

“A Nose for News”: From (News) Values to Valuation

Juliette De Maeyer*

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Abstract

“News values” — that is, the set of criteria that journalists use to assess newsworthiness — are a central concern for journalism studies. Since Galtung and Ruge’s seminal piece (1965), scholarship about news values has repeatedly attempted to define and refine a list of qualities that facts and events should possess to become news stories. This article outlines the limitations of news values research: a proliferation of lists of news values complicates the matter instead of offering an explanation, researchers often have to rely on other factors or on an unsatisfactory gap between ideal and practice to explain what journalists actually do, and such research does not account for another way in which journalists and scholars explain news selection — through the “nose for news” metaphor. Consequently, the article discusses how John Dewey’s theory of valuation offers a good way to revisit the news-values conundrum. Through an exploration of metajournalistic discourse about the “nose for news” between 1863 and 2010, it shows that Dewey’s theory of valuation converges with how journalists think about newsmaking.

Keywords: Journalism; valuation; Dewey; nose for news; news values.

* Department of Communication, University of Montreal (Canada); ✉ juliette.de.maeyer@umontreal.ca;
📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6482-5365>

1 Introduction

How do events become news? This question is at the heart of journalism studies scholarship concerned with “news values” — that is, the set of criteria that journalists use to assess news-worthiness. Since Galtung and Ruge’s seminal piece (1965), studies have repeatedly attempted to define and refine a list of qualities that facts and events should possess to become news stories — the criteria themselves being inferred from the way in which journalists describe their work, or from content analyses of news reports. As a result, studies have come up with lists of qualities: to become news, events must be timely, unexpected, unambiguous, consonant, familiar, meaningful, positive or negative, and so on.

In this article, I describe several limitations of such a list-of-news-values approach. As an idealized set of criteria, news values need constant caveats to factor in the practical constraints of journalism. Unsatisfied with the list of values, journalism studies scholars seem to be in a perpetual need of updating it, proposing new values to be included in the list, new ways to observe them empirically, or alternative factors that also weigh into the news-selection process. All this conspires to make news values complicated, unstable, and unsatisfactory. Moreover, lists of news values do not seem to correspond to the other way in which journalists describe their work: they simply say that they use their “nose for news.” Finally, the discussion around news values in journalism studies reproduces the broader (and fruitless) “problem of values,” (Spaulding, 1913) a puzzle that has divided philosophers for more than a century: are values a quality that things possess, or something that the human mind creates?

2 News Values Research

The field of journalism studies usually credits Walter Lippmann (1922/1998) with being the first to articulate the problem of selecting the news among the (too) many events that take place in the world, and with discussing how the “raw material” of events acquire various levels of “news value” (1922, p. 348). But it is Galtung and Ruge’s “The Structure of Foreign News,” an article published in 1965, that usually holds the title of foundational study of news values. In an attempt to elucidate news selection, the two scholars identified a list of twelve factors: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, personification, and negativity. They argued that the more an event satisfies these criteria, the more likely it will be reported as news.

2.1 A Proliferation of Lists

From then on, the list of factors stood at the core of what journalism studies means by “news values.” Following Galtung and Ruge’s own acknowledgment that the list was not complete (1965, p. 64), numerous studies have extended, refined, revisited, and/or criticized the famous list of values. Efforts to do so have aimed at extending the list’s limited scope beyond international news (the focus of the original study), at updating it to take the alleged novelty of changing realities into account (and particularly the digitization of journalism that started in the late 1990s), or at including broader forces such as ideology and culture. In a tendency that is quite typical of journalism studies’ emphasis on change (rather than continuity), researchers even periodically revised the revisions. As a result, the state of our collective disciplinary knowledge about news values now resembles a list of lists, each more sophisticated or simpler, more

current and/or thorough than its predecessors. The entry about news values in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* describes a “proliferation” of lists of news values, “many of which overlap with each other in terms of the aspects of newsworthiness they deal with and only differ in their labeling/naming practices” (Caple, 2018, p. 10).

The initial list, as well as its numerous revisions and updates, poses a problem of incommensurability, as the new news values that are added to the mix sometimes speak to vastly different aspects of newsmaking (Caple & Bednarek, 2016). They describe apparent qualities of events or people, some elements pertaining to the requirements of journalistic writing (such as style, brevity, clarity), others to business models and market conditions. To those already radically different aspects, we could add what Brighton and Foy (2007) have categorized as news values research that takes a “broader approach” — that is, one that seeks to incorporate “areas such as ideology, cultural conditioning, technological determinism and others” (p. 6). The news-values literature alternately characterizes news values as something newswriters can explicitly articulate or as something they are unaware of (often resulting from broader forces such as ideology, culture, or professional routines) that need to be reverse-engineered.

A well-known example of the broader approach and of implicit news values is perhaps Gans’s (1979) authoritative ethnographic account of American newsmaking in the 1970s. In *Deciding What’s News*, Gans describes a set of “enduring values,” which he groups into eight clusters: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership. Taken together, these values “[affect] what events become news” (Gans, 1979, p. 41), but they function at an implicit level: they constitute a “paraideology” — a term that Gans uses to underline that this aggregate of values is different from a “deliberate, integrated and more doctrinaire set of values usually defined as ideology” (Gans, 1979, p. 68).

As these enduring values work at an implicit level, Gans turns to another category to explain how newswriters make “news judgments.” He calls these “considerations” — that is, “unwritten rules journalists apply” (p. 73) to select which stories to pursue and publish. They include concerns about “substantive considerations” that evaluate story content, “product considerations” that speak to the “goodness” of stories in terms of format and medium, and “competitive considerations” that emphasize rivalry among news organizations. Those three categories in turn lead to a description of more specific rules. Among many other factors, a story is more likely to be selected, written, and published if it involves people highly ranked in governmental and other hierarchies, if it has an impact on the nation and national interest or an impact on a large number of people, or if it is significant for the past and future. Also at play are the particular format requirements of each medium, the sheerly “interesting” (p. 155) character of a story, and the overall balance between stories published in a same issue or edition. I can name only a handful of these unwritten rules because Gans’s in-depth ethnographic work resists synthesis. Its rich nuances can leave the reader somewhat puzzled: among all those implicit “enduring values” and many unwritten “considerations,” what exactly explains how events become news?

