents had money set aside for us for college; we worked parttime jobs and saved up on our own.

I grew up in a small town – about 7,000 residents at the time. It was a Dutch immigrant community. My grandparents were immigrants, deeply steeped in Dutch Calvinism. They and my parents believed in and modeled hard work, personal responsibility, and humility. It was a small, sheltered world, but in many ways, it gave me a great foundation for my life. When I was ready to go to university, my parents were concerned that I would be leaving their world behind and wanted me to attend a relatively new, denominational college[1] in Iowa. I agreed to go for one year, before I would transfer. I met there the woman who would become my wife, so the transfer didn't happen. She was – and still is – Canadian. To say she and her family broadened my outlook would be an enormous understatement. Suddenly I was thinking about the world rather than my small patch of Iowa.

You obtained your BA degree in Iowa in 1984 (Dordt University) and your Master's degree a decade later (University of Iowa). Then another ten years passed before you received your PhD from Syracuse University. What was your career as a journalist like before you decided to become a researcher and professor?

Dordt College (now Dordt University) didn't really have a journalism program. I majored in Communication with a Broadcast focus but also worked at the campus newspaper and at the college-owned radio station. I ran out of courses I wanted to take in Communication and found myself drawn to Political Science and then Philosophy and History. It was a great intellectual preparation for thinking about social theory and how it might apply to journalism.

My first journalism job, working in radio news, was a lot of on-the-job training. I loved what I was doing. I was working in Iowa where the whole US presidential selection process started. I got to interview essentially everyone who wanted to be president and suddenly saw myself doing what national journalists were doing. I was really hooked on journalism. I worked hard to improve as a journalist, started doing side freelance work for a couple of national publications, and joined professional trade associations, serving elected terms on the Iowa Broadcast News Association board.

But at the same time, having not gone to a journalism school meant I was trying to figure out some of the bigger questions about journalism, such as, what should be journalism's role in society and what did 'objectivity' really mean? So, I went to the University of Iowa's Journalism School to explore those questions. I returned to being a journalist after getting my Masters' degree, but I'd already now also been hooked by the intellectual life of doing advanced scholarship. I went back to teach briefly at Dordt College but then laid plans to pursue a doctoral degree.

Even when I was doing daily journalism, I had never stopped being a student of journalism. Now that I'm a professor of journalism I also feel like I haven't stopped being a journalist. Much of what I research is tied to the fundamental questions I wrestled with as a journalist. It turns out the kinds of questions I was hoping to find answers to when I was a journalist are not the kinds of questions that can be answered once and for all.

I often joke that I would still be a journalist if I wasn't so terrible at remembering names. Getting a name wrong, of forgetting a name, are pretty much cardinal sins in doing the day-to-day work of journalism. It seems my brain just wasn't wired for remembering names.

As a PhD student at Syracuse University, you had the opportunity to work with scholars such as Pamela Shoemaker, your advisor. How do you see the influences of these important names in the field on your early career as a scholar?

At each stop in my education, I've had professors who expanded my world. At Dordt College it was a philosophy professor who got me thinking about social institutions and what constitutes them. In my Masters' program, it was the great critical scholar Hanno Hardt who exposed me to cultural theory. In the final semester of my MA program, with my thesis already nearly done, I took a course called the Social Meanings of News with Dan Berkowitz. It would become the basis for an edited volume by Berkowitz (1997) that beautifully organized a body of scholarship into a coherent research program. It was essentially the research program that we would call Media Sociology and eventually Journalism Studies. The Berkowitz course was also where I first read Pam Shoemaker's work. I knew I'd found my research program.

Iowa was a great place to learn qualitative research, particularly from a critical and cultural perspective, and historical research, also with a strong critical, cultural foundation. My thesis became the basis for a book chapter on the structure and style of news writing (Vos, 2002). One of my class papers became the basis for an article I published much later (Vos, 2012), where I examined the role of journalism education in legitimizing the objectivity norm. Both were historical articles with a strong influence – mostly implicit – from cultural theory.

I was ready to return to the University of Iowa for my doctoral program, but my wife was also going to be working on a graduate degree, and Iowa didn't have a degree program in her discipline (nutrition science). We had followed my career to that point, so it was time to make hers a priority. As fate would have it, Syracuse University was her top choice. Pam Shoemaker had recently moved there from Ohio State, so Syracuse seemed perfect for me too. I count myself fortunate that I was accepted into the program and that Pam plucked me from my cohort to be one of her research assistants.

