

Conférence organisée par le Centre de linguistique et des sciences du langage (CLSL)
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Scripting the Liminal Zone.

Membership Categorization and News-Culture-in-Action.

The work of journalism often involves transforming personal identities into social categories which in turn have normative actions attributed and which inferentially account for some behavior. In this sense journalism involves creating stories where familiar characters do familiar actions for familiar reasons, but where these often involve (routine) category *disjunctures*. This may be described as a ‘*news culture in action*’ where news has its own set of reasoning practices. Recently this routine feature of news coverage of unfolding stories has come under pressure with the advent of newer forms of communication where immediate information comes from multiple of sources. This is especially the case during those events described as disaster marathons or where circumstances are not clear. Because of this the ‘liminal zone’ between an event occurring and knowing the facts about that event have become a highly contested area of journalism where the rush to storify or provide a context for the events can be at the expense of establishing solid knowledge of the events. This has exposed journalism’s increasing reliance on using forms of ‘scripts’ drawing on normative assumptions in relation to social categories, their assumed actions and their assumed reasoning, despite the actual events, characters and actions being unclear. This is particularly apparent in some high profile events such as the 9/11 attacks in the US, Anders Breivik’s killings in Norway and the recent Germanwings tragedy that highlights the issue in 24/7 news where the ‘scripts’ have proved fallacious and even dangerous to dealing with the still ongoing events. Following an initial introduction to Membership Categorization Analysis the discussion will examine a number of instances where the pressure to provide a context for events relies upon mundane categorial reasoning which both underpins the work of reporting but also reflexively reveals what may be termed a *news-culture-in-action*.

Richard Fitzgerald is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Macau, and currently Visiting Professor at the University of Western Brittany, Brest. He completed his BA and PhD at Bangor University UK and has held posts at Brunel and Cardiff Universities in the UK and the University of Queensland, Australia. He has published extensively in the area of Membership Categorisation Analysis often with a focus on broadcast media. His latest book, *Advances in Membership Categorisation Analysis*, co edited with William Housley, was published in March 2015 with Sage.