In an attempt to reduce such complexity to something more manageable, some authors have tried to circumscribe the concept of news values. Strömbäck et al. (2012), for example, make a distinction between news values understood as “cognitive and normative concepts that refer to what journalists believe should constitute the news” and all the other factors that come into play — such as “format considerations, audience interests, resources, source considerations” (Strömbäck et al., 2012, p. 719). Similarly, Caple and Bednarek (2016) identify three categories: they distinguish (1) (real) news values from (2) concerns related to writing, and from (3) another catchall category, called “selection factors,” that encompasses “any factor im-

pecting whether or not a story becomes published,” such as commercial pressure, availability of reporters, or deadlines (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 438, emphasis in original).

When looking at these different taxonomies of news values, a certain amount of confusion ensues. The fact that there are so many different taxonomies of news values suggests that the notion of news values itself is confused. In that regard, news values constitute a prime example of journalism studies’ failure to provide a coherent and (relatively) durable body of knowledge that illuminates the phenomena it is supposed to study — rather, the theory of news values seems to obscure how events actually become news.

2.2 Are News Values a Good Explanation?

A theory is a “plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena.” Just as John Dewey often liked to think with common dictionary definitions (see below), I am referring here to the first definition given by the *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* — but this is also in line with one of the meanings often given to theory by sociologists (Abend, 2008), that of “a general proposition (...) which establishes a relationship between two or more variables” (p. 177). That is exactly the aim of the list of news values, which makes an explicit relationship between the qualities that an event possesses and the likelihood it will become news. Or, in Galtung and Ruge’s (1965, p. 71) classic formulation: “the more events satisfy the criteria mentioned, the more they will be registered as news.”

But is the list of news values a good explanation? Is the relationship between the two variables satisfactory? It does not seem so. In addition to the need for regular updates, journalism studies scholars constantly have to find workarounds to explain news selection. They have to resort to something *else* to explain how events become news, as if the explanatory power of values weren’t enough. Quite often, this takes the form of arguments that contrast ideal and practice: in their day-to-day performance of newswork, journalists are faced with many different practical constraints that force them to deviate from the ideal news values. These practical constraints include many things that can cause “fluctuations,” such as

the availability of resources and time, and subjective, often unconscious, influences, such as a mix of the social, educational, ideological and cultural influences on journalists, as well as the environment in which they work, their position in the workplace hierarchy and the type of audience for whom journalists are producing news (Harcup & O’Neil, 2017, p. 1483).

It is quite honorable for scholars to acknowledge the limitations of the theories and concepts they use, but in the case of news values one is left to wonder whether the theory ever worked in the first place. For a theory that supposedly emanates from practice (as news values are inferred from how journalists describe their work, or from content analyses of news reports), it does not constitute a very robust explanatory framework of the said practice.

Even scholars who adopt the news-values framework empirically show that its explanatory power is limited. For example, in her ethnographic study of newsmaking from a sociolinguistic perspective, Cotter (2010) first argues that news values “function as guidelines for decision-making and are invoked, unconsciously or explicitly, at every step of the news process” (Cotter, 2010, p. 67). She draws on a taxonomy of news values defined by journalists themselves, and comes up with the following list of news values: importance, impact, relevance, proximity, and timeliness. Her fascinating account of editorial meetings empirically shows how journalists and editors make decisions and argue on the grounds of these values. But it *also* shows that

some decisions are taken following rationales that completely escape the determined list of news values, such as when an editor defends a story because the lede sounds good (p. 98), or when another argues for page-one prominence because of his childhood attachment for the main protagonist of a story (p. 104).

That empirical reality takes a more nuanced and complicated path than the one suggested by the theory is not surprising. But are those instances exceptional? Acknowledging the discrepancy between news content (what is actually published) and the criteria of newsworthiness (news values), Strömbäck et al. (2012) argue that there is a consistent gap between the “normative” importance of events properties and the “actual” importance of events that have become news stories. It is a difference between ideal and practice, or between what journalists think *should* be and what they actually do. Just as with other key notions of journalism studies (such as objectivity), news values can then be understood only as distant ideals, always negated by the harsh conditions of real-life newswork. This is a rather pessimistic view of newsmaking: one in which journalists are constantly dissatisfied, torn between an ideal that they can never really fulfill and a reality driven by those many “other factors” that weigh into the news production process.

2.3 News Values and the Nose for News: Competing Explanations?

Aside from the list of news values, there is another explanation as to how journalists transform events into news stories: they follow their “nose for news.” The metaphor appeared in the professional discourses in the late 19th century, when journalism started to professionalize and to articulate standards. It became a part of the mainstream journalistic vocabulary in the US by the 1930s, and still is today (Mirando, 1992; Vos & Finneman, 2017; Parks, 2019). The phrase suggests an innate ability to determine what news is: journalists just recognize news when they see it. They describe the “journalistic gut feeling” as something physical: it is “part of your spinal cord,” “in the back of your head,” “something like a feeling” (Schultz, 2007, p. 199).

The nose for news and the list of news values are competing explanations that coexist in professional discourses. Their differences should not be put down to a caricatural dispute between journalism scholars and professionals (the former having a taste for theory and abstraction that makes them prone to typologizing news values, the latter favoring more concrete, embodied explanation, the nose for news). Lists of news values remarkably close to those proposed by researchers have appeared in journalism textbooks — often written by professionals — since the late nineteenth century. And as Parks (2019) has shown in his analysis of textbooks, those values (prominence, proximity, timeliness, magnitude, unusualness, human interest) have been remarkably stable over more than a century. Moreover, the scholarly literature also acknowledges the more intuitive aspect of news selection. Quite notably, although Gans’s (1979) whole enterprise is to objectively describe all the values, factors, and “considerations” that come into play when newsmakers select stories, he also recognizes that news judgment is “partly a matter of feel” (Gans, 1979, p. 171) and that journalists “act on the basis of quick, virtually intuitive judgments, which some ascribe to ‘feel’ ” (p. 82).