Two things happened that first semester working for Pam in 2001. First, I was an organizer for a conference she'd pulled together, 'What's News?' It was the basis for a large, 10-country comparative research project, examining newsworthiness, and was my first introduction to comparative scholarship – something else that would become a passion for me. Pam and Akiba Cohen published a book out of that project a few years later (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006). Getting to know Akiba was a tremendous bonus from that project. I learned much from both of them about the logic of comparative research design. But the conference included other luminaries in Journalism Studies – such as David Weaver, Max McCombs, and Wolfgang Donsbach. Weaver would also become a friend and mentor following that conference. Another added benefit from that event was learning conference organizing skills. It helped enormously when I organized a series of conferences in Brussels and Barcelona in the 2010s and also helped when I became president of AEJMC.

The second thing that happened that first semester was that I needed to produce a full empirical research paper in Pam Shoemaker's class. It was a lot to ask from a 13-week course, but I quickly decided it would be on journalistic roles – still thinking about those questions I had as a working journalist. I was taking a concurrent course from Dr. Carol Liebler where we had to do a concept explication of a communication concept. I chose journalistic role conception. But in diving deeply into the role theory literature, I realized there was a concept no one in journalism studies was really talking about – role performance, or what I called it, role enactment. I used that to expand the project I would do in Pam's class. So, not realizing how ambitious the project was, I set out to survey journalists about their role conceptions and then to compare their perceptions to a content analysis of their work – the journalists' role enactments. I presented that paper at the 2002 AEJMC conference, where David Weaver gave me helpful feedback and encouraged me to continue this line of scholarship.

It took me a long time to return to the work on journalistic roles – when another once-in-a-lifetime opportunity came along – but it has driven a significant body of work since (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017, 2018; Tandoc, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013; Vos, 2016, 2023a). In fact, Thomas Hanitzsch and I have a forthcoming book from Polity Press where we are trying to offer a definitive treatment of journalistic roles. When I was inducted as an ICA Fellow in 2023, my work on theorizing journalistic roles was cited as one of my lasting contributions.

Of course, the other important development that came out of my time working with Pam – and that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I mentioned – was joining her in theorizing journalistic gatekeeping. Pam's piece on gatekeeping was what I had read in Dan Berkowitz's class and what got me very excited to work with Pam at Syracuse. During my third year in my doctoral program, Pam asked if I'd join her to write a second edition of her Gatekeeping book (Shoemaker, 1991). As the project developed, it became clear that it would be much more than a second edition; we would attempt to revisit the theoretical mechanisms of a gatekeeping model to think anew about why news turns out the way it does and how news reaches people in the ways it does.

I worked on my dissertation and on the book project at the same time, leaving the work on journalistic roles on the back burner. The book, *Gatekeeping Theory* (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), was a labor of love. When the book was published, Pam said, "This book will make you famous." I'm quite certain there's no such thing as fame in a small discipline such as Journalism Studies, but I know what she meant.

During my doctoral program, we were required to take a few courses outside of the Newhouse School of Public Communications. I took courses in Syracuse's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, where I used the opportunity to deepen my understanding of social theory. It was here that I was immersed in Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. The connections – and differences – to Kurt Lewin's version of field theory, which was the foundation for gatekeeping scholarship, was quickly obvious to me. In fact, it was reading Bourdieu's work that helped Pam and I rethink gatekeeping theory.

But the other important thing to come out of my coursework at Maxwell was a deep dive into new institutionalism. I was attracted to institutionalism, particularly historical institutionalism, which provided a conceptual framework for thinking about historical mechanisms, such as path dependence, that largely account for why institutions have the stability they do. But I wasn't entirely convinced that institutionalism – at least how I initially encountered it – painted a full picture of how social institutions really operated. And there was the pesky problem of thinking about institutional change – which we know happens – but I didn't see reflected in the institutional literature. I was simultaneously drawn to various forms of cultural theory. I had a professor at Maxwell, Craig Parsons, who taught a course where he tried to map the various theoretical, explanatory frameworks used in political science and public affairs, pointing to structural, cultural, institutional, and psychological logics of explanation. He would soon publish a book where he provided this map (Parsons, 2007). I continue to cite it regularly, since it's so foundational to my thinking.

As I got further into institutionalism, the problems that have given me pause essentially got worked out. Sociological institutionalism blended cultural and institutional frameworks in a meaningful way – essentially treating institutions as cultures, with values, attitudes, and ideas unique to the institution, but resonant with the broader culture. This framework would shape some of my subsequent scholarship (e.g., Vos, 2013, 2019). I kept tinkering with the institutionalist framework, but, coming out of my doctoral program, I leaned into Bourdieu's field theory for several years.

Pam Shoemaker's influence extended in other ways too. I took a research design class with her that she and some colleagues were turning into a book, *How to Build Social Science Theories* (Shoemaker, Tankard, & Lasorsa, 2004). It would influence how I thought about research. So, did I say, that doing research with Pam meant doing quantitative, social scientific research? It was a huge paradigm shift for me. Well, perhaps less a shift than a broadening of my research repertoire. The cultural, critical work I'd done in my Masters' program came from an entirely different epistemological and ontological outlook than what I encountered in the doctoral program at Syracuse. It remains a tension that runs through my thinking and my work. Pam's approach to social science still influences how I think about research and research design.

You have co-authored some works with Pamela Shoemaker, such as Gatekeeping Theory (Routledge Press, 2009). Besides this book, the approach of her theory of levels of influence is also visible in other of your works, including Gatekeeping in Transition, edited with François Heinderyckx, Routledge Press, 2015). How significant is Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese's approach in Western scholarship?

The five levels of influence that Pam and Steve have put forward is an incredibly useful framework for thinking about why news turns out the way

it does. At a very basic level, it's a helpful catalog of factors to consider when thinking about what might influence how news is covered or framed. I recall Pam pushing back when I called it a catalog of factors, and, of course, she was right to do so, because it can be much more than that. In fact, we can be – and should be – mindful of ways these factors and levels of influence relate to one another.

Pam and Steve have talked about their idea as a hierarchy of influences model. They reordered the influences in their third edition of *Mediating the Message* (2014) in part to capture the way the levels relate to each other in a hierarchical fashion. However, in *Gatekeeping Theory* we didn't refer to it as a hierarchy – we talked about it as an interactive model. This allowed us to argue that when we look at specific examples of news coverage, we would be open to exploring how factors from various levels might have combined to produce an effect.

The model is an important corrective for reductionist arguments that point to one overarching explanation. When I was a student, I saw a lot of truth in Herman and Chomsky's (2002) classic formulation in *Manufacturing Consent*. But when I read it a second time (and a third and fourth) it struck me as too reductionistic. If everything comes back to the monied interests of the powerful, we have little reason to study anything other than the monied interests of those holding power. Yet, we will have missed the many lessons of those who have resisted the powerful and sometimes even got their way and redirected the course of history. Journalistic norms and routines, it turns out, can stave off exogenous economic, political, and other forces (Vos & Russell, 2019).

I'm pleased to see that empirical studies still make use of the levels of influence. But I find it particularly interesting that a number of recent articles are interrogating how these levels of influence compare or relate to each other in the changing news environment. There's a piece I saw recently that examines how the social system level is playing an outsized role in some contexts, but that that influence is mediated by the other levels (Elsheikh, Jackson, & Jebril, 2024). Pat Ferrucci and Tim Kuhn (2022) have put forth an argument for why the organization level has been the most important level of influence in shaping news in the digital age. I think it's important to be having these debates in journalism studies, and it's satisfying to see the levels of influence being the occasion for some spirited debates.

You are a past president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), one of the most important research associations in the US and abroad. How did your relationship with AEJMC begin and develop? What were the key challenges and opportunities?

Like most members, I was exposed to AEJMC as a graduate student. So, I've been a member for 30 years and counting. This was the first research community that I became a part of, and it was exhilarating to attend my first conference, once I was a doctoral student, and discover all these peers with similar interests and questions. And not just peers, but also to meet and hear from the leading scholars in our field. When David Weaver sought out my paper to talk to me about it back in 2002, it was clear to me the importance of academic conferences to inspire and challenge.