Although the two explanations may coexist peacefully in the professional and academic literature, they nevertheless suggest a different vision of the newsmaking process. Notably, they differ in the agency left to newswriters. The “nose for news” gives a lot of leeway to journalists who are the sensorial machine through which events (somewhat mysteriously) become news, while the list of news values gives newswriters a rather weak or mechanical agency, as they supposedly have only to apply the list of criteria to do their job (even leading to attempts to auto-

mate the act of assessing newsworthiness, see Diakopoulos, 2008). Moreover, the metaphorical nose make it look like news selection is an individual matter (a nose is not something one can share), whereas the news values approaches envisions journalism as a collective behavior: the news values can be shared and taught — in textbooks, as shown above, but also in the many processes of professional socialization (Singer, 2004).

Few scholars have taken the “nose for news” metaphor seriously or studied it directly, dismissing it as “somewhat magical” (Cotter, 2010, p. 77) or “murky” (Zelizer & Allan, p. 96). As a result, we do not know whether there’s a connection between the nose for news and the lists of news values. Some studies argue that the nose for news is how journalists have “internalized” news values (Cotter, 2010) — which suggests, implicitly, that the list of news values exists somewhere externally and that journalists need to ingest, interiorize, and apply it. This way of framing the relation between news values and the nose for news leads to another issue, which is the focus of the next section: where exactly do news values come from? Do they spring from objective qualities of events, or are they subjective judgments made by journalists?

2.4 Where Do Values Come From, Anyway?

The question of the exact origins of news values refers to a broader “problem of value,” one that has stirred debate among philosophers and social scientists for a long time. The problem can be expressed in many different ways, but it often takes the form of a dichotomy between what belongs to/springs from things and what belongs to/springs from the human mind, as in this classic formulation by Spaulding in 1913, to which Dewey provided a response:

Is Value (1) something which is ultimate and which attaches itself to “things” independently of consciousness, or of an organic being with desires and aversions, or (2) is it a characteristic which a thing gets by its relation to the consciousness of an organic being, or to an organic being with desires and aversions? (Spaulding, 1913, p. 168).

This “problem of value” also preoccupies journalists. In their study of metajournalistic discourses found in newspapers, periodicals, journalism trade publications, and journalism textbooks between 1870 and 1930, Vos and Finneman (2017) show how journalists oscillate between explanations that put the emphasis on internal causes (news judgment is a special skill that journalists have) and external forces (news judgment is based on qualities that events possess, but also on the economic value of the news and/or estimations of the public interest).

Journalism studies scholarship does not always explicitly connect its attempts at defining news values to broader philosophical and ontological debates, but it nevertheless reproduces the two poles of the problem. Caple and Bednarek (2016) name these two options the “material perspective” and the “cognitive perspective.” According to the former, news values exist “in the actual events and people who are reported on in the news, that is, in events in their material reality,” whereas the latter holds that news values “exist in the minds of journalists” (2016, p. 435). These differing conceptualizations also go with different methodological emphases, they argue: the material perspective usually takes the form of content analysis, whereas cognitive perspectives favor ethnographic methods.

Note that this is a spectrum more than a dichotomy, as no study of news values simplifies the question to the extent that it attributes news values purely to things of the world or purely to the minds of journalists. More often than not, news-values research opts for a nuanced (but unsteady) middle ground and attributes importance both to external and internal

origins. When it comes to nuances, I also want to stress that the internal/cognitive pole is rarely presented in terms of pure subjectivity — taken to the extreme, it would mean that events become news only because of journalists' individual whims and moods. Rather, “in the mind of journalists” is understood against the strong social constructivist background that underlies most journalism studies scholarship: news values are created by journalists as a social group, they belong to the realm of conventions and norms, and they are constructed in discourse (for a focus on such discursive perspective, see Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Caple & Bednarek, 2016).

To some extent, the “problem of value” highlights some enduring ontological and epistemological tensions that exist within journalism studies scholarship: on the one hand, there is a tradition that seeks to determine what qualities events of the world must possess to become news stories (that is the literature on news values that I have described above). On the other hand, many classic works have embraced a social-constructionist perspective (e.g., Molotch & Lester, 1974; Tuchman, 1978) and argue that events do not really exist in and of themselves and that they are (at least partly) constructed by journalists (and all the forces that speak through them). As a result, looking for “qualities” that events would possess does not make much sense. Just as the discussion on objectivity is too often posed on the basis of a fruitless distinction between subject and object (Martine & De Maeyer, 2019), I argue below that Dewey's pragmatism helps us escape the dichotomous way in which the “problem of value” is formulated.

3 Enter John Dewey

This problem of value is exactly what the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) addressed in his theory of valuation. Executing a “flank movement” (Muniesa, 2011), Dewey proposed to radically redefine the terms of the problem. We need to shift away from value (or values), he argues, and instead understand valuation as an action.

The work of John Dewey is at the same time central and strangely evanescent in media and communication scholarship. His philosophy “with” communication — a phrase used by Rakow (2019) to underline the extent to which communication is everywhere in Dewey's work, rather than an object among others — makes him a key thinker of the field. But the limited ways in which Dewey has been used in media and communication scholarship pales in comparison to the sheer vastness of his work, and large parts of his philosophy remain either unexploited, misunderstood, or little known (see Rakow, 2019, for a reappraisal of Dewey's thought in communication studies).