So, I kept going back and kept reading the journals. I'll admit though that I also felt like a bit of an outsider in those early years. I came to realize that I was carving out research ideas that sometimes didn't quite fit in the mainstreams of the discipline. But even that was fun. It helped me form my

research identity and position my arguments for maximum effect. But, as I started going to ICA, I also came to realize that my intellectual compatriots were there. This is where journalism studies was growing and maturing. I'd characterize AEJMC as being more oriented to mass communication research, with more of an emphasis on media effects. But I found the History Division to offer something that ICA – at least at the time – did not, so I kept going back.

I've said this publicly, so I'll repeat it here – I had pretty much decided that I was going to orient myself more to ICA and treat AEJMC as a second outlet for my work. A few weeks after making that decision I was asked if I'd stand for nomination for vice president, thus putting me on the track to become president-elect and then president. I didn't immediately respond, but my instinct was to say, 'absolutely not.' I was going to put my energies into ICA. But I pretty quickly thought, 'here's my chance to address the things I've come to not like about the Association.' So, I said yes. Then I was elected and set out to propose changes – changes to the name of the association, to its divisional structure, and orientation to its Council of Affiliates. I didn't get very far. Partly or mostly because the Covid-19 pandemic happened, and the executive director retired, and I had more pressing day-to-day challenges to handle.

I still think the association needs to revisit what its common intellectual objects of study are. Journalism sits alongside many other broader interests, but 'mass communication' no longer captures what those interests are. Do journalism studies scholars have interests in common with scholars of political communication, public relations, advertising, and entertainment studies? I think they probably do, do spend essentially no time discussing what that might be and what we might learn from each other.

As well as being President, you were also head of the AEJMC's History Division. We can see a strong influence of historical studies in your research. In short, what do you think we can learn from the history of journalism at this time of such changes in the field?

The short answer to that question is that history helps us think about change and therefore is quite relevant to a field that seems to be characterized by change. The story is, of course, more complicated than that, but having of sense of what has driven change in journalism in the past provides a useful lens for thinking about change in the present.

I can't quite escape the approach of thinking about journalism as a social institution, and an institution can't be understood apart from its history. If journalism as a social institution is about its roles, rules, and routines, these are all things that both form over time and are in a near-constant state of refinement, redefinition, or re-creation. You might have noticed some symmetry in my study of things like journalism's gatekeeping role. I've examined how gatekeeping came to be articulated as a foundational role of journalism – looking back to discursive work by journalists in the 19th and 20th centuries (Vos & Finneman, 2017). But I've also looked at how gatekeeping has been discursively challenged and reworked during the digital age (Vos & Thomas, 2019).

I think we also need to recognize how our own journalism theories are historically situated. Theories from agenda setting to collective memory need to be reexamined in light of fundamental changes in the digital age (Vos, 2023b; Vos & Moore, 2018). As Henrik Ornebring (2018) points out, many of our contemporary and past theories about journalism – such as

professionalization, commercialization, and digitalization – or about media more broadly – such as mediatization – speak to processes that happen over time. Temporal change is thus built into how we theorize our field.

As a side note, most strands of social theory have long conceptualized social institutions as historical creations. Likewise, to be a media sociologist was to consider the history of media. Thus, some of the leaders of our field – from Michael Schudson to Barbie Zelizer – have attended to the history of journalism and to the history of our field. I'd like to think I'm part of that tradition. In fact, I'd like to see all journalism studies scholars address the history of the field, or institution, or profession, or whatever they want to call it.

In addition to the history of journalism itself, we also found in your research a very interesting approach to the history of journalism theories, such as the history of gatekeeping theory, starting with Kurt Lewin and David White. How do you see the relevance of studying these studies, such as those of David White, Warren Breed, Herbert Gans and Leon Sigal, in the light of history, rather than simply abandoning them and trying to create new theories for the present?

That's a good question. I'm not sure I have a particularly elaborate answer. I think we sometimes just think we can absorb knowledge of a concept without actually going back to the ways that concept has been conceptualized. Perhaps this isn't very generous of me, but when I read David Manning White's original study of gatekeeping it struck me as having a fairly superficial grasp of Kurt Lewin's (1951) field theory, from which he drew gatekeeping. It seems like a lot of gatekeeping studies paid tribute to White (1950) but largely reproduced the same shortcomings of White by not taking the additional step of understanding Lewin's larger argument about field theory. Thus, a theory that sought to understand the social forces that shaped media messages became, in White's interpretation, a story about individuals' selections of news.