In journalism studies, familiarity with Dewey does not extend much beyond two landmark events: the so-called Dewey-Lippmann “debate” and the public journalism movement in the 1990s. The idea of a debate between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann has been famously introduced into the field by James Carey, who considered Dewey one of the founding fathers of the field (Munson & Warren, 1997). In Carey's narrative, Dewey and Lippmann incarnate antagonist positions on the role of media and public opinion in democracy. Since then, the so-called debate has been commented upon, debunked, and revisited countless times (see, e.g., Allan, 2012; Bybee, 1999; Russill, 2016; Trudel, 2016; Schudson, 2008), but it still serves as a familiar anchoring point in journalism and mass communication research to secure the epistemological grounds for political differences about the public (Rakow, 2018)

The second arena in which journalism studies has been drawing on Dewey's work is in the realm of public and/or civic journalism. Public journalism is a reform movement put forward in the late 1980s and the 1990s by American journalists (Merritt, 1998) and scholars (Glasser, 2000; Rosen, 2000). It sought to reimagine journalism to better integrate, reflect, and promote

civic engagement and public life. Dewey was hailed as one of the key influences on public journalism (Perry, 2003). The movement drew heavily on Dewey's conception of public life and democracy — one that he famously articulated in his 1927 *The Public and Its Problems*. Since then, Dewey is regularly evoked by researchers trying to explore the civic, public, or conversational quality of journalism (see, e.g., Coleman, 2007; Compton, 2000; Kunelius & Renvall, 2010; Min, 2016).

Some studies have explored how other aspects of Dewey's work matter for journalism studies, whether the subject is journalism ethics in a post-truth era (Stroud, 2019), the indeterminacy of sourcing practices (Hutter & Farias, 2017), or the relationship between journalists and academics (Trudel & De Maeyer, 2017). But due to the centrality of the Dewey-Lippmann debate and Dewey's status as an inspirational figure of public journalism, it is mostly only a part of Dewey's work that has found an echo in mainstream journalism studies: his conception of public life and public participation, as articulated in *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey, 1927). I propose to explore another facet of his work, the theory of valuation.

4 Reading Dewey against the “Nose for News”: Notes on Methods and Corpus

The first objective of this article is to revisit news values through the lens of John Dewey's theory of valuation. As one of the issues highlighted above is the inability of news-values theory to account for the idea that journalists decide what is news through an embodied, intuitive, and felt experience, the second objective of this paper is to read Dewey against metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016) about the “nose for news.” In other words, I have tried to take the metaphorical “nose for news” seriously. In the remainder of this paper I argue that Dewey's theory of valuation is actually quite compatible with the idea of a nose for news. To do so, I propose a close, interconnected reading of two kinds of texts: Dewey's work about valuation and a series of documents that present a partial snapshot of metajournalistic discourses about the “nose for news” between 1868 and 2010.

Since Dewey's career was long, and his work is impressive in size, my take here is therefore obviously incomplete. *Theory of Valuation*, first published in 1935, is undoubtedly the key volume to consider, but my reading also draws on *Experience and Nature* (1925), *Some Questions about Value* (1944), *Further as to Valuation as Judgment* (1943) and *Valuation Judgments and Immediate Quality* (1944). My understanding was also crucially informed by the work of Bidet, Quéré, & Truc (2011), Frega (2006), De Munck & Zimmerman (2015), and Muniesa (2011). All references to Dewey in this paper are to *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953: The Electronic Edition*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman. The volumes of the collection are divided into sets called *The Early Works, 1882–1898* (EW); *The Middle Works, 1899–1924* (MW); *The Later Works, 1925–1953* (LW); and *Supplemental Volume, 1884–1951* (SV). I will therefore use these acronyms, volume numbers, and page numbers for citations.

In exploring metajournalistic discourses about the “nose for news,” I purposely favored historical depth (in a modest attempt to rebalance journalism studies' usual emphasis on novelty). Drawing on the plain-text search features of digitized collections, I compiled newspaper articles and journalism textbooks that contain the expression “nose for news.” For newspaper articles, I queried newspapers.com and the Library of Congress's *Chronidling America*, and for journalism textbooks, *Hathi Trust* and *Archive.org*. My explorations gathered 94 documents

(40 textbooks and 54 newspaper articles), published between 1863 and 2010. They are listed in the appendix, and I will from now on refer to them by their number on this list.

These documents are by no means exhaustive and they are certainly biased toward English-speaking publications from the US (although a couple of textbooks published in the UK are included). I treated them as a coherent corpus and did not try to systematically describe how the metajournalistic discourse evolved over the course of a century and a half. Actually, the discourse around the “nose for news” seems remarkably stable (Mirando, 1992; Parks, 2019) in a profession that is always concerned with change, revolutions, and crises.

In the next sections, I first expose the core aspects of valuation theory and how they apply to journalism. Then, I turn to metajournalistic discourse about the “nose for news,” and I discuss how they converge with some of the key theoretical principles of valuation theory.

5 A Theory of (News) Valuation

Theory of Valuation starts with an interesting lexical point: Dewey notes that, in English, “value” has two meanings, one that has an immediate, personal, feeling-like connotation, and the other that refers to a more abstract, relational ordering of things. Valuing designates both “prizing, in the sense of holding precious, dear (and various other nearly equivalent activities, like honoring, regarding highly), and appraising in the sense of putting a value upon, assigning value to” (MW: 13, p. 195, emphasis in original). Such linguistic considerations, Dewey continues, points precisely to the problem that he intends to tackle, and he subsequently proceeds to determine how valuation is *both* prizing and appraising.

The movement from prizing to appraisal, called valuation, is the difference between saying “I like this painting” and “This painting is beautiful.” It is a shift of focus from an immediate feeling to a shareable proposition that (implicitly) connects the painting to other things. Prizing and appraisal are not fundamentally different in nature; they both exist on the continuum of experience. Their “rhythmic succession (...) suggests that the difference is one of emphasis, or degree” (LW: 1, p. 300). Dewey regularly underlines two dimensions of experience: one is felt and immediate, the other is more intellectual and reflective. He insists that both dimensions are valid, that they should be studied seriously, and that they are contiguous: “ap-praising then represents a more or less systematized development of what is *already present* in prizing” (LW: 15, p. 105, my emphasis). Applied to journalism, considering both prizing and appraising means that the intuitive, immediate “nose for news” is not incompatible with the existence of shared “news values,” a more intellectualized horizon of newsworthiness. Both occur in rhythmic alternation to constitute news valuation. The two dimensions should therefore not be too strictly separated:

[T]he move is typical of Dewey. Just when we think we have grasped the analytic separation of the emotional and the intellectual — as with the too-quick parsing of means and ends — he invites us to wonder, “Are they separate or are they complementary?” (Stark, 2011, p. 327).