I see something similar in how contemporary studies of journalism that draw on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1998) field theory have stripped out some of Bourdieu's nuance and focus. On the one hand, no one owns field theory. So, scholars can mean whatever they want to mean about fields, or doxa, or any other concept that Bourdieu used. Bourdieu doesn't own them. But that too often means that a certain sloppiness enters into our theorizing. For example, Bourdieu conceptualized doxa as unarticulated assumptions about the nature of a field. However, a good deal of journalism studies scholarship refers to things like objectivity as doxa. Objectivity is one of the most articulated norms there is in journalism (Schudson, 2001). Thus, by (re) defining doxa as articulated norms, we end up overlooking those unarticulated assumptions that actually do drive journalism practice and perpetuate inequalities.

But, to your question, I think it's important that we create new theories for the present. Writings by Lewin and Bourdieu aren't sacred texts. We don't always have to anchor theories to the past. Yet, those theories will rarely be as robust and nuanced as they could be if they don't engage with how similar questions have been addressed in the past.

You are an expert on gatekeeping theory. Following on from the previous question, how do you see the contemporary updates (secondary gatekeeping, algorithmic gatekeeping, gatewatching, gatebouncing, etc.) of this theory, which was originally developed in the first half of the last century?

I think these ideas represent important achievements in rethinking gatekeeping to account for the new empirical realities that gatekeeping theory has sought to explain. This is precisely how theory should work – it should always be in dialogue with the real world it purports to make sense of. Interestingly, I think most of these concepts, such as gatewatching, secondary gatekeeping, and even algorithmic gatekeeping, had been suggested in earlier versions of gatekeeping. Lewin even hinted at such things. What's different is something like secondary gatekeeping is now much more easily and effectively done and has a much larger imprint on the public information environment than ever before. So, while we focused primarily on journalists as gatekeepers in the past, we can now add some other important gatekeepers – such as people sharing news on social media – to our understanding of information flows. And journalists have new gatekeeping routines too. So, things certainly look much different from in the past.

It may, or may not, surprise you, though that I don't think any of these concepts – at least one of which I've coined – does not displace or fundamentally alter the notion of gatekeeping – at least the version of gatekeeping that Pam and I have sought to put forward. Yes, there are new actors, actions, channels, and processes, but they just account for the new empirical details of the digital environment. The theoretical notion of gatekeeping still stands – we still need a way to understand "the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day" (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 1). That statement of gatekeeping is just as true in an era of information abundance is a social media saturated world as it is of newspaper journalism in the 19th or 20th centuries.

The counter argument to this has largely been that the new networked media environment has so many gates that the gates have largely become meaningless. Information that can't get through one gate can just get through another. Indeed, this pretty much describes why we are flooded with misinformation and disinformation. In an earlier era, the relatively small set of gatekeepers had the power to keep this dis- and misinformation out of information flows. So, the focus now is different. I know now how someone's information diet is formed – what reaches them. Since there is not one undifferentiated information environment that we all share, the focus needs to be on how information diets vary from person to person. From there, we want to understand similarities in information diets based on characteristics or actions of groups of persons. In other words, how does a conspiracy theory about vaccines reach the people is does and what do those people have in common?

We can see from your career that you are essentially a qualitative researcher. However, this is not the hegemonic line in the field, both in the US and abroad. How do you see the role of qualitative research in international journalism scholarship?

That's a fair conclusion. I definitely do more qualitative research than anything else. I'd hasten to add a couple of footnotes though. First, I wouldn't conflate historical work with qualitative work. There's a portion of my research program that uses historical methods to understand why journalism, media policy, and even some aspects of advertising are the way they are (Vos, 2010, 2011; Vos & Li, 2013). I'd also say that I've done quantitative research when I think the questions, subject matter, or goals require it (Hanitzsch, Vos, et al., 2019; Tandoc et al., 2013; Wolfgang, Vos, Kelling, & Shin, 2021). *The Worlds of Journalism* research, of course, is a largely quantitative undertaking.

But, to the point of your question, qualitative research has long taken a backseat to quantitative research in mass communication research in the US and other parts of the Global North. Social science from a positivist or post-positivist paradigm puts the researcher in a privileged position at distance from their research subjects and relies on fixed definitions of concepts based on the etic approach of the researcher[2]. A lot of valuable scientific knowledge has been generated from that approach. Indeed, for a long time, this social scientific approach had a hegemonic status, such that those who had been socialized into this approach largely believed other approaches lacked rigor, validity and reliability. What the paradigm didn't allow its adherents to acknowledge is that collapsing the distance from research subjects and taking an emic approach to concepts could also be done with rigor and might just yield valuable, theoretical knowledge as well.

I do think that has been changing though. An article by Matt Carlson and colleagues (Carlson, Robinson, Lewis, & Berkowitz, 2018) outlined what unites journalism studies as a discipline. They identify methodological pluralism as one of journalism studies' core commitments. They were able to make that claim because a couple of important academic journals came on the scene that didn't accept the old paradigm. The introduction 25 years ago of *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* and *Journalism Studies* created strong venues for qualitative scholarship. There have been other journals since, such as *Journalism Practice* and *Digital Journalism*, that publish a lot of qualitative scholarship. I count myself fortunate to have joined the journalism research community as these two journals got established.

I think journalism studies scholars have embraced qualitative methods because they were the best way to address the most pressing issues of journalism's digital era. We wanted to understand how journalists and those around journalism were rethinking the field in the context of social, economic, and technological disruptions. We wanted to see how journalistic practices adapted – or didn't – in the face of those disruptions. It's not those quantitative methods can't help answer these questions – some quantitative methods certainly do help – but many of the research questions being posed in the last 25 or so years were simply questions best answered inductively, and from the emic perspective of the actors involved. They required the kind of "contextual sensitivity" (Carlson et al., 2018, p. 6) and "sensitizing concepts" (Christians & Carey, 1989, p. 369) that qualitative research thrives at.

But also, for me personally, as I've embraced a discursive institutionalist theoretical framework, it only makes sense that I heed the emic discourse of the institutional actors I study. I and others have (e.g., Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Vos, 2019; Vos, 2023a) argued that institutions such as journalism are constituted through discourse. To me, the way to understand an institution, then, is to attend to naturally occurring institutional and social discourses. It's this theoretical commitment that explains why several of my studies claim to be focused on the 'discursive construction' of some institutional features of journalism (e.g., Vos & Perreault, 2020; Vos & Thomas, 2018; Vos & Thomas, 2019).

But you've also asked about the role of qualitative research in international journalism scholarship. You don't need me to tell you that the post-positivist paradigm is not the dominant paradigm outside the Global North. If we want to hear global voices, then we need to be ecumenical in accepting the research approaches that are indigenous to other countries.

Note that this is a question from a Brazilian perspective. In addition to the rise of qualitative methodologies, we can also see the emergence of new

epistemologies in journalism studies, often questioning some consolidated concepts, such as the idea of detachment and objectivity in journalism. How do you interpret this movement and to what extent is it linked to the arrival of scholars from the Global South in the main spaces (international conferences and international journals)? Also, speaking specifically of the United States, what is the role of these scholars in US universities?

As I've noted, my educational experience rooted me in critical and cultural perspectives, and those perspectives were often developed by scholars outside the US. Reading the work of Stuart Hall (1980, 1989, 1992, 1997), for example, opened my understanding of the social construction of meaning and the importance of discursive contestation, which was fundamental to interrogating things like detachment and objectivity. Even more traditional sociological approaches in the US tried to problematize notions of objectivity, sometimes through historizing the concept (Schudson, 1978, 2001). Yet, these strands of scholarship were often kept at the margins, or in Schudson's case, only slowly recognized in the mainstreams of journalism scholarship.

But I think you're right that the arrival of journalism studies scholars from outside the Global North and West has reset how we think about the mainstreams of journalism studies. Going back to Carlson and his colleagues' (2018) claims about the commitments of journalism studies as a field, they see a field that values contextual sensitivity and that harbors a comparative inclination. I think the credit for that goes to scholars from the Global South. They have been speaking to the hegemony of the Global North for a long time, and as they've gained a voice in our international associations, they've driven the message home (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2023; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014).

Pablo Boczkowski and Silvio Waisbord, of course, bring Latin American perspectives from their positions at US universities and are highly influential scholars – both ICA Fellows and, in Silvio's case, a past president of ICA. They, of course, are just two of the more visible scholars, with journalism studies scholars at US universities coming from nearly every country in the world. Once the discipline stopped trying to force those scholars into a post-positivist approach, their authentic voices have come through and are a constant witness to the importance of contextual sensitivity and comparative inclination.