Dewey’s insights further help us to better understand some aspects of news valuation: (1) Prizing is not a sheer mental state or an indecipherable emotional response, but it must be understood as an activity. (2) Appraisal is not reducible to the application of rules, norms, or conventions, as it is a process that involves inquiry. (3) Appraisal exists on an ends-means continuum.

5.1 Valuation Is an Activity

Prizing (expressed by this and other words such as “liking,” “caring for,” “looking out for,” “tending,” “cherishing,” and “enjoying”) is not a mental state, Dewey says, but rather an activity, and it must be taken in its behavioral sense (LW: 15, p. 102). As an activity, prizing is manifest in the efforts one makes to call into existence or maintain what is prized, and those efforts are what we can empirically observe. In prizing what is newsworthy, in smelling a good story, journalists are on a path to actively calling news into existence.

Here, Dewey also discusses valuation in terms of desire and interests. Desire means the prizing and caring for that occurs when something is lacking, when there is “trouble” in an existing situation, when there is “something the matter” (MW: 13, p. 220), or when one wants to conserve something that is threatened. Interest, in turn, is the maintenance of those desires over a longer time span (LW: 15, p. 103). In Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy, desires and interests are not the internal contemplation of the pictures in our heads: they are oriented toward action and they must be understood contextually and ecologically, in experience. Desire is an “active relation of the organism to the environment” (MW: 13, p. 203); it makes us do things. This characterization is typical of Dewey’s ecological philosophy, which sees mind, body, and world as generative of one another through their ongoing interactions.

Desires also depend on the particular situation in which they arise. Desires for news that arise when reporters and their “nose for news” are on the hunt for a story will differ if the reporters work for a monthly feature magazine or a 24-hour rolling-news TV channel, if they operate in a big urban center or in a small, regional community. Trying to understand news valuation outside of its experiential contexts, from a disembodied list of values, does not therefore make much sense. The situated, contextual quality of valuation also has empirical consequences: as desire/valuation depends on the situation, its adequacy “depends upon its adaptation to the needs and demands imposed by the situation” (MW: 13, p. 205).

5.2 Appraisal Involves Active Inquiry

If prizing is the *felt* dimension of valuation, appraisal is more *reflective* and abstracts away from immediate feeling to establish relations and connections. When we do this, we engage in another central piece of Dewey’s theory of knowledge and truth: inquiry, the concept Dewey puts forward to underline that intelligence is not something that we have, but something that we use, in relation to our environment. Inquiry is not a rare intellectual phenomenon reserved for deep thinkers; it happens all the time, in everyday life. It is practical. Consequently, value judgments are practical judgments, too (Frega, 2006). Their function is to determine a course of action in answering this question: what is it *better* to do?

When we pass from “I like this painting” to “This painting is beautiful,” or from “I smell a news story here” to “It should be on Page One,” are we merely applying norms? Are we mechanically applying conventions? No, we aren’t, says Dewey, as appraisal is an active inquiry, grounded in experience. Affirming the contrary

is equivalent to denying that any element of intelligence enters into any form of practice; to affirming that all decisions on practical matters are the arbitrary products of impulse, caprice, blind habit, or convention. Farmer, mechanic, painter, musician, writer, doctor, lawyer, merchant, captain of industry, administrator or manager, has constantly to inquire what it is better to do next. Unless the decision

reached is arrived at blindly and arbitrarily it is obtained by gathering and surveying evidence appraised as to its weight and relevancy (LW: 12, p. 162–163).

Considering value judgments to belong to the broader category of practical judgments, embedded in specific situations, also has another consequence: there is no (simple) separation between the act of judging and the object of judgment, since valuation is part and parcel of the situation. This may seem obvious to anyone that has ever been a protagonist in a news story (and a point that has been amply made by researchers in the social-constructivist tradition): the news valuations that journalists make are not outside of the events themselves; rather, they become part of the situation, potentially transforming it.

5.3 The Ends-Means Continuum

Moreover, valuations are practical judgments that imply a relation of means and ends, causes and consequences. The relation between means and ends is also a classical problem in philosophy. Can we define the things that are “good” (the things we value) and that could become the goals we pursue (the ends)? How do these things relate to the means necessary to achieve them (are bad means acceptable when the end is good)? Dewey notes that an easy — but misleading — breakdown could be made here: ends relate to prizing (what we ultimately desire), whereas means relate to appraisal (the calculations we make to assess what needs to be done in order to attain the ends). This separation is absurd to Dewey. The end does not exist a priori; it takes shape in a course of action: “It is simply impossible to have an end-in-view or to anticipate the consequences of any proposed line of action save upon the basis of some, however slight, consideration of the means by which it can be brought into existence” (MW: 13, p. 222). Means and ends exist together, form a continuum, and have a “thoroughly reciprocal character” (MW: 8, p. 37).

Reconceptualizing means and ends in this way also has consequences for our theory of news valuation: there are no “ideal values” on the one hand and “practical constraints” on the other hand. The ends-in-view (what is pursued and desired — be that to inform the public, to get a lot of page views, or to influence public opinion) are inseparable from the means by which to achieve them. In editorial meetings, journalists and editors do not merely discuss the ends; their news valuation also implies a consideration of the means (Do we have a source? Is there a reporter available? Can we send them there? Will it make the deadline? Do we have pictures? Will it sell?).

Finally, if the account that I have made above seems to put the emphasis on valuation as an individual phenomenon at a microlevel, this is entirely my doing: according to Dewey’s ecological view, no individual action is separated from its environment and from interaction. Everything is always social. In *Theory of Valuation*, elucidating how valuation works at an individual level is only the first step toward understanding the conditions of social theory (which are the topic of the last chapter). Valuations are “rules of methodic procedure in the conduct of the investigations,” and as such they can be “personal” (individual) and/or “associated” (collective) (MW: 13 p. 242), but there is no fundamental difference between the individual and the collective. Ending the book with a plea for more “cultural anthropology,” Dewey recognizes that an “adequate theory of human behavior” cannot be formed “considering individuals apart from the cultural setting in which they live, move, and have their being” (MW: 13, p. 248). But this is not an afterthought: his whole philosophy is devised to think the individual and the collective in the same movement.