I don't see any going back. It's clear to anyone who's paying attention that US journalism has not escaped the problems of journalism everywhere. The quaint assumptions about the superiority of US journalism look particularly hallow in a context in which journalism's authority has eroded in the US (Boczkowski & Papacharissi, 2017; Carlson, Robinson, & Lewis, 2021). Indeed, the idea that objectivity is the best way to cover would-be or actual authoritarians seems to have been recognized in the US as a failed approach (Parks, 2019).

But to circle back to how you framed the question, it's also important to recognize that a significant body of scholarship within the US has problematized notions of objectivity and autonomy from the perspectives of persons of color (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2020; Alemán, 2017; Robinson & Culver, 2019) and from feminist perspectives (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004). [Note that Linda Steiner's (1988) early work tapped into Stuart Hall's notion of encoding and decoding in advancing a feminist critique of journalism.] Your point, of course, is that once excluded voices have been included, our collective assumptions about the scope of journalism's problems broadens. I agree with that.

This is largely the point of research, writ large, right? Sure, it's about gaining knowledge, but even gaining knowledge only works by discovering our ignorance (Firestein, 2012). I think we're still a long way from every scholar in the US or Europe recognizing the role of their own positionality in their research. And even for those of us who thrive to reflect on their own positionality, it's a lifelong process, it seems, of coming to grips with the persistence and expanse of our own ignorance.

Speaking of internationalization, you have several collaborations with scholars from different parts of the world, including participation in large-scale research such as the *Worlds of Journalism Study*. How do you see the importance of these large-scale cross-national initiatives? What are the key challenges and opportunities in these studies?

One of the shortcomings of traditional research epistemologies is that they are focused also exclusively on change. They are not suited to explaining what is constant, which might be a very important aspect of understanding our lived media experience. Yet, those things that are constant can escape our attention and investigation. That's where comparative research can be so important. We can see the things that escape our attention, because we can see how other places operate. I think that's particularly important at a time when we see technology as the driving force in journalism's evolutionary or revolutionary changes (Dierickx & Lindén, 2024; Zelizer, 2019). What comparative research largely supports is that technology is not determinative. Technology gets adopted and adapted in different ways, which speak to the power of cultural and institutional arrangements from place to place (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, & De Beer, 2019).

I'm encouraged that the state of comparative research is so robust. We are seeing more comparative research than ever before, it is generally rigorous, and it is well-cited – pointing to its value to journalism studies broadly (Hanusch & Vos, 2020). At the same time, though, comparative journalism research has some problems to overcome. I see three main practical problems – the political economy of doing this kind of research still favors the Global West, meaning the view we get of the world is skewed accordingly. Relatedly, the work that gets cited the most is still mostly from men in the Global North. And then, much of the research still focuses on elite publications and less on the vibrant ways that journalism is innovating around the world (Hanusch & Vos, 2020).

There are methodological challenges too. Using the country as the unit of comparison is problematic because some countries have stark sectional differences, and many countries are dominated by other countries in a way that methods can't quite address. Plus, globalization has meant country borders aren't what they once were. The key challenges of doing large-scale comparative projects such as the *Worlds of Journalism* is that they inevitably rely on a shared set of methods and measures. These don't work everywhere. That means findings can sometimes be an artifact of the methods used. And then there are theoretical challenges tied to these methodological issues, such as establishing sound rationale for selecting comparative cases and determining whether we are even comparing comparable phenomena.

What I've liked about the *Worlds of Journalism* project is that we don't presume the numbers speak for themselves. The quantitative comparisons point to differences, but we have sought to understand and explain what drives those differences. That's been a collective undertaking, where we've relied on each other's local knowledge but also engaged in meaningful debates as we try to figure out what it all means.

Aside from the research that has come out of the *Worlds of Journalism*, the team of researchers around the world has been something of a community. In fact, there have been some good-natured debates if the *Worlds of Journalism* team is more like a community or like a family. I've learned a lot from these colleagues; they've expanded how I think about and see things. Some have indeed become like family.

Finally, I would like to ask you about your role as a professor of graduate students, training new doctoral researchers. In your career, working at leading universities such as the University of Missouri and Michigan State University, you have served as advisor to some young and emerging scholars such as Patrick Ferrucci (University of Colorado), Edson C. Tandoc (Nanyang Technological University), and Lea Hellmueller (City University, London), among many others. Beyond your many important publications, how do you see your contribution to the field from this perspective?