6 Metajournalistic Discourses About the Nose for News

In short, Dewey proposes a shift from value(s) to valuation, considered as an action. This action comprises both prizing (an immediate, felt dimension) and appraisal (an intellectual dimension), it moves along an ends-means continuum, and it is always situated. In line with Dewey's ecological perspective, valuation is relational and brings together mind, body, and world. All this is fairly abstract, and journalists certainly do not go about their job worrying about the "ends-means continuum" or the rhythmic succession of prizing and appraisal — that is, they do not frame their activity in these terms. In the next sections, however, I show how valuation theory provides a conceptual framework that is actually quite compatible with metajournalistic discourse about the nose for news.

6.1 The Instinct for News

As is obviously suggested by the nasal metaphor, when news articles and journalism textbooks talk about the nose for news they often emphasize an instinctive and natural ability. This is congruent with the "prizing" pole of news valuation: news is something journalists feel, something they intuitively grasp. In line with Dewey's description of prizing as immediate, the ability to sniff out news is characterized as rapid. It is "a quick guess" (57, 58), a "quick, practically instantaneous appreciation of what is news" (48).

The nose for news is also something "natural" (91) and "innate" (83): it "comes as naturally as blue birds and robins in spring and pansies and tube roses in summer" (37). To emphasize such natural quality, animal analogies abound. The documents are full of references to dogs—be they bird dogs (57, 74) or drug-sniffing dogs (86). But reporters and editors are compared to other animals, too: the lynx with its precise vision (44), the camel with its ability to absorb lots of water (37), and even the "newshawk, press card in hat, sniffing out a story and disappearing into the wings screaming 'Stop the presses'" (76). In addition to having a nose for news, the editor who inhabits this strange menagerie must also possess "horse sense" (39).

Not only are the animal metaphors amusing — especially when the texts are literally about animals, such as the famous case of the beer-drinking donkey (35) or the story about a reporter who embarks on a quest for news helped by Ace, a very cute six-week-old puppy (87) — they also imply that having a nose for news is an activity. As a matter of fact, "instinct" (42, 46, 57, 58, 70, 90) is not something that animals or humans contemplate in their minds, but rather something they act upon. This is particularly clear when the documents portray noses for news picking up on a scent: along with the dog analogies and explicit reference to hunting (44, 48), the metaphor suggests that newsworthiness is not a scent that one just whiffs: it is to be followed. It also connotes an end-in-view and an always-revisable course of action: other scents may come up or obstacles may appear.

The instinctive quality of having a nose for news also speaks to an important question: Is it innate or can it be acquired? Are journalists "born or made" (38)? The debate was particularly active in the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century (38, 41, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 52, 55, 58, 59, 62, 65), which corresponds to a period of professionalization (Vos & Finneman, 2017) when journalism schools started to pave the way toward more formalized education. The "born or made" question looks like another dualism that Dewey would reject. Certainly, a part of valuation is felt and immediate, but that does not mean that journalism comes down to sheer impulses that cannot be cultivated. To explain more broadly how some aspects of experience are immediate, Dewey relies on the notion of habit — that is, our capacity to appreciate things directly (be it from an aesthetic or moral point of view), grounded in all

our past inquiries, individual and collective (for a discussion of habit and impulse, see *Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922; MW: 14).

6.2 The Active Nose for News

Activity is also connoted in another way: the news articles and the journalism textbooks often relate anecdotes of journalists in the field. The value of news, in other words, is not something that newswriters devise theoretically and then act upon. Rather, it is something that emerges in action, which is evident in the numerous accounts of how specific news stories were found — or failed to be found, as in the recurring and edifying stories of cub reporters who miss obvious stories (52, 53, 53, 59, 68, 75). The fact that the nose for news is somewhat mysterious or strange (40, 70, 74, 89, 93) does not prevent journalists from explaining how it works, only with a case-based approach. A nose for news is something that can be understood through an accumulation of anecdotes: “Many an old newspaperman would summarize by saying that a reporter must have a ‘nose for news.’ He would cite case after case where successful journalists obtained stories when others had failed, attributing it all to a congenital news-finding ability” (75).

In Dewey’s ecological view, valuation happens in experience, which implies an active relation to the environment. Mind, body, and world are generative of one another through their ongoing interactions. How journalists talk about the nose for news also emphasizes that it is a bodily experience. Of course, the sense of smell is often at the forefront: journalists smell out news stories (65) or they know they have a story “the instant it touche[s] [their] nostrils” (41). An article from 1986 explicitly reflects on newswork as a craft of smell:

I couldn’t help but think how closely smell resembles my job. Reporters are said to “have a nose for news,” or at least the good ones have, and then, of course, there’s the line about “sniffing out a news story.” Often a good investigative piece comes about simply because something doesn’t “smell” right (something smells fishy?) (86).

Other senses are also involved. There is the overall “news sense” or “sense of news” (42, 93), an overarching sense that makes a journalist “know what is news when he sees it, hears it, smells it, tastes it, feels it” (71). In addition to the nose, eyes and ears are also important (1, 46, 67, 82): “reporters needed two related traits: an eye for detail and an ear for a quote” (90). The whole sensorium is used when making the news. Again, this tends toward the “felt” dimension of experience, but it also highlights that sensing the news is a bodily experience in which journalists are connected to their environment: there must something to smell and something to see. The news is co-constituted by journalists and by the world that they smell and feel.

6.3 News Values Are Relational

So far, what I have exposed about the nose for news speaks to the “prizing” pole of news valuation, what is immediately felt and intuitively grasped. But the other pole — that is, the (collective) intellectual effort of grasping what is valued in relation with other things (and other people) — also stands out. A relational view of news valuation is quite explicit in the documents that highlight the *relative* value of news. A good city editor must “be able to recognize on the instant the *relative* value of news” (39), and a good reporter “must not only know a news item but he must know the *relative* value of the same” (44, my emphasis). The relative

value can be determined by critically evaluating one news story against other news stories, and against the judgment of other newswriters (notably the editor) to determine “how much value one piece of news has when compared with another piece of news that comes in at the same time” (48). As any practical judgment of valuation, it takes place in a specific situation, and the adequacy of the valuation can be understood only in relation to this context. It is not about comparing all news items against a general idea of their worth, but it is a question of examining it in relation to pieces of news that come in *at the same time*.

Comparing news stories against each other also means to have a sense of proportion and perspective, a “mental yardstick” (74) to “place the proper value on a news item” (39). The “price-tag” (74) put on news then has a very material resonance: it is the “size of the headline” (74), “how much it is worth in space; how prominent a headline to put over it” (44). The means-ends continuum involved in news valuation therefore may contain broader ends-in-view (such as informing the public or revealing hidden truths), but also a spatial calculation: how much space on a page, how long a segment, how big a headline? The material, practical constraints are not an afterthought of news valuation, but rather an integral part of it.

The shift from reporter’s intuition to conscious evaluation of news stories’ relative importance is similar to the shift from “I like this painting” to “This painting is beautiful.” It involves a comparison (that can be explicit or implicit) between the items that are valued. In making such comparisons, journalists reflectively judge the importance of a potential story by finding points of comparison between stories but also between the story and all the elements of news-making (notably what the news values literature has described as constraints in terms of format or medium).

What is interesting is that the relational aspect happens roughly at the same time as the instinctive impulses that I have described above. Prizing and appraisal are not distinct phases. They can happen together or at least in very quick succession. When reporters sniff out a story, they *already* think about it in relational terms: How important is it in comparison with other stories? How much space is it going to occupy? Will the editor like it?

The texts also illustrate how appraisal is necessarily collective, as having a “nose for news” is a quality that both reporters and editors must possess. While the nose metaphor hints at something individual, the process of determining the value of a news item is definitively collective: reporters and editors define newsworthiness together. To some extent, the texts that I have analyzed also constitute a moment of collective appraisal: they are examples of newswriters deliberating publicly about newsworthiness.

7 Discussion: Empirical Inquiry into News Valuation and Its Limitations

The theory of valuation helps us find a way out of several deadlocks in which news values research seemed to be stuck. It does so largely by redefining the problem. If we focus on news valuation as an action and wonder how values are *formed*, then there is no need to come up with a list of universal news values (a kind of finality that does not sit well with Dewey’s pragmatism). If we consider the situatedness (Vannini, 2008) of valuation as well as the ends-means continuum, then there is no need to resort to the discrepancy between ideal and practice to understand how journalists work: their judgments of value *are* practical, which does not mean that they are simplistic or that they do not critically pursue an end-in-view. Valuations are not the application of mere conventions, which would almost completely deprive newswriters of agency: they imply an active (and collective) process of inquiry.

Dewey's philosophy has been criticized for an optimism that sometimes seems to set aside big structural constraints and inequalities (see Rakow, 2019, for an introduction on Dewey on race and gender, though), but it is also what I fundamentally like about it: it imagines the conditions in which people can thrive, in which they can exert their intelligent judgment. The fact that news valuation accounts for the immediate and felt dimension of prizing seems particularly important as journalism is often a thankless job. In the midst of economic gloom and a bleak post-truth media environment, valuation theory accounts for the *thrill* of a good news story, the exhilaration of newsworthiness. In that regard, this paper also hopes to contribute to a growing body of research that takes emotions and affect into account during the study of journalism (Le Cam & Ruellan, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). As Dewey shows, recognizing that news valuation has to do with feelings does not mean attributing it to some mysterious, irrational subjectivity that escapes inquiry. On the contrary, because the felt dimension is part of any experience, we need a vocabulary and conceptual tools to account for it.

Redefining the problem in different terms paves the way for new empirical questions that I hope future research will address. These are numerous, but I want to highlight a few that could also put to the empirical test potential limitations of the theory:

First, what does the rhythmic alternation of prizing and appraisal that happens in news valuation look like? Dewey's theory states that these are not fundamentally distinct phases. They can happen simultaneously or in very quick succession. If the difference between prizing and appraisal is only one of degrees or emphasis, I would suggest that we need to pay attention to our analytical focal point to better account for news valuation as a whole. Many ethnographic studies of newsmaking have actually already highlighted instances of appraisal: we see it at play when Gans (1979) pinpoints the different "considerations" that matter in news selection, or when Ryfe (2012) describes the (sometimes conflicting) views of reporters and editors over what they should cover. Inquiries informed by the theory of valuation would still aim to understand those moments of collective deliberation, when rationales for news selection are articulated and when what resembles rules emerges — but they would also try to systematically connect these moments to the other pole of news valuation: to the intimate, felt, and instinctive "nose for news." Noting that the two aspects exist is not enough. A Deweyan line of questioning would run as follows: How are they connected? How do newswriters constantly pass from one to the other?

I have underlined that valuation is not the mere application of conventions, rules, or norms, but that does not mean that conventions, rules, or norms do not exist, nor that other constraints never impinge on action. Dewey proposes an interesting distinction between practical judgments (which requires free, active inquiry) and technical judgments (which do not require any form of deliberation because they assume that the ends are predetermined, so one has only to choose the means by which to attain them). Surely, in making the news, journalists go through many of these technical judgments when they do not have the freedom to inquire into mutually determined means and ends because the ends are already determined. Future studies could focus on exploring this distinction: when is journalism a process of actual valuation, which presupposes an open-ended situation and free inquiry, and when is it only the accumulation of "technical judgments" — or "constrained labor," in the words of Sennett (2008, p. 288) — that is shaped by conventions, norms, traditions, and other constraints? I see this as an interesting reformulation of the question of journalistic autonomy in a context of multiple economic and material constraints. We have many examples that show how the different decisions that shape newsmaking do not form free inquiry in the sense of the pragmatist question that defines practical judgments ("what is *better* to do"). Instead, we see quasi-automatic

decisions, routine coverage, shovelware and clickbait, or Tuchman's (1978) strategic rituals. Dewey's vocabulary tends to accentuate how individuals can seize a form of freedom and actualization in action: it is about desire, intelligent inquiry, and the conditions in which experience can become fulfillment. But experience is not always fulfilling, and Dewey's optimism should not incite us to deny that newswork is sometimes constrained, that it may be an accumulation of mere technical judgments, that the desires and ends-in-view that are pursued might not be those of reporters who want to inform the public about important matters but rather those of the media conglomerate, of the private equity firm, of the algorithm that sells ads, of audience metrics. In that context, an interesting empirical question arises: When is there enough wiggle room for actual news valuation, which implies a form of collective and free inquiry into what is better to do?