To be perfectly honest, I'm somewhat uncomfortable when people praise my scholarship. It's nice to hear that other scholars have found my contributions useful to the ongoing intellectual conversation that we call journalism studies, but being interviewed by *About Journalism / Sur Le Journalisme / Sobre Jornalismo* comes with a certain amount of trepidation. At the same time though, I'm proud to be considered an effective mentor. I value mentorship and very much try to invest in students and other early career scholars as best I can. I've had many young scholars tell me they find my scholarship helpful, but in honesty, I have almost no individual recollections of the specific details of those encounters. However, I can remember in a fair degree of detail a doctoral student from the University of Groningen coming up to me in the lobby of the ICA conference hotel in Toronto in 2023 and introducing himself by saying he'd heard that I was a well-regarded mentor in our field. That was memorable. Granted, not so memorable that I actually remember his name. Alas, I still struggle to remember names.

I think my own life experiences have helped me be a good mentor. Being a first-generation college student meant the whole experience of going to university was new to me at every turn. Frankly, I was sometimes lost. I try not to assume that people know what they're doing. So, I ask. I try to treat them the way I would have liked to be treated – and sometimes was – when I was trying to learn to be a scholar. I try to elicit the intellectual voice that students have within them and empower them to pursue the questions that are intellectually interesting to them. Then, it's about making sure they can do the work effectively and in a way that really engages with the broader journalism studies community.

As you've been able to discern, I didn't start my research life at the age most scholars in our field have. The later start made me keenly aware from the beginning that my career won't be long enough to do every research project I'd like to do. So, I try not to be possessive about my research program, opting instead to think about the collective research program that I and others are contributing to. I guess what I'm saying is, I can't do all the research I think of, so I try to join forces with students and colleagues. At the same time, I'm fine when students develop their own interests that don't overlap with mine. We all should have the agency to direct our own research agendas.

It's always a source of pride when I see students get great jobs, get promoted, and establish their own research programs. I recall someone told Edson Tandoc early on that their research looked a lot like their advisor's. I'm not sure that was true, but even if it was true then, it's certainly not the

case any longer. They're doing their own thing. So are Pat Ferrucci, Lea Hellmueller, and the others. That's as it should be.

One of the lessons I learned early on is that I couldn't want for students what they don't want for themselves. I've had many excellent students in classes that I thought would make great journalism studies scholars. I generally let them know I think that about them. But I've learned to not push them in that direction if it's not their passion. Students need to bring their own passions and commitments to the work of journalism studies, or it just won't work.

I will admit that my administrative duties as the Director of a School of Journalism have detracted from the time and effort I have to put into mentorship. That's the main reason this term as Director is likely going to be my last. I've been advising three doctoral students in our program at Michigan State and I feel like I've not been able to give them the depth of attention that they deserve and what I aspire to. I hold myself to a high standard when it comes to mentorship. Life is full of compromises, but I find it especially hard to compromise on mentorship. I will say that one of the awards I'm most proud of is the university-wide award I received at Missouri for Graduate Faculty Mentorship. It's nice to be recognized for something you feel very strongly about.

Any final message to our readers?

Not really. I'm just grateful for this opportunity to reflect. I look forward to talking with your readers at future conferences and events. Just forgive me if I forget your name.

Propos recueillis par Marcos Paulo da Silva.
Janvier-juin 2025.

Pour citer cet article, to quote this article, para citar este artigo :
Marcos Paulo da Silva , « Journalism studies in perspective: a conversation about life, history and changes in the field with Tim P. Vos », *Sur le journalisme, About journalism, Sobre jornalismo* [En ligne, online], Vol 14, n°1 - 2025, 15 juin - june 15 - 15 de junho - 15 de junio.
URL : https://doi.org/10.25200/SLJ.v14.n1.2025.664

Notes

1. In the US tradition, a denominational college is a academic institution that is affiliated with a specific religious denomination, meaning it is founded, sponsored, or directed by that religious group.

2. In the field of research, the term "emic" refers to an approach that seeks to understand a culture or phenomenon from an insider's perspective, employing their own terminology and categorizations. This contrasts with the "etic" perspective, which uses universal categories to analyze a culture from an outsider's point of view.

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