The question of ends-in-view seems particularly open-ended to me, and, because of the situatedness of valuation, it is one that can be solved only empirically. If valuation arises when there is desire, when there is something that is lacking, an absence, some kind of trouble, something incomplete (all those things coming together to form provisional ends-in-view), then what exactly are newswriters endeavoring to do? Here, one can imagine many different answers, big and small: to inform the public, to fill the news hole, to be better than the competing news organization, to be the first on a scoop, to sell a lot of copies or ads, to expose injustice, to influence public opinion, to perform well in terms of metrics... One could also wonder whose desires and whose ends-in-views are pursued in each case. There is no *a priori* distinction between economic success and normative beliefs about the role of journalism; all these things matter if they are "translated into the meaning and import of what actually happens" (LW: 1, p. 311). Refusing to give prominence to some explanations (be they economic, political, ideological, or normative) does not mean discounting structural forces. Rather, it suggests that many different things can matter, and that the import of one and the same thing can change according to the situation. For example, the weight and the meaning that news organizations give to something as seemingly objective as audience metrics varies widely (Christin, 2020).

Taking the emotional and felt dimension into account should not, however, make us forget that there is also a form of economic rationality at stake in news valuation. News is a hybrid good, with both a price-tag and a symbolic/public worth. Works in economic sociology (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013; Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013) have highlighted how valuation is a useful concept for thinking about worth beyond price and market-based calculation. However, these are still part of the equation, and they certainly translate into the meaning and import of newsmaking. Future research could therefore try to understand how more traditional conceptions of value, as something calculable (in terms of price, of advertising revenue, of changing business models), play a role in the process of news valuation. In other words, the news-valuation framework refuses to prioritize pricing over prizing and appraisal, but pricing is still part of what counts (Starks, 2011). This seems particularly interesting as journalism has undergone many important changes in terms of how it is priced and sold—from the emphasis on objectivity and mass audiences in the twentieth century to the quest for new business models after the digital revolution at the turn of the twenty-first century; but, over the same period, news values have remained remarkably stable (Parks, 2019).

Finally, I am aware that my emphasis on dynamic and situated action may leave the readers with a feeling of empty relativism: if everything can count, depending on the situation, then nothing counts. Surely, we have discarded the list-of-news-values approach, but does that mean that we will never find relatively consistent patterns of social action? Is every case of newsworthiness unique? Certainly not. Again, I want to point to the idea of ends-in-view. Dewey insists

that ends are never final, and are always reciprocally determined by means, but that does not mean that ends-in-view cannot be shared or that some ends-in-view might consistently matter in news valuations. In that regard, an empirical description of news valuations might very well find out that at least some of the time, ends-in-view overlap with some of the values of the lists that I have spent so much time criticizing above: timeliness, unexpectedness, and proximity probably stand among the ends-in-view that regularly drive newswriters.

Finally, contra the idea that pragmatism leads to some extreme form of relativism, future research could delve into the question of commensurability. This is in line with one of the core questions that preoccupies valuation studies and some areas of economic sociology (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Stark, 2011): can we compare different orders of worth? Valuation theory offers an opportunity to think about what journalists do in comparison to other ways of determining worth. I see no reason why we should presume that journalists are exceptional: the formation of values among newswriters is not radically different from other valuations. So, instead of coming up with an endless list of rules that narrowly apply to journalists and editors, we might try to understand how events become news, by using a vocabulary and a conceptual toolbox that can also describe other valuations — notably those of the public. Future research could therefore try to explore how news is valued by members of the public, and the extent to which those valuations overlap (or do not overlap) with the “nose for news” valuations. This is the horizon that Dewey always aims at (and which is explicitly addressed throughout his work): studying valuation means understanding what we hold dear, but also what holds us together.

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8 Appendix

Untitled articles are identified by their first words.

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2. “The Washington Correspondents,” *The New Orleans Crescent*, 1869-02-09

3. "Don Platt dined," *Quad-City Times*, 1870-04-21
4. "Song of the shears", *The Richmond Palladium*, 1872-01-06
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8. "San Francisco Letter," *Arizona Citizen*, 1873-03-01
9. "A Couple of Questions," *Arizona Citizen*, 1873-03-08
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11. "Country Newspapers," *Lexington Weekly Intelligencer*, 1873-06-04
12. "The solomn indifference," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1874-04-04
13. "The newspaper reporter," *The Dallas Daily Herald*, 1874-05-14
14. "A Card from Henry Macrery," *Nashville union and American*, 1874-07-02
15. "Floral Mill," *Pioche Daily Record*, 1874-07-17
16. "Some one with a nose for news," *The Democratic Press*, 1874-08-27
17. "Arrested for riotous conduct," *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 1874-10-27
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22. "Belmont chronicle," *Belmont Chronicle*, 1875-09-09
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24. "Whisky," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1876-09-26
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35. "A Beer-drinking Donkey," *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 1880-01-14
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Juliette De Maeyer: Department of Communication, University of Montreal (Canada)

📧 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6482-5365>

✉ juliette.de.maeyer@umontreal.ca; 🌐 <https://juliettedm.wordpress.com/>

Juliette De Maeyer is an Associate Professor at the Department of Communication, University of Montreal (Canada). She studies the intersection of journalism and technology, with a particular interest for the materiality of newsmaking and for historical approaches. Her work was published in scholarly journals such as *Communication Theory*, *New Media and Society* and *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, as well as in *The Atlantic* and *The Nieman Lab